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Hurrah for Anarchy

Mayday as Celebrated by the Anarchists

Strangers In a Tangled Wilderness

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May 1, 2017

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Contents

Two Days of Massacres	5
The Trial	6
The Defendants	7
August Spies, 1855 – 1887 (hanged)	7
Albert Parsons, 1848 – 1887 (hanged)	8
George Engel, 1836 – 1887 (hanged)	9
Adolph Fischer, 1858 – 1887 (hanged)	9
Louis Lingg, 1864 – 1887 (suicide)	10
Samuel Fielden, 1847 – 1922 (pardoned)	11
Michael Schwab, 1853 – 1898 (pardoned)	12
Oscar Neebe, 1850 – 1916 (pardoned)	13

Oscar Neebe, 1850 — 1916 (pardoned)

Oscar Neebe, a German immigrant and yeast-peddler, was also the office manager of the anarchist newspaper Arbeiter-Zeitung. He was not present at the Haymarket rally, nor did he even hear of it until the next day, when the editors of the Arbeiter-Zeitung were arrested. He said: "As long as I stand I shall publish that paper," and published it for several days before being arrested himself. Held on the flimsiest evidence of any of the defendants, he was sentenced to 15 years. In his final address to the court, he declared: "Hang me, too; for I think it is more honorable to die suddenly than to be killed by inches. I have a family and children; and if they know their father is dead, they will bury him. They can go to the grave, and kneel down by the side of it; but they can't go to the penitentiary and see their father, who was convicted for a crime that he hasn't had anything to do with. That is all I have got to say. Your honor, I am sorry I am not to be hung with the rest of the men." He was not hanged, and served 6 years before being pardoned by the new governor. After he was released he continued to agitate, and was instrumental in forming the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), that infamous and lovely anarchist union.

that I gladly give it up; and the price is very small for the result that is gained." After being released from prison, he lived quietly on a ranch with his wife for the rest of his years.

Michael Schwab, 1853 — 1898 (pardoned)

Michael Schwab, a German immigrant and bookbinder, helped edit *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. Arrested and sentenced to death, he spoke his final address: "We contend for communism and Anarchy—why? If we had kept silent, stones would have cried out. Murder was committed day by day. Children were slain, women worked to death, men killed inch by inch, and these crimes are never punished by law. The great principle underlying the present system is unpaid labor. Those who amass fortunes, build palaces, and live in luxury, are doing that by virtue of unpaid labor. Being directly or indirectly the possessors of land and machinery, they dictate their terms to the workingman. He is compelled to sell his labor cheap, or to starve. The price paid him is always far below the real value. He acts under compulsion, and they call it a free contract. This infernal state of affairs keeps him poor and ignorant; an easy prey for exploitation." And that: "It is entirely wrong to use the word Anarchy as synonymous with violence. Violence is one thing and Anarchy another. In the present state of society violence is used on all sides, and therefore we advocated the use of violence against violence, but against violence only, as a necessary means of defense." Schwab wrote to the governor and his sentence was commuted to life in prison. Six years later, a new governor stepped in and pardoned him. Schwab opened a shoestore where he sold socialist books alongside the other wares, but his health never recovered from his six years in jail and he died of respiratory failure.

Mayday, to the anarchists, is a holiday of remembrance. Perhaps you've heard the communists and liberals say that it's a celebration of the eight-hour workday. I suppose it's that too. But for me, it's a holiday to remember when the State put anarchism itself on trial. In 1886, the line was drawn and the US radicals lost their innocence; the illusion of "free speech" and free association was shattered. Let that illusion never re-form.

Mayday is our holiday. Mayday is a celebration of anarchism, of our history of defiance. It has a lot to do with labor, but Mayday has nothing to do with electoral politics, with the American flag. "Labor day" was invented and implemented to distract people from the radical history of labor.

Mayday is also, of course, the celebration of Beltane — a religious and spiritual holiday that celebrates springtime. And for the past decade at least, it's the day of protest and action in response to the US treatment of immigrants. It's a big enough holiday to share, and anarchists are present in those movements as well.

Myself, on Mayday, I remember five people who were killed for being anarchists.

Two Days of Massacres

In 1884, radical labor unions declared that, as of May 1st, 1886, the eight-hour workday would be enacted.

On May 3rd, 1886, un-armed striking workers of the McCormick Harvester factory in Chicago demonstrated against the scabs who stole their jobs, and the strikers were fired upon by police. At least four workers were killed and many more were wounded.

