RAT'S IN THE TRASH - Notes from Philadelphian Comrades

HAYMARKET CENTENNIAL

During two critical decades of the nineteenth century, the 1870's and the 1880's, the struggle between workers and industrial capitalism had intensified to the point of class war. In the United States, this struggle had found a focus in the demand for the eight-hour work day. Revolutionists of all persuasions, including anarchists, unified themselves around this demand in unprecedented strength. In Chicago, the struggle was particularly fierce. That city was seeing the proliferation of many great industrial empires - McCormick, Pullman, etc. Along with this exploitive growth had emerged a powerful workers' movement which carried out massive demonstrations and strikes around the issue of the eight-hour day.

The rapid development of the eight hour-movement posed critical political questions for the anarchists of Chicago. An eight-hour work day was hardly a transformation of society, and the anarchists were loath to throw themselves behind a reform of the wage system. Yet the cause was attracting a spectrum of anti-capital forces and, it was reasoned, held the potential to perhaps go beyond mere reforms. Therefore the anarchists joined the movement and in time, came to take on leadership roles in planning actions and in public oratory.

The weekend of May 1st, 1886 had witnessed a number of demonstrations all over the city that drew a brutal response from the police. A rally was called for May 4th to protest the police violence; the meeting place, on the near west side of Haymarket Square. The crowd that assembled was not large, nor rowdy, and it eventually dwindled to about two hundred people. Suddenly an equal number of police appeared at the Square. A bomb was thrown into the crowd (by whom it has never been determined) and many people were killed and injured, among them eight policemen.

The authorities used this violent incident as a pretext for the total suppression of the anarchist movement in Chicago, a movement large enough to support two papers, one a daily. Eight anarchists were tried, and convicted, of culpability for the lives of the policemen. Of these eight, four were hanged on November 11, 1887. One committed suicide in prison, and the other three remained imprisoned for eight years.

If the movement was crippled in Chicago, then the opposite was the case for the rest of the country. The trial received international attention. Outrage and sympathy over this terrible injustice made the cause of the Martyrs of Chicago the cause of radicals everywhere. In cities the world over, streets and parks were named after the Chicago Martyrs. Spurred by the tragedy of Haymarket, such future luminaries as Emma Goldman, William Haywood, and Voltairine De Cleyre were among the thousands who joined the revolutionary movement. Henceforth, May Day came to be honored each year as the workers' day, and for a time it was also a special comemoration of the murder of the anarchists.

1986 will mark the one-hundredth anniversary of the Haymarket affair. Our comrades in Chicago have begun to organize for the centenary. With the support of anarchists everywhere, they will be promoting an international gathering in Chicago, and also local events to coincide with it. We, in Philadelphia, are hopeful for a large and enthusiastic participation.

It is important that the event illuminates the central role in the incident played by anarchists. It is customary for the "left" and labor organizations to claim Haymarket as their own, and use the story of the affair for their own ends. For example, Michael Harrington of DSA was talking about Haymarket here recently.

It is up to us to redress this balance of misinformation. Historian Paul Avrich's exhaustive study of the Haymarket affair which is scheduled for publication within the next year will be a very useful part of this process. A vigorous anarchist presence in Chicago in 1986 could also be very worthwhile in countering the lack and reliability of public knowledge about anarchism and anarchists. We have a precedent, apparently the fiftieth year anniversary was an impressive event with representatives present from groups around the world.

There will be a gathering in Chicago this year to make plans for the 1986 celebration. It will take place May 4, 5, and 6. If you are not able to be there in person please send ideas and notice of your support to the Autonomy Centre, 3951 N.Ashland Ave. Chicago Il. 60613. Also contact the center for any further information on the 1984 planning session.

FINALLY

Winter has nearly passed. Your comrades in Philadelphia have for the most part taken it pretty easy. The Wooden Shoe collective has been conducting an in-depth study group on workers' councils (or council communism), which is the theoretical foundation for the group which established the collective. For some members, it was a first look at this body of thought. A series of lectures will be beginning next month, and there will be a film festival (anarchist films), probably at the end of May. For information on these events write: The Wooden Shoe, 112 So. 20th st. Phila. PA 19103

Bacon

MEANWHILE . . . BACK IN SPAIN

About 40 anarchists are in jail today for their attempts to carry out expropriations (from banks). What they are trying to do in these expropriations is to return to the CNT at least a part of the property (worth more than $20,000,000) that was stolen from that anarcho-syndicalist union by the fascists in 1936--and never returned. The CNT badly needs funds in order to carry on the work that they and their parents and grandparents began. Letters in support of fair treatment of the CNT can be addressed to: Exmo. Sr. Martinez Zato, Director General de Prisiones, Ministerio de Justicia, Madrid, Spain, with, if you wish, a copy and letter of encouragement to one of the prisoners: Fedel Manrique Garrido, Apartado Correos 113, Segovia, Spain.