
The Chicago Anarchists

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On the night of May 4th, 1886, there was a meeting held in Haymarket Square, Chicago. The attendance was estimated at about one thousand persons, who were denounced as anarchists.

Americans, being in favor of law, order and a stable government, anarchists, who oppose such conditions, are necessarily unpopular in the United States. The meeting in Haymarket Square, it seems, was called to publicly discuss numerous outrages perpetrated upon workmen in Chicago by the police and Pinkerton thugs.

Governor Altgeld, in his masterly message, extending pardon to three Anarchists, makes the following statement showing the underlying causes of the Haymarket meeting:

Again it is shown that the bomb was in all probability thrown by some one seeking personal revenge; that a course had been pursued by the authorities which would naturally cause this; that for a number of years prior to the Haymarket affair there had been labor troubles, and in several cases a number of laboring people guilty of no offense had been shot down in cold blood by Pinkerton men and none of the murderers were brought to justice. The evidence taken at coroners' inquests shows that in at least two cases men were fired on and killed when they were running away and there was consequently no occasion to shoot, yet nobody was punished; that in Chicago there had been a number of strikes in which some of the police not only took sides against the men, but without any authority of law invaded and broke up peaceable meetings, and in scores of cases brutally clubbed people who were guilty of no offense whatever.

In this, the Governor arraigns the government of Chicago and states facts which would make anarchists of Quakers. People shot down in cold blood, who were guilty of no offense, by Pinkerton thugs, and never brought to justice, and a brutal police clubbing peo-

ple who were guilty of no offense whatever, and never punished for their infamous outrages, would, anywhere under heaven create anarchists. It should be borne in mind that it is the Governor of Illinois who arraigns Chicago for the perpetration of murders as black as that caused by the Haymarket bomb, for he says the Pinkertons, employed by Chicago, had in cold blood shot down a number of laboring people, guilty of no offense, and that none of the murderers were brought to justice. What more natural than that such murders should create excitement and result in fiery denunciation?

But we write for the purpose of getting before our readers the views of Governor Altgeld, as expressed in his message pardoning three of the convicted anarchists — Michael Schwab, Samuel Fielden and Oscar Neebe. Besides the three anarchists named, there were five others indicted for murder, viz: Albert R. Parsons, Louis Lingg, George Engel, Adolph Fischer and August Spies. Louis Lingg committed suicide, while Parsons, Fischer, Engel and Spies were hanged.

Governor Altgeld makes the declaration that the convicted anarchists not only did not have a fair trial, but on the contrary, the purpose of the trial was to convict regardless of proof, and that conviction was obtained by methods the most scandalous and infamous that ever blackened the records of Anglo Saxon jurisprudence. A miscreant, by the name of Henry L. Rice, was made special bailiff to summon men to act as jurors, who, it is shown, had openly and repeatedly expressed opinions relating to the guilt of the accused, and boasted that the indicted men would hang as certain as death, and Governor Altgeld shows that the trial judge outraged justice and fair dealing by using his position to secure conviction.¹

No one attempts any defense of the man who threw the murderous bomb, but the man who threw the bomb could not be discovered. All efforts to find him utterly failed. He was the one and the only one guilty of murder, and in this connection Governor Altgeld says:

The prosecution could not discover who had thrown the bomb and could not bring the really guilty man to justice, and, as some of the men indicted were not at the Haymarket meeting and had nothing to do with it, the prosecution was forced to proceed on the theory that the men Indicted were guilty of murder

¹ **Joseph E. Gary** (1821-1906) presided over the 1886 trial of eight Chicago anarchists who were charged with inspiring a May 4, 1886 bombing and gunfight in which 11 people were killed.

because it was claimed they had at various times in the past uttered and printed incendiary and seditious language, practically advising the killing of policemen, of Pinkerton men and others acting in that capacity, and they were, therefore, responsible for the murder of Mathias Degan. The public was greatly excited, and after a prolonged trial, all of the defendants were found guilty; Oscar Neebe was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment and all of the other defendants were sentenced to be hanged.

