

## The Globalization of a Memory: The Enduring Remembrance of the Haymarket Martyrs around the World

James Green

In the winter of 1941 Lucy Parsons, aged ninety-one, braved the cold winds and spoke to strikers on Blue Island Avenue, still known as the Black Road, where a union affiliated with the new Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was campaigning for votes at the old McCormick Works—where all the trouble started in 1886, all the trouble that led to the tragedy in the Haymarket. When the weather warmed up that spring, Parsons reappeared at a May Day parade riding through the South Side as an honored guest sitting atop a float sponsored by the CIO's Farm Equipment Workers' Union. It would prove to be her last May Day.<sup>1</sup>

On March 7, 1942, the stove in Parsons's little house caused a fire. Handicapped by her blindness, she could not escape. She died of smoke inhalation. Her ashes were placed at Waldheim Cemetery, close to the remains of her beloved husband, Albert Parsons, and her daughter, Lulu. Lucy Parsons's funeral was attended by many of the young radicals who carried on the union fight that began with the Great Upheaval in April and May of 1886 when tens of thousands of workers launched a general strike for the eight hour day of her youth.<sup>2</sup>

Parsons's final May Day in 1941 was also the last one celebrated in Chicago for a long time. During the Cold War years that followed, the Chicago idea of militant unions taking mass action against capital and the state—the idea Albert Parsons and

This article includes material from the author's forthcoming book, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement, and the Bombing That Divided Gilded Age America*, which is scheduled for publication by Random House in March 2006.

1. Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 299; Toni Gilpin and Steve Rosswurm, "The Haymarket Tradition," *Haymarket, Chicago's Progressive Journal of Politics and Arts* 21 (May 1986): 21–22; Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons, American Revolutionary* (Chicago: Illinois Labor History Society, 1976), 262.

2. Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 300; and Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons*, 262–64.

August Spies espoused until their last breaths—simply vanished from the American labor scene. As Michael Kammen wrote in *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, the story of the Haymarket anarchists “provided one of the first in a series of working class martyrdoms . . . that have been readily blocked from the memories of that disparate class.”<sup>3</sup>

In other parts of world, however, particularly Latin America and Spain and Italy, the Haymarket story has been retold many times over. Indeed, no other event in American history after the Civil War exerted the kind of hold the Haymarket tragedy maintained on the popular imagination of working people in other countries, such as Mexico, where May 1 became a national holiday long known as “the Day of the Martyrs of Chicago.”<sup>4</sup>

To understand the endurance of the Haymarket memory around the world, it is necessary to return to those days in 1887 when the world’s first international amnesty movement was swinging into gear and when nascent socialist and anarchist movements shaped a transnational working-class consciousness. After the jury that had tried and convicted the Haymarket Eight and then sentenced them to death, an Amnesty Committee was formed in Chicago led by the city’s brilliant labor reformer, Henry Demarest Lloyd, and Chicago’s great trade union activist, George A. Schilling. At first, the response to the committee’s appeal came in the form of resolutions from labor unions and cash contributions from workers in many cities across the country and particularly from Chicago. The city’s immigrant unionists were kept constantly informed by a revived radical press comprised of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, which had reopened under new management after its publisher, August Spies, was arrested; the city’s *Knights of Labor* publication; and Joseph Buchanan’s *Labor Enquirer*, a popular radical newspaper the editor had produced in Denver until the Haymarket trial compelled him to move to Chicago and publish there. Buchanan was a major player in the national affairs of the Knights of Labor, one of the main adversaries of Grand Master Workman Terence Powderly. A legendary organizer with anarchist sympathies of his own and an editorial voice that had national resonance, Buchanan led the way in making the anarchist case a cause célèbre in the national labor movement during the summer and fall of 1887.

Meanwhile, in New York City John Swinton, the most influential labor journalist in the land, attacked the death sentence as a judicial murder and then joined with fourteen union leaders representing various wings of the city’s union movement to condemn the verdict and to call for a mass protest on October 20. That night a

3. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 517.

