

Views & Comments #3

Libertarian League

1955

Contents

May Day	3
The Libertarian League	4
Security and Slavery-G.A.W.	4
Strike Bulletins	5
New Hope in Soviet Russia	6
What We Stand For	7
Calendar of Events	7

May Day

Today and yesterday are never very far apart; seventy years ago, workers gathered together to celebrate another May Day, and the issues were drawn as sharply as they are today.

Then, it was such an issue as the eight hour day; an issue which was a very serious one at that time. The workers had tried legislative remedies, and they had tried negotiation, but not until direct economic action and solidarity that cut across all artificial boundaries between the workers, was there success.

This is what happened in May, 1886, and what led to it.

By a resolution of the Knights of Labor, and the Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Unions, the historic date of May 1st was set as the day for the general inception of the eight hour day. For more than two years, intensive work had been going on to prepare the way; and opposition in the capitalist world had grown equally fast.

The New York Times, May 1st, 1886: "Strikes to enforce the demand for eight hours work a day cannot succeed."

This was said as 340,000 workers went on strike in all the major cities of the nation, for the eight hour day. A week before there had been a tremendous mass meeting in Chicago, addressed by Parsons, Spies, Fielden, Schwab, and others.

In Chicago, there was immediate success; more than 45,000 workers gained the eight hour day at once when they struck. But in many other areas the strike continued through May 1st, and went on. Lumber, iron and steel, shoe manufacturing, and others rejected the demands of the workers, and organized their own united front to crush the unions.

On Monday, May 3rd, police and Pinkertons broke up meetings and clubbed workers; every way of breaking the strikes was brought into use. By Monday afternoon police had fired on crowds of unarmed workmen, and six were dead. And within hours after the murders August Spies' leaflet went out to the workers of Chicago.

"...They killed them because they dared to ask for the shortening of their hours of toil. They killed them to show you 'Free Americans' that you must be satisfied and content with whatever your bosses condescend to allow you, or you will be killed.

"You have for years endured humiliation; you have worked yourself to death; you have endured the pangs of want and hunger; your children you have sacrificed to the factory lord—why? To satisfy the insatiable greed, to fill the coffers of your lazy thieving master? When you ask him now to lessen your burdens, he sends his bloodhounds out to kill you.

"If you are men, if you are the sons of grandsires who have shed their blood to free you, then you will rise in your might and destroy the hideous monster that seeks to destroy you!"

On May 4th, after a day that saw violent attacks by the police on strikers, occurring repeatedly, the mass meeting that has gone down in history began; Haymarket Square, the heart of the lumberyard and packing house district. It was a comparatively quiet meeting. The speakers talked about the eight hour demands, and the police, armed and ready, kept their distance. When the meeting was drawing to an end, after the principal speakers had left, when, in fact most of the thousands of listeners had gone home, Inspector Bonfield of the police arrived. Bonfield, always a bold man when a rank of stout policemen stood between him and dangerous women or children, had chosen a time when his force of 180 police would be equal to the occasion. The new force of police advanced toward the workers still in the square, unmistakably out for trouble.

Suddenly, someone threw a bomb at the ranks of policemen. It might have been someone whose brother or father had been murdered by Bonfield's uniformed goons. There were a good many such. Or, as some have suggested, it might have been the work of an inefficient agent provocateur. Certainly, none of the responsible leaders of the workers knew anything about it; and to this day no one can say who threw the bomb.

The police fired, killing several and wounding more than 200. Later, the courts completed the murders by judicially killing eight more men for a crime which no sane man then, or now, could believe they had committed.

That was May, 1886. These words are written in May, 1955. The struggle is not ended. It has only just begun.

The Libertarian League

THE LIBERTARIAN LEAGUE would like to hear from individuals or groups in other cities who would like to organize forums such as we conduct in New York. The L.L. will give all possible aid to such projects, wherever requested. In addition, the L.L. welcomes any criticisms or comments you may have. As VIEWS AND COMMENTS reaches out toward a larger circulation and an increased size, it will become possible to give publicity to all kinds of activities, as well as to publish your comments. If you're interested, write to us, at 813 Broadway, for detailed discussion of your particular locality; we may already have other contacts there.

THE LIBERTARIAN LEAGUE

Security and Slavery—G.A.W.

