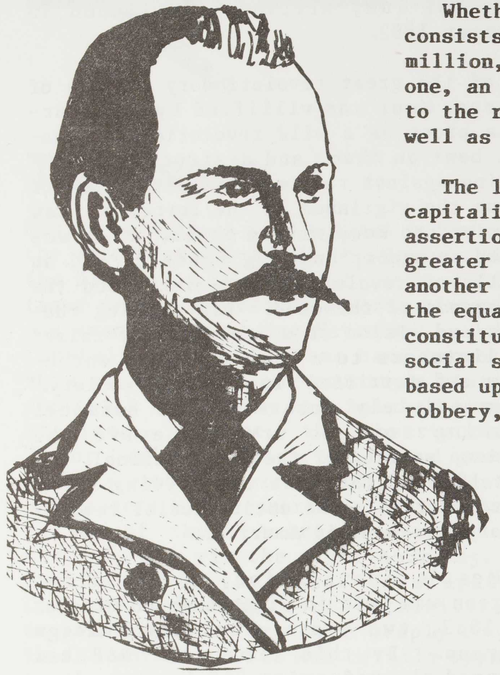


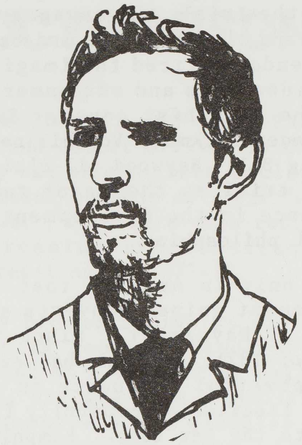
Whether the government consists of one over the million, or a million over one, an anarchist is opposed to the rule of majorities as well as minorities.

The legal right of the capitalist is virtually the assertion that one man has a greater right to life than another man, since it denies the equality of natural constitutions. Our present social system, therefore, is based upon the legalization of robbery, slavery, and murder.

Albert Parsons

The history of all time teaches us that oppressing classes always maintain their tyranny by force and violence.

George Engle



The strongest bulwark of the capitalist system is the ignorance of its victims.

Adolph Fischer

Anarchism means peace and tranquility to all. Anarchism, or socialism, means the reorganization of society upon scientific principles and the abolition of causes which produce vice and crime.

August Spies

Naturally, the anarchists weren't the only group gaining members as a result of the 1883-86 depression. At its 1884 convention, the leaders of what was to become the American Federation of Labor declared that, after the first of May 1886, "eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor. . . ."

Though the IWPA was and remained (being largely the creation of Johann Most) a primarily German group, there were "American" groups of English-speakers in several cities. The "American" group in Chicago had 150 members by the time of Haymarket, and embraced five of the eight Haymarket defendants as members: Parsons, Spies, Fielden, Fischer, and Niebe.

The bloody suppression of the great strike in 1877 had taught labor radicals a bitter lesson, and the most important task of the IWPA, aside from propaganda and agitation, came to be the arming of the workers for self-defense. Armed sections of the IWPA drilled with weapons and paraded through the streets in military formation during demonstrations and celebrations. Dynamite bombs were widely praised as the "proletariat's artillery". The IWPA militants had convinced themselves that the revolution was imminent, and their calls to the workers to arm themselves were a warning to be prepared for it when it came, and not let themselves be mowed down like they had been in '77.

The leading spirits of the IWPA initially disdained the eight-hour movement as mere reformism. But during the winter of 1885-86, seeing what a mass movement the campaign had become, the IWPA moved to support it. Fearful of becoming isolated from the working class, their main support, they quickly radicalized the eight-hour movement. In Chicago the IWPA became the movement's undisputed leader. Parsons' and Spies' names were on everybody's lips -- they were heroes to the workers and bogeymen to the bosses. For many, May First acquired an apocalyptic significance. Both sides expected an incident and, when the day arrived, Chicago was an armed camp. On the first of May 1886, over 300,000 workers in 13,000 establishments nationwide laid down their tools. In Chicago, the hub of the eight-hour campaign, 40,000 workers went out on strike. There were marches and demonstrations, but no trouble until May

3rd at the McCormick Reaper works on Chicago's south side. McCormick had a history of brutality to organized labor going back to the great strike of '77. Scabs working there were forcibly denied entrance to the plant by pickets. The police arrived in force, wading into the striking workers with clubs swinging. When the striking workers had the unmitigated gall to defend themselves by throwing stones, the police opened fire on the crowd, killing at least two, and wounding many more.

A meeting was called for the following evening in Haymarket Square to protest the police brutality at the McCormick plant. The meeting was small and peaceful, contrary to the expectations of the authorities. Mayor Harrison attended, calling attention to his presence, and sent word that the large detachment of police held in readiness nearby wouldn't be needed. Nonetheless, after Harrison left and the meeting was breaking up, the police appeared in force and ordered the few remaining people to disperse. It had started to rain, and the crowd of 2,000-3,000 had dwindled to a few hundred. Fielden, the last speaker, stopped and protested to the inspector that this peaceful meeting was concluding anyway. The inspector repeated his imperious order, at which point somebody threw a bomb into the ranks of the police. They, in turn, opened fire on the crowd. Seven cops and an unknown number of civilians were killed, almost entirely as the result of police gunfire.

The immediate result of the disaster at Haymarket Square was the rounding up of all anarchists and their sympathizers in the city of Chicago. Meetings, homes, and the offices of anarchist newspapers were raided. The two anarchist papers in Chicago, one of them a daily, were shut down and their staffs arrested. Labor unions and progressive organizations stumbled all over each other to disavow and denigrate the anarchists. The terrorized city whipped the police to greater effort while the police, in turn, kept public fear at a high pitch.

Before the end of the month, a grand jury had returned indictments against Albert Parsons, August Spies, Michael Schwab, Samuel Fielden, George Engle, Adolph Fischer, Oscar Neebe, Louis Lingg, William Seliger, and Rudolph Schnaubelt for the