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Peter Linebaugh
The incomplete, true, authentic and wonderful history of May Day
May First, 1986

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Linebaugh, [Midnight Notes collective member, P.O. Box 204, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130, midnotes@aol.com].

May First, 1986.

A Beginning

The Soviet government parades missiles and marches soldiers on May Day. The American government has called May First "Loyalty Day" and associates it with militarism. The real meaning of this day has been obscured by the designing propaganda of both governments. The truth of May Day is totally different. To the history of May Day there is a Green side and there is a Red side.

Under the rainbow, our methodology must be colorful. Green is a relationship to the earth and what grows therefrom. Red is a relationship to other people and the blood spilt there among. Green designates life with only necessary labor; Red designates death with surplus labor. Green is natural appropriation; Red is social expropriation. Green is husbandry and nurturance; Red is proletarianization and prostitution. Green is useful activity; Red is useless toil. Green is creation of desire; Red is class struggle. May Day is both.

The Green

Once upon a time, long before Weinberger bombed north Africans, before the Bank of Boston laundered money, or Reagan honored the Nazi war dead, the earth was blanketed by a broad mantle of forests. As late as Caesar's time a person might travel through the woods for two months without gaining an unobstructed view of the sky. The immense forests of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America provided the atmosphere with oxygen and the earth with nutrients. Within the woodland ecology our ancestors did not have to work the graveyard shift, or to deal with flextime, or work from Nine to Five. Indeed, the native Americans whom Captain John Smith encountered in 1606 only worked four hours a week. The origin of May Day is to be found in the Woodland Epoch of History.

In Europe, as in Africa, people honored the woods in many ways. With the leafing of the trees in spring, people celebrated "the fructifying spirit of vegetation," to use the phrase of J.G. Frazer, the anthropologist. They did this in May, a month named after Maia, the mother of all the gods according to the ancient Greeks, giving birth even to Zeus.

The Greeks had their sacred groves, the Druids their oak worship, the Romans their games in honor of Floralia. In Scotland the herdsman formed circles and danced around fires. The Celts lit bonfires in hilltops to honor their god, Beltane. In the Tyrol people let their dogs bark and made music with pots and pans. In Scandinavia fires were lit and the witches came out.

Everywhere people "went a-Maying" by going into the woods and bringing back leaf, bough, and blossom to decorate their persons, homes, and loved ones with green garlands. Outside theater was performed with characters like "Jack-in-the-Green" and the "Queen of the May." Trees were planted. Maypoles were erected. Dances were danced. Music was played. Drinks were drunk, and love was made. Winter was over, spring had sprung.

The history of these customs is complex and affords the student of the past with many interesting insights into the history of religion, gender, reproduction, and village ecology. Take Joan of Arc who was burned in May 1431. Her inquisitors believed she was a witch. Not far from her birthplace, she told the judges, "there is a tree that they call 'The Ladies Tree' — others call it 'The Fairies Tree.' It is a beautiful tree, from which comes the Maypole. I have sometimes been to play with the young girls to make garlands for Our Lady of Domremy. Often I have heard the old folk say that the fairies haunt this tree…" In the general indictment against Joan, one of the particulars against her was dressing like a man. The paganism of Joan's heresy originated in the Old Stone Age when religion was animistic and hamans were women and men.

Edward Thompson, THE MAKING OF THE ENGLISH WORKING CLASS (1963);
Aleander Trachtenberg, THE HISTORY OF MAY DAY (1947);
Midnight Notes, THE WORK/ENERGY CRISIS AND THE APOCALYPSE (1981)

Author's Note

The little history that you're holding in your hand has grown from an earlier version published last year called "The Silent Speak." There's more information this year, thanks to conversations in Quincy with John Wilshire and Monty Neill and thanks to newspaper research by Jonathan Feldman and John Roosa. Bryn Clark made a portable Maypole last year which we capered around at the Bank of Boston. We were gratified by the interest shown by lunchtime workers but also struck by how widespread May Day amnesia had become. So, this year we have added some 'how to' sections, on games (p.5), on the Maypole (p. 11), and on getting to Merry Mount (p. 16), which we hope may make it more practical. Last year's May Day demonstration against Kruggerand gold encouraged us to add (an incomplete) list (p. 16) of the many May Day events this year. We especially thank Gene Bruskin and Jim Green who have helped to plan the demo against apartheid and the centennial celebration at Faneuil Hall, respectively. Dana Moser helped with the graphics. Hohn Flym, DeAnn Burrows, Mike Ryan, and friends in Teas, Rochester, Nigeria, Big Indian, Somerville, Belize, and Tufnell Park have provided support and encouragement. And thanks to the workers at Copy Cop.

