

From Frank Donner, Protectors of Privilege: Red Squads and Police Repression in Urban America (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), pp.12-22.

Haymarket and Its Legacy

Our purpose here is not to recount the oft-told tale of Haymarket, but to focus on the conduct of the police principals. During the two decades after the 1871 fire, the Chicago police were, according to Herbert Asbury, "probably the most inefficient organization of its kind in the United States . . . poorly paid and riddled with graft . . . and unable to handle with any degree of intelligence the railroad and streetcar strikes of 1877 and 1885 . . . and the other labor troubles and radical outbreaks that kept Chicago in almost constant turmoil." It was not that the force loafed: in one year alone (1879) the police made 28,480 arrests on charges of disorderly conduct, primarily in connection with labor disturbances and riots.

The reliance by the Chicago business community on repressive police tactics to deal with labor unrest was unconcealed. Indeed, the Chicago police were as much the minions of the business community as hired Pinkertons. The leadership role of Captain (then Inspector) Bonfield in both the May 3 and May 4 episodes was no accident. He had impressed the business community with his "shoot to kill" orders in an 1885 streetcar strike, and his readiness to order clubbings had led his victims to dub him "Black Jack." As a result of the indiscriminate clubbings he instigated on the morning of July 2, 1885, during the course of the streetcar strike, one man was beaten senseless, another died, and others never fully recovered from the injuries inflicted by the police."

In February 1886 Bonfield posted a security guard of three hundred policemen around the McCormick Works to implement a lockout of some 1,482 workers, and on March 1 the police began escorting strike-breakers into the plant. On March 2, without warning, Bonfield's men clubbed a number of locked-out workers peacefully gathered outside the plant. In the ensuing confrontation, the police shot at the workers, killing at least four of them while they were in flight.

Bonfield's role in the Haymarket affair is illuminated by the fact that when he was informed at the station house by Mayor Carter Harrison at about 10:00 o'clock that the meeting was about over and that it had been peaceful,* he nevertheless stayed on until the mayor left, and then led his men to the tragic encounter in the square.

*He hardly needed to be told the news: all during the evening he had plain-clothesmen or informers (it is not clear which) shuttling between his post and the meeting to alert him to developments.]

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We must now turn to Captain Michael J. Schaack, who dominated the stage after the bombing. In the wake of the bombing, he was assigned to assist the state prosecutor, develop his case, and bring to justice others who were implicated. Schaack may well be called the founding father of modern police antiradical theory and practice: his operational methods, ideological assumptions, exploitation of mass fear, and use of publicity together form a legacy that became the foundation of a police specialty in subsequent years.

Subsequent to the bombing, Schaack's men (they were frequently referred to as his "boys" commenced a terror campaign during which well over two hundred sixty individuals were rounded up. They raided and ransacked homes, made illegal arrests, dragged people out of their beds, subjected dragnet victims to intimidation and torture, and bribed several into becoming prosecution witnesses. The justification offered for these tactics was a claimed vast revolutionary conspiracy targeting the city and, ultimately, the nation.

The Chicago Citizens' Association and its allies raised funds used by Schaack to bribe witnesses and pay off informers. In addition, it apparently hired Pinkerton agents to assist the police, raised over \$30,000 to succor the families of the dead and wounded policemen, donated land to - to be used "for military purposes," that is, as a *redoubt* for rapid troop deployment without delay when needed to curb disturbances in the city, and subsequently, in 1899, collected funds to build an armory for the same purpose.

As the city writhed in fear, kept at a high pitch by a frenzied press, Schaack took center stage as a detective-hero, casting himself in the role of master detective, a figure that in the nineteenth century gripped the popular imagination, whose daring and skill would unlock mysteries and bring him acclaim as the man who had not only solved "the crime of the century" but rescued the city and nation from destruction. How could his vision be marred by such piddling details as apprehending the actual bomber? Instead, he bragged unceasingly of his cleverness and courage in rooting out secret conspiracies, confident that no one in the fear-ridden city would dare challenge his boastful disclosures, however absurd or incredible.

This self-styled master detective left no stone unturned to keep himself in the public eye. Not only did he falsely announce the discovery of bombs, but he actually sought to set up anarchist cells on his own. Three years after the bombing, on May 10, 1889, Police Chief Frederick Ebersold told the *Chicago Times* in an interview:

Captain Schaack wanted to keep things stirring. He wanted bombs to be found here, there, all around, everywhere. I thought people would lie down to sleep better if they were not afraid their homes would be blown to pieces any minute. But this man, Schaack ... wanted none of that policy... After we got the anarchist societies broken up, Schaack wanted to send out people to organize new societies right away... He wanted to keep the thing boiling, keep himself prominent before the public.

