Punkin Ward

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Independent Research into Radical Theory

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Ode to the Haymarket

We wanted freedom, not a happy hour

In which we could get a beer for half off

While half of ourselves was left in the workplace

The ten, twelve, fifteen hour days with which we traded

The sunlight for the ability to eat

Or clothe our children or house ourselves

We missed the sun and we wanted to see it again

We would strike, we would walk out

And in response they would lock out

Anyone who would not drop their demands

For a shorter work day and bread

They would shoot at us in the streets

If we refused to admit defeat

And the reforms so many of us died for

Were ignored or taken away

Death in the Haymarket

While we gathered in peaceful assembly

We did not all say it was anarchism

But we knew in our hearts it was,

And so did the state and the bosses.

If you were faced with an army

With guns and batons,

If they told you to go back to work

Or to go home to a place you could no longer afford

That you would get beaten or shot if you did not concede

Would you go?

We thought of our children and our spouses

Whom we could not let down

Whom we barely got to see after

Coming home from a long weary day

And falling asleep

Knowing that we would be gone before they awoke

And would be home after they were asleep

How could we let our children grow up

Into the same position we were in?

Working for pittance while never getting a moment

To enjoy the company of the people we loved

So when the police came and told us to disperse

Even though we were not being violent

Even though we were just having a meeting

In chicago on that fateful day in May, 1886

While the bosses and the owners

Enjoyed a “golden decade of profit,” (Green, 3).

There were 200 police and there were thousands of us (Parsons, 4)

It looked as if it would rain, and many of us were heading home

Most of us were immigrants

We had come to the United States for work

But the work that was provided was lacking

In high enough wages

And our days were so long, our nights so short

Our peaceful appeals at wage reform were ignored

Being an immigrant is not a reason to deprive us

Of the things we need

Or the sunlight on our skin

Or the rest that humans should have

But it has always been profit over people

I heard comrade Fielden say,

‘Captain, this is a peaceable meeting,’ (Parsons, 4)

But the police gave no mind,

For they were funded by the capitalists

And their job had nothing to do with whether

The workers were being peaceful or not

Someone threw a bomb and the sound rang out

Just as the invention of gunpowder

Made tyrants shake when feudalism was overthrown (Parsons, 4)

The crowd of police was crumbled for a moment

And the workers and the police opened fire on each other

The shooting went on for twenty minutes (Green, 6)

They were injured, and so were we

Many of the bullets that hit the police were from other officers

They arrested so many of us

They left us to bleed out and die without remorse

The state chose eight of us to blame

For the bomb that had been thrown

While police received no repercussions

For the deaths they had caused over the years

And the deaths they had caused in the street that day

This was not the first time police opened fire on striking workers

The state, so controlled by capitalists, filtered jurors for the trial

They asked jurors if they were associated with labor organizing (Parsons, 5).

They only allowed Americans to be on the jury (Green, 209)

And although there were only 8 workers facing charges,

The rest of us were being shunned, mocked, and beaten in the streets (Green, 211)

Albert Parson, accused of aiding in the creation and detonation of the bomb,

Said he “could never be a free man again,” (Green, 211)

Even if he was not convicted

They said that the eight men being charged

Were being tried for murder, but we all knew

“They were being tried for being anarchists

Before a jury whose members had admitted their bias against anarchists” (Green, 216).

Four men were condemned to death

The fateful day came in 1887

The Haymarket Martyrs would be hung on November 7

Parsons, Spies, Fischer, and Engel faced the gallows

“An unbearable anxiety gripped Chicago” (Green, 267)

The city feared of revolt from anarchists,

Going so far as to rumor that bombs had been planted under the jail,

Set to explode at the moment when the men would be hung (Green, 267).

No friends or relatives would be allowed to witness the execution (Green, 267)

Lucy Parsons, the wife of convicted Albert, was arrested

As she threatened to get a bomb if they did not let her

And the children in to see Albert one last time (Green, 268).

Spies entered first, then Fischer and Engel

Parsons was last, and the look he gave the crowd

Would never be forgotten (Green, 269).

Each took their place next to a noose

Before they were able to have last words, the executioner covered their heads

And each one spoke from behind the white mask

But as Parson’s attempted to say his last words,

The chord was cut and the four men were hanging

None of them died from a broken neck

Each one suffocated

We wept at the journalists depictions.

Spies’ voice would forever inspire us:

“The time will come when our silence

will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today” (Green, 270).

If they think that murdering our comrades

In public shows of power and control

Will strike fear into us,

Will make us back down and give up,

Then they are wrong.

There are worse things than dying because you stood up and fought

You could die inside because you gave up

Works Cited

Green, J. (2006). *Death in the Haymarket.* New York: Anchor Books.