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MAY DAY

Anarchist Origins of 1st May

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Following the 1st of May 1886, strikes were still ongoing as the fight with employers became tougher. On the 4th of May, a meeting gathering around 15,000 people was attacked by police. By the end of the day, both sides had suffered numerous dead and wounded. It was a perfect occasion to muzzle the protest. Eight of the main organisers, all anarchists, were arrested and sentenced to death. The sentence was turned to life imprisonment for three of them.

Hanged

Then Acquitted

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Anarchist monument, Chicago

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THE 1st OF MAY is an occasion to remind us that the fight against capitalism is still going on. Nowadays in Europe, strikes and social struggles are seriously discredited. Yet, the difference between rich and poor keeps growing, the financial markets are back in the saddle and traders are still handling billions of dollars. Are we wrong to ask for more when half of the world’s wealth is owned by 1% of the population? Meanwhile, workers are asked to make more and more effort to “save” the economy and put the State back on its feet with its batch of new taxes (such as the bedroom tax) and cuts in public services. We are heading toward a neo-liberal capitalist system in which the State’s main purpose is to maintain social control so capitalism can develop without constraint.

Workers are producing everything and yet they own very little. This analysis is old and well known but despite it, workers in Europe slowly give up the fight for a fair redistribution and instead just hope that troubles will fall on someone else. In addition, work has been sanctified so that the idea is widespread that if you don’t want to be a good worker that produces and obeys it makes you lazy, a parasite or an idealist (choose yours!).

As anarchists, we think that human beings shouldn’t be defined by the surplus value they bring to capitalism. Work should be the way to produce by necessity and not to create new needs. Work must be organized so everyone can work less, and for means other than profitability. No capitalist society will ever achieve full employment because it needs a pool of unemployed people so the necessity to work can make us accept bad working conditions. In order to reorganise work, we need a society free from State, Police and Capital.

“As anarchists, we think that human beings shouldn’t be defined by the surplus value they bring to capitalism.”

THE YEAR 1968 was marked by many events—the huge demonstrations throughout Europe and America against the American intervention in Vietnam, unrest in Czechoslovakia, riots in the black ghettos of the USA and student occupations in Britain. But what surged to the forefront were the events of May–June 1968 in France.

Today, in a period which seems the opposite of 1968, it’s hard to realise that a vast movement of struggle, with youth at its forefront, shook the world. But 1968 was prepared for on a number of fronts—countercultural as well as political.

This large countercultural movement flourished above all in the United States, but also in northern Europe. By 1968, however, this movement was beginning to run out of steam. Before May 1968, tiny minorities were engaged in agitation, and these were ignored by practically every political observer in France. One inquiry published in a book before the events, described young people as completely depoliticised and eager to integrate as quickly as possible into work and ‘adult life’, which was never questioned.

It was at Nanterre University where the March 22nd Movement formed with anarchist students. These groups led off the occupation of the admin block after the arrest of militants of the Vietnam Committees. This agitation came together with that led
ulties, the banks and offices, each offering a savage analysis of the institutions and where the Sorbonne was the most eloquent example of discussion and debate between different sectors of society. However, except at Nantes, where students were admitted to meetings of the strike committee, coordination between students and workers was difficult. The union bureaucrats, many in the Communist Party, exploited the differences between the ‘adventurism’ of the students and the ‘realism’ of the workers. Many workers perceived students as spoiled children of the bourgeoisie who could reject what they themselves had never had the privilege to experience. But equally there was little sign of revolutionary tendencies among workers to go beyond the limits set by the union bureaucrats. The thousand workplaces occupied and open as forums for free discussions were not seen as ways of moving forward.

Soon, the occupations were abandoned by the majority of workers who left only the Communist Party and the union central it controlled, the CGT, running things. As for realism, the bureaucrats fixed a deal of vague promises on retirement payments and conditions and family pay-outs, and a pay rise that was swiftly wiped out by a galloping rate of infla-
Who We Are...

The Anarchist Communist Group (ACG) is a revolutionary anarchist communist organisation made up of local groups and individuals who seek a complete transformation of society, and the creation of anarchist communism.

This will mean the working class overthrowing capitalism, abolishing the State, getting rid of exploitation, hierarchies and oppressions, and halting the destruction of the environment. To contribute to the building of a revolutionary anarchist movement we believe it is important to be organised.

We are committed to building an effective national and international organisation that has a collective identity and works towards the common goal of anarchist communism, whilst at the same time working together with other working class organisations and in grass roots campaigns.

We do not see ourselves as the leaders of a revolutionary movement but part of a wider movement for revolutionary change. In addition, we strive to base all our current actions on the principles that will be the basis of the future society: mutual aid, solidarity, collective responsibility, individual freedom and autonomy, free association and federalism.

If you are considering joining the ACG, then to see where we are coming from in terms of ideas and politics, we suggest you look first at our Aims and Principles on our website www.anarchistcommunism.org

Then if you think the ACG is politically the right place for you, simply drop us a line at info@anarchistcommunism.org or write to the postal address at the top left of this page.

The Revolts of 1968: an incomplete list...

Brazil: Military police kill student Edson Luis de Lima Souza, resulting in major protests against the military dictatorship.

Britain: Over 10,000 anti-Vietnam war demonstrators outside the US Embassy. Fighting with police. 86 injured. 200 arrested in London.

Czechoslovakia: Warsaw Pact tanks cross into Czechoslovakia. Uprising against invasion.


Germany: Rudi Dutschke shot and wounded. Demos, riots in Berlin, Essen, Frankfurt, Hamburg. In Munich the Springer building is wrecked.


Italy: Battle of Valle Giulia. Students fight police.


Mexico: Student resistance and demonstrations. 10,000 protesters in Tlatelolco plaza, Mexico City. Soldiers open fire killing around 400 people.

Pakistan: November, daily riots, strikes and demonstrations.

Poland: 20,000 students and workers demonstrate, fighting with security forces. Warsaw.

Russia: Eight Russians demonstrate in Moscow against Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Spain: Student demonstrations shut down University of Madrid for 38 days.

Sweden: Students occupy university and clash with police.

USA: Boston. 235 men turn in their draft cards in front of their university and clash with police.

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