Ebersold's charges were probably prompted by Schaack's attack on him in his book *Anarchy and Anarchists*, published in February 1889, sixteen months after the Haymarket executions.¹⁹ This volume was prepared to advance Schaack's career as a master anarchist hunter and to exploit his national reputation as the hero of Haymarket, and it was circulated by the Pinkerton Agency to induce employers to engage its services. The exaggerations and inventions in the book—admitted by Schaack himself later to be (at least) one-third lies—also reflect the narrative strategies of nineteenth-century police thrillers, and they are clearly intended both to sow and to exploit mass fear. The book is a handsome volume of 697 quarto pages, with 191 illustrations (a great many bomb-related), and its title page blazes with three subtitles: *A History of the Red Terror and the Social Revolution in America and Europe; Communism, Socialism and Nihilism, in Doctrine and in Deed*; and *The Chicago Haymarket Conspiracy, The Detection and Trial of the Conspirators*.

Anarchy and Anarchists is embroidered with tales of creepy encounters with strangers, meetings with

mysterious women veiled in black, heroic penetrations of clandestine meeting places, anonymous missives, and so on. At the outset, the author startles us with the assurance (p. 74) that "Socialism in the United States may be regarded as synonymous with Anarchy." Well-meaning, naive strikers were duped by the "Socialists-Anarchists" in 1886 "to strike a blow which would terrorize the community and inaugurate the rule of the Commune." Moreover, the bloody streetcar confrontations in the summer of 1885 had not been due to inspector Bonfield's detail at all, but resulted from "prearranged plans" of "the Anarchists and Socialists of Chicago [who] did everything to create a bloody conflict between the police and the strikers."

Dipping into Social Darwinist wisdom, Schaack treats his readers to an extended paean to the glories of free enterprise and the perils of a socialist, equalitarian society, which not only offers no incentive to great achievements in art, literature, or invention, but places everyone on an equal footing, "the profligate with the provident and the drunken wretch with the industrious" (p. 84).

Arrayed against kindly and generous employers are the "Huns and Vandals of modern civilization," the socialists and anarchists who demand ten hours' pay for eight hours' work in the hope that employer resistance will lead workers who secretly profess socialism "to the point of violence" (p. 103). All of the conflicts preceding Haymarket were planned preliminary stages in a vast takeover conspiracy, culminating in what Schaack repeatedly refers to as the "Monday Night Conspiracy," to be ignited by the Haymarket demonstration on the following day. This plot, a product of Schaack's febrile imagination, was assertedly proposed by Engel and endorsed by Fisher and contemplated that bombs be thrown into police stations; riflemen of the *Lehr und Wehr* would post themselves outside, and whoever came out of the station would be shot down. They then would come into the heart of the city, where the fight would commence in earnest. When all the conspirators finally reached the center of the city, they would set fire to the most prominent buildings, attack the jail, open the doors, and free the inmates to join them. And why did it not take place? The reason "is not explicable upon any other hypothesis than that the courage of the trusted leaders failed them at the critical moment."

Schaack had control of a slush fund provided by the Chicago Citizens' Association for such purposes as bribing witnesses and purchasing the services of informers-called "privates" or "secret service men." In an illuminating passage, Schaack describes how his network operated:

I did not depend wholly upon police effort, but at once employed a number of outside men, choosing especially those who were familiar with the Anarchists and their haunts. The funds for this purpose were supplied to me by public spirited citizens who wished the law vindicated and order preserved in Chicago. I received reports from the men thus employed from the beginning of the case up to November 20, 1887.... At each Anarchist meeting I had at least one man present to note the proceedings and to learn what plots they were maturing. (pp. 49-50)

Like so many authoritarian radical-hunters, Schaack was revolted by activist women:

In many of the smaller meetings ... a lot of crazy women were usually present, and whenever a crazy proposition to kill someone or blow up the city with dynamite [was made], these "squaws" proved the most bloodthirsty ... they would show themselves much more eager to carry it out than the men and it always seemed a pleasure to the Anarchists to have them present. They were always invited to the "war dances" . . . and they fairly went wild whenever blood-thirsty sentiments were uttered.... At one meeting on North Halsted Street [were] the most hideous-looking females that

could be found.... Some of them were pock marked, others freckled faced and red haired and others again held their snuff boxes in their hand while the congress was in session. One female appeared at one of these meetings with her husband's boots on and there was another about six feet tall. She was a beauty! She was raw boned, had a turned up nose and looked as though she might have carried a red flag in Paris during the reign of the Commune. (pp. 207-8)

The "slut" image of radical women was augmented by stereotypical denunciations of their slovenly housekeeping and callousness to the needs of their children. On the other hand there were some-but only a few-decent women, good housekeepers and good mothers, who de- plored the political involvement of their spouses.

