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Looking Backward

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Before me lies a copy of the Philadelphia *Evening Herald*, bearing date of June 21, 1877. On that day the "Mollie Maguires" were executed, six of them—Boyle, McGeghan, Munley, Roarity, Carroll and Duffy—at Pottsville; four of them—Campbell, Doyle, Kelly and Donahue—at Mauch Chunk, and one—Lanahan—at Wilkesbarre. They all protested their innocence and all died game. Not one of them betrayed the slightest evidence of fear or weakening. The issue of the *Herald* referred to contains a full account of the executions, with portraits of the hapless victims.

Not long ago in the jail at Pottsville I stood on the spot where the six "Mollies" met their doom, and I uncovered in memory of their martyrdom.

Not one of them was a murderer at heart. All were ignorant, rough and uncouth, born of poverty and buffeted by the merciless tides of fate and chance.

To resist the wrongs of which they and their fellow-workers were the victims and to protect themselves against the brutality of their bosses, according to their own crude notions, was the prime object of the organization of the "Mollie Maguires." Nothing could have been farther from their intention than murder or crime. It is true that their methods were drastic, but it must be remembered that their lot was hard and brutalizing; that they were the neglected children of poverty, the products of a wretched environment.

At the scenes of the execution the tragedy is today, thirty years later, still spoken of in whispers. A vague dread of reviving the fearful past seems to silence the tongue of the resident when the subject is introduced. But bit by bit the truth has slowly and painfully filtered through the dungeon

doors of false history, and the world is beginning to understand the true inwardness of the "Mollie Maguire" organization and its real relation to the labor movement.

These unfortunate victims of the basest betrayal since the days of Judas had no possible means of defense or justification. The corporate press howled like fiends incarnate for their blood. They had dared to assert themselves against a powerful and piratical corporation, and this was sufficient warrant for their extermination. Spies, informers and assassins wormed their slimy way into their councils. Bloody crimes were instigated and committed; the innocent and ignorant "Mollies" walked into the traps set for them.

The powers of the law now fell upon them with crushing effect. Their organization was annihilated. No friendly voice pleaded in extenuation of the crimes charged upon the leaders.

The labor movement was in its infancy; it had no press and no standing; no influence and no power. There was but one side to the tragedy and that was, of course, the capitalist side. The poor, dumb victims, bound and gagged, had but to await their bloody fate. At the grates of their cells the hounds of hell snarled and growled with savage ferocity to lap their blood. No helping hand was extended, and scarce a whisper of kindness was ventured in their behalf.

June 21, 1877, the curtain fell upon the last mournful act in this tragedy of toil. The executioner did his bidding and the gallows-tree claimed its victims.

On that day history turned harlot and the fair face of truth was covered with the hideous mask of falsehood.

For thirty years the press of corporate power has been lying grossly and outrageously about the "Mollie Maguires" and their organization. But the truth will out at last, and the time is near when the history of the Pennsylvania tragedy, as now written, will be radically revised and the names of these martyrs rescued from the cruel calumny with which they have been loaded.

The "Mollie Maguire" episode was incidental to the organization of the working class; a link in the chain of the labor movement.

The men who perished upon the scaffold as felons were

labor leaders, the first martyrs to the class struggle in the United States.

It is profoundly significant that Franklin B. Gowen, president of the Philadelphia & Reading railway, and chief prosecutor and persecutor of the "Mollie Maguires," sought in suicide a refuge from the avenging Nemesis that pursued him.

In the year 1876 the Workmen's party was organized, and in the following year, 1877, after the execution of the "Molly Maguires," it became the Socialistic Labor party.

This same year the great railroad strikes swept like a tidal wave from the eastern to the western states.

Eight years later, in 1885, the Knights of Labor came into national prominence, and the great strikes on the Gould Southwest system in that year and the year following were inaugurated.

On May 1, 1886, hundreds of thousands of workers in various parts of the country went on strike to enforce the eight-hour work day, the agitation incident to the movement culminating in the Haymarket tragedy of May 4.

On November 11 of the following year, 1887 (twenty years ago today), occurred the infamous execution of the anarchists at Chicago. This judicial massacre constitutes the blackest page in American history. When Parsons, Spies, Fischer and Engel were launched into eternity to "vindicate the majesty of the law," a crime was committed of such enormity, that even at this late day the sober senses reel in its awful contemplation.

These fellow-workers and their four comrades—Lingg, Fielden, Schwab and Neebe—the first of whom died by violence in his cell, and the last three of whom were sentenced to the penitentiary and subsequently pardoned by the immortal Altgeld—were martyrs to the labor movement in the noblest sense of that term. They had fearlessly espoused the cause of labor and consecrated themselves body and soul to the working class. They had the true revolutionary spirit, were animated by the loftiest motives, and were utterly void of selfish ambitions.

The sordid capitalism which preys upon the life-blood of labor, whose ethics are expressed in beastly gluttony and insatiable greed, and whose track of conquest is strewn with the

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bones of its countless victims, pounced upon these men with the cruel malignity of fiends and strangled them to death.

A more cruel and heartless crime, a more flagrant outrage of justice, was never committed. Twenty years have passed since these leaders of labor paid the penalty of their loyalty, and marvelous have been the changes in public sentiment since that day. They would not now be executed under the same circumstances. The workers today are too far advanced, too well organized and too conscious of their class interests and duties to submit to such a monstrous outrage.

The recent trial and acquittal of Wm. D. Haywood proves it. Had labor been no farther advanced than it was twenty years ago, Moyer, Haywood, Pettibone and Adams would long since have shared the fate of Parsons, Spies, Fischer and Engel.

Since that fateful period of two decades ago, events have pressed each other closely in the world of labor. Three months after the execution of the Haymarket victims the C., B. & Q. strike broke out in Chicago, and the issue was hotly contested for almost a year before the employes finally succumbed to defeat. From that time forward strikes, boycotts and lock-outs were numerous, a long series of industrial battles marking the path of the class struggle and the progress of the labor movement.

Homestead, Buffalo, Chicago, Latimer, Virden, Pana, Leadville, Coeur d'Alene, Telluride and Cripple Creek followed in swift succession, each the scene of a bloody battle in the historic struggle for emancipation.

The battle of the American Railway Union with the allied railroad corporations in 1894 developed extraordinary activity on the part of our capitalist government. The strikers were completely victorious at every point when the government openly took sides with the railroads and employed all its vast repressive machinery to defeat the strike and crush out the union.

The lessons of this strike were among the most valuable ever learned by the working class, and many thousands date their class-consciousness from that memorable conflict.

The more recent strikes in Colorado, Utah and other western states, culminating in the kidnapping conspiracy of the mine

owners and the bold attempt to repeat the Haymarket and "Mollie Maguire" massacres, are still fresh in the memory of the people, especially the rugged miners who, under the banner of the Western Federation, fought with all the energy and bravery of desperation against the plots and wiles of the organized mine owners, as unscrupulous and heartless an aggregation of exploiters as ever robbed and murdered their fellow-beings.

Looking backward over the last thirty years, the progress of the labor movement can be clearly traced, and its contemplation is fruitful of inexpressible satisfaction. Looking forward, the skies are bright and all the tongues of the future proclaim the glad tidings of the coming Emancipation.