In San Francisco, they used to say that if you didn't like the history we have so far, go out and make some that you do like. The same can be said of this story, so if it is to continue to grow please submit new contributions for next year to Peter

ter off Lake Street and have a picnic lunch." This correspondent now teaches kindergarten. "In recent years," she continues, "I have always decorated a May Pole for my kindergarten class (they do the decorations actually), and we would dance around it. It would always attract attention from the older children."

Research

The best way to learn more is to participate in May Day activities and to talk to your neighbours. Using your library's newspaper collection, talking to school teachers, and getting people to talk about their childhood, their strikes, and their working conditions are good ways too. For those who wish to read more, here are a few suggestions.

William Adelman, HAYMARKET REVISITED (Illinois Labor History Society, 1976);

Charles Francis Adams, THREE EPISODES IN MASSACHUSETTS HISTORY (1894);

William Bradford, HISTORY OF PLYMOUTH PLANTATION 1620–1647;

Jeremy Brecher, Strike! (1972);

R. Chambers, THE BOOK OF DAYS: A MISCELLANY OF POPULAR ANTIQUITIES (1864);

Henry David, THE HISTORY OF THE HAYMARKET AFFAIR (1936);

J.G. Frazer, THE GOLDEN BOUGH: A STUDY OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION (1890);

James R. Green and Hugh Donahue, BOSTON'S WORKERS: A LABOR HISTORY (The Public Library, 1979);

Jane Hatch, THE AMERICAN BOOK OF DAYS (1976);

William Hone, THE EVERY-DAY BOOK (1824);

Thomas Morton, THE NEW ENGLISH CANAAN (1637);

Monotheism arose with the Mediterranean empires. Even the most powerful Roman Empire had to make deals with its conquered and enslaved peoples (syncretism). As it destroyed some customs, it had to accept or transform others. Thus, we have Christmas Trees. May Day became a day to honor the saints, Philip and James, who were unwilling slaves to Empire. James the Less neither drank nor shaved. He spent so much time praying that he developed huge callouses on his knees, likening them to camel legs. Philip was a lazy guy. When Jesus said "Follow me" Philip tried to get out of it by saying he had to tend to his father's funeral, and it was to this excuse that the Carpenter's son made his famous reply, "Let the dead bury the dead." James was stoned to death, and Philip was crucified head downwards. Their martyrdom introduces the Red side of the story, even still the Green side is preserved because, according to the Floral Directory, the tulip is dedicated to Philip and bachelor buttons to James.

The farmers, workers, and child-bearers (laborers) of the Middle Ages had hundreds of holy days which preserved the May Green, despite the attack on peasants and witches. Despite the complexities, whether May Day was observed by sacred or profane ritual, by pagan or Christian, by magic or not, by straights or gays, by gentle or calloused hands, it was always a celebration of all that is free and life-giving in the world. That is the Green side of the story. Whatever else it was, it was not a time to work.

Therefore, it was attacked by the authorities. The repression had begun with the burning of women and it continued in the 16th century when America was "discovered," the slave trade was begun, and nation-states and capitalism were formed. In 1550 an Act of Parliament demanded that Maypoles be destroyed, and it outlawed games. In 1644 the Puritans in England abolished May Day altogether. To these work-ethicists the festival was obnoxious for paganism and worldliness. Philip Stubs, for example, in Anatomy of Abuses (1585) wrote of the

Maypole, "and then fall they to banquet and feast, to leape and daunce about it, as the Heathen people did at the dedication of their Idolles." When a Puritan mentioned "heathen" we know genocide was not far away. According to the excellent slide show at the Quincy Historical Society, 90% of the Massachusetts people, including chief Chicatabat, died from chicken pox or small pox a few years after the Puritans landed in 1619. The Puritans also objected to the unrepressed sexuality of the day. Stubs said, "of fourtie, threescore, or an hundred maides going to the wood, there have scarcely the third part of them returned home again as they went."

