

Excerpt from Thirty Years of Labor, 1859–1889 T.V. Powderly Mire of Anarchy

The events of that year [1886] have been written, and such a short time ago that it is not necessary to re-produce them here, but there are matters in connection with the explosion of the bomb that did so much harm that should be known.

Passing over for the present the events, which transpired on and succeeding the first of May, 1886, we find the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor in session at Richmond, Va. On page 240 of the proceedings of that convention will be found the record of the election of the General Master Workman. This occurred on October 13. On the 19th of that month his salary was fixed by vote of the General Assembly. The record on page 285, and on the day after the fixing of the salary — page 228 — the following resolution was offered by a representative from New York City, James E. Quinn:

That this General Assembly regards with sorrow the intended execution of seven workingmen in Chicago, and appeals for mercy in behalf of the condemned.

The General Master Workman left the chair, and when an opportunity presented itself, he said: I do not approve of the resolution in its present form, and would ask of the General Assembly to give the most careful consideration to this question. I object to the word “workingmen” in that resolution. The societies which favored the measures which were put into practice on May 4th are not made up of workingmen, nor do they pretend to be such. Even though they were, this convention should object, to the work done in the name of labor by these misguided men, instead of countenance it, or any part of it, by showing a morbid sympathy for them as workingmen. The world regards all labor societies in the same light since May 1st; and had it not been for the imbecile act which afforded the Anarchists the opportunity to do an evil deed while the eyes of the world were upon the men of labor, we would not be regarded with suspicion by all who are beyond our sanctuaries. If the word workingmen is stricken out of the resolution, and a condemnation of the methods which brought these unfortunates to their present condition inserted, I shall vote for it, but not otherwise. Under no circumstances should we do anything that can, even by implication, be interpreted as identification with the Anarchist element. Their blind, unlawful act has cast a stain upon the name of labor, which will take years to wipe out. Instead of owing them sympathy we owe them a debt of hatred for their unwarrantable interference at a time when labor had all it could do to weather the storm which had been precipitated upon it by men who apparently did not look very far into the future when naming the first of May as the date on which to put in operation a plan which, from its very nature, must revolutionize the industrial affairs of the country. We are apt to give too little thought to important measures, and to view them from the standpoint of our immediate surroundings, rather than from the standpoint of common sense, and this is such a case. We see men in trouble and rush to their assistance without considering that our action may bring trouble to thousands. Think well over this before you vote, and then vote on such a resolution as will not commit the order to any wild or visionary scheme which men, whom

I believe to be its enemies, would like to see it become involved in.

After the views of the General Master Workman were stated, a representative from Missouri offered a resolution in accord with the sentiments expressed. It reads as follows:

Resolved, That while asking for mercy for the condemned men, we are not in sympathy with the acts of the Anarchists, nor with any attempts of individuals or associated bodies that teach or practice violent infractions of the law, believing that peaceful methods are the surest and best means to secure necessary reforms.

That resolution passed unanimously and met with the approval of nearly all who were present. The few who favored anarchy did not relish it because it lacked that indorsement of their ideas, which they had hoped to carry away with them.

In response to the address of welcome of Governor Lee, the General Master Workman, in comparing monopoly and anarchy, said:

To remedy the evils we complain of is a difficult and dangerous undertaking. The need of strong hearts and active brains was never so great as at the present time. The slavery that died twenty-two years ago was terrible, but, bad as it was, it never developed a millionaire, while the new slavery, which now reaches out with a far stronger hand than the old, has developed hundreds of them. The lash in the hands of the old-time slave-owner could strike but one back at a time, and but one of God's poor, suffering children felt the stroke. The lash of gold in the hands of the new slave-owner falls not upon one slave alone, but upon the backs of millions, and among the writhing, tortured victims, side by side with the poor and the ignorant, are to be found the well to do and the educated. The power of the new slave-owner does not end when the ordinary day laborer bends beneath his rule. It reaches out still further and controls the mechanic, the farmer, the merchant, and the manufacturer. It dictates not alone what the price of labor shall be, but regulates the price of money as well. This new slavery counts among its victims servants of the State who have been chosen by the people to execute a people's will. Not alone does it control the legislator at the State capitol, but in the halls of our national Congress will you find its most willing, cringing slave. It reaches out even further, and holds in its iron grasp the judge upon the bench; not that alone, but it has the power and does confer the judicial ermine upon its most subservient creatures. Do I overestimate its power? Have I made a single misstatement? If my word is not sufficient, turn to the pages of the history of to-day — the public press — and you will find the testimony to prove what I have said is true. Evidence in abundance can be adduced to corroborate every statement made by the press.

