

VOLUME 1

NUMBER 147

The Haymarket Affair - Part I

Lead: In early May 1886 in the Haymarket area of Chicago a bloody confrontation occurred between police and workers. There followed the first "Red Scare" in American social history.

Intro.: "A Moment in Time" with Dan Roberts.

Content: The so-called Haymarket Affair began on May 3 when Chicago police attacked a crowd of strikers at the McCormick Reaper Works, killing and wounding several men. The next night anarchists held a protest rally

near Haymarket Square in the commercial area of the City. Just as the meeting was breaking up because of the approach of a storm a squad of police arrived and ordered the crowd to disperse. The speaker Samuel Fielden protested but was getting down from the wagon to comply when someone threw a bomb into the police ranks. The officers lost control of themselves and started firing in all directions killing, and wounding civilians and policemen as well.

Chicago that spring was in the grip of wide-scale labor protest focusing on demands for an eight-hour work day. These protests were being organized by labor associations from across the political spectrum. Some of the most

effective work was done by the anarchists, a group of libertarian socialists who, in part, took their philosophical inspiration from Mikail Bakunin who opposed Karl Marx's insistence on a centralized and disciplined Communist party. They wanted a society based on voluntary cooperation of free individuals with no government and private property. Within their ranks, however, there were many who spoke the rhetoric of violence and more than a few were quite willing to use it.

The police were provoked by almost constant confrontation with labor agitators that spring, excited by inflammatory rhetoric of the speaker that and some of the more extreme propaganda of the anarchists, and

were led by Inspector John Bonfield. Bonfield had been fretting under the moderate policy of Mayor Carter H. Harrison who believed that the constitution demanded that police should control and channel protest not suppress it. The Inspector disagreed and that night he did something about it. When the smoke cleared 67 policemen lay wounded many of them by shots from their own ranks. Later eight died. A significant number of civilians were also among the casualties. Next time the Haymarket Anarchists on trial.

``A Moment in Time'' is produced at the University of Richmond. This is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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