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The Aftermath of May Day

MAY DAY, the day on which Labor greets the rebirth of nature after the decay of winter, has come and gone—and Labor counts its sores.

Never was such a May Day; after five years of hideous winter, life again began to bud, and Labor marched in mingled hope and shame. In the ears of the marchers, marching to demonstrate their solidarity with their brothers and sisters of all lands, rang the echo of the cry from the millions of rotting corpses on the war torn fields of Europe: "Your lack of solidarity scattered us here!" And because Labor recognized the justice of the cry it marched with uneven tread, but because it determined that past shame should not blot out future hope Labor marched, though its tread was uneven.

Throughout the length and breadth of the land Socialists and radical labor unions set out in peaceful protest against the thousand wrongs inherent in capitalist society, and in penance for their own weaknesses. In protest against the wholesale slaughter of their comrades through the long years of war, against the continued slaughter of their comrades in Russia, against the imprisonment of their comrades and spokesmen in this country; and in penance that they allow these things to be. . . . And everywhere the peaceful parades were met with guns and bludgeons. Organized bands of soldiers and sailors set upon the unarmed marchers, tore the flags and emblems from their hands, beat men and women alike into insensibility, raided the halls where meetings were in progress and wrecked the buildings, built after long years of patient effort and self-sacrificing devotion.

Where the police did not actively engage in the attacks upon Socialists and unionists, they stood idly by encouraging the "black hundreds" by their inaction and, in some places, open approval. In Cleveland the "riot" started when two army officers assaulted some soldiers who were marching with the Socialists. Resenting the attack the paraders hit back and immediately called down upon the heads of their women and children the blows of the police, who were apparently ambushed for just such an opportunity. The determination of the marchers to protect themselves as best they could with their naked hands brought into action tanks and revolvers with the result that two persons were killed and scores injured. Wholesale arrests of the Socialists, followed by heavy sentences, stamped the approval of organized "justice" upon the acts of the attackers.

In Boston the police took the initiative and set upon the marchers with club and gun because they had the temerity to insist upon parading through the streets they, themselves, had built with their slave labor. When the attack was resisted the mob joined with the police and unmercifully beat the paraders, following which 116 persons were arrested and are at present held in heavy bail.

In New York, where the Socialist and labor groups merely attempted to hold meetings, gangs of soldiers and sailors invaded various Socialist buildings and attacked those present while the police stood supinely looking on. Men were beaten into unconsciousness, women brutally assaulted,

little children torn from their parents and frightened into hysterics. The Rand school was invaded early in the afternoon by a gang of rowdies, badges were torn from the women's clothes and men were made to kiss the American flag, for which the gangsters professed a great reverence. The mob then marched to the new building of *The New York Call*, where a group of people were looking over the plant. The premises were invaded and after beating the men, women and children present, the mob proceeded to wreck the building. Over thirty persons were sent to hospitals as a result of the raid. Minor incidents of the same character were general throughout the city until late at night. . . .

The whole affair, in its broader aspects, can be credited to the governmental forces. The mobs were deliberately inflamed against the Socialists and labor groups. On the eve of May Day the newspapers carried flaring headlines of the discovery of a "nation-wide bomb plot" which they openly charged to the Socialist and Labor movements, although up to the present time not the slightest evidence has been produced to support the charge. At no other time would the discovery of such a plot—a plot in which as far as can be ascertained on acceptable evidence nobody was seriously hurt—be accompanied with the same amount of publicity. The whole newspaper campaign was a direct incitement to mob violence.

Congressmen and senators have since seized on the occurrences to announce that new laws directed against the Socialist and labor movements must be framed, and the Mayor of one of the largest American cities, Mayor Hanson of Seattle, has taken the opportunity to advocate the hanging of members of the I. W. W. Nowhere has the government intervened to discourage the repetition of this mob violence. None of the rioters have been arrested, while hundreds of the paraders have been seized and thrown into jail. All the agencies of publicity have grasped the opportunity to call for further repressive measures against Socialism and the great body of the people have by their silence seconded these appeals and vindicated the actions of the mobs.

Occurrences of this nature are not unknown to the labor and Socialist movements. The history of the past decade in Europe is red with such stories and today the history of Europe is flaming with the record of the reactions of the people's masses to such incidents. European labor has answered such treatment with organized effort everywhere and in many places with open revolt. Russia, Hungary and Bavaria have swept the system responsible for such outrages out of existence. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the workers' answer to repression.

What are the American Socialist and labor movements to learn from the story of last May Day? Are they to learn that labor must bend its back in dumb submission to no matter what tyranny? Are they to learn to bare their heads to the clubs of organized violence and to submit their bodies to the will of prejudiced courts to the end that their sores may heal behind prison bars? Or are they to learn the lesson that their European brothers

have already half mastered—that in organized power there is safety?

The workers of England paraded through the streets of English cities and nowhere is there a record of violence against them. Through the fashionable quarters of London the Socialist and Labor movements paraded with banners voicing their oneness with their brothers in industry everywhere, and crying their protest against capitalist tyranny to the world, but no one moved a hand against them. In Ireland, under the bayonets of an alien power, the workers declared a general strike without molestation. In France the action of the police resulted in protracted fighting and the injuries resulting were not all on one side. Since the riot the press has condemned the authorities and governmental action is pending against the police. Even the American press, which acts against the Labor and Socialists movements here, takes the side of the European marchers. And the reason is that the European movements have power. They are organized for their own protection and any attack is followed with swift retribution.

A duplication in England of the outrages throughout America last May Day would have resulted in swift and sharp resistance, if not open revolution, therefore the English government was careful that no "bomb plots" were discovered on the eve of May Day and that no gangs of soldiers and sailors were organized for the purpose of disturbing the parades.

The occurrences in this country are directly traceable to the spirit of pogrom fostered by the prostitute press in suggesting that the radical movement is about to resort to terrorism; bomb throwing, assassination, and mob violence; the fact that the authorities allow, and in many places even encourage the organization of irresponsible groups for the express purpose of intimidating and terrorizing the workers; and the psychology of submission created in the Socialist and Labor movements through their organs of publicity and the advice of their "leaders." The three or four hundred alleged soldiers and sailors, who take refuge in their uniforms, could not successfully interfere with any duly organized meeting or parade except with the connivance and approval of the police and judicial authorities, who are obviously dominated by the powerful moneyed interests of the country, and the fact that the doctrine of submission which has been preached by the misleaders of the radical movement has devitalized the spirit of the rank and file.

The American Labor and Socialist movements have had ample warning of what they may expect in the future—and to the intelligent "forewarned is forearmed." The only method by which the workers can safeguard themselves is their own organization. We expect nothing from the authorities except the kind of treatment we received on May Day. We ask nothing from the capitalist state. Its very violation of its own hypocritical principles is wonderful propaganda for revolutionary Socialism.

The workers are getting tired of dumb submission to inexcusable brutality.