

May Day 1951 - Howard Fast

IS IT SUBVERSIVE to march on May Day? Well, by now you know that anything which does you some good and takes a nickel out of the boss's pocket is subversive. A dollar raise is "subversive," and it's "subversive" to want your kids to grow up instead of becoming corpses in Korea.

But how "subversive" is May Day? It just happens to be the most American holiday we have. It was brought into being in 1886 by the Chicago workers, in their struggle for the eight-hour day. Remember their slogan:

"Eight hours of work, eight hours of sleep, eight hours of recreation!"

The corrupt press, the bosses and the sellout artists screamed that it was "subversive," but the American working class fought it through, and the eight hour day became an accepted thing.

Not without the workers paying a price, there was never a time when good things came easy. Even then, the bosses worked with the time-honored pattern of frameup and lies, and four of the best and bravest leaders of American labor were framed for a crime they never committed; and then they were sentenced, and executed.

And one of them, a brave and honest man, August Spies, said, as he stood on the gallows:

There will come a time when our silence will be more powerful than the voices you strangle today!"

And his words have come true. This May Day, millions of workers will march in every corner of the earth. They will march on that day which our working class ancestors won with their courage and militancy.

James Turnbull's drawing and Fred Ellis's deal with the historical and international aspects of May Day. Turnbull and Ellis are not only among the best of America's labor cartoonists, but fine graphic artists as well. Fred Ellis is the foremost cartoonist of America's labor press.

WHY DO THEY FEAR the worker's holiday? Why, when a hundred days in the year are celebrated, is the one day that the American working class has chosen as its own day hated and maligned?

Why do they scream that May Day is subversive, a foreign importation, an "un-American" plot?

What are they afraid of? They have many sweet words about organized labor, but on that one day when organized labor marches through the

streets of New York City, the corrupt press, the bosses and the sellout artists scream with rage and fear. Why?

We have some answers, good answers. Answers which mean life and peace to you, as workers, and to all the millions of good and decent people in our land — people whose only hope of happiness lies with the working class.

Here are some of them — good reasons why you must march for life, for peace, for freedom on May 1st.

WE MARCH FOR PEACE on this May Day. Back in Civil War days, the Confederate soldier summed up his position in these words:

“A poor man’s fight and a rich man’s war.”

A lot of truth in that. You never saw war profiteers in the infantry. The workers do the fighting and dying; the bosses grow rich. Only this time, they’re playing with atom bombs. Your boss can buy himself an atom-proof shelter in the Sherry Netherlands Hotel. You and your wife and kids are supposed to fry and like it.

More than any other group, the working class suffers from war; and only the working class, in all its strength, can lead and win the fight for peace.

That’s what we march for this May Day, for peace, for a decent world where our kids can look to a future other than death. The whole of the human race looks to the American working class to win its fight for peace.

For a peaceful co-existence with the Soviet Union!

For an end to the Korean war!

For peace, friendship and trade with China!

I conceive of labor as a giant. This giant has the power and strength to do almost anything. His history as you know has been exploitation, betrayal and misleadership. He has been blinded and hypnotized by this poison propaganda to the extent that he is not fully aware of what goes on about him. He does not want war, yet he works for war, pays for war, and sends his sons to a war he does not want. He produces all the necessities of life, yet he has a difficult time getting some of these necessities for himself and his family, and so with his education, culture, amusement.

When this giant finally stands up and lifts his head out of the fog, it will be then that we will have no hysteria, loyalty acts, McCarran Bills, wars, persecution of the minorities, lynchings, rats, inflation, gangsterism, corrupt politicians, Peglers, and what not, but a wonderful MAY DAY.

WILLIAM GROPPER

In the history of the American labor movement very few artists share that place of honor and integrity and consistent service occupied by William Gropper. For three decades American workers have found their hopes, their dreams and their bitter anger mirrored in the magnificent drawings and paintings of William Gropper. Gropper's integrity has become a by-word in the field of American culture. He cannot be bribed or bought, nor can he be swerved from his chosen arena of struggle in the defense of the workers and oppressed people of America. Gropper's reputation is an international one. Not only has he drawn for the labor press in a score of lands, but his paintings have an honored place in the galleries of Europe and Asia as well as America.

WE MARCH FOR FREEDOM from want on this May Day. There was a time when our great labor unions could look with pride and confidence on the gains they had won under honest and militant leadership.

That is not the case today. We have come through a period when the sellout artists did their work well. The Taft-Hartley Act has crippled organized labor. President Truman has broken strike after strike. Supporting the war makers, the Murrays and the Reuthers split the CIO. And honest and militant labor leaders, such as Harry Bridges and Julius Emspak, are thrown in jail. Wage freezes, phony escalator clauses, and skyrocketing prices — these add up to misery for the American people. There can be no freedom and no peace in America without a free and powerful and courageous trade union movement. Recent strikes in coal, railroad, textile and packing house have demonstrated that labor will resist the war profiteers. This resistance must be directed into the building of a great peace movement of the working class. Only the struggle for peace can defend the hard-won gains of the workers.

There can be no freedom for American workers if the Communist Party is outlawed and the Communist leaders jailed. This meant fascism in Germany and in Italy, and it means fascism here. And under fascism, workers are slaves.

Down with the Taft-Hartley Act and the McCarran law!

We march for freedom from want on May Day.

WE MARCH FOR EQUALITY on this May Day, and in defense of our Negro brothers. *"Labor in white skin can never be free, while his brother in black skin is branded!"*

It is almost a hundred years since those words were written, but they were never more true than today. The same Truman government that is smashing

organized labor has instituted a veritable blood bath among the Negro people.

Because the Negro people are overwhelmingly workers, and because the Negro people understand and oppose the injustice and horror of the Korean war.

The Hitler-like murders of the Negro people must stop! John Derrick and the seven Martinsville martyrs already dead – the Trenton Six and Willie McGee to die – the bloodbath must end!

On this May Day, we march shoulder to shoulder, Negro and white – for democracy and equality. We march with full understanding and bitter memory of the murder of six million Jews by the fascists of Hitler Germany, and we take a sacred vow that this will not happen here.

We demand an end to segregation! We demand an end to Jimcrow in every form and manifestation! We say:

“Hands off the leaders of the Negro people! Hands off Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Du Bois and William L. Patterson! Free Lieutenant Gilbert!

We call for unity of all Negro and white workers!

WE MARCH FOR THE CONSTITUTION of the United States and for the people’s *Bill of Rights* on this May Day.

The Truman government has torn the Constitution to shreds. For the first time in a century and a half, our jails are crowded with political prisoners, Negro and white. Artists, writers, film workers who have taken their stand on the side of the working class are either in jail or facing imprisonment – as are Communists and trade unionists.

Leaders of people’s organizations are being jailed daily. Guilt by association or through the testimony of stoolpigeons is becoming the legal pattern of America.

The greatest of all American scholars, W.E.B. Du Bois, leader of the American peace movement and of the Negro liberation movement, has been indicted and faces five years in jail – in spite of his 83 years.

The un-American Committee has become the fascist inquisition of America. Workers, artists, professionals – all who fight for peace and freedom are hailed before it. The Smith Act and the McCarran Bill round out the fascist work of this committee.

Great peoples’ leaders, like Paul Robeson, are denied passports and virtually imprisoned in America.

Only the working class can restore the Bill of Rights to the American people. Freedom for all Americans to assemble and speak!

We march for the Constitution on May Day!
March on May Day — Tuesday, May 1st.