4. George Richard Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain, 1868–1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 172, 189, 191, 197, 202–3; John Hart, *Anarchism and the Mexican Working Class, 1860–1931* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 83–94, 108–11; Philip S. Foner, *May Day: A Short History of the International Workers Holiday, 1886–1986* (New York: International Publishers, 1986), 74, 78; Dan LaBotz, e-mail message to author, November 18, 2004, Mexico City; and Pablo Pozzi, e-mail message to author, December 2, 2004, Buenos Aires.

large crowd jammed into the Great Hall at Cooper Union in New York City to hear Samuel Gompers, the new president of the American Federation of Labor, denounce the proceedings in Chicago. Unlike Powderly, who refused to endorse the campaign for clemency, Gompers joined other trade union leaders in making an appeal for liberty, free speech, and justice, expressing the belief that the impending execution would be “a disgrace to the honor of this country.”<sup>5</sup>

In Cuba a surprising level of concern over the case welled up among workers in Havana where the anarchist newspaper *El Productor* had closely followed the eight-hour struggle and the ordeal of the anarchists accused of the May 4 bombing. The editor, Enrique Roig, like many labor activists in Havana, was an exiled anarchist from Spain who published many reports on the Chicago trial and the demonstrations of protest and solidarity around the world. Two weeks before the Cooper Union meeting in New York City, *El Círculo de Trabajadores de La Habana* convened a meeting of workers in the colonial capital to begin a campaign to save the lives of the Chicago Eight. A special committee was formed that on November 8 held a meeting of one thousand workers from various unions, “tipógrafos, cigareros, zapateros, mecánicos,” and so forth, where it was agreed to send to the governor of Illinois a petition urging a pardon; the document was also signed by workers in all the provinces and in a great number of towns in the interior. One result of this impressive solidarity campaign was that 1,000 pesos were raised to send to the families of the condemned men.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, European socialists and trade unionists turned their attentions to the events unfolding in Chicago. The European socialist press devoted a “truly impressive amount of coverage to the Haymarket bombing and all the events flowing from it,” wrote R. Laurence Moore.

Indeed, for the next half century no “incident on the American scene was given so much space or remembered so long.”<sup>7</sup> Although European socialists, particularly those of the outlawed German Social Democratic Party, regarded anarchists

5. Quoted in Henry David, *The History of the Haymarket Affair: A Study in the American Social-Revolutionary and Labor Movements* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1936), 345–46; *Chicago Tribune*, September 24, October 11, 21, 1887.

6. Fabio Gorbart, “Cosmopolitismo, recuerdos de la Commune y Chicago (Internationalism and Memories of the Commune and Chicago),” in *Anarquistas in America Latina (Anarchists in Latin America)*, by David Vinas (Buenos Aires: Paradiso, 2004), 86–88. According to Evan Daniel, Cuban cigar makers were initially organized by followers of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon in the mid-nineteenth century. During the 1880s these “mutualistas” were joined by militant anarchists, followers of Mikhail Bakunin, who were immigrants or political exiles from Spain. By 1887 a “creole anarchism” had emerged among native Cubano cigar makers who were internationalists but also supporters of the Cuban nationalist movement led by Jose Martí who wrote extensively about the Haymarket case for the Latin American press (Evan Daniel, “[Re]Examining Class: Transnational Workers and Nationalist Struggles in the Nineteenth Century United States” [paper presented at the Southwestern Labor Studies Association and Labor and Working Class History Association Conference, University of California, Santa Barbara, May 6, 2005]).

7. R. Laurence Moore, *European Socialists and the American Promised Land* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 33, 36.

as destructive provocateurs at best, their newspapers embraced the Haymarket defendants as heroic social revolutionaries and widely circulated their hard-hitting speeches on the state of American freedom.

The repression following the bombing at Haymarket, the reaction by employers against the eight-hour movement, the show trial in the Cook County courthouse during the summer of 1886, the anarchists' fervent and highly publicized speech making, the rejection of appeals to the higher courts and the governor, and finally the intensely scrutinized execution on "Black Friday," November 11, 1887—all these events confirmed the critical views of the United States held by European socialists at a time when popular opinion on the Continent regarded the United States as a Promised Land, a new Canaan.<sup>8</sup>