An emergency proclamation, in German and English, went throughout the city by the means of the anarchist press: "They killed the poor wretches because they, like you, had the courage to disobey the supreme will of your bosses. They

killed them to show you ‘Free American Citizens’ that you must be satisfied with whatever your bosses condescend to allow you, or you will get killed. If you are men, if you are the sons of your grand sires, who have shed their blood to free you, then you will rise in your might, Hercules, and destroy the hideous monster that seeks to destroy you. To arms we call you, to arms.” An emergency rally was called for the next day, and on May 4th, 3,000 gathered at Haymarket Square in Chicago.

The anarchists Albert Parsons, August Spies, and Samuel Fielden spoke to the peaceably assembled crowd. The Mayor himself stopped by and, noting the non-violent nature of the rally, continued on his way. By the end of Fielden’s speech, two-thirds of the crowd had left and the rally was winding down. But then 180 police—led by the infamously violent Captain John Bonfield—marched into the rally and demanded the dispersal of the crowd. (This seems to still happen quite a bit.)

Someone threw a bomb into the police, killing one officer. The police opened fire and killed an unknown number of the rally’s attendants. 7 more officers were killed, most by friendly fire, but it is possible that the crowd defended itself as well. And while most of the history of Mayday focuses exclusively on men fighting, men dying, men as heroes and villains and martyrs, it’s known that the crowd there at Haymarket was composed of women and men alike, and that there were women militants as well as men.

The Trial

After the second massacre, the police went into a panic, rounding up hundreds of workers, raiding union halls, destroying houses and apartments. The State’s attorney, Julius Grinnell, announced: “Make the raids first and look up the

and thieves [the police and courts] to defend it you call ‘disorder.’” He mocked the hypocrisy and perjury and irony of the court openly, and he said: “if you cannonade us, we shall dynamite you. You laugh! Perhaps you think, ‘you’ll throw no more bombs’; but let me assure you I die happy on the gallows, so confident am I that the hundreds and thousands to whom I have spoken will remember my words; and when you shall have hanged us, then—mark my words—they will do the bombthrowing! In this hope do I say to you: I despise you. I despise your order, your laws, your force-propped authority. Hang me for it!” Later, while awaiting his death, he somehow acquired a large number of bombs, most likely for the purpose of escape for himself and the other anarchists, but these were confiscated. He was thrown into solitary, but had smuggled enough explosive to take his own life, denying the State their chance to hang him.

Samuel Fielden, 1847 — 1922 (pardoned)

Samuel Fielden, an English immigrant and a self-employed teamster, was shot in the knee by police during the Haymarket Massacre. The next day he was arrested and charged with conspiracy. Although he was sentenced to die, he chose to write to the governor, requesting clemency, which was granted, and he served 6 years of his life sentence before eventually being pardoned by the new governor. During his address to the court, he recited a poem, “Revolution” by the German poet Freilegrath. He said that every intelligent German in the world had a copy of that poem on their shelf, and that: “It is not generally considered a crime among intellectual people to be a Revolutionist, but it may be made a crime if the Revolutionist happens to be poor.” He spoke well and at great length, also mentioning that: “If my life is to be taken for advocating the principles of Socialism and Anarchy, as I have understood them and honestly believe them to be in the interests of humanity, I say to you

Chicago. He was sentenced to die by hanging. During his last testimony in court, he said: "If I am to die on account of being an Anarchist, on account of my love for liberty, fraternity and equality, then I will not remonstrate. If death is the penalty for our love of the freedom of the human race, then I say openly I have forfeited my life; but a murderer I am not ... if the ruling class thinks that by hanging us, hanging a few Anarchists, they can crush out Anarchy, they will be badly mistaken, because the Anarchist loves his principles more than his life. An Anarchist is always ready to die for his principles; but in this case I have been charged with murder, and I am not a murderer. You will find it impossible to kill a principle, although you may take the life of men who confess these principles. The more the believers in just causes are persecuted, the quicker will their ideas be realized. For instance, in rendering such an unjust and barbarous verdict, the twelve 'honorable men' in the jury-box have done more for the furtherance of Anarchism than the convicted could have accomplished in a generation. This verdict is a death-blow against free speech, free press, and free thought in this country, and the people will be conscious of it, too." As he was hanged, he said: "Hurrah for Anarchy! This is the happiest moment of my life!"

Louis Lingg, 1864 – 1887 (suicide)

A German immigrant and a carpenter, Louis Lingg was only 22 when he was arrested and 23 when he died in his jail cell. Louis was not easy to arrest: when they came for him, he drew a gun and struggled against the police. In court, he was unrepentant, admitting that he did indeed make bombs, although he had nothing to do with the Haymarket bombing. He was sentenced to die. As part of his final statement to the court, he said: "Anarchy means no domination or authority of one man over another, yet you call that 'disorder.' A system which advocates no such 'order' as shall require the services of rogues

laws later!" The strikebreaking bosses donated money to the police to help with the efforts. It's come out since that the police bribed false witnesses, planted weapons, tortured and beat folk who didn't even know what socialism or anarchism were. Ten of the arrested were indicted, eight went to trial (William Seliger turned state's evidence, while Rudolph Schnaubelt was never caught and lived free for the rest of his days.)

