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SUPER MARKETS



Ten workers were killed, seven of them shot in the back, when 150 Chicago policemen attacked a peaceful parade of Republic Steel strikers on Memorial Day, 1937. Newsreels of the incident showed as many as four policemen at a time clubbing one defenseless striker. Sixty marchers required hospital care, 30 of them for gunshot wounds.

Memorial Day Massacre of 1937 A Monument To Labor's Early Battles

CHICAGO (LPA).—May 30, 1937, was a day of infamy and violence to be remembered even in this city which has become hardened to blood in its streets and the roar of guns in broad daylight.

There was gunfire and blood in the streets on that Memorial Day 16 years ago, too. But the pistols of Chicago policemen were not brought into play to end the usual upsurge of underworld violence. The victims were working men. It was the Memorial Day Massacre of 1937.

Movies taken of the event tell a shameful story of an unprovoked police attack on strikers at the South Chicago Plant of the Republic Steel Corporation. When the gunsmoke had cleared, ten workers lay dead in the Chicago streets. Police bullets had hit seven of them in the back, three in the side. Thirty other people had received gunshot wounds and more than 60 of the marching strikers were seriously hurt and required hospital care.

A St. Louis Post Dispatch reporter described the newsreels of the Massacre as follows: "A vivid close-up shows the head of the parade being halted by a group of 150 policemen. The flag-bearers are in front. Behind them the placards are massed. They bear such devices as 'Come on out—Help win the Strike,' 'Republic vs. The People and the CIO.' The leader of the strikers is arguing earnestly with a police officer who appears to be in command.

"Suddenly, without apparent warning, there was a terrific roar of pistol shots and the men in the front ranks of the marchers go down like grass before a scythe, as many as a dozen in one heap.

"The police then charged the marchers with riot sticks flying. Tear gas grenades are seen sailing into the midst of the marchers and clouds of gas rise over them. The crowd is in flight. The only discernible case of resistance is that of a marcher with a placard on a stick, which he uses in an attempt to fend off a charging policeman. He is successful for only an instant, then he goes down under a shower of blows.

"The ground is strewn with dead and wounded, some isolated individuals are caught, and with business-like precision, groups of policemen close in. In several instances from two to four policemen are seen beating one man. One strikes him across the face using his club as he would a baseball bat. Another crashes it down on top of his head and still another is whipping him across the back. Then one gives the fallen a final smash on the head before moving on to the next job."

A Senate committee which investigated the brutal police attack found that it was entirely unprovoked. The marching steel strikers were within the law. The committee also denounced as biased and a farce a local investigation of the Massacre by city officials under Mayor Edward J. Kelly.

Labor's League for Political Education was formed by the American Federation of Labor to carry out the non-partisan political program of the AFL.

L. L. P. E. supports candidates on the basis of their record . . . not their party label.

Four Unjustly Hang After 'Haymarket Riot, In Chicago

CHICAGO (LPA).—A working day of eight hours is taken for granted by American Labor in 1953 but the long and bitter fight that led to its achievement involves one of the greatest outrages of justice in history.

It is a story of police violence, a packed jury, an unfair judge and eight men convicted of a murder it was freely admitted they did not commit. The incident that led to the rigged trial has become known as the Haymarket Riot. It occurred on May 4, 1886, in the midst of nationwide strikes to win the 8-hour day.

Laws legalizing the 8-hour day had been on the books of a few states for several years, but they were so full of loopholes that the shorter working day was only a myth. In actual fact, average working time was 10 hours a day, six days a week. For some workers, such as bakers and bus drivers, 84 to 120 hours was a normal work week.

The Federation of Trades and Labor Unions, forerunner of the AFL, decided in 1885 that it would take determined action by labor to make the 8-hour day a reality. It resolved that the shorter working day would start on May 1, 1886, and that general nationwide strikes would take place if necessary to bring it about. The plan also won the approval of other labor groups.

In Chicago, some 40,000 workers struck on the appointed day, parading through the city to proclaim their demand. By May 3 the number had doubled and there were numerous brushes with the police, even though the parades were peaceful demonstrations.