In London many articles and editorials about the Haymarket case appeared in the socialist publication *Commonweal* produced by William Morris, the noted poet and designer who worried about unemployed marchers rioting in his native London and feared that city authorities would now adopt the repressive tactics of the Chicago police, who "hunted socialists like wolves."<sup>9</sup> Coverage of the trial and the appeal hearings was even more extensive in Paris, a city with an active anarchist movement (though it was tiny compared with the International in Chicago). When word of the failed appeal to the Illinois Supreme Court reached France, the socialist newspaper *Le Cri du Peuple* announced a protest against what would be the most atrocious political crime in the United States since the hanging of John Brown. Public concern reached all the way to the municipal council of the Seine, whose deputies issued a plea for mercy to the U.S. legation, recalling the clemency the North had extended to the "vanquished leaders of the Southern rebellion." Many of the same deputies also signed a clemency petition to Governor Richard Oglesby.<sup>10</sup> In October radicals called Haymarket protest meetings in London, The Hague, Rotterdam, Vienna, Brussels, Lyon, Marseille, and Toulon.<sup>11</sup> It was no wonder, then, that the *Chicago Tribune* admitted on October 11 that "the eyes of the world seem to be on the Chicago anarchists."<sup>12</sup>

Morris's *Commonweal* reported on the entire trial and appeal process as a travesty of justice. By contrast, the editors of the *London Times* praised the Chicago police

8. *Ibid.*, 33.

9. Edward Thompson, *William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), 409; and Beryl Ruehl, "From Haymarket Square to Trafalgar Square," in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, ed. David Roediger and Franklin Rosemont (Chicago: Kerr, 1986), 217, 220.

10. Marjorie Murphy, "And They Sang the 'Marseillaise': A Look at the French Left Press as It Responded to Haymarket"; and Hubert Perrier, Catherine Collomp, Michel Cordillot, and Marianne Debouzy, "The 'Social Revolution' in America? European Reactions to the 'Great Upheaval' and to the Haymarket Affair," both in a special Haymarket centennial issue of *International Labor and Working Class History*, no. 29 (spring 1986): 42–44.

11. Raymond C. Sun, "Misguided Martyrdom: German Social Democratic Response to the Haymarket Incident," *International Labor and Working Class History*, no. 29 (spring 1986): 53–60; and Perrier et al., "'Social Revolution' in America?" 44.

12. Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain*, 6–9, 125–27, 155–56; *Chicago Tribune*, October 11, 1887.

and their use of force, and suggested British police might well follow the example of their American counterparts, who did not hesitate to invade public meetings without legal sanction or to “carry revolvers, and use them without mercy when they see signs of resistance.”<sup>13</sup>

When news of the executions of Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel, and Adolph Fischer reached England, William Morris said that it exhibited “the spirit of cold cruelty, heartless and careless at once, which is one of the most noticeable characteristics of American commercialism.” Here, said Morris, was “a country with universal suffrage, no king, no House of Lords,” and yet it was “a society corrupt to the core, and at this moment engaged in suppressing freedom with just the same reckless brutality and blind ignorance as the Czar of all the Russias.”<sup>14</sup>

On November 13, two days after the Chicago executions, the London city police attacked a peaceful demonstration of the unemployed in Trafalgar Square with extreme brutality. Two hundred were treated in hospitals, and three expired because they had been beaten to death. Working-class London was outraged. The trauma of London’s “Bloody Sunday,” following so closely on Chicago’s “Black Friday,” galvanized British radicals and reformers; it also stimulated the rise of an anarchist movement in Great Britain that challenged Morris and his Socialist League for a short time.<sup>15</sup>

The news of Haymarket exerted its greatest influence on Spanish workers who had organized a powerful federation with anarchist leaders in the early 1880s. When the open trade unions were destroyed, anarchist politics remained alive in hundreds of resistance societies that existed side by side with other workers’ circles, café clubs, and choirs, as well as in newspapers that published a talented bunch of writers who presented an enormous volume of information in accessible forms like serials and novellas.<sup>16</sup>

On the first anniversary of the executions in 1888, November 11 became a widely celebrated workers’ holiday in Spanish cities and in many villages as well, according to a London reporter. “The ceremonies of the ‘holy day’ were commonly held in the evening, when, after having toiled a full day, workers would gather in their *centro* or other commonly used meeting place.” For the evening festivities the halls were transformed into shrines to the martyrs of Chicago and of Spain who had given their lives in the struggle for freedom.<sup>17</sup>

In 1889 the second national literary competition for radical artists and writers concluded with a huge celebration in Barcelona that attracted twelve thousand people. This ecumenical event reached its climax when an overflow crowd gathered at the Palacio de Bellas Artes to hear speeches commemorating the lives and deaths of

13. Quoted in Thompson, *William Morris*, 487.

14. *Ibid.*, 507.