The people resisted the repressions. Thenceforth, they called their May sports, the "Robin Hood Games." Capering about with sprigs of hawthorn in their hair and bells jangling from their knees, the ancient charaders of May were transformed into an outlaw community, Maid Marions and Little Johns. The May feast was presided over by the "Lord of Misrule," "the King of Unreason," or the "Abbot of Inobedience." Washington Irving was later to write that the feeling for May "has become chilled by habits of gain and traffic." As the gainers and traffickers sought to impose the regimen of monotonous work, the people responded to preserve their holyday. Thus began in earnest the Red side of the story of May Day. The struggle was brought to Massachusetts in 1626.

Thomas Moreton of Merry Mount

In 1625 Captain Wollaston, Thomas Morton, and thirty others sailed from England and months later, taking their bearings from a red cedar tree, they disembarked in Quincy Bay. A year later Wollaston, impatient for lucre and gain, left for good to Virginia. Thomas Morton settled in Passonaggessit which he named Merry Mount. The land seemed a "Paradise" to him. He wrote, there are "fowls in abundance, fish in multitudes,

Among the orderers (the police) Law Day isn't much of a holiday either. Yet, police, men and women, all over the United States owe a lot to May Day and the Boston police. It is true that more than 1,000 Boston men of blue lost their jobs owing to Calvin Coolidge's suppression of the Boston police strike of 1919. They had been busy earlier in the summer during May Day. At the same time there were lasting gains: a small pay increase ($300 a year), shorter hours (73–90 a week had been the norm), and most important, free uniforms!

An Ending

Where is the Red and Green today? Is it in Mao's Red Book? or in Col. Khadafy's Green Book? Some perhaps. Leigh Hunt, the English essayist of the 19th century, wrote that May Day is "the union of the two best things in the world, the love of nature, and the love of each other." Certainly, such green union is possible, because we all can imagine it, and we know that what is real now was once only imagined. Just as certainly, that union can be realized only by red struggle, because there is no gain without pain, as the aerobiticians say, or no dreams without responsibility, no birth without labor, no green without red.

The children used to celebrate May Day. I think schools stopped encouraging them sometime around when "Law Day" was created, but I'm not sure. A correspondent from East Arlington, Mass., writes that in the late 1940s, "On any given Saturday in May, anywhere from 10–30 children would dress up in crepe paper costumes (hats, shirts, &c.); we would pick baskets of flowers and parade up and down several streets (until the flowers ran out!) The whole time we would be chanting, 'May Party, May Party, rah, rah, rah!'. A leader would be chosen, but I don't remember how. (Probably by throwing fingers out). Then, we would parade up to Spy Pond at the edge of the Cen-

that the traditional May Day "bordered on treason." As an activity for the day Senator Wiley recommended that people read Statute Books. In preaching on "Obedience to Authority" on May Day 1960, the Chaplain of the Senate believed it was the first time in the 20th century that the subject had been addressed. He reminded people of the words carved on the courthouse in Worcester, Massachusetts: "Obedience to Law is Liberty." He said God is "all law" and suggested we sing the hymn, "Make Me a Captive, Lord, and Then I shall be Free." He complained that TV shows made fun of cops and husbands. He said God had become too maternal.

Beneath the hypocrisy of such talk (at the time the Senate was rejecting the jurisdiction of the World Court), there were indications of the revolt in the kitchens. In addition to the trumpeting Cold War overtones, frightened patriarchal undertones were essential to the Law Day music. Indeed, it attempted to drown out both the Red and the Green. Those who have to face the law and order music on a daily basis, the lawyers and the orderers, also have to make their own deals.

Among the lawyers there are conservatives and liberals; they are generally ideologues. On Law Day 1964 the President of the Connecticut Bar wrote against civil rights demonstrators, "corrupt" labor unions, "juvenile delinquency," and Liz Taylor! William O. Douglas, on the other hand on Law Day 1962 warned against mimicking British imperialism and favored independence movements and the Peace Corps by saying "We need Michigan-in- Nigeria, California-in-the-Congo, Columbia-in-Iran" which has come true, at least judging by what's written on sweat shirts around the world. Neither the conservative nor the liberal, however, said it should be a holiday for the lawyers, nor did they advocate the 8- hour day for the workers of the legal apparatus. In Boston only the New England School of Law, the Law and Justice Program at UMass., and the College of Public and Community Service celebrate the Green and the Red.

and I discovered besides, millions of turtle doves on the green boughs, which sat pecking of the full, ripe, pleasant grapes that were supported by the lusty trees, whose fruitful load did cause the arms to bend."