Schaack then regales the reader with a stream of pulp-style spy stories:

One of his "privates" is accused of being a spy; the plant then charges his accuser, a bona fide anarchist, with be- ing a Pinkerton agent and asks the assemblage whether he should kill his accuser; he is told to take him out somewhere and kill him. The accuser, overcome by the countercharge, "ran for his life." But the plant, fearing exposure, successfully urges adjournment explaining that his accuser, being a police spy, would return with police reinforcements. (pp. 208-9)

Between May 7, 1886, and November 1877, Schaack was a very busy man-supervising surveillance programs, coaching witnesses, planting informers, having holes bored in walls and floors at which eavesdroppers were positioned, and fending off attempts to do him in or spy on him (p. 215).

Schaack's prime post-Haymarket objective was to stoke the fires of fear and panic, which the trial and executions might quench. Vigilance cannot be relaxed; the danger is greater than ever. In addition to the 75,000 men, women, and children who are socialists, we must remember the 7,300 dangerous anarchists! (Wholly invented figures, as his book's appendices show.) He cannot warn us often enough that we must be prepared for a fight to the death:

All over the world the apostles of disorder, rapine and Anarchy are today pressing forward their work of ruin, and preaching their gospel of disasters to all the nations with more fiery energy and a better organized propaganda than was ever known before. People who imagine that the energy of the revolutionists has slackened, or that the determination to wreck all the existing systems has grown less bitter, are deceiving themselves. The conspiracy against society is as determined as it ever was, and among every nation the spirit of revolt is being galvanized into a newer and more dangerous life. (p. 687)

Schaack comes through as the quintessential political sleuth, the fore- runner of a long line of zealots who, with the support of the business community, used their countersubversive specialty to achieve self-promotion, power, fame, and profit. Like the police red-hunters who walked in his tracks, he thirsted, in Shakespeare's words, for "the big wars / That make ambition virtue" (*Othello* 3.3.349-50).

Schaack and his detail blazed a trail in another area-corruption and greed. While such failings were endemic in the nineteenth-century Police world, they were particularly notable in areas where the urban elites of the Gilded Age felt threatened by the unrest of the lower classes and were hence ready to pay whatever was needed-tolerating graft or direct payoffs-to ensure police aggression in restraining troublemakers.*

' Schaack made much of the fact that the anarchists' victims were not a lot of nobodies, but valiant guardians of the public order. Indeed, the fact that the victims were such noble fellows in itself proved that

the defendants were fiends. An ironic commentary on this attempt to glorify the murdered policemen emerges from the fate of Thomas F. Birmingham, the policeman who served as a model for the statue memorializing the victims of the Haymarket bomb. In 1890 and 1899 he was charged with collaborating with criminals and selling stolen merchandise for his own gain. Subsequently, according to Emma Goldman's account, he became a petty thief and a skid-row drunk, and died in the county hospital. See William J. Adelman, *Haymarket Revisited: A Tour Guide of Labor History Sites and Ethnic Neighborhoods Connected with the Haymarket Affair* (Chicago: Illinois Labor History Society, 1976), p. 39. The Birmingham statue became a repeated target of assaults in the sixties by young radicals, who forced its removal.

All three of the police officials identified with Haymarket would have strongly endorsed Iago's advice to Roderigo: "Put money in thy purse" (*Othello* 1.3.345). In September 1885 the *Daily News* uncovered a series of scandals revealing that Bonfield, jointly with another official (Captain Ward), was running an extortion and bribery ring involving payoffs from gambling houses and prostitutes. According to a *Chicago Times* expose on January 5, 1889, both Bonfield and Schaack were receiving immunity bribes from local taverns and prostitutes. The story also revealed that a great deal of stolen merchandise had been traced to policemen under Schaack's command, including the gold cuff links of Haymarket defendant Louis Lingg. In reprisal, Schaack, repeating a tactic used against the radical press in 1886, promptly ordered the shut-down of the *Times*, then owned by Carter Harrison, a liberal former mayor of Chicago. But even more startling was the discovery that Schaack was the bagman of a \$475,000 fund collected by Chicago businessmen for a continuing war on subversion. In the course of a prosecution of the wife of one of Schaack's boys, Jacob Lowenstein, she released documents establishing that her husband and Schaack had stolen and fenced a considerable amount of property, including possessions of the Haymarket defendants as well as property seized in the course of the subsequent terror campaign. Later, in 1889, after an investigation, the recurring scandals led to dismissal of a group of officers. Schaack managed, after an interval under a cloud in the wake of the corruption expose, to retain leadership of the East Chicago Avenue station because of his supportive German ethnic constituency. In 1898 he died in peace.