A rally of striking members of the Lumber-Shovers Union was scheduled for that afternoon on a road near the McCormick Harvester factory and August Spies, editor of the Socialist newspaper, "Arbeiter Zeitung," was asked to speak.

The rally site was known as "Black Road" because of the number of labor disturbances which had occurred there after McCormick, in violation of a promise to its workers, had fired union men a few months previously and hired strikebreakers to replace them.

Spies was in the midst of urging the workers to stick together in their fight for the 8-hour day when the McCormick factory let out. As the strikebreakers emerged, several men left the rally audience to attack them. The police arrived in large numbers and fired on the crowd. One striker was killed and several wounded by bullets and others were injured in the melee.

Outraged at the police brutality, Spies rushed back to his office and printed a highly inflammatory editorial in which he declared that working men would have to use force to win their rights. The editorial ended with the summons, "To arms, we call you to arms!"

Next day, there were constant clashes between the 8-hour strikers and the police. A rally to protest the McCormick killing of the day before was scheduled for 7:30

p. m. at Haymarket Square and Spies again was asked to speak.

A leaflet announcing the rally was prepared and shown to Spies. The last words on it were, "Workmen, arm yourselves and appear in full force." Spies said he would not appear at the rally unless those words were removed. Some 20,000 of the leaflets were distributed and only about 200 or 300 of them contained the inflammatory words.

About 3000 people showed up for the rally, but a rain storm came up in the midst of the speeches and all but about 200 left. As Samuel Fielden was concluding a talk to the remaining workmen, 180 police arrived on the scene, formed a line and began to advance on the crowd.

Fielden had just shouted to the police that the meeting was a peaceable one when a bomb was hurled at the police, killing one of them and knocking others off their feet. The police immediately opened fire, killing one man and wounding many others. About seventy policemen also were wounded in the gunfire and six of them died later.

About 200 people who had been at the rally were arrested and subjected to what was described as "rigorous" police examination. At the inquest for Policeman Degan who had been killed by the bomb, all the demonstrators then in the hands of the police were charged with his death.

Thirty-one people later were indicted, but only eight were brought to trial. In addition to Spies and Fielden, these were Michael Schwab, Adolph Fisher, George Engel, Louis Lingg, Albert R. Parsons and Oscar W. Neebe. All were leaders or members of an anarchist organization called the International Working Peoples Association.

The eight were brought to trial before Judge Joseph E. Gary with the sole purpose in mind of convicting the men to get rid of the leaders of the anarchist movement.

The trial record shows that Gray coaxed prospective jurors into saying they could render an impartial verdict after they already had said their minds were made up about the case. The jurors selected included a relative and a friend of the bomb victim.

The person who threw the bomb was never found and there was no evidence produced at the trial to show that any of the defendants had had anything to do with the blast. It was shown that Schwab, Lingg, Fischer and Neebe were not even in Haymarket Square when the bombing occurred.

The jury brought in the expected verdict—all guilty of murder—after an eight weeks trial. Seven of the men were sentenced to death and Neebe was given 15 years in prison. Lingg committed suicide while in jail and the sentences of Fielden and Schwab were commuted to life imprisonment.

The other four were hanged Nov. 11, 1887, in spite of pleas for mercy from church, civic and

labor groups throughout the nation. The newly-formed American Federation of Labor, while condemning the principle of violence advocated by the anarchist movement, had joined in the pleas because of the obvious injustice of the jury verdict.

AFL President Samuel Gompers had personally travelled to Springfield to appeal to Governor Oglesby to commute the death sentences. Gompers charged that there had been no semblance of a fair trial and that that men had been found guilty of murder on the ground that advocacy of force makes the advocate responsible for an act of violence.

Six years later the case exploded

into the public limelight again when Gov. John P. Altgeld pardoned Fielden, Neebe and Schwab. It was not the pardon, however, which created an uproar which almost ruined Altgeld's career.

With full knowledge of what it would mean to his future in politics, Altgeld had written a pardon order which made it plain that he was not releasing the men as an act of mercy. It was he who officially charged that the jury was packed, the judge unfair and the verdict entirely against the evidence. There was only one inference to be drawn from his conclusions—the State of Illinois had itself committed murder in hanging the four men six years earlier.

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