

Remembering Mayday:

A fighting tradition of the Working Class

May Day is a symbol of working class solidarity and unity, of remembrance and commemoration. It is also a celebration of the unshakable power of the working class united, and the culture of resistance that we have carved out for ourselves in our long history of struggle.

May Day began over a century ago when the unions in the United States adopted a resolution which asserted that *"eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labour from and after May 1st, 1886"*. Their demands remained unheeded and direct action was seen as the most effective way of creating change.

On this day an estimated half a million people took to the streets across the United States. In Chicago, where the anarchist movement was strong, violent incidents involving police and strikers led to a crackdown of the labour movement. Eight well-known anarchists were arrested and convicted of throwing a bomb at the police at a union meeting in Chicago's Haymarket Square days after May 1st. Four of them were executed. There was never any evidence that they were the bombers. In the end, they were condemned for their revolutionary ideas.

When mounting the scaffold about to be hung, August Spies, one of the convicted anarchists, declared: *"if you think that by hanging us, you can stamp out the labour movement – the movement from which the downtrodden millions, the millions who toil and live in want and misery – the wage slaves – expect salvation – if this is your opinion, then hang us! Here you will tread upon a spark, but there, and there, and behind you and in front of you, and everywhere, flames will blaze up. It is a subterranean fire. You cannot put it out."* May Day was later declared an international workers day to commemorate these events.

May Day must continue to be a day of resistance. Today, union members stroll through town with their banners – about the only day of the year they get them out of the office. Then they stand around listening to boring (and usually pretty meaningless) speeches by equally boring union bureaucrats. We all need to remember that May Day is a day of struggle where we the workers of the world display our strength, proclaim our ideals and celebrate our successes.

With that in mind, we need to link May Day back to its anarcho-syndicalist roots: i.e. the idea that the working class is international, can organise internationally, build an opposition, and create a world based on real democracy and workers' self-management. We want independent working class politics without collaboration with government and bosses. We want real solidarity with fellow workers in struggle. We want a socialism that is based on real grassroots democracy, democracy where everyone affected by a decision can take part in making

that decision – not the present charade where we get to choose who will rule us once every few years. We want a world where production is in the hands of the workers, and satisfies the needs of all instead of the profits of a few.

***Only the workers can free
the workers!***

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