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## **The Best Kept Media Secret of November: Labor Day**

By George Gerbner

The mass media fill our cultural environment with affairs of the rich and famous. Our own Cultural Indicators study shows that low-income working people are virtually invisible; they account for only 1.3 percent of prime time characters. The Cultural Environment Movement, an international media-watch action coalition, is working for greater diversity on the public airways.

"Daily papers and hourly news broadcasts keep us well informed of stock-market trends and outlooks for investors," writes syndicated columnist Norman Solomon. "But details aren't nearly as profuse when it comes to what directly affects most of the nation's employees: job-security issues, eroding benefits and stressful working conditions."

It will come as no surprise, therefore, that November will pass without learning from the mainstream press about the international labor holidays of November 11, commemorating the Haymarket martyrs, and November 19, anniversary of the murder of labor organizer Joe Hill.

Every daily newspaper has a financial page but no labor page. or even a labor reporter. The U.S. Labor Party had its Founding Convention in Cleveland last June -- but it was blanked out in the mainstream press. We celebrate Labor Day at a time that is the farthest removed from the international labor holiday on the first of May. Most Americans think that May Day is some kind of Soviet import, domesticated into a parade down Fifth Avenue.

In fact, however, Labor Day originated November 11, 1887, in Chicago, U.S.A. Chicago had gone through the devastating fire of 1871. Immigration from abroad and from the South doubled its population in a decade. Rapid growth and economic expansion brought unparalleled prosperity to property owners and unprecedented poverty to its polyglot working class population.

The labor movement had been organizing and mobilizing workers through the 1870s and 80s. The Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions organized a rally that turned out some 90,000 demonstrators in Chicago's Haymarket Square.

The response was fierce. A bomb was thrown. The police riot that followed left eight demonstrators dead, 70 wounded, hundreds arrested. Thirty-one scapegoats were framed and indicted, and four hanged on November 11, 1887.

"Remember Haymarket" became a rallying cry of the labor movement. The International Socialist Congress meeting July 14-20, 1889, in Paris, resolved to honor the Haymarket martyrs. . by launching the annual international May Day as a demonstration for the eight hour day.

The reaction against union organizing struck again during and after both World Wars. Joe Hill, Swedish-born organizer of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), of whom Earl Robinson

wrote one of his famous ballads, was framed on a trumped-up murder charge, tried in Salt Lake City, Utah, and, despite international protest, condemned to death and executed on November 19, 1915. The only memorial for Joe is in the Swedish town of Gavle where he was born in 1879 and grew up as Joel Emanuel Haglund. His ashes have been scattered under a cherry tree. About 10,000 visitors go through "Joe Hill Gardens" every year. There is no marker in the U.S. for whose workers Joe fought and died.

The infamous Palmer raids (named for Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer) used the pretext of the Russian revolution of 1919 and the complicity of the mainstream press to incite the "red scare," leading to mass arrests, the deportation of another 556 scapegoats, and the rise of "red hunter" J. Edgar Hoover to head the F.B.I.

The cold war began while the Soviets were still our allies in World War II. During my service in the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.) of the U.S. Army I was investigating war criminals suspects, until I was told by the Colonel in command: "Lt. Gerbner, forget your charge. The real enemy is our ally, the Soviets." Soon the Truman Doctrine made the red hunt official. Loyalty hearings and wholesale firings of activists "purged" education and the labor movement.

I was subpoenaed before the California Unamerican Activities Committee and asked if I ever showed a documentary film in my class entitled "Races of Mankind," based on anthropologist Ruth Benedict's book of the same title. As the Committee new well, I showed that film each semester. But during the "McCarthy era," named for infamous red-hunter Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin, any rational discussion of race was evidence of a communist conspiracy. I was fired from my teaching job.

The anti-red hysteria, fueled by the media, gave rise to Nixon, the Hiss case, and the execution, again despite worldwide protest, of the Rosenbergs. Its chilling effect persists to this date.

The way to counter the best kept secrets of November is to remember them in every home, school, and church, and to work with CEM for freedom, fairness, gender equity, general diversity, and democratic decision-making in media ownership, employment and representation.