

“Let every dirty, lousy tramp arm himself with a revolver or a knife, and lay in wait on the steps of the palaces of the rich and stab or shoot the owners as they come out.”

-Lucy Parsons, quoted in the Chicago Tribune, 1885



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Mrs. Parsons!

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I am an Anarchist, pg. 3

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The Haymarket Martyrs, pg 8

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I Am An Anarchist
Lucy Parsons

Check out episode 4 of our monthly podcast in which Tai hosts a discussion of “I am an Anarchist” by Lucy Parsons with a smorgasbord of Lit Supply friends: Kit, Elsa, Emily and Ben discuss anarchy, violence, organizing and the IWW. Our Podcast is available almost everywhere podcasts are available.

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Lucy E. Parsons was a leading figure in American anarchism and the radical labor movement. Born a slave near Waco, Texas, she married Albert R. Parsons who had become a white radical Republican after serving first as a Confederate soldier. In 1873 Albert and Lucy moved to Chicago where they became involved in radical labor organizing. Thirteen years later she rose to national fame when she embarked on a speaking tour to raise money for her husband who was one of nine men tried and sentenced to be executed for “speaking in such a way as to inspire the bomber to violence” following the Haymarket Square Bombing which killed a Chicago policeman.

Lucy Parsons remained an activist after the execution of Albert and in 1892 founded the newspaper *Freedom* which addressed such issues as labor organizing, lynching and black peonage in the South. In 1905 Parsons became the only woman to address the founding convention of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). In the early 1930s Parsons joined in the defense of the Scottsboro Boys and Angelo Herndon. Parsons died accidentally in a house fire in 1942.

I am an anarchist

(a speech she delivered in defense of the Haymarket Martyrs, 1886)

I am an anarchist. I suppose you came here, the most of you, to see what a real, live anarchist looked like. I suppose some of you expected to see me with a bomb in one hand and a flaming torch in the other, but are disappointed in seeing neither. If such has been your ideas regarding an anarchist, you deserved to be disappointed. Anarchists are peaceable, law abiding people. What do anarchists mean when they speak of anarchy? Webster gives the term two definitions chaos and the state of being without political rule. We cling to the latter definition. Our enemies hold that we believe only in the former. Do you wonder why there are anarchists in this country, in this great land of liberty, as you love to call it? Go to New York. Go through the byways and alleys of that great city. Count the myriads starving; count the multiplied thousands who are homeless; number those who work harder than slaves and live on less and have fewer comforts than the meanest slaves. You will be dumbfounded by your discoveries, you who have paid no attention to these poor, save as objects of charity and commiseration.

They are not objects of charity, they are the victims of the rank injustice that permeates the system of government, and of political economy that holds sway from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Its oppression, the misery it causes, the wretchedness it gives birth to, are found to a greater extent in New York than elsewhere. In New York, where not many days ago two governments united in unveiling a statue of liberty, where a hundred bands played that hymn of liberty, ‘The Marseillaise.’ But almost its equal is found among the miners of the West, who dwell in squalor and wear rags, that the capitalists, who control the earth that should be free to all, may add still further to their millions! Oh, there are plenty of reasons for the existence of anarchists. But in Chicago they do not think anarchists have any right to exist at all. They want to hang them there, lawfully or unlawfully.

You have heard of a certain Haymarket meeting. You have heard of a bomb. You have heard of arrests and of succeeding arrests effected by detectives. Those detectives! There is a set of men nay, beasts for you! Pinkerton detectives! They would do anything. I feel sure capitalists wanted a man to throw that bomb at the Haymarket meeting and have the anarchists blamed for it. Pinkerton could have accomplished it for him. You have heard a great deal about bombs. You have heard that the anarchists said lots about dynamite. You

have been told that Lingg made bombs. He violated no law. Dynamite bombs can kill, can murder, so can Gatling guns. Suppose that bomb had been thrown by an anarchist. The constitution says there are certain inalienable rights, among which are a free press, free speech and free assemblage. The citizens of this great land are given by the constitution the right to repel the unlawful invasion of those rights. The meeting at square was a peaceable meeting. Suppose, when an anarchist saw the police arrive on the scene, with murder in their eyes, determined to break up that meeting, suppose he had thrown that bomb; he would have violated no law. That will be the verdict of your children. Had I been there, had I seen those murderous police approach, had I heard that insolent command to disperse, had I heard Fielden say, 'Captain, this is a peaceable meeting,' had I seen the liberties of my countrymen trodden under foot, I would have flung the bomb myself.