On May Day, 1627, he and his Indian friends, stirred by the sound of drums, erected a Maypole eighty feet high, decorated it with garlands, wrapped it in ribbons, and nailed to its top the antlers of a buck. Later he wrote that he "sett up a Maypole upon the festival day of Philip and James, and therefore brewed a barrell of excellent beare." A ganymede sang a Bacchanalian song. Morton attached to the pole the first lyric verses penned in America which concluded.

> With the proclamation that the first of May
> At Merry Mount shall be kept holly day

The Puritans at Plymouth were opposed to the May Day. they called the Maypole "an Idoll" and named Merry Mount "Mount Dagon" after the god of the first ocean-going imperialists, the Phoenicians. More likely, though the Puritans were the imperialist, not Morton, who worked with slaves, servants, and native Americans, person to person. Everyone was equal in his "social contract." Governor Bradford wrote, "they allso set up a Maypole, drinking and dancing aboute it many days together, inviting the Indean women for thier consorts, dancing and frisking together (like so many faires, or furies rather) and worse practise."

Merry Mount became a refuge for Indians, the discontented, gay people, runaway servants, and what the governor called "all the scume of the countrie." When the authorities reminded him that his actions violated the King's Proclamation, Morton replied that it was "no law." Miles Standish, whom Morton called "Mr. Shrimp," attacked. The Maypole was cut down. The settlement was burned. Morton's goods were confiscated, he was chained in the bilboes, and ostracized to England aboard

the ship "The Gift," at a cost the Puritans complained of twelve pounds seven shillings. The rainbow coalition of Merry Mount was thus destroyed for the time being. That Merry Mount later (1636) became associated with Anne Hutchinson, the famous mid-wife, spiritualist, and feminist, surely was more than coincidental. Her brother-in-law ran the Chapel of Ease. She thought that god loved everybody, regardless of their sins. She doubted the Puritans' authority to make law. A statue of Robert Burns in Quincy near to Merry Mount, quotes the poet's lines,

> A fig for those by law protected!
> Liberty's a glorious feast!
> Courts for cowards were erected,
> Churches built to please the priest.

Thomas Morton was a thorn in the side of the Boston and Plymouth Puritans, because he had an alternate vision of Massachusetts. He was impressed by its fertility; they by its scarcity. He befriended the Indians; they shuddered at the thought. He was egalitarian; they proclaimed themselves the "Elect". He freed servants; they lived off them. He armed the Indians; they used arms against Indians. To Nathaniel Hawthorne, the destiny of American settlement was decided at Merry Mount. Casting the struggle as mirth vs. gloom, grizzly saints vs. gay sinners, green vs. iron, it was the Puritans who won, and the fate of America was determined in favor of psalm-singing, Indian-scalpers whose notion of the Maypole was a whipping post.

Parts of the past live, parts die. The red cedar that drew Morton first to Merry Mount blew down in the gale of 1898. A section of it, about eight feet of its trunk became a power fetish in 1919, placed as it was next to the President's chair of the Quincy City Council. Interested parties may now view it in the Quincy Historical Museum. Living trees, however, have since grown, despite the closure of the ship-yards.

> And makes us all less than we can be.
>
> For teachers who learn and students who teach
> And schools that are kept beyond the reach
> Of provosts and deans and chancellors and such
> And Xerox and Kodak and Shell, Royal Dutch.
>
> An end to shops that are dark and dingy,
> An end to Bosses whether good or stingy,
> An end to work that produces junk,
> An end to junk that produces work,
> And an end to all in charge — the jerks.
>
> For all who dance and sing, loud cheers,
> To the prophets of doom we send some jeers,
> To our friends and lovers we give free beers,
> And to all who are here, a day without fears.
>
> So, on this first of May we all should say
> That we will either make it or break it.
> Or, to put this thought another way,
> Let's take it easy, but let's take it.

