Name:_____

Thesis Workshop - 8th US History
interpreting and organizing information/resource article note taking
Bombing in Haymarket Square
By: Robert Sobel

Introduction

1. Can you tell if the Introduction tells of events which happened before, during or after the main article sections? This means is the introduction in Chronological (time) order?

2. In the Introduction there are a number of terms which YOU MUST UNDERSTAND to know what is happening. YOU MUST find out what the terms mean!

    - Anarchists:
    - SLP=Socialist Labor Party:
        - What is a socialist?
        - Who is Labor?
        - Party means what?
    - "8 Hour Workday Movement" seems fairly clear - What do you think it means?
    - "Radical Groups" What is meant by Radical?

3. What is the thesis that is stated in the last line of the introduction?

Section I - Bombing in Haymarket Square

4. In which city were the events located?

5. This city was the center of two movements. What were they?

6. What reasons does the author give for these movements to have been centered there?

7. Who were the main backers of the anarchist movement in U.S.?

Drawing conclusions: What 2 groups of people, some of whom share certain characteristics, are the focus of this event?

8. What type of labor protest were thousands of workers engaged in during May of 1886?

9. Where did violence first break out and why? Describe the event and the actions of the police.

10. How did August Spies, editor of the *Arbeiter Zeitung* (a German language radical, anarchist labor newspaper), use the newspaper and posters to respond to the death of the workers outside the McCormick plant?

11. Were those who gathered at Haymarket Square encouraged to have weapons?

12. On Tuesday, May 4th how many workers came to the Haymarket Square meeting? Was this more or less than expected and why?

13. At what time did the meeting start? Fill in the timeline of the **events (use bullet notes)** that night (you will need to return to this timeline)
    - 8:30
    - 9:00
    - About 10:00
    - About 10:20- give detailed account of events

14. What was the topic of both Spies and Parsons's speeches? Were they violent in nature? Give evidence.

15. What role did Chicago Mayor Carter Harrison play? Give details.

16. About 10:00 PM Parsons introduces Samuel Fielden. What happened next and how many people were present at 10:20?

17. How many police arrived and who led them? What is significant about the police captain's views?

18. Describe the events of the bombing using bullet points.

19. What questions/confusion do you have about what happened that night?

18. How might you find the answers to those questions?

INTRODUCTION

On a cold and bleak November day in 1887 four men walked steadily to the gallows in the Cook County Jail in Chicago. The four men were anarchists and members of the SLP—*the Socialist Labor Party. They were also well-known leaders in the fight for the eight-hour-workday movement. Each had been found guilty of murder by calling for the bombing of Chicago's Haymarket Square on May 4, 1886. But not one of them could have thrown the bomb. Their deaths touched off a controversy that has lasted for nearly a century.*

Serious labor problems had been building in Chicago and the nation for years, fueled, in part, by the SLP and other radical groups. But widespread labor unrest did not spill onto Chicago streets until the end of April 1886. On April 30 thousands of workers in Chicago and elsewhere walked off their jobs in support of the eight-hour-workday movement. Workers would no longer put up with twelve-hour to sixteen-hour workdays, low pay, and unsafe working conditions. Strikes crippled the city, disrupting food production, mail delivery, and other needed items. However, the SLP was only partly responsible for the unrest. Nevertheless, the SLP and its members received the blame for the bombing and for other Chicago labor problems. SLP members August Spies, George Engel, Adolph Fischer, and Albert Parsons went to their deaths because of their political beliefs.

By Robert Sobel

1 Bombing in Haymarket Square

Chicago became the center of the *eight-hour-workday movement* shortly after the Civil War, because many of the country's largest industries were based there, employing large numbers of workers. Chicago also nurtured a largely immigrant-backed movement that came to be known as the *anarchist movement*. An event that broke out on Chicago streets and ended in a Chicago courtroom in the mid-1880's grew out of these two movements.