The current collective bargaining between the U.A.W. and the giant General motors and Ford corporations is centered around the demand for a "Guaranteed Annual Wage." What does this slogan mean? This is explained in a "Report on Automation," to the U.A.W. Economic and Collective Bargaining Conference.

"The establishment of the guaranteed annual wage becomes imperative for workers in the face of these new and revolutionary technological changes developing in our economy. The productive potential of automation is matched only by its potential for disruption and chaos, unless harnessed in the interest of the nation as a whole. Workers must be provided with employment and income security so that the nation can meet these revolutionary possibilities. The guaranteed annual wage represents the most essential element of that needed security structure..."

The development of automation has resulted in increased production, and increased unemployment. Bell Telephone: automation deprived 17,000 workers of their jobs in 1954. Steel: as production rose 65% in the last 15 years the number of workers in the industry declined 10%. Production- greater now than in 1953. Unemployment- two million more than in 1953. And it is impossible to tell whether many more may be unemployed than the statistics tell us.

We cannot, however, agree with the contention that "G.A.W. represents the most essential element of that needed security."

1. According to the U.A.W., employers would agree not to use automation if said automation would displace workers. The U.A.W. says "the introduction of new and more efficient machinery would be geared to periods of expanding markets, so that other jobs will be available for the

workers displaced by automation.” This is, of course, wholly unrealistic. The figures given prove, that despite the expanding markets, unemployment is increasing, that productivity is greater than the ”expanding market.”

2. The U.A.W. contends that ”where the introduction of automation would nevertheless result in the displacement of some, the guaranteed annual wage would cushion the shock of layoffs for them, giving them a year in which to find employment commensurate with their experience and abilities...”

Since automation is not limited to the auto industry, but is embracing all industry, and since competition is forcing all major industries to install labor saving machinery; considering that a slump in the basic auto industry would affect other industries; where would the displaced workers find ”employment commensurate with their abilities?” What about the worker whose abilities are confined to the auto industry itself?

The industry can absorb only a certain number of workers. After paying the penalty for firing the excess, a certain number of workers who enjoy top seniority would be retained. They would get the G.A.W., and they would be tied to their jobs by that fact; made docile, willing, slaves of the employers, for fear of losing both their seniority and their G.A.W. In effect, they would have become chattels within a closed system of industrial feudalism. Within that system the union pie-cards could exercise control, unhampered by rank-and-file revolts or wildcat strikes. The pie-cards’ G.A.W. would, of course, always be forthcoming.

The situation is trenchantly summarized by Benjamin Tucker; ”The people cannot afford to be enslaved for the sake of being insured.”

4. It is strange that the demand for shorter hours is conspicuously absent from the demands of the U.A.W. Within the framework of capitalism, the unemployed can be absorbed by harmonizing the working hours with the increase of automation; by shortening the hours and lengthening the pay; and by calling a halt to the barbaric speedup system.

This, however, can be done only by exercising militant direct action tactics. The class-collaborating union bureaucrats, tied as they are to the political bandwagon, are unalterably opposed to such tactics. This, perhaps, explains why they have raised the phony issue of G.A.W., in order to take the minds of the workers away from real issues.

* * *

”The great are great only because we are on our knees.”

–Max Stirner

”It is impossible to give a soldier a good education without making him a deserter.”

–Thoreau

Strike Bulletins

Across the country, strikes are increasing; at least three have been notable recently both for their vigor and duration, and for the fact that the labor union officials have generally failed to support the workers demands.

Sperry Gyroscope, Long Island; Saturday, 4/23, the company appeared to believe the strikers had been beaten, and issued the usual ”Loyal workers, come home, all is forgiven.” Monday; a good number of scabs showed up for work, but the plant is still cold.

In the South; two strikes, one by Bell Telephone workers, and the other against the Louisville and Nashville railroad. Both have been marked by an increasing solidarity of the workers, ignoring artificial boundaries. AFL, CIO and Railroad Brotherhood workers, as well as the unorganized, have all respected the picket lines to a great extent. It's a good beginning for a unity that may supersede any merger that the labor bosses can invent.

New Hope in Soviet Russia

The American press recently mentioned the existence of a secret anarchist club in a Soviet school in East Berlin in articles concerning Valery Lisykov, an escaped Russian student. The interview as reported had been tailored to suit the needs of American war propaganda. The "anarchist" angle was played down and the major stress placed on the youth's admiration for all things American.