The government never pretended that any of the arrested threw the bomb. Instead, it was anarchism itself they tried, explicitly. Seven were sentenced to death, one to fifteen years. Of the seven, five refused to sign a petition to the governor for clemency, because they refused to admit guilt and because they refused to plead to the State. Of those five, four were hanged, the fifth took his life in prison.

Later, with five anarchists dead, the government was pressured to admit its wrongdoing and pardoned the three remaining anarchists. But the damage was done. Radicals all over the country, all over the world, were inspired for generations to understand that the State (the USA at the time was considered a beacon of freedom) was inherently oppressive, that it cared not for its own feigned laws or justice.

The Defendants

August Spies, 1855 – 1887 (hanged)

August Spies, a German immigrant, was an upholsterer and an editor of an anarchist daily paper, Arbeiter-Zeitung ("Worker's Newspaper"). In court, during his final address, he spoke: "I am an Anarchist. I believe with Buckle, with Paine, Jefferson, Emerson, and Spencer, and many other great thinkers of this century, that the state of castes and classes—the state where one class dominates over and lives upon the labor of another class, and calls this order—yes; I believe that this barbaric form of social organization, with its

legalized plunder and murder, is doomed to die, and make room for a free society, voluntary association, or universal brotherhood, if you like. You may pronounce the sentence upon me, honorable judge, but let the world know that in A.D. 1886, in the State of Illinois eight men were sentenced to death, because they believed in a better future.” And he said: “If you think that by hanging us, you can stamp out the labor movement—the movement from which the downtrodden millions, the millions who toil and live in want and misery—the wage slaves—expect salvation—if this is your opinion, then hang us! Here you will tread upon a spark, but there, and there, and behind you and in front of you, and everywhere, flames will blaze up. It is a subterranean fire. You cannot put it out.” His last words, as he stood upon the gallows, were: “The day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today!”

Albert Parsons, 1848 — 1887 (hanged)

Albert Parsons, American born and the son of a factory-owner but orphaned young, fought for the confederacy during the Civil War. He regretted his defense of slavery for the rest of his life, and later married a mixed-ancestry woman Lucy Parsons (a famous anarchist in her own right). He went on to become an anti-slavery republican before eventually settling in Chicago and discovering anarchism. He worked as an orator and writer for several years before the Haymarket massacre. At first, he fled Chicago to escape capture, but later turned himself in to stand in solidarity with his doomed comrades. In his last letter to his wife before he was hanged, Albert wrote: “My children—well, their father had better die in the endeavor to secure their liberty and happiness than live contented in a society which condemns nine-tenths of its children to a life of wage-slavery and poverty. Bless them; I love them unspeakably, my poor helpless little ones. Ah, wife, living or

dead, we are as one. For you my affection is everlasting. For the people, humanity. I cry out again and again in the doomed victim’s cell: Liberty! Justice! Equality!” On the scaffold, his last words were cut short by the hangman, and he was not permitted to speak.

George Engel, 1836 — 1887 (hanged)

Born poor in Germany and orphaned as an early teen, George Engel emigrated to America, believing he would soon be in the land of the free, and worked as a shoemaker before opening a toyshop. 50 years old at the time of his arrest, George (who was an active socialist and anarchist) wasn’t even present at the Haymarket rally; he was at home playing cards. After being sentenced to die, Engel wrote the governor refusing clemency. In the letter he wrote: “I took part in politics with the earnestness of a good citizen; but I was soon to find that the teachings of a ‘free ballot box’ are a myth and that I had again been duped. I came to the opinion that as long as workingmen are economically enslaved they cannot be politically free. It became clear to me that the working classes would never bring about a form of society guaranteeing work, bread, and a happy life by means of the ballot.” He warned the governor that by making open agitation for anarchism impossible, anarchists would turn towards bombs, that “no power on earth can rob the workingman of his knowledge of how to make bombs.” As the noose went about his neck, George Engel the toymaker cried out simply: *Hoch die anarchie!* (“Hurrah for Anarchy!” in German).

Adolph Fischer, 1858 — 1887 (hanged)

Adolph Fischer, a German immigrant and second-generation socialist, was a typographer and compositor who worked on the anarchist newspaper *Arbeiter-Zeitung* in