The First of May. Many workers in Chicago spent Saturday, May 1, 1886, rallying for the eight-hour-workday movement. More than 30,000 workers went out on strike and remained away from their jobs. One Chicago newspaper said that "no smoke curled up from the tall chimneys of the factories and mills and things had assumed a Sabbath-like appearance." Some workers stayed at home, but most took part in parades and demonstrations that were held in many parts of the city. The workers marched, usually from their job sites to wide-open areas where large groups of people listened to speakers talk about working conditions, pay, work hours, and the labor movement. "There is an eight-hour agitation everywhere," one labor newspaper noted.

The agitation died down on Sunday, May 2. There were no parades, no demonstrations—only the quiet clip-clop of horses drawing carriages on the nearly empty cobblestoned city streets. But somewhere—either in Chicago or nearby—someone was building a small package made of wadding, fuses, and dynamite.

The McCormick Riot. Sunday's calm exploded into violence on Monday, May 3. Strikers again held large rallies in many parts of the city. The largest gathering took place on Black Road near the front gates of the McCormick Harvester Machine Company. More than 6,000 strikers listened intently to 31-year-old August Spies, a member of the SLP and editor of the German-American workers' newspaper, *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. Spies told his listeners to band together and not to surrender to the pressures of their employers. But the shriek of the McCormick factory whistle midway through his speech cut him short.

The whistle signaled a change in the factory work shift. And before the first blast of the whistle had faded, about 500 men in Spies's audience left the rally and ran toward the factory.

The 500 strikers reached the factory gates as the first *scabs*—strikebreakers—were leaving for the night. Suddenly, fists were flying as strikers and strikebreakers fought each other in the street. The strikers wanted their jobs back—but on their own terms. The strikebreakers wanted jobs, too, and they were willing to work for whatever the factory owners offered them.

As the fighting spilled further down the narrow street, about 200 Chicago police officers charged into the crowd of brawling workers. The police did not rely on their nightsticks to curb the rioters. Instead, they opened fire with their service revolvers, leaving 1 striker dead

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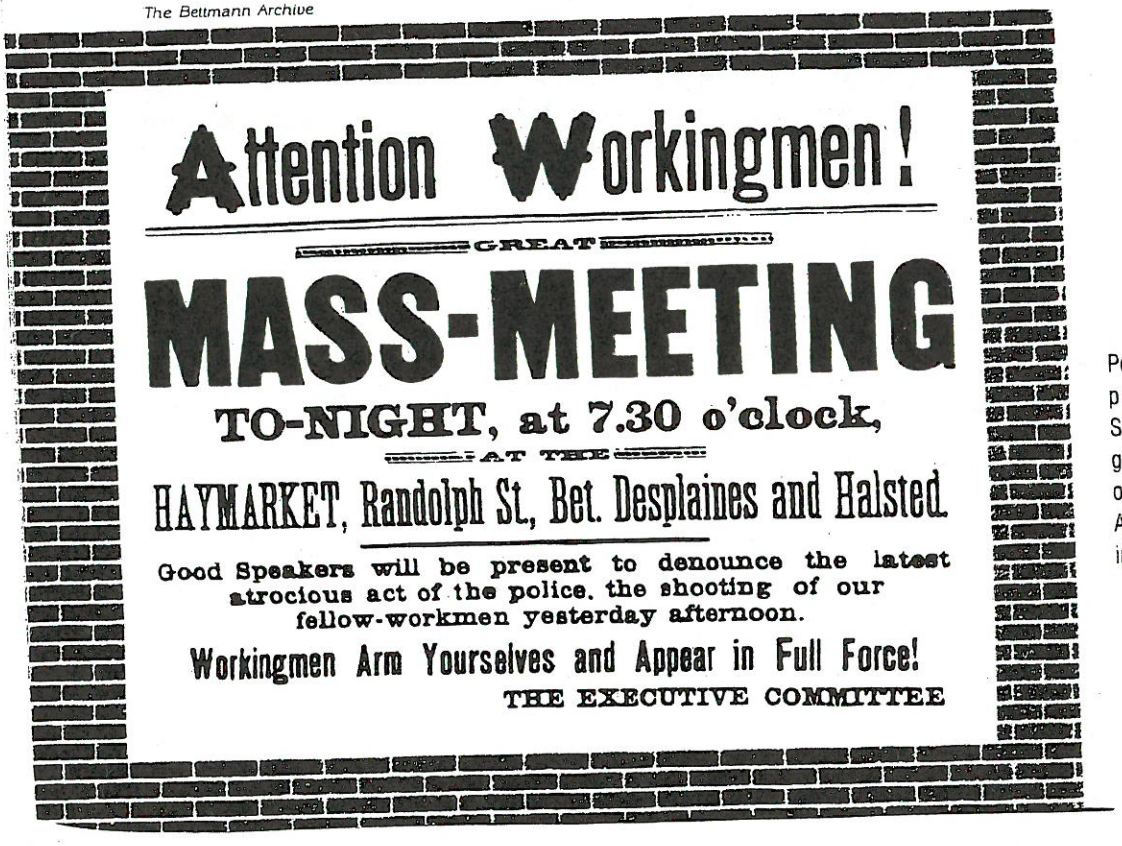


