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# Sunday not just another working day

## Unions, supporters rally on labor's day

By Stephen Franklin  
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They commiserated about their battles. They sang about solidarity. They prayed and then, with heads bowed, labor activists in Chicago showed their respects on May Day, not just to American workers but to laborers everywhere.

"Workers of the world speak with one voice," Colombian union activist Johnny Meneses said in Spanish, his voice breaking at times with emotion, as a plaque was unveiled marking the struggles and deaths of union members in his native country.

"Everyday is a first of May in Colombia," Meneses said Sunday at the memorial to the Haymarket Square Riot on Desplaines Street near Randolph Street on the Near West Side. "You have one monument. But in Colombia, we would need many more than that."

The small plaque with Spanish text was added to the back of the memorial. The sign and the presence of Colombian union activists fit perfectly with the goal of the rally held by dozens of union members and supporters at the historic site.

Almost 119 years after the riot, where a rally over workers' pleas for an eight-hour day boiled into a bloody clash with police, Chicago union activists and others said they wanted to "reclaim" May 1 as the real Labor Day in Chicago.

As several speakers pointed out, the clash on May 4, 1886 that killed four workers and eight police officers, became the spark that united workers around the world to celebrate May 1 as the day for workers.

"Let us remember that there is a global labor movement too," said Les Orear, 93, president of the Illinois Labor History Society.

A Chicago stockyard worker who rose up to become a leader in the fledgling

packinghouse workers union in the 1930s, Orear was one of those who pushed years ago for a monument to mark the Haymarket Riot.

The blood red bronze monument by Chicago artist Mary Brogger was dedicated last fall on Desplaines Street near where the riot took place.

It shows a wagon where someone had been giving a speech when a bomb was tossed into the crowd, setting off the riot. Several bodies are clustered about the wagon.

Rising from the wagon is a faceless orator, who is a symbol of labor's will to endure, said William Adelman, a professor emeritus of labor history at the University of Illinois at Chicago and a leader in the drive for the monument.

After the riot, eight workers were convicted for inciting disorder. Three were pardoned, four were hanged and one committed suicide.

On Sunday, bread and roses were handed to those who had gathered on a cool, breezy afternoon for the rally.

Ever since a strike by female textile workers in the early 20th Century, bread and roses have been symbols of labor's demand for life's basic needs and its joys.

Similarly, to tie together the day's meaning in words, there were striking workers from the Congress Hotel in downtown Chicago, who told about the difficulties that their long dispute has wrought for them. A baseball cap was passed around on their behalf, and within a few minutes \$700 was collected.

In a powerful talk that drew encouraging shouts from the crowd, Rev. Gregory Livingston talked of the bonds between workers and the clergy and the need for workers to help each other.

"Don't let nobody tell you what you can have," he said. "And don't let anyone tell you what you be."

To Leon Fink, a labor historian at UIC, the rally's historic theme had a strong parallel for workers in the U.S. today.

"They are faced once again with a workplace out of control and no security," he said. "Haymarket occurred in the Gilded Age, and today we are in the global Gilded Age."

John Canniff, 43, a member of Iron Workers Local 63 from suburban Elmhurst, said he was glad he brought his children--Shawn, 8, Emma 10, and Claire, 12--to the rally. He said he wanted them to hear about labor's history and its struggles for benefits such as the eight-hour day.

Claire, who clutched a rose for most of the rally, said she learned something after hearing the Colombian union members talk about their troubles.

"It's really sad that there are people who have to die to get what they should have," she said.

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Pictures By: Steve Tisza, President CWA Local 4250, Chicago



Larry Spivack Chairman, Board of Directors of Illinois Labor History Society



Les Orear, 94 year-old President of the Illinois Labor History Society and Bill Adelman, Professor Emeritus of Labor History at the University of Illinois and a leader in the drive for the Haymarket Monument