15. Quoted in *ibid.*, 487. See also 489, 507–8.

16. Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain*, 6–9, 125–27, 156.

17. Quoted in *ibid.*, 159.

the Chicago martyrs.<sup>18</sup> The memorials to the martyrs were even more widespread in Italy, according to Peter Kropotkin, who reported that enthusiastic crowds of workers in all the major cities commemorated “the bloody anniversary.”<sup>19</sup>

The memory of the Haymarket victims deepened when it became associated with the celebration of May Day as the international workers’ day beginning in 1890, when, as Eric Hobsbawm has observed, the extent to which workers took part in the marches and meetings amazed the leaders of the Socialist International who had called on them to do so, notably the 300,000 who filled Hyde Park in London for the largest demonstration of the day.<sup>20</sup> In cities all over Europe, icons of the Chicago martyrs appeared in the first of May processions along with red flags and crimson flowers. In Barcelona a militant eight-hour strike swept the city and in Italian towns and cities from Piedmonte to Calabria, socialists and anarchists celebrated *Primo Maggio* with marches, festivals, and strikes. Rank-and-file workers quickly transformed May Day into a potent ritual event to demonstrate for the eight-hour day and to assert a new working-class presence in the world.<sup>21</sup>

On future May Days, northern European socialists and trade unionists emphasized the holiday as a festive, forward-looking occasion, one that was often scheduled on a Sunday to avoid causing a general work stoppage. However, in the Latin world, in Spain and Italy, and later in Cuba, Mexico, and Central and South America, the first of May remained a militant occasion for quitting work, heightening revolutionary fervor, and observing a day of grief, highlighted with the black banners anarchists flew in commemoration of the Chicago martyrs.<sup>22</sup>

Why were workers in these countries so seized with emotion by the ordeal of the Chicago anarchists? First, as noted above, the trial and hangings had been widely publicized in mainstream newspapers, especially in the radical periodicals that emerged in great profusion during the mid-1880s. Socialist newspapers in Europe devoted “a truly impressive amount of coverage” to the Haymarket affair and its aftermath. “Indeed, no future incident on the American scene,” writes one historian, “was given so much space or remembered so long.”<sup>23</sup>

Second, the drama of the trial and appeal lasted a year and a half, long enough to become a kind of serial drama or passion play in which the lives and beliefs of the defendants became well known, partly through their own simply written autobiogra-

18. *Ibid.*, 136, 160.

19. Quoted in James Green, *Taking History to Heart: The Power of the Past in Building Social Movements* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 126.

20. Eric Hobsbawm, “The Birth of a Holiday: The First of May,” in *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion, and Jazz* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 117.

21. Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working Class Movement in Spain*, 163; Andrea Panaccione, ed., *Sappi che oggi e la tua festa . . . per la storia del 1 maggio* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1989); and Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass Producing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 285.

22. Hobsbawm, “Birth of a Holiday,” 119.

23. Moore, *European Socialists and the American Promised Land*, 33.

phies. Albert Parsons and the immigrants who died with him became familiar characters in working-class quarters and were endowed by their admirers with the purest hearts and minds. European workers who learned about the Chicago anarchists came to believe that their “brethren were thoroughly *honest*” and that, as Kropotkin explained, “Not a single black spot could be detected in their lives, even by their enemies. Not a single black spot!” They were not ambitious men who yearned to rise out of their class, to “climb up” on the shoulders of their fellow workers. “They sought no power over others, no place in the ranks of the ruling classes,” he added. Furthermore, the condemned men acted courageously, refusing to renounce their beliefs to save their lives, refusing to sacrifice their manhood by begging for mercy from evil men.<sup>24</sup>

Thus the four figures in the white shrouds became heroes in the working-class quarters of European cities, especially in Spain and Italy, where laborers who had been raised Catholics also embraced the men as secular saints crucified by the Caesars. The “retratos” with the anarchists’ faces that appeared in Spanish anarchist circles and the similar images produced in Italy looked remarkably like holy cards with sacred images of the saints canonized in Rome.<sup>25</sup>