Posters announcing the workers' protest meeting at Haymarket Square were printed in both English and German because many of the strikers were of German American origin. What are working men asked to do?

and 6 others seriously wounded. Six police officers were also injured, but none had been shot.

Over the heads of his terrified and fleeing audience, Spies sighted the wisps of gun smoke curling into the night air. He heard the shouts and cries of the wounded and dying strikers. Spies immediately ran back to the office of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, where a poster was being printed calling on all workers in Chicago to "rise in your might.... To Arms! We call you to arms." The poster was headlined "Revenge," and it called for a mass meeting to be held the next night at the Haymarket Square on the city's West Side.

Tuesday, May 4. The Chicago sky threatened rain most of the day, but no one was prepared for the storm that broke later in the evening. Striking workers and police had several run-ins during the day. Many workers were arrested, but no one was hurt. The upcoming Haymarket meeting, therefore, was met with a great deal of uneasiness. In fact, most workers were so worried about possible trouble at Haymarket Square that the turnout at the meeting was small. Most of the expected workers stayed home.

The Square had been chosen because it could hold about 20,000 people. But no more than 1,200 people showed up. With such a small gathering, August Spies, the first speaker, moved the meeting out of the Square and down the street to the mouth of a nearby alley, where he and the other speakers could be heard more easily.

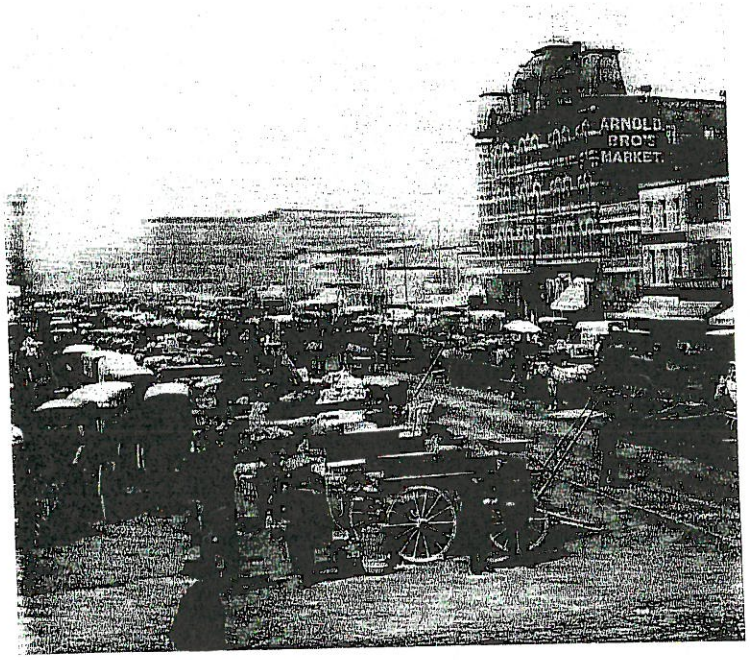
The meeting, set to begin at 7:30 at night, started an hour later. Two speakers—Albert Parsons and Samuel Fielden—had not yet arrived when Spies began to speak. The meeting, Spies explained, was to discuss "the general situation of the eight-hour strike, and the events which have taken place in the last forty-eight hours." He was talking about the shootings at the McCormick factory. The small crowd listened quietly.

