

With the release of the pardoned anarchists, commentators once again expressed the belief that the dramas of Haymarket were finally over. "The concluding chapter in the famous Anarchist case was written yesterday," one newspaper story proclaimed, "when Oscar Neebe, Michael Schwab and Samuel Fielden walked forth from Joliet Penitentiary." After all the tumultuous events that marked the previous seven years, what was most striking was the calm surrounding the former prisoners' return. The train carrying Neebe, Schwab, and Fielden arrived in Chicago in the June twilight, and they disembarked without any crowds or demonstrations to greet them. "An hour later joy abided within three humble homes," readers were told, "and the last act in the most famous drama in modern history had been acted."



The Heritage of Haymarket

Not quite. Deeply embedded in the social conflicts that led to the Haymarket rally and the bombing, and then in the legal proceedings and public uproar that followed, was a guarantee that Haymarket would be a drama without end. Until society achieved the impossible goal of reaching a consensus on what the nature of the social order was and should be, the story of Haymarket would be told and retold by partisans eager to announce and advance their deeply held views about truth and justice. And many of the dramas inherent within this story would be enacted again and again.

These dramas continued on many different stages. Those who believed in the principles or goals of the convicted men waged their struggle on several fronts. Just as Parsons, Spies, and their comrades had celebrated events like the French Revolution and the Paris Commune, so did the memory of the Haymarket become a rallying point for friends of labor and of those who saw economic and political inequity as woven into the fabric of the current order. Most leaders of organized labor, even those like Samuel Gompers who argued for clemency, continued to insist that although they shared the convicted men's concern for working people, they disagreed with their anarchistic beliefs and had no toleration at all for bombs and armed confrontation.



Gompers and other union leaders expressed strong regrets that the explosion in the Haymarket, so closely linked in the public mind with the eight-hour campaign, halted its progress. Wary of



being associated with anarchism, they avoided political ideology and critiques of the capitalist system, focusing on bread-and-butter issues such as wages, hours, and working conditions.

On the fourth anniversary of Haymarket, an editorial in the Chicago Tribune noted the American Federation of Labor's renewed advances in the effort to win an eight-hour day. The traditionally antiunion Tribune praised the current effort for its more "subdued" tone, observing that there were "no loud-mouthed Anarchists this time proclaiming the policy that has been adopted by secret organizations in countries where free movements of labor are suppressed by violent means." Two years later, however, another Tribune Haymarket editorial derided those who now spoke on the Lake Front where Spies and Parsons once held forth. The editorial counseled workers that the wrongs labor visited on itself were far greater than the evils of capitalism. The Tribune patronizingly recommended that workers should spend less on liquor and more on savings, and that if they wanted shorter hours and better pay, they should work more efficiently.

In time, it was labor leaders and the rank-and-file who blurred the distinction between the anarchists in particular and union organizers in general. Although philosophical anarchists and more radical unions such as the International Workers of the World, founded in Chicago in 1905, maintained that they had a higher claim on the heritage of the Haymarket martyrs than did conventional trade unionists, the latter adopted the men buried at Waldheim as heroes of the eight-hour campaign. The harsh punishment they received demanded a redoubled dedication to the goal of increasing the power of unions, since it revealed the extent to which the authorities would go to break the spirit of the worker.

Haymarket also remained an international drama, a rallying symbol around the world, arguably attracting more interest abroad than in the United States. The executed men became heroes among laboring groups in the industrialized nations of Europe. Their visibility in other countries is attributable to a stronger labor tradition abroad, greater receptivity to socialist ideas, and a markedly less ardent belief in and reverence for the integrity of American justice. The symbolic resonance of Haymarket extends also to Asia, Australia, and South America, in many forms of cultural expression. In 1939, fifteen-year-old O. William Neebe III was first made aware of his own personal connection to events in the Haymarket in Mexico City. A relative took him to a May Day parade and showed him the mural by Diego Rivera in the Palace of Justice in which his grandfather Oscar Neebe and his seven codefendants are featured prominently, the nooses of capitalist injustice around their necks.

Haymarket has hardly belonged solely to those who viewed the defendants as heroes and martyrs. There were also those eager to point out that the real

struggle and sacrifice had been endured by others. Fifteen years after the bombing, the surviving policemen incorporated themselves as the Veterans of the Haymarket Riot. Four years later they honored Judge Gary with a special citation expressing their gratitude to him for his conduct of the trial, and they would meet regularly to recall their courage under fire. The police increasingly associated their experience in the Haymarket with patriotism and law and order broadly defined, just as union leaders and friends of labor would use the trial and executions to remind themselves of the need to organize against the bosses.

It could be argued that Haymarket has in fact been invoked more effectively by the forces of social control than of liberation. In spite of the intelligence, refinement, and broad human sympathies that were recognizable by anyone who got to know the accused, Haymarket was responsible for the wholesale stereotyping of radical dissenters of many different kinds as crazed bomb-throwers and enemies of the people. Anyone with unpopular political ideas would be branded an anarchist, which was taken to mean a dangerously disaffected person who would seek to remedy his own baseless discontent by doing violence to public order and "American" values. The bombing became a focus for free-floating xenophobia, leading to the imposition of restrictions on political radicals and on immigration in the early decades of this century. Meanwhile, it was not until well into Franklin Roosevelt's second administration that the eight-hour standard became federal law.