When Samuel Gompers appealed to the governor of Illinois to commute the sentences of the four anarchists on death row in 1887, he predicted that executing them would cause “thousands and thousands of labor men all over the world” to look on the anarchists as martyrs, “executed because they were standing up for free speech and free press.” This is precisely what happened, as “labor men” created a ritualized memory of their heroes. When Gompers visited European cities in 1895, he noticed in nearly every union hall pictures of Parsons, Lingg, Spies, etc., with the inscription “Labor’s Martyrs to American Capitalism.” On later visits, he saw “the same pictures still there.”<sup>26</sup>

Third, the Spanish *retratos* of *i martirios* and the memorials to the Chicago anarchists on November 11 as well as the strikes and the parades on May 1 reflected the power of the Haymarket story for ascendant labor movements worldwide between 1886 and 1914, and even later in Latin America. The remembrance of Spies, Parsons, and their comrades was far more than ceremonial; their martyrdom became the key parable in constructing a homily of supreme sacrifice for workers’ movements struggling at birth in cities all over Europe and Latin America during the 1890s and beyond.

Confronting aggressive employers, hostile churches and newspapers, armed forces and militarized police forces, these movements needed issues like the eight-

24. Quote in Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 436.

25. A *retrato* from Barcelona is reproduced in Roediger and Rosemont, *Haymarket Scrapbook*, 226. See also Italian posters in Andrea Panaccione, ed., *The Memory of May Day: An Iconographic History of the Origins and Implanting of a Workers’ Holiday* (Venice: Martilio Editori, 1989).

26. Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor: An Autobiography* (New York: Dutton, 1925), 238–39.

hour day (a truly international demand), tactics like the mass strike (pioneered in Chicago in 1886), and heroes like the Haymarket martyrs, whose dedication to the labor cause was absolute and whose vision transcended national boundaries. The pioneers of the labor movement—from Barcelona to Havana, from Rome to Mexico City—found all these things in the tragic Chicago story.<sup>27</sup>

Mother Jones knew the power of the martyrs' story and how far it reached. Traveling in Mexico in 1921, she received a hearty reception in many places, notably in Orizaba, a thoroughly organized textile-manufacturing town where workers had formed a libertarian mutualist cooperative society in 1901 and had launched a general strike in 1906 that produced an upsurge in Mexican working-class radicalism.<sup>28</sup>

It was May Day of 1921 when Mother Jones addressed a large meeting of workers and deputies in Orizaba. She was surprised when most of the elected officials referred to Haymarket in their speeches. What impressed her most came at the start of the meeting when a parade entered the hall with bearers of the Mexican national flag and a banner recalling “the murder of the so-called Chicago anarchists of 1886.” The audience rose and erupted in applause. “The tribute paid the banner as it entered the hall was the most remarkable demonstration I have witnessed in all my years of industrial conflict,” she wrote to the leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labor.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, similar demonstrations occurred all over Mexico that day. The Confederación General de Trabajo, founded that year on anarchist principles, raised the celebration of May 1 to a new level, calling for twenty-four-hour strikes by its members, an action joined by the other major union movements. In subsequent years, May Day general strikes took place in several states of the Mexican republic, especially in Mexico City where the great march and walkout would be referred to “as the annual demonstration glorifying those who were killed in Chicago in 1887.”<sup>30</sup>

When Mother Jones described the stirring Mexican May Day events of 1921 to John Fitzpatrick of the Chicago Federation of Labor, she knew that memorials to the anarchists in the United States had ended. Indeed, she told Fitzpatrick that if Chicago labor leaders staged celebrations for the Haymarket martyrs like the ones she saw in Mexico, they would be thrown in jail.

The memorials to the Chicago martyrs endured in Mexico partly for ceremonial reasons. Traveling near Mexico City on May Day in 1923, an American poet, together with D. H. Lawrence and his wife, saw working people laying a cornerstone for a statue to the martyrs of Chicago whose executions—described during a rally as “shameless and villainous”—could still arouse “all Mexico to protest.” At a time

27. See James Green, “Remembering Haymarket: Chicago’s Labor Martyrs and Their Memorial Legacy,” in Green, *Taking History to Heart*, 134.

28. Mother Jones quoted in Roediger and Rosemont, *Haymarket Scrapbook*, 213. On Orizaba textile workers, see Hart, *Anarchism*, 93–94.