Albert Parsons began speaking at about nine o'clock. Fearing trouble, Parsons made an effort to keep his speech tame and his listeners calm. He spoke mainly about the state of labor unions in the world, adding many statistics as he spoke. When, at one point, some people in the crowd shouted their desire to hang Jay Gould, a well-known railroad owner, Parsons replied, "No! This is not a conflict between individuals, but for a change of system... [Socialism] does not aim at the life of the individual."

Chicago's Mayor Carter Harrison was in the audience, listening to the speakers. He, too, feared that trouble might break out. But he later admitted that "nothing had occurred yet, or looked likely to occur to require interference." The mayor then left the meeting and went to the Desplaines Street police station, a half block away. He told the police that the workers' meeting was peaceful. He stressed that no action needed to be taken by the police that night.

The Haymarket Bombing. Parsons ended his talk about ten o'clock. He turned and introduced Samuel Fielden, the final speaker. Fielden had talked for about ten minutes when, as many people had expected, rain began to fall. Most of his audience left at that point, leaving Fielden with a crowd of only

Chicago Historical Society



Chicago's Haymarket Square was the scene of a violent labor demonstration on May 4, 1886.

about 200 people. Nevertheless, Fielden went on talking for ten minutes more. About 10:20 P.M. Fielden began to end his talk by saying, "In conclusion..." But he never finished the sentence. A team of nearly 200 police officers broke through the thinning crowd and surged toward the wagon that served as the speakers' platform. The team of police was led by Chicago police captains Ward and Bonfield, who were widely known for their strong, anti-labor-union views.

"In the name of the people of the State of Illinois," Captain Ward shouted, "I command this meeting immediately and peaceably to disperse."

"We are peaceable," Fielden replied, a look of shock on his face as he and the others on the wagon platform began to leave.

But just then a dark object rocketed through the damp night air. It made a strange hissing noise, like the sound of frying bacon. And it had an eerie glow as well, like the sputtering of a holiday sparkler. The mysterious object landed among the police, at the feet of police officer Mathias J. Degnan.

Someone had tossed a dynamite bomb into the police ranks. Chicagoans many blocks away first saw a blinding flash, followed by a deafening roar. Police officer Degnan was killed instantly. Six other police officers died soon after in a hospital. And more than 70 other police officers were seriously wounded in the blast. Two workers also died in the explosion, and 60 others were severely hurt.

The shocked crowd ran for cover as the police opened fire on them. Several workers were killed, and many more were wounded. The exact number of people killed has never been learned. The police quickly arrested a large number of workers, including Fielden and Spies. But the person most responsible for the nightmare—the bomber—was never found.

Questions End Here

2 Anarchists on Trial

Word of the Haymarket bombing traveled quickly throughout the country and the world. For the most part, business leaders who had always distrusted the labor-union movement felt that they had been proved right. Labor-union leaders and workers who backed the eight-hour-workday movement, on the other hand, were shocked and dismayed at the news. They could not believe that any labor-union member would have committed such a terrible crime.