Law Day/USA

Yet, May Day was always a troubling day in America; some wished to forget it. In 1939 Pennsylvania declared it "Americanism Day." In 1947 Congress declared it to be "Loyalty Day." Yet, these attempts to hide the meaning of the day have never succeeded. As the Wobblies say, "We Never Forget."

Like in 1958, at the urging of Charles Rhyne, proclaimed May First "Law Day/U.S.A." As a result the politicians had another opportunity for bombast about the Cold War and to tout their own virtues. Senator Javits, for instance, took a deep historical breath in May 1960 by saying American ideas were the highest "ever espoused since the dawn of civilization. Governor Rockefeller of New York got right to his point by saying

On May Day in 1971 President Nixon couldn't sleep. He order 10,000 paratroopers and marines to Washington D.C. because he was afraid that some people calling themselves the May Day Tribe might succeed in their goal of blocking access to the Department of Justice. In the Philippines four students were shot to death protesting the dictatorship. In Boston Mayor White argued against the right of municipal workers, including the police, to withdraw their services, or stop working. In May 1980 we may see Green themes in Mozambique where the workers lamented the absence of beer, or in Germany where three hundred women witches rampaged through Hamburg. Red themes may be seen in the 30,000 Brazilian auto workers who struck, or in the 5.8 million Japanese who struck against inflation.

On May Day 1980 the Green and Red themes were combined when a former Buick auto-maker from Detroit, one "Mr. Toad," sat at a picnic table and penned the following lines,

> The eight hour day is not enough;
> We are thinking of more and better stuff.
> So here is our prayer and here is our plan,
> We want what we want and we'll take what we can.
>
> Down with wars both small and large,
> Except for the ones where we're in charge:
> Those are the wars of class against class,
> Where we get a chance to kick some ass..
>
> For air to breathe and water to drink,
> And no more poison from the kitchen sink.
> For land that's green and life that's saved
> And less and less of the earth that's paved.
>
> No more women who are less than free,
> Or men who cannot learn to see
> Their power steals their humanity

On Both Sides of the Atlantic

In England the attacks on May Day were a necessary part of the wearisome, unending attempt to establish industrial work discipline. The attempt was led by the Puritans with their belief that toil was godly and less toil wicked. Absolute surplus value could be increased only by increasing the hours of labor and abolishing holydays. A parson wrote a piece of work propaganda called Funebria Florae, Or the Downfall of the May Games. He attacked, "ignorants, atheists, papists, drunkards, swearers, swashbucklers, maid-marians, morrice-dancers, maskers, mummers, Maypole stealers, health-drinkers, together with a rapscallion rout of fiddlers, fools fighters, gamesters, lewd-women, light-women, contemmers of magistracy, affronters of ministry, disobedients to parents, misspenders of time, and abusers of the creature, &c."

At about this time, Isaac Newton, the gravitationist and machinist of time, said work was a law of planets and apples alike. Thus work ceased to be merely the ideology of the Puritans, it became a law of the universe. In 1717 Newton purchased London's hundred foot Maypole and used it to prop up his telescope.

Chimney sweeps and dairy maids led the resistance. The sweeps dressed up as women on May Day, or put on aristocratic perriwigs. They sang songs and collected money. When the Earl of Bute in 1763 refused to pay, the opprobrium was so great that he was forced to resign. Milk maids used to go a-Maying by dressing in floral garlands, dancing and getting the dairymen to distribute their milk-yield freely. Soot and milk workers thus helped to retain the holyday right into the industrial revolution.

The ruling class used the day for its own purposes. Thus, when Parliament was forced to abolish slavery in the British dominions, it did so on May Day 1807. In 1820 the Cato Street conspirators plotted to destroy the British cabinet while it was

having dinner. Irish, Jamaican, and Cockney were hanged for the attempt on May Day 1820. A conspirator wrote his wife saying "justice and liberty have taken their flight… to other distant shores." He meant America, where Boston Brahmin, Robber Baron, and Southern Plantocrat divided and ruled an arching rainbow of people.

Two bands of that rainbow came from English and Irish islands. One was Green. Robert Owen, union leader, socialist, and founder of utopian communities in America, announced the beginning of the millennium after May Day 1833. The other was Red. On May Day 1830, a founder of the Knights of Labor, the United Mine Workers of America, and the Wobblies was born in Ireland, Mary Harris Jones, a.k.a., "Mother Jones." She was a Maia of the American working class.