The Russian emigre paper, *Russkaya Zhisn* of April 7th gave a more extensive verbatim report of the interview. For example: "Question: Was your organization based on the classical ideology of anarchism? Answer: We had no ideology. We were fascinated by the exploits of Batko Makhno. Communism in our opinion was equivalent to absolute lack of liberty. We were against communism and for absolute freedom. In our opinion such absolute freedom is to be found in Anarchism." And further along, "Question: How will your flight to the West affect your father's position? Answer: My father is an old communist and therefore a conservative (?) like all the other communists. It is not his fault that I left but he will certainly have to leave Germany after this and return to the U.S.S.R." The parenthetical question mark is neither Lisykov's nor our own. We include it as it appears in *Russkaya Zhisn*, a reactionary sheet that could hardly be expected to distinguish between communism and radicalism:

The Russian emigre press represents innumerable splinter movements from the Anti-Stalinist left all the way to the monarchists. It is a rich source of information, eye-witness accounts, and rumors concerning the internal situation in Russia today. The mutual animosities of these various tendencies keep them from slanting their reports in a uniform manner. The stereotyped interview in which the escapee is prodded by leading questions to describe Russian hatred of the Bolshevik dictatorship in terms of a "return to religion" and an overwhelming admiration for the "American way of life" does not appear.

The readers of the emigre press would not be satisfied with information rehashed and "analyzed" by American "experts." Disregarding the ideological commentaries of the various editors, one is struck by the general pattern. It differs from the approved capitalist attitude as completely as it does from the official Stalinist line.

Through all these reports of strikes, sabotage, illegal pamphleteering, terrorist activities and actual armed partisan resistance, there runs the constant theme of proletarian rebellion against the state, the bureaucracy and the police. There is no evidence to support the thesis that this very real revolutionary undercurrent has as its goal the establishment of capitalist democracy. There are no calls for the reopening of the churches, the return to private ownership or the establishment of parliamentary government.

This mass of reports strikes at the heart of capitalist propaganda which assumes only weak conservative opposition or mass apathy and that effective resistance is only to be expected at the bureaucratic top. Such of the facts as are known do not appear to bear this out.

Future issues of Views and Comments will give further information on the revolutionary underground movement behind the iron curtain.

What We Stand For

Two great power blocs struggle for world domination. Neither of these represents the true interests and welfare of Humanity. Their conflict threatens mankind with atomic destruction. Underlying both of these blocs are institutions that breed exploitation, inequality and oppression.

Without trying to legislate for the future we feel that we can indicate the general lines along which a solution to these problems can be found.

The exploitative societies of today must be replaced by a new libertarian world which will proclaim—Equal freedom for all in a free socialist society—“Freedom” without socialism leads to privilege and injustice—“Socialism” without freedom is totalitarian.”

The monopoly of power which is the state must be replaced by a worldwide federation of free communities, labor councils and/or cooperatives operating according to the principles of free agreement. The government of men must be replaced by a functional society based on the administration of things.

Centralism which means regimentation from the top down must be replaced by federalism which means cooperation from the bottom up.

The Libertarian League will not accept the old socio-political cliches but will boldly explore new roads while examining anew the old movements, drawing from them all, that which time and experience has proven to be valid.

Calendar of Events

to be held at the LIBERTARIAN CENTER, 813 Broadway, New York (between 11th and 12th Streets)

ALL MEETINGS AT EIGHT P.M.

Tuesday May 3. Lecture by Benjamin Marcus—RELIGION AND THE WORKING CLASS

Friday May 6. Round Table Youth Discussion—SECURITY AND THE GUARANTEED ANNUAL WAGE

Friday May 13. Round Table Youth Discussion—THOUGHT CONTROL AND CENSORSHIP TODAY

Tuesday May 17. Lecture by Conrad Lynn—RACISM AND REACTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Friday May 20. Round Table Youth Discussion—IS TODAY’S SCIENCE ANTI-SOCIAL?

Friday May 27. Round Table. Youth Discussion—THE WAR THREAT IN ASIA

Saturday May 28. Social Supper—7:30 PM.

Prepared by the Cultura Proletaria (Spanish Group) Everyone Invited. Voluntary Contribution

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