

**Red May
and the
Physiognomy
of
Social Revolution:
The Story
of the
Chicago Martyrs**

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In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act

Red May: Tragedy and Resurgence

“Chicago Swells the Surging Throng.”

From 1887, down to the year before the outbreak of the world war, it was the custom, in Anarchist circles, to commemorate, every 11th of November, the death of the Chicago Martyrs. That day was dedicated, after 1918, to the fraud and farce of capitalist armistice celebration, until the second world war ended such tributes to the dead of 1914-18. In proletarian circles the Russian revolution anniversary dwarfed the importance of the Chicago commemoration. The worth of that revolution was liquidated somewhat by the retreat to capitalism via the New Economic Policy. Events must pass into history, however, and decline as mere celebrations. This fate has overtaken the memory of the Chicago Martyrs. We celebrate their deaths no more. We no longer make a saints' day of it. But we record it as a passage of Socialist history, a chapter of proletarian struggle.

May, even more than March, is Labour's Red Month. It is the month of warmth, life, and beauty, the magic month of sunshine and rebirth, of colour and abundance, of energy and song. Because of its rich, warm call to life it is the month of labour. May is a satire on capitalist society, an irony on wage-slavery. It calls to active revolutionary opposition to the present economic order, and bids the proletariat awake to a knowledge of its economic might. Then shall we witness a real month of May, a month of labour at harmony with nature, an epoch of harmony in place of our present discord. The Sun, in all his glory, will shine no more on masters and slaves, on palaces and hovels, but on a world of freemen and freewomen, citizens of the earth, active, co-operative, and equal.

Fifty-one years have passed since the Paris Congress, at the suggestion of the American Knights of Labour, decided on the May Day demonstration. The idea was to symbolise the direct struggle of Labour against Capitalism, to usher in the social battle, to sound the note of victory. The symbolism has been crushed by economic conditions, and the call of May has lost its psychological significance. This was inevitable. Symbolism cannot satisfy for ever. The struggle towards emancipation is something more than a mere parade. The true import and essence of the May idea was lost when the parade became accepted. It menaced parliamentary careerism and so the opportunist parliamentary leaders falsified the meaning of the celebration. They liquidated its energy. To them the germinating of spring, the symbol of awakening labour, was an omen of evil. And so they dulled the workers' enthusiasm,