29. Hart, *Anarchism*, 159; Roediger and Rosemont, *Haymarket Scrapbook*, 213.

30. Luis Araiza, *Genesis, significado y mixtificación del Primero de Mayo (The Origin, Significance, and Mystification of May First)* (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios Historicos del Movimiento Obrero Mexicano, 1977), 118–19.

when radical and militant labor activists had been driven underground in the United States, their Mexican comrades remained important in the labor movement as the Confederación General de Trabajadores (CGT).<sup>31</sup>

Later, when the unions helped bring the proworker Lázaro Cárdenas government to power, Albert Parsons, August Spies, and their comrades were recalled in a massive parade of sixty thousand factory and fieldworkers in Mexico City on May 1, 1936, who voiced their indignation over “the death of the martyrs in Chicago.”<sup>32</sup> The martyrs were also in a grand site of memory—on the walls of the Palace of Justice in a mural by Diego Rivera. Perhaps these Mexican memorials to “los martirios de Chicago” reflected one more effort by architects of Mexican national identity, like Rivera, to define Mexico in opposition to the United States, as if to say, “We’re Indian, they’re Anglo. We’re Catholic, they’re Protestant. We have history, they have no memory.”<sup>33</sup>

In Latin America martyrs were not just recalled on memorial occasions. They were also remembered during especially violent strikes led by revolutionary trade unionists—*anarcho-sindicalistas*—who continued as the vanguard of working-class struggle in Latin America until they were displaced by the political party bosses, as in Mexico, or by Communists, as in Cuba. During the period before 1920, when only thirty-seven unions in all of Latin America were legally recognized, the anarchists and *anarcho-sindicalistas* led the most powerful and militant workers’ organizations and often led them into terribly risky confrontations, as they did in 1916 in Bogotá, Colombia, in which numerous workers were killed and more than five hundred imprisoned, and in the 1918–19 conflicts on the Atlantic Coast, including a general strike in Cartagena and the first strike of banana workers against the United Fruit Company in Santa María.<sup>34</sup>

Even after radical independent unions were replaced by party-dominated worker federations in some Latin countries, and even after trade unions were destroyed and military dictators banned demonstrations during the 1970s in other countries, like Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay—even in these places, icons to the martyrs could still be found. While traveling in the remote Llagua tin-mining region of Bolivia during the 1980s, the journalist Dan LaBotz met a worker who invited him into his little home. During dinner with the miner and his family, LaBotz noticed a small piece of cloth hanging in the window, an embroidery that in the United States might have read: “God bless our home.” He moved closer to take a look and saw that it read: “Long Live the Martyrs of Chicago.”<sup>35</sup>

31. Avrich, *Haymarket Tragedy*, 435–46.

32. Foner, *May Day*, 118.

33. *Ibid.*, and quote from Rueben Martinez, “Mexico’s Search for Self,” *Nation*, April 28, 1997, 22.

34. Vinas, *Anarquistas in America Latina*, 119, 124–25.

35. LaBotz, e-mail message to author. In 1986, when the centennial of Haymarket was celebrated in Chicago, unions and labor history groups in Australia and Europe produced memorial publications; in Greece, May Day was used by Left parties as an occasion to honor the memory of the Chicago martyrs and to call for the closing of U.S. military bases—this at a massive rally of 100,000–200,000 people in Athens. Thanks for this note to Gunther Peck, who participated in the rally. The Haymarket memory also survived

Off and on over the years that followed, visitors to Chicago from Central and South America set out west from the Loop to find Haymarket Square, the site of the great riot in 1886. For some it was a pilgrimage; one of these was the exiled Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, who came to Chicago in 1985 to discuss the new English editions of books he had written while in exile from his homeland.

Galeano was already renowned for his indignant work *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, published in 1970 and translated into twenty languages, a book written when he was an influential journalist and editor in Montevideo.

