

## A Brief History of the Haymarket Massacre and the Origins of May Day as International Workers' Day

Originally a pagan holiday welcoming summer, the roots of the modern May Day holiday are in the fight for the eight-hour working day in Chicago in 1886 and the subsequent execution of innocent anarchist workers.

On May 1, 1886, hundreds of thousands workers in 13,000 businesses across the United States walked off their jobs to demand an 8-hour workday in the first May Day celebration in history. In Chicago, 40,000 went out on strike. The numbers soon swelled to over 300,000. Parades, bands and tens of thousands of demonstrators in the streets exemplified the workers' strength and unity. On May 3, however, violence broke out between police and strikers and at least two strikers were killed and an unknown number were wounded.

In response, a public meeting was called by some of the anarchists for the following day in Haymarket Square to discuss the police brutality. As the rally wound down, the police began to disperse the already thinning crowd, when a bomb was thrown into their ranks. Enraged, the police fired into the crowd killing seven or eight civilians and wounding up to forty.

Eight anarchists and well-known labor organizers - Albert Parsons, August Spies, Samuel Fielden, Oscar Neebe, Michael Schwab, George Engel, Adolph Fischer and Louis Lingg - were arrested and convicted of murder. The entire world watched as they were convicted, not for their actions, of which all of were innocent, but for their political and social beliefs. On November 11, 1887, after many failed appeals, Parsons, Spies, Engel and Fisher were hung to death. Louis Lingg, in his final protest of the state's claim of authority and punishment, took his own life the night before with an explosive device in his mouth.

Four years later the Second International recognized May Day as International Workers' Day. Today May Day is an official holiday in 66 countries and unofficially celebrated in many more. Ironically, here in the United States in an attempt to quell worker's solidarity, May 1<sup>st</sup> has been deemed "Law and Order" Day. More than 100 years have passed since the bombing of Haymarket. In that time, the 1<sup>st</sup> of May has come to be a day of struggle and resistance throughout the world - from general strikes and worker's mobilizations to Anti-war demonstrations to Revolution.