The response to Haymarket also set the pattern for the subsequent repression of alleged subversives at times of cultural crisis, such as at the end of World War I and during the early 1950s. Though it proceeded as farce rather than tragedy, there were haunting echoes of Haymarket as well in the conspiracy trial of the political agitators arrested for their alleged role in causing the pitched battles between protesters and Chicago police during the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

Local Dramas

In Chicago, the dramas of Haymarket have played out in many other ways. From the late 1880s on, the dates of the rally and of the executions, and the sites of the Waldheim monument and the police statue, became special markers for different groups and interests. The Waldheim monument has become holy ground for the American and international left. Several dozen activists in whose political consciousness Haymarket was a defining event are buried or have their ashes scattered near their heroes. The area around the anarchists' graves has served as the site of literally scores of ceremonies, usually on or around May 4 or November 11. To this day, pilgrims to Waldheim lay roses on the monument, or on the nearby stones for Lucy Parsons, Emma Goldman, and others. In 1997 the United States Department of the Interior designated the site a National Historic Landmark.

The 1889 statue dedicated to the policemen who were at the Haymarket meeting has had a much more troubled career, one that reflects the passions and resentments that the story of the bombing, trial, and executions still elicit, and the persistent power of Haymarket as symbol and locus of cultural drama. Over the years the statue has served many times as the site of ceremonies honoring the police, but it also has repeatedly been a target for those attacking the current order. In addition to being vandalized and defaced, the statue was blown up twice during the Vietnam era.



Not that all protests have been against memorials to the police, however. On May 3, 1970, the Illinois State Historical Society and the Illinois Labor History Society (ILHS) jointly dedicated a commemorative plaque to the Haymarket meeting placed on the exterior of the Catholic Charities building on the southwest corner of Randolph and Desplaines. The ILHS had originally been formed on May 4, 1969, as the Haymarket Workers Memorial Committee, but it soon changed its name and became an organization devoted to examining the larger context of labor history. Although the plaque was entirely descriptive—its most controversial statement being that that no evidence was found to link any radicals to the bomb—someone soon pried it off the wall. This vandalism, and the violence suffered by the police statue across the street, indicate the level of passion that the heritage of Haymarket still aroused more than eighty years after the fact.

The prolabor and propolice rallies continued in the Haymarket, each laying claim to and continuing different memories of what actually happened on May 4, 1886, and why it was important. Up into the 1960s, every early May would witness a gathering of officers, politicians, and area businessmen around the police monument. They were usually joined by a descendant of one of the men who served in the riot, a Catholic clergyman, an honor guard from a patriotic organization, and at least one person in a police uniform from the 1880s. Waldheim, meanwhile, remained the site of ceremonies paying homage to the Haymarket cast of characters in particular and to labor in general.



By the time of the Haymarket centennial in 1986, one could argue that labor had become the virtually undisputed "hero" of the dramas of Haymarket in the public mind. Chicago now had an African-American mayor, Harold Washington, who declared May 1986 "Labor History Month in Chicago." Washington's official proclamation honored "the movement toward the eight-hour day, union rights, civil rights, human rights" and recalled "the tragic miscarriage of justice which claimed the lives of four labor activists." The poster for the

centennial referred to "the vicious frameup" that led to the executions of four innocent men, and deemed the anniversary a "celebration of the history and culture of working people." The city hosted dozens of commemorative conferences and concerts, films and dramatic performances, marches and rallies, and special exhibits, including a major installation at the Chicago Historical Society. All of these activities celebrated unions and working people. A group of police officers, wearing uniforms from the 1880s, paraded from City Hall to the site of the police monument, but this was a very modest event and by this point the police statue was long gone from the vicinity of the original rally.

An Elusive Consensus

It still remains difficult, however, to reach a consensus on the meaning of Haymarket. Various attempts to erect a significant monument or memorial in the area of the meeting have never been realized, probably because Haymarket, in spite of the passage of time, remains so controversial and defies any attempt to offer an interpretation acceptable to all interested parties. On March 25, 1992, the City Council finally adopted an ordinance conferring landmark status on the block of Desplaines Street between Randolph and Lake. So far this has only resulted in the placement of a small plaque in the sidewalk near where the speakers' wagon was located in 1886.

An irony surrounding more recent protests of commemorations of Haymarket in this country is the criticism they have received from the radical left, even though such commemorations are now almost invariably prolabor occasions. One of the most recent scenes in the dramas of Haymarket was the ceremony on May 3, 1998, marking the designation of the Waldheim monument site as a National Historic Landmark. Landmark status had been approved in 1997, and the plaque placed near the monument explained that it "represents the labor movement's struggle for workers' rights." Once again the speakers were dominated by labor leaders, with the keynote address given by the president of the Chicago Federation of Labor, who criticized the latest instances of what he termed corporate greed and disregard for the welfare of workers. Present also were descendants of the martyrs, a representative of the National Park Service, the combined German-American Chorus of Chicago, and the German consul.



But when actress Alma Washington, dressed as Lucy Parsons, unveiled the plaque, self-declared anarchists created a brief disturbance when they spat on the brass tablet and berated the crowd for permitting the Haymarket defendants to be "honored" by the very government that martyred them. By this time many union representatives and their rank-and-file, while still deeply concerned about the attempts by American business interests to

weaken the position of the worker, were also likely to take a fairly conservative stand on issues of law and order and police authority.

Other echoes and ironies of Haymarket persist. In late November and early December of 1999, a group of young anarchists severely disrupted the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle and caused considerable destruction, though they claimed that any property they damaged was only that of large multinational corporations. Around the same time a great-grandson of Peter Butterly, one of the policemen who marched on the labor rally in the Haymarket, was elected president of the Chicago Police Sergeants Association, a young union that had only recently won the legal right to exist. All this indicates how rich and complex a drama Haymarket continues to be, and that the last act will never be written.