May Day continued to be commemorated in America, one way or another, despite the victory of the Puritans at Merry Mount. On May Day 1779 the revolutionaries of Boston confiscated the estates of "enemies of Liberty." On May Day 1808 "twenty different dancing groups of the wretched Africans" in New Orleans danced to the tunes of their own drums until sunset when the slave patrols showed themselves with their cutlasses. "The principal dancers or leaders are dressed in a variety of wild and savage fashions, always ornamented with a number of tails of the small wild beasts," observed a strolling white man.

The Red: Haymarket Centennial

The history of the modern May Day originates in the center of the North American plains, at Haymarket, in Chicago — "the city on the make" — in May 1886. The Red side of that story is more well-known than the Green, because it was bloody. But there was also a Green side to the tale, though the green was

bee where there are no national boundaries, Spanish-speaking Americans were singing "The International" on May Day.

In the 1920s and 1930s the day was celebrated by union organizers, the unemployed, and determined workers. In New York City the big May Day celebration was held in Union Square. In the 1930s Lucy Parsons marched in Chicago at May Day with her young friend, Studs Terkel. May Day 1946 the Arabs began a general strike in Palestine, and the Jews of the Displaced Persons Camps in Landsberg, Germany, went on hunger strike. On May Day 1947 auto workers in Paris downed tools, an insurrection in Paraguay broke out, the Mafia killed six May Day marchers in Sicily, and the Boston Parks Commissioner said that this was the first year in living memory when neither Communist nor Socialist had applied for a permit to rally on the Common.

1968 was a good year for May Day. Allen Ginsberg was made the "Lord of Misrule" in Prague before the Russians got there. In London hundreds of students lobbied Parliament against a bill to stop Third World immigration into England. In Mississippi police could not prevent 350 Black students from supporting their jailed friends. At Columbia University thousands of students petitioned against armed police on campus. In Detroit with the help of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, the first wildcat strike in fifteen years took place at the Hamtramck Assembly plant (Dodge Main), against speed-up. In Cambridge, Mass., Black leaders advocated police reforms while in New York the Mayor signed a bill providing the police with the most sweeping "emergency" powers known in American history. The climax to the '68 Mai was reached in France where there was a gigantic General Strike under strange slogans such as

> Parlez a vos voisins!
> L'Imagination prend le pouvoir!
> Dessous les paves c'est la plage!

working class and is dedicated to the revolution," as Eugene Debs put it in his May Day editorial of 1907. The A. F. of L. declared it a holiday. Sam Gompers sent an emissary to Europe to have it proclaimed an international labor day. Both the Knights of Labor and the Second International officially adopted the day. Bismarck, on the other hand, outlawed May Day. President Grover Cleveland announced that the first Monday in September would be Labor Day in America, as he tried to divide the international working class. Huge numbers were out of work, and they began marching. Under the generalship of Jacob Coey they descended on Washington D. C. on May Day 1894, the first big march on Washington. Two years later across the world Lenin wrote an important May Day pamphlet for the Russian factory workers in 1896. The Russian Revolution of 1905 began on May Day.

With the success of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution the Red side of May Day became scarlet, crimson, for ten million people were slaughtered in World War I. The end of the war brought work stoppings, general strikes, and insurrections all over the world, from Mexico to Kenya, from China to France. In Boston on May Day 1919 the young telephone workers threatened to strike, and 20,000 workers in Lawrence went on strike again for the 8-hour day. There were fierce clashes between working people and police in Cleveland as well as in other cities on May Day of that year. A lot of socialists, anarchists, bolsheviks, wobblies and other "I-Won't- Workers," ended up in jail as a result.

This didn't get them down. At "Wire City," as they called the federal pen at Fort Leavenworth, there was a grand parade and no work on May Day 1919. Pictures of Lenin and Lincoln were tied to the end of broom sticks and held afloat. There speeches and songs. The Liberator supplies us with an account of the day, but it does not tell us who won the Wobbly-Socialist horseshoe throwing contest. Nor does it tell us what happened to the soldier caught waving a red ribbon from the guards' barracks. Meanwhile, one mile underground in the copper mines of Bis-

not so much that of pretty grass garlands, as it was of greenbacks, for in Chicago, it was said, the dollar is king.