The Trial Begins. Rumors of a plot by German Americans to destroy Chicago spread rapidly. Because of these stories and the resulting fear, the police launched a city-wide dragnet, hoping to round up as many anarchists as they could. "Make the raids first and look up the law afterward!" the state's attorney, Julius S. Grinnell, stated when asked if search warrants had been signed by a judge. About 200 people—mostly German Americans—were picked up in the raids.

By the end of May 1886 all but 31 persons had been freed from jail. The remaining suspects were charged with four separate crimes stemming from the bombing. Each was accused of conspiracy to murder police officer Mathias J. Degnan by means of a bomb, of murder by pistol shots, of being accessories to one another in carrying out Degnan's murder, and of general conspiracy to commit murder.

The state of Illinois limited its case to trying only nine of the 31 men originally charged. Each was a well-known member of the Socialist Labor Party. Each man also had taken some part in the labor-union movement. And each *defendant*—person on trial—was an admitted anarchist.

Those standing trial were August Spies, Samuel Fielden, Albert Parsons, Michael Schwab, Adolph Fischer, George Engel, Oscar Neebe, Louis Lingg, and Rudolph Schnaubelt. However, only seven defendants were in the courtroom when the trial began. Schnaubelt, released on bail, had fled the country. Parsons was hiding in Wisconsin, but he voluntarily entered the courtroom in the early afternoon of the opening day of the trial. Thus, eight men finally went to trial before Judge Joseph E. Gary in the Cook County Criminal Court in Chicago.

The Verdict Is Reached. Defense attorney William Black tried to limit the scope of the case to the bombing itself. But, by Judge Gary's instructions, the state had only to prove that the men on trial were anarchists in order to find them guilty of a *capital offense*—a crime for which they could be put to death. Since each defendant admitted to belonging to the anarchist movement, the jury had little to consider. Even the courtroom bailiff could foretell the outcome of the trial as the trial began. "Those fellows are going to be hanged as certain as death..." he said. Not surprisingly, then, the hand-picked jury sided with the state after only three hours of deliberations. The twelve jurors found each of the eight men guilty as charged. And all but one of the defendants was sentenced to death. 36-year-old Oscar Neebe, against whom no evidence whatsoever was presented, was given a sentence of fifteen years in prison.

After several motions for a new trial, Judge

Gary set October 7, 1886, as the day for passing the final sentence. On that day the judge asked each defendant if he had anything to say before the sentence was read. To Judge Gary's surprise, each man had a great deal to say—so much so that the eight men spent three days talking about their beliefs and feelings and about the American system of justice.

When they had finished, Judge Gary read the sentence: "In substance and effect it is [the court's decision] that the defendant Neebe be imprisoned in the State Penitentiary at Joliet [Illinois] at hard labor for the term of fifteen years.

"And that each of the other defendants, between the hours of ten o'clock in the forenoon and two o'clock in the afternoon of the third day of December next, in the manner provided by the statute of this State be hung by the neck until he is dead. Remove the prisoners."

During the Haymarket trial, Judge Joseph E. Gary consistently favored the prosecution.

Culver Pictures

Final Pleas. Defense attorney Black immediately appealed the case to the Illinois Supreme Court. He was helped by Leonard Swett, who had been a friend and law partner of Abraham Lincoln.

The appeals process went on for almost a year. During that time a growing number of people began to feel that justice had not been served. Nevertheless, the Illinois Supreme Court upheld Judge Gary's rulings on September 14, 1887. A final appeal to the United States Supreme Court was turned down on November 2, 1887. Since the date of execution had been moved back during the appeals process to November 11, 1887, the condemned men had only nine days to live. Attorney Black tried to get an immediate pardon for his clients from Richard J. Oglesby, governor of Illinois, but he was only partially successful.

Black and others presented the governor with petitions signed by more than 200,000 people asking that the lives of the Chicago anarchists be spared. Well-known people, such as Samuel Gompers of the American Federation of Labor and George Bernard Shaw, a famous Irish playwright, either met with or telegraphed the governor to ask for mercy for the condemned men. Even Judge Gary and Prosecutor Grinnell had a change of heart—at least in part. Both men asked the governor to spare Fielden and Schwab from hanging.