It will be observed that the men tried and convicted, five of whom were sentenced to be hanged, two imprisoned for life and one for 15 years, were not tried for committing the crime of murder, but for "uttering and printing seditious language, practically advising the killing of policemen and Pinkertons and others acting in that capacity."

Governor Altgeld, in issuing his pardon sets forth the fact that petitions for executive clemency, and letters have poured in upon him, setting forth the reasons why the Governor should act. These petitions assert as follows:

1. That the jury which tried the case was a packed jury selected to convict.
2. That according to the law as laid down by the Supreme Court both prior to and again since the trial of this case, the jurors, according to their own answers, were not competent jurors, and the trial, therefore, was not a legal trial.
3. That the defendants were not proven to be guilty of the crime charged in the indictment.
4. That as to the defendant, Neebe, the state's attorney had declared at the close of the evidence that there was no case against him, and yet he has been kept in prison all these years.
5. That the trial Judge was either so prejudiced against the defendants, or else so determined to win the applause of a certain class in the community that he could not, and did not grant a fair trial.

In commenting upon the foregoing, the Governor leaves nothing in the dark, but shows most conclusively that the jury was packed and selected to convict — that the trial was throughout illegal, and that while the dead had passed beyond the reach of the clemency which justice and mercy demands, the survivors could be and ought to be pardoned. The Governor fortifies his act of clemency by reciting, in

detail, the questions propounded to men selected by Rice for jurors and their answers, and in reading them now, after passion has subsided and reason has resumed its sway, the infamy of the proceedings to convict in defiance of law, justice and all things decent, sends a thrill of horror through every fibre of the hearts of honest men. Judge Lynch, at the head of a mob, was never more cruel. It was an exhibition of civilized savagery without a parallel in all of the centuries.

It is of special importance for those who would have any clear conception of the farce trial, or a trial to convict, to know how Rice and the trial Judge proceeded to secure a jury to convict. We give the official records of a case or two which illustrates the infamy of the proceedings:

H. N. Smith, hardware merchant, stated among other things that he was prejudiced and had quite a decided opinion as to the guilt or innocence of the defendants, that he had expressed his opinion and still entertained it, and candidly stated he was afraid he would listen a little more attentively to the testimony which concurred with his opinion than the testimony on the other side; that some of the policemen Injured were personal friends of his. He was asked these questions:

Q. That is, you would be willing to have your opinion strengthened and hate very much to have it dissolved?

A. I would.

Q. Under these circumstances do you think that you could render a fair and impartial verdicts

A. I don't think I could.

Q. You think you would be prejudiced?

A. I think I would be, because my feelings are very bitter.

Q. Would your prejudice in any way influence you in coming at an opinion, in arriving at a verdict?

A. I think It would.

H.D. Bogardus, flour merchant, stated that he had read and talked about the Haymarket trouble; had formed and expressed an opinion; still held It as to the guilt or Innocence of the defendants; that he was prejudiced; that this prejudice would certainly Influence his verdict, If selected as a juror. *I don't believe that I could give them a fair trial upon the proof, for it would require very strong proof to overcome my prejudice. I hardly think that you could bring. proof enough to change my opinion.*

The foregoing is in keeping with others who, though challenged for having formed an opinion and being prejudiced against the defendants, but were, nevertheless, forced upon the jury to try men impartially, whose life and liberty trembled in the balance. Every allegation set forth by the petitioners Governor Altgeld held to be absolutely true. First, the jury was packed to convict. Second, the law was ruthlessly bludgeoned out of court. Third, the defendants were not proven guilty. Fourth, Neebe was absolutely innocent, and fifth, the judge showed himself to be a monster. The trial was a crime and the execution of the men judicial murder.

What of it all? The trial was a monstrous perversion of justice — a disgrace to our civilization, a murderous stab at free speech and if such infamous court proceedings could be made the rule in the United States the difference between Russia and America would not be perceptible. The three men rescued from prison is something in the line of redeeming the country from this odium of the trial, and Governor Altgeld deserves a monument for the moral courage he has displayed in breaking the fetters forged by a judicial crime, and thereby setting three unfortunate men, who were not legally convicted, free.

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