Of course the prairies are green in May. Virgin soil, dark, brown, crumbling, shot with fine black sand, it was the produce of thousands of years of humus and organic decomposition. For many centuries this earth was husbanded by the native Americans of the plains. As Black Elk said theirs is "the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four- leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit." From such a green perspective, the white men appeared as pharaohs, and indeed, as Abe Lincoln put it, these prairies were the "Egypt of the West".

The land was mechanized. Relative surplus value could only be obtained by reducing the price of food. The proteins and vitamins of this fertile earth spread through the whole world. Chicago was the jugular vein. Cyrus McCormick wielded the surgeon's knife. His mechanical reapers harvested the grasses and grains. McCormick produced 1,500 reapers in 1849; by 1884 he was producing 80,000. Not that McCormick actually made reapers, members of the Molders Union Local 23 did that, and on May Day 1867 they went on strike, starting the Eight Hour Movement.

A staggering transformation was wrought. It was: "Farewell" to the hammer and sickle. "Goodby" to the cradle scythe. "So long" to Emerson's man with the hoe. These now became the artifacts of nostalgia and romance. It became "Hello" to the hobo. "Move on" to the harvest stiffs. "Line up" the proletarians. Such were the new commands of civilization.

Thousands of immigrants, many from Germany, poured into Chicago after the Civil War. Class war was advanced, technically and logistically. In 1855 the Chicago police used Gatling guns against the workers who protested the closing of the beer gardens. In the Bread Riot of 1872 the police clubbed hungry people in a tunnel under the river. In the 1877 railway

strike, Federal troops fought workers at "The Battle of the Viaduct." These troops were recently seasoned from fighting the Sioux who had killed Custer. Henceforth, the defeated Sioux could only "Go to a mountain top and cry for a vision." The Pinkerton Detective Agency put visions into practice by teaching the city police how to spy and to form fighting columns for deployment in city streets. A hundred years ago during the street car strike, the police issued a shoot-to-kill order.

McCormick cut wages 15%. His profit rate was 71%. In May 1886 four molders whom McCormick locked-out was shot dead by the police. Thus, did this 'grim reaper' maintain his profits.

Nationally, May First 1886 was important because a couple of years earlier the Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada, "RESOLVED… that eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor, from and after May 1, 1886.

On 4 May 1886 several thousand people gathered near Haymarket Square to hear what August Spies, a newspaperman, had to say about the shootings at the McCormick works. Albert Parsons, a typographer and labor leader spoke net. Later, at his trial, he said, "What is Socialism or Anarchism? Briefly stated it is the right of the toilers to the free and equal use of the tools of production and the right of the producers to their product." He was followed by "Good-Natured Sam" Fielden who as a child had worked in the textile factories of Lancashire, England. He was a Methodist preacher and labor organizer. He got done speaking at 10:30 PM. At that time 176 policemen charged the crowd that had dwindled to about 200. An unknown hand threw a stick of dynamite, the first time that Alfred Nobel's invention was used in class battle.

All hell broke lose, many were killed, and the rest is history.

"Make the raids first and look up the law afterwards," was the Sheriff's dictum. It was followed religiously across the country. Newspaper screamed for blood, homes were

ransacked, and suspects were subjected to the "third degree." Eight men were railroaded in Chicago at a farcical trial. Four men hanged on "Black Friday," 11 November 1887.

"There will come a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today," said Spies before he choked.

May Day Since 1886

Lucy Parsons, widowed by Chicago's "just-us," was born in Teas. She was partly Afro-American, partly native American, and partly Hispanic. She set out to tell the world the true story "of one whose only crime was that he lived in advance of his time." She went to England and encouraged English workers to make May Day an international holiday for shortening the hours of work. Her friend, William Morris, wrote a poem called "May Day."

Workers
They are few, we are many: and yet, O our Mother,
Many years were wordless and nought was our deed,
But now the word flitteth from brother to brother:
We have furrowed the acres and scattered the seed.

Earth
Win on then unyielding, through fair and foul weather,
And pass not a day that your deed shall avail.
And in hope every spring-tide come gather together
That unto the Earth ye may tell all your tale.

Her work was not in vain. May Day, or "The Day of the Chicago Martyrs" as it is still called in Mexico "belongs to the