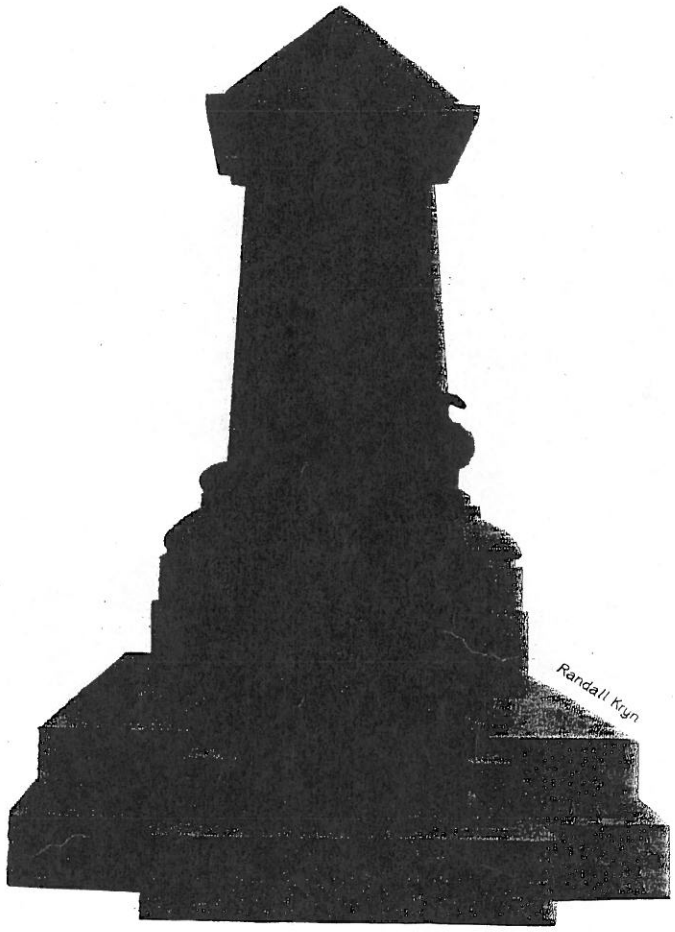
Seventeen hours before the scheduled hanging, the governor announced that he was changing the sentences of Fielden and

Schwab to life in prison. But the others—Spies, Parsons, Engel, and Fischer—would meet the executioner as scheduled. The seventh prisoner, Louis Lingg, 22 years old, had taken his own life earlier in the day.

Final Moments. Spies, Engel, Fischer, and Parsons took the news of the governor's decision well. They spent their last night in prison quietly after saying good-bye to their families. Parsons spent the long night talking with his jailers and writing a farewell letter to his two young children.