The lash was stricken from the hand of the slave-owner of twenty-five years ago, and it must be taken from the hand of the new slave-owner as well. The monopolist of to-day is more dangerous than the slave-owner of the past. Monopoly takes the land from the people in million-acre lots; it sends agents abroad and brings hordes of uneducated, desperate men to this country; it imports ignorance and scatters it broadcast throughout the land. It, and it alone, is responsible for every manifestation of anarchy that our country has witnessed. All men may not be willing to admit that the statement is true, but when monopoly dies, no more Anarchists will be born unto this country, for anarchy is the legitimate child of monopoly. While I

condemn and denounce the deeds of violence committed in the name of labor during the present year, I am proud to say that the Knights of Labor, as an organization, are not in any way responsible for such conduct. He is the true Knight of Labor who with one hand clutches anarchy by the throat, and with the other strangles the monopoly!

We are told that it is because of the importation of so many ignorant foreigners that anarchy has shown its head in our country. Rather is it true that because of the importation of foreign airs, manners, and graces by the wealthy we have forgotten what it is that constitutes the true citizen of the republic. The man who still believes in the "little red school house on the hill" should take one holiday and visit the mine, the factory, the coal breaker, and the mill. There, doing the work of men, will he find the future citizens of the republic, breathing an atmosphere of dust, ignorance and vice. The history of our country is not taught within these walls. The struggle for independence and the causes leading to that struggle are not spoken of there; the name of Washington is unknown, and the words that rang out trumpet-tongued from the lips of Patrick Henry are never mentioned. Our country, her history, her laws and her institutions are unknown to these poor children. How, then, can the child of the foreigner learn to appreciate the freedom which they have never been told about, much less experienced? The little red schoolhouse must fail to do its work properly, since the children of the poor must pass it by on the road to the workshop. How can they appreciate the duties of citizenship when we do take the trouble to teach them that to be an American citizen is greater than to be a king, and that he upon whom the mantle of citizenship is bestowed should part with his life before surrendering one jot or title of the rights and liberties which belong to him?

Turn away from these hives of industry, stand for a moment on a street corner, and you will see gaily-caparisoned horses driven by a coachmen in livery; a footman occupying his place at the rear of the coach is also dressed in the garb of the serf. On the coach door you will find the crest or coat of arms of the illustrious family to whom it belongs. If you speak to the occupant of the coach concerning our country, her institutions or her flag, you will be told that they do not compare with those of foreign countries. The child who graduates from the workshop dons the livery of a slave, covers his manhood, and climbs to the footman's place on the outside of the coach. The man who apes the manners and customs of foreign noblemen occupies the inside. The one who with strong heart and willing hands would defend the rights and liberties of his country had never learned what these rights or liberties are. The other does know, but has learned to love the atmosphere of monarchy better than that which he breathes in this land. Between these two our freedom is in danger, anarchism is fostered, and that is why we, as Knights of Labor, most emphatically protest against the introduction of the child to the workshop until he has attained his fifteenth year, so that he may be enabled to secure for himself the benefits of an education that will enable him to understand and appreciate the blessing of our free institution, and, if necessary, defend them with his life.

During the year which followed, no effort was spared to give out the impression that the

condemned men were Knights of Labor, and that they had the endorsement of their local assemblies in acting with the Anarchists. It is true that it was not stated that any of the condemned were Knights except Albert R. Parsons, but the idea was conveyed that they were entitled to the sympathy of the order. In his address to the General Assembly at Minneapolis, Minn., October 1887, the General Master Workman detailed the experiences of the year so far as his connection with anarchy was concerned, and asked that the convention speak out in the name of the order at large against the practices of the violent element which had gained admission to the organization.