Three years later, after the military coup in Uruguay, Galeano was imprisoned, then forced to leave his native country for Buenos Aires, where he founded the cultural journal *Crisis*. He stayed there until the military coup of 1976; when the death squads added his name to their lists, he escaped Argentina for Barcelona, the historic center of Spanish anarchism, where citizens and workers were still celebrating the death of the dictator Franco and his fascist regime. There, in Catalonia, Galeano began to write his magnum opus, the trilogy *Memoria del fuego*, an epic prose poem to the people of the Americas and their bloody histories—memory books that transcended existing literary genres. “I am a writer obsessed with remembering,” he said, “with remembering the past of America, above all that of Latin America, intimate land condemned to amnesia.”<sup>36</sup>

Galeano’s obsession with the past remains obvious in the third volume of the trilogy, finished in 1985, the year he came to Chicago. In *Century of the Wind* he offers yearly calendar scenes that begin at Montevideo in 1900 with a new century being born as “the time of anybodies,” a time when “the people want democracy and trade unions.” The book proceeds with Galeano’s imaginative vignettes of American lives, of the oppressors and the oppressed, of the dictators and the dissenters—all locked in deadly embrace: the anarchist Flores Magón brothers in Mexico, who “flouted the authority of eternal president Porfirio Diaz”; the Wobbly Joe Hill in Utah, “a proletarian troubadour . . . a foreigner seeking to subvert the good order of business,” condemned to death by those who “make all the decisions in Salt Lake City”; the two Italians in Massachusetts, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, whose lives are in the hands of the governor, “a man who has made forty million dollars selling Packard cars”—and so on into modern times ending in 1976 in the author’s native Monte-

---

in China, even in a year, 1987, when the Communist government held no May Day celebrations. “Yesterday is the holiday for the working class,” a friend wrote to me from Beijing on May 2, 1987. “Though we did not hold any grand meeting or some parade, yet the mighty struggle for the eight hour day is ingrained in our minds.” In the past “we paid great tribute to these heroes who sacrificed their lives for the benefit of the working class. May First is one of the most important holidays; on this day we pay tribute to the Haymarket martyrs” (Huang Shao-xiang, letter to author, May 2, 1987, Beijing).

36. Biography of Eduardo Galeano, [www.kirjasto.sci.fi/galeano.htm](http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/galeano.htm). See also Luis Roniger, Luis Sznajder, and Mario Sznajder, “The Politics of Memory in Redemocratized Argentina and Uruguay,” *Memory and History* 10, no. 1 (1998): 155–56.

video, where the generals “punish solidarity” with “seventy-five methods of torture,” and “obligatory new texts impose military pedagogy on the students.”<sup>37</sup>

After the generals were overthrown in Uruguay, Galeano returned to his beloved Montevideo and shortly thereafter came to Chicago to talk about his memory books. He arrived in the spring of 1985 wondering if May 1 would be celebrated in this city “full of factories” and “full of workers.” As soon as he arrived in the Windy City, Galeano asked his hosts to take him to the Haymarket, the place where the great saga began with speeches by the martyred workers.<sup>38</sup> After a fruitless search of the barren square Galeano realized nothing had been erected to mark the spot. “No statue had been erected in memory of the martyrs of Chicago in the city of Chicago.” Not even a bronze plaque. Nothing. Furthermore, May Day came and went without notice. “May 1st is the only truly universal day of all humanity, the only day when all histories and all languages and religions and cultures of the world collide,” Galeano wrote. “But in the United States, May 1st is a day like any other. On that day people work normally and no one, or almost no one, remembers that the rights of the working class did not spring whole from the ear of a goat, or from the hand of God or the boss.”<sup>39</sup>

What Eduardo Galeano did not know in 1985 was that a few Chicagoans did remember the martyrs, did know the origin of May Day, and did get a bronze plaque dedicated to the workers who died there placed in the Haymarket (only to see it ripped down). Nor was he aware that a small party of the memory was dedicated to erecting a statue “in memory of the martyrs of Chicago in the city of Chicago.” These people with long memories were the founders of the Illinois Labor History Society: Les Orear, Bill Adelman, Bill Garvey, Mollie West, and many others, who with the support of Studs Terkel and Don Turner of the Chicago Federation of Labor and the artistry of Mary Brogger, have finally succeeded in their campaign to erect a memorial to all those who died in the Haymarket on May 4, including the anarchist workers.

There is a statue now on the exact spot where Sam Fielden stood speaking on a hay wagon when Captain William Ward ordered the crowd to disperse that night in 1886, but it is not the kind of monument Galeano had come looking for in 1985—one that explicitly memorializes the Chicago martyrs and their struggle for workers’ rights. The memorial does not literally represent workers killed in the struggle for the eight-hour day, nor does it recall the policemen who died following orders to defend law and order or the anarchists executed for speaking freely about the tactics workers needed to adopt in an all-out class war. Instead of naming the casualties of the Haymarket tragedy, the new Haymarket memorial on Desplaines Street offers

37. Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Century of the Wind, Part Three of a Trilogy* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 4, 16, 65–66, 231, 271.