I would have violated no law, but would have upheld the constitution. If the anarchists had planned to destroy the city of Chicago and to massacre the police, why was it they had only two or three bombs in hand? Such was not their intention. It was a peaceable meeting. Carter Harrison, the mayor of Chicago, was there. He said it was a quiet meeting. He told Bonfield [Captain

Thus it was that the eight-hour movement got under way. Many other cities agitated for it, but Chicago was the storm center of the movement, owing to the zeal and courage of the men and women of this city who worked day and night for it. The result was that when May 1st, 1886, arrived, it found Chicago well-organized and demanding the eight-hour day, striking by the thousands where the demand was refused. It was a veritable holiday for the workers.

The bosses were taken completely by surprise. Some were frightened and threatening; some were signing up; others were abusing those "scoundrels" who had brought all this trouble upon "our" city, and declaring that they would be made examples of, that they ought to be hung and the like.

The police were unspeakably brutal, clubbing and shooting; factory whistles blew, but few responded.

I was chairman of the Women's Organization Committee and know personally how that great strike spread. I have never seen such solidarity.

Rest, comrades, rest. All the tomorrows are yours!



The Haymarket Martyrs

Does this rising generation know that those who inaugurated the eight-hour day were put to death at the command of capital?

Until forty years ago men, women and children toiled ten and often twelve hours a day in factories for a mere pittance, and children from six to nine years of age had to work to help keep up the family.

The Knights of Labor, a powerful organization claiming 500,000 members, had never agitated for a reduction of the hours of labor. Then who were the pioneers of the eight-hour movement? Those martyrs who were strung from the gallows in Chicago on November 11, 1887, the much-lied-about and abused Anarchists.

I will verify this statement. Until 1885 there had never been a concerted action for the reduction of the hours of labor. If eight hours was mentioned in some of our meetings (they were never really mentioned), why, that was only a dream to be indulged in by fools; the bosses would never tolerate such a thing, was the reply.

In 1885 a convention was held in Chicago, composed largely of delegates from Canada. They passed a resolution calling upon the workers of this country and Canada to unite in a demand for a reduction of the hours of toil to eight a day on the first of May, 1886, and to strike wherever it was refused.

Albert R. Parsons brought the matter up before the Trade and Labor Assembly of Chicago, the first central labor body ever organized in this city, a body which he himself organized and of which he was elected president three consecutive times. The matter was hotly debated and finally rejected on the ground that the bosses would never tolerate it.

The Central Labor Union, composed of German mechanics, took the matter up and endorsed it. At the same time they passed a resolution requesting August Spies, editor of the Chicago Arbeiterzeitung, the daily German paper, and Albert R. Parsons, editor of the Alarm, to support it in their papers and speeches; they were both splendid orators.

John Bonfield, Commander of Desplaines Police Station] to send the police to their different beats. I do not stand here to gloat over the murder of those policemen. I despise murder. But when a ball from the revolver of a policeman kills it is as much murder as when death results from a bomb. The police rushed upon that meeting as it was about to disperse. Mr. Simonson talked to Bonfield about the meeting.' Bonfield said he wanted to do the anarchists up. Parsons went to the meeting. He took his wife, two ladies and his two children along. Toward the close of the meeting, he said, 'I believe it is going to rain. Let us adjourn to Zeph's hall.' Fielden said he was about through with his speech and would close it at once. The people were beginning to scatter about, a thousand of the more enthusiastic still lingered in spite of the rain. Parsons, and those who accompanied him started for home. They had gone as far as the Desplaine's street police station when they saw the police start at a double quick. Parsons stopped to see what was the trouble. Those 200 policemen rushed on to do the anarchists up.

Then we went on. I was in Zeph's hall when I heard that terrible detonation. It was heard around the world. Tyrants trembled and felt there was something wrong. The discovery of dynamite and its use by anarchists is a repetition of history. When gun powder was discovered, the feudal system was at the height of its power. Its discovery and use made the middle classes. Its first discharge sounded the death knell of the feudal system. The bomb at Chicago sounded the downfall of the wage system of the nineteenth century. Why? Because I know no intelligent people will submit to despotism. The first means the diffusion of power. I tell no man to use it. But it was the achievement of science, not of anarchy, and would do for the masses. I suppose the press will say I belched forth treason. If I have violated any law, arrest me, give me a trial, and the proper punishment, but let the next anarchist that comes along ventilate his views without hindrance.

Well, the bomb exploded, the arrests were made and then came that great judicial farce, beginning on June 21. The jury was impaneled. Is there a Knight of Labor here? Then know that a Knight of Labor was not considered competent enough to serve on that jury. 'Are you a Knight of Labor?' 'Have you any sympathy with labor organizations?' were the questions asked each talisman. If an affirmative answer was given, the talisman was bounced. It was not are you a Mason, a Knight Templar? O, no! I see you read the signs of the times by that expression. Hangman Gary, miscalled judge, ruled that if a man was prejudiced against the defendants, it did not incapacitate him for serving on the jury. For such a man, said Hangman Gary, would pay closer attention to the law and evidence and would be more apt to render a verdict for the defense.

