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Lucy E. Parsons
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November 1926

Labor Defender

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Does this rising generation know that those who inaugurated the eight-hour day were put to death at the command of capital?

Until forty years ago men, women and children toiled ten and often twelve hours a day in factories for a mere pittance, and children from six to nine years of age had to work to help keep up the family.

The Knights of Labor, a powerful organization claiming 500,000 members, had never agitated for a reduction of the hours of labor. Then who were the pioneers of the eight-hour movement? Those martyrs who were strung from the gallows in Chicago on November 11, 1887, the much-lied-about and abused Anarchists.

I will verify this statement. Until 1885 there had never been a concerted action for the reduction of the hours of labor. If eight hours was mentioned in some of our meetings (they were never really mentioned), why, that was only a dream to be indulged in by fools; the bosses would never tolerate such a thing, was the reply.

In 1885 a convention was held in Chicago, composed largely of delegates from Canada. They passed a resolution calling upon the workers of this country and Canada to unite in a demand for a

reduction of the hours of toil to eight a day on the first of May, 1886, and to strike wherever it was refused.

Albert R. Parsons brought the matter up before the Trade and Labor Assembly of Chicago, the first central labor body ever organized in this city, a body which he himself organized and of which he was elected president three consecutive times. The matter was hotly debated and finally rejected on the ground that the bosses would never tolerate it.

The Central Labor Union, composed of German mechanics, took the matter up and endorsed it. At the same time they passed a resolution requesting August Spies, editor of the Chicago *Arbeiterzeitung*, the daily German paper, and Albert R. Parsons, editor of the *Alarm*, to support it in their papers and speeches; they were both splendid orators.

Thus it was that the eight-hour movement got under way. Many other cities agitated for it, but Chicago was the storm center of the movement, owing to the zeal and courage of the men and women of this city who worked day and night for it. The result was that when May 1st, 1886, arrived, it found Chicago well-organized and demanding the eight-hour day, striking by the thousands where the demand was refused. It was a veritable holiday for the workers.

The bosses were taken completely by surprise. Some were frightened and threatening; some were signing up; others were abusing those "scoundrels" who had brought all this trouble upon "our" city, and declaring that they would be made examples of, that they ought to be hung and the like.

The police were unspeakably brutal, clubbing and shooting; factory whistles blew, but few responded.

I was chairman of the Women's Organization Committee and know personally how that great strike spread. I have never seen such solidarity.

Rest, comrades, rest. All the tomorrows are yours!