38. Eduardo Galeano, *The Book of Embraces* (New York: Norton, 1991), 191, 256, 114–15, 117–18. See also Jeff Huebner, “Haymarket Revisited,” *Reader: Chicago’s Free Weekly*, December 10, 1993, 1, 14–16.

39. Galeano, *Book of Embraces*, 118.

the public a symbolic memorial: a figurative composition of rounded-off bronze figures with a reddish hue, shapes of people who are assembling, or perhaps disassembling, a wagon.<sup>40</sup>

A *New York Times* reporter called the figures “an ambiguous memorial” to the Haymarket tragedy, featuring a cautiously worded inscription that refers to the affair as “a powerful symbol for a diverse cross section of people, ideas and movements,” which touched “on the issues of free speech, the right of public assembly, organized labor, the fight for the eight-hour workday, law enforcement, justice, anarchy, and the right of human beings to pursue an equitable prosperous life.”<sup>41</sup> This language is nothing like what the fierce partisans of the Haymarket martyrs would have chosen. Rather, the inscribed words on its base reflect a point of view carefully hammered out by a committee of citizens and local officials trying to represent an event that left a deeply divided memory still capable of arousing strong emotions a century later. So it took some time to agree on the Haymarket memorial—thirty-five years after the idea was first raised by Orear, Adelman, and others—the time it took for Chicagoans to look back on the Haymarket affair and see that it was “everybody’s tragedy.”<sup>42</sup>

Like everything about the memory of Haymarket, the new memorial has provoked controversy. Some Chicago labor people are thrilled with Brogger’s figures and others are not, but, in any case, it already seems clear that the monument will provide a symbolic site of memory, the kind of site that impedes forgetting and provides a locus for the rituals of remembering.<sup>43</sup> This was evident on this past May Day at a spirited rally sponsored by the Illinois Labor History Society and the AFL-CIO—the first May 1 celebration the federation had endorsed in Chicago since 1890.

When May Day returned to Chicago in 2005—as a day honored by the whole labor movement—a delegation of Colombian trade unionists appeared with members of the city’s Federation of Labor on a platform next to the new monument at the Haymarket site on Desplaines Street, where they spoke to an audience together with Chicago union leaders and labor historians. After the speeches, the Colombians unveiled a plaque attached to the base of the new monument and dedicated to the memory of the more than 1,300 trade unionists who have been murdered in Colombia by paramilitary groups and other assassins between 1991 and 2001. The killing of labor activists has continued ever since, with the number of victims reaching new heights in 2005. Johnny Menesses, a Colombian union activist, gave a fiery speech in Spanish invoking the memory of Haymarket martyrs and explaining that in Colombia massacres like those that occurred in Chicago on May 3 and 4, 1886, took place

40. Deanna Isaacs, “A Monumental Effort Pays Off,” *Chicago Reader*, January 16, 2004, 22.

41. Stephen Kinzer, “In Chicago, an Ambiguous Memorial to the Haymarket Attack,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2004.

42. Ibid.

43. On sites of memory that provide loci for ritualized remembrance, see Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 6, 8, 19.

every day. In a voice choked with emotion, he said: "You have one monument. But in Colombia, we would need many more than that."<sup>44</sup>

The moving May Day ritual that took place in Chicago this year was another reminder of why for more than a century, when union activists have become latter-day martyrs for labor's cause, the ghosts of the workingmen executed in Cook County's jail so long ago are still recalled from their graves at Waldheim Cemetery. ■

44. Stephen Franklin, "Sunday Not Just Another Working Day," *Chicago Tribune*, May 2, 2006. For a report on the escalating violence from 1991 to 2001, see Juan Forero, "Union Workers in Colombia Easy Prey for Gunman," *New York Times*, April 29, 2001. The situation in Colombia worsened in 2002 when the number of trade unionists murdered increased to 223, according to a study by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (Katie Nguyen, "Reports Show Latin American Trade Unionists Suffer Most," Reuters, June 18, 2002).



Copyright of *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas* is the property of Duke University Press. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.