Haymarket was exploited in a crusade to broadly tar peaceful labor activities with the brush of violence. As in the aftermath of the Great Upheaval, conspiracy concepts were extended by statute to peaceful labor activities and enlarged police forces in industrial cities were encouraged to apply vaguely worded common law restraints ("trespass," "disorderly conduct") and newly enacted ordinances to justify disruption of peaceful labor activities.²¹ Thus, Haymarket created a climate in which Schaack-style abuses, both in targeting and operations, were not only overlooked, but encouraged in major industrial centers. The stereotypes applied to immigrant laborers and radicals were spiced with new epithets branding them violence-prone fiends armed with bombs and dynamite. The Haymarket tragedy also marked the emergence of a new form of policing: anarchists were indiscriminately surveilled not only as a means of crime suppression, but for ideological reasons alone. This targeting concentrated on identifiable individuals (leaders, activists) as well as the organizations with which they were identified. The emergence of professional "anarchist chasers" led to the organization in large American cities of "bomb" and "anarchist" squads and resort to infiltration by informers as a surveillance technique. This style of ideological warfare against anarchism broke ground for subsequent similar police initiatives against socialism and communism and marked the beginning, in Richard Drinnon's phrase, "of the rationalization of conformity."

Thomas Byrnes: Protector of Plutocrats. In New York the post-Haymarket syndrome of increased

police surveillance was typified by the emergence of Inspector Thomas Byrnes, who paralleled Schaack's role both as an outstanding anarchist chaser and as a manipulator who used the fears of the business community and the general corruption of the time to line his purse. Finley Peter Dunne later recalled-

The celebrated Inspector Byrnes whose fortune was made by scaring millionaires into the belief that there was about to be an uprising of anarchists and assembling an army of cops to surround a few hundred garment workers in Union Square who had gathered to hear a squeaky little tailor rant in Yiddish against the tyranny of Capital. "

Dunne did not overstate Byrnes's success in milking his wealthy patrons by his alertness in protecting their interests. After apprehending a blackmailer of Jay Gould, he became Gould's intimate and explained his fortune of \$350,000--an enormous sum in those days, especially for one on a salary of \$2,000 a year--as the reward of sound investment advice. As in Chicago, a sense of beleaguerment after Haymarket intensified the felt dependency of the business community on Byrnes's protective resources and loosened its purse strings. Byrnes was quick to cash in on such fears: during his years as chief of detectives and inspector, he dispatched details to block anarchist meetings and assigned plain-clothes note-takers to monitor them.

In August 1893 an anarchist scare was triggered by hysterical press accounts and police reports of an occurrence, promptly labeled a riot," involving a wrecked East Side hall. Anarchists were held responsible for the disturbance--although there was no proof of their involvement--because Emma Goldman had delivered a passionate speech in an adjacent hall to an audience of the unemployed. Word spread that a true riot inspired by anarchists was about to erupt as meetings were held to protest police misconduct. All police leaves were canceled, meetings were infiltrated, and the city prepared for the worst. Police hustled known anarchists out of their meeting rooms and headquarters and broke up peaceful meetings, which then moved to new sites, only to be broken up again.

Emma Goldman fell afoul of Byrnes's anarchist hunt when she was arrested in Philadelphia on August 31 on a violence-incitement charge arising from a speech she had made on August 21, 1893, in New York's Union Square to develop support for a public works program to alleviate the needs of the victims of the economic depression. Byrnes's vigorously repressive response to the August scare, culminating in the Goldman arrest, won him acclaim as a fearless anarchist chaser, a "man of the hour." . . .

Although the Knights of Labor quickly distanced themselves from the anarchists on trial in Chicago, the reverberations from the 1886 Haymarket bombing severely damaged the fortunes of the Knights and the rest of the union movement. The anti-labor reaction that followed in the wake of the bombing helped precipitate a rapid decline in membership in the Knights. In Detroit, for example, membership dropped by 1888 to one-third of what it had been in 1886. Oscar Ameringer - then a young immigrant furniture worker not yet blacklisted for his politics - may have later exaggerated the speed with which the Eight Hour strikes in Cincinnati collapsed in the aftermath of Haymarket. But this humorous recollection of the "bad news from Chicago" does capture the devastating impact that Haymarket had on workers around the country.