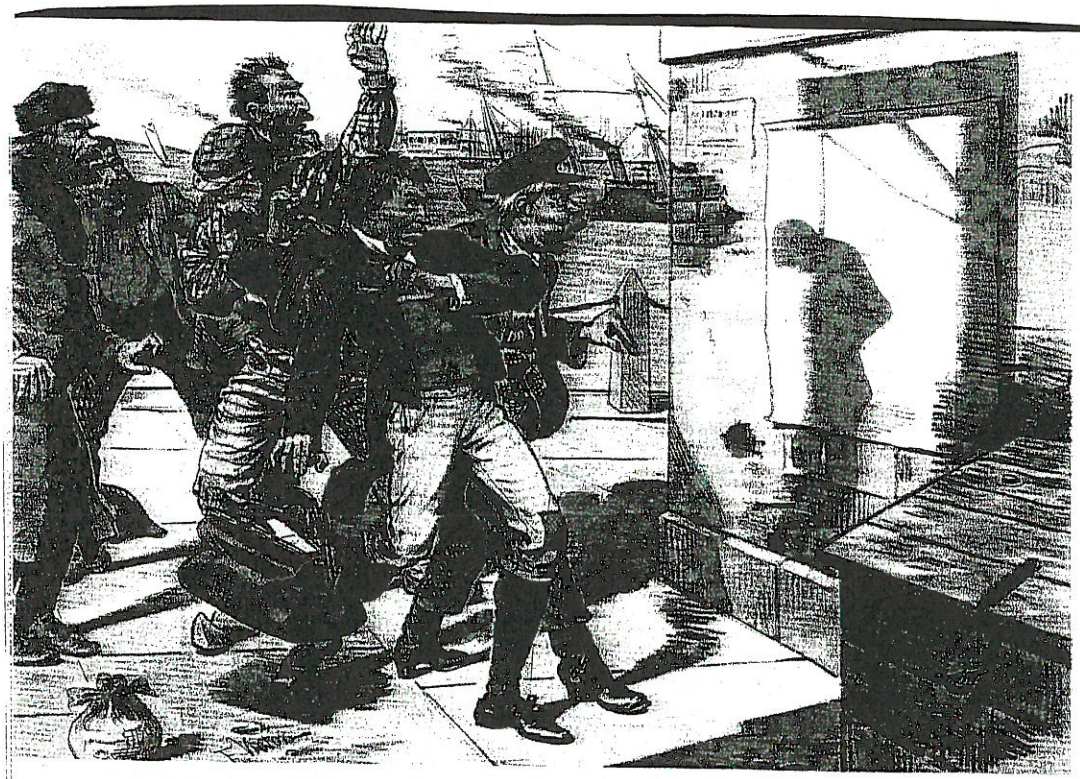
The four condemned men were handcuffed in their cells and walked to the gallows at 11:30 Friday morning, November 11, 1887—a damp, dreary day in Chicago. The men were calm, even good-humored. Fischer adjusted his noose because it was too tight. Spies thanked the executioner for making him more comfortable. But as the four stood on the gallows, each hurriedly spoke his last words. August Spies was, as usual, the first to speak: "There will come a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today." Albert Parsons, the last to speak out, was silenced by the hangman's rope in midsentence: "Let me speak, oh men of America! Will you let me speak, Sheriff Matson! Let the voice of the people be heard! Oh—"

The four Chicago anarchists died at a few minutes past noon. As the Cook County hangman pulled open the gallows' trapdoor, the Haymarket Affair was thought to have ended. To this day, it never has.



Many people went to the dedication of a monument for the Haymarket defendants in 1893. What saying is carved on the monument?

The Altgeld Pardon. Six years after the hanging, a new governor of Illinois, John P. Altgeld, pardoned Fielden, Neebe, and Schwab. In doing so, the governor criticized Judge Gary's courtroom procedures and the state's shoddy case against the Chicago anarchists. But such criticism almost ended the governor's own political life. By 1893 few persons objected to the governor's actions, but he was widely criticized for his reasoning. Many people agreed that the prisoners should be pardoned, but few people supported the governor's stinging criticism of the unusual



The Bettmann Archive

Newspaper and magazine editorial cartoons often used anarchists and their ideas as a theme for drawings during the late 1800's. Why do these men look dismayed?

courtroom practices that led to the anarchists' conviction.

But even before the governor's pardon was signed, several people pointed to questions about the police raids that had followed the bombing. Chicago Police Chief Ebersold, for example, stated in 1890 that Captain Michael J. Schaack—who had conducted the raids in which the eight anarchists were arrested—"wanted to keep things stirring. He wanted bombs to be found here, there, everywhere....After we got the anarchist societies broken up, Schaack wanted to send out men to organize new societies right away....He wanted to...keep himself prominent before the public."

The Haymarket Affair raises many questions about the American system of justice in the 1880's. But such an event also serves as a reminder of what can happen to our belief in fair trials when public fear and lack of courtroom fairness come together in a court of law.