

MAY DAY 2020

Origins

In 1886, workers in Chicago in the US kicked off a campaign to win the eight hour day, starting with a strike on 1 May. Police started breaking up a peaceful workers' demonstration, then an unknown person threw a bomb. Seven police and at least four workers died from the explosion and the following gunfight. A kangaroo court convicted eight Anarchist union organisers, without any evidence of guilt being presented. Four were hung, one committed suicide and two later had death sentences commuted. In the campaign to defend them, International Workers' Day was born.

Back to the Future

The labour movement, just getting started in 1886, grew to a massive size and strength over the following decades. Despite massive internal conflict over political philosophy, it made revolutions in several countries and won great reforms in many others. Inequalities were greatly ameliorated in industrialised countries and many developing countries. The revolutions, though, were defeated – some by the capitalists and some by tyrants who claimed to rule in the name of the workers. And then the capitalists went on the offensive again, taking advantage of new technology to integrate world markets and pit the new workforces of the Third World against the labour movements of developed countries. Today, inequality has widened again to levels last seen in the 19th Century.

Coronavirus

The novel coronavirus, which causes the disease COVID-19, has caused a global health emergency. The economic emergency that has accompanied it, though, is caused by capitalism. And this, in turn, aggravates the health emergency. Workers need wages to buy their daily necessities. Petty traders need their turnover to make ends meet. And capitalists need both workers and customers to make profits. When people stay home to stop the spread of the virus, the wheels of capitalism grind to a halt and the system falls into crisis. Some countries, like Australia, have a buffer that will last a while. Most others have none. In some countries, workers already have to choose between the possibility of infection and the certainty of starvation. Capitalism kills.

A New World

The struggle against the coronavirus pandemic is one that can only be won by an act of unprecedented human solidarity. Through that act the values of a new world can be born. But turning those values into reality requires the working class. Only the working class: global, multi-racial, multicultural and gender diverse, has the potential strength to uproot the power of capital at its source and steer a new course. We can start by defending health and safety for all workers and by fighting for adequate resources for the health care system. We can extend the struggle by defending civil liberties and opposing austerity. And we can culminate it with a revolution to overthrow capitalism and create libertarian communism, worldwide.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

PO Box 5108 Brunswick North 3056
<https://www.melbacg.wordpress.com>

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macg1984@yahoo.com.au