



PROFILES IN COURAGE

Teacher's Guide

JOHN PETER ALTGELD

CREDITS:

Starring Burgess Meredith, Howard St. John, John Kerr, Milton Selzer, and John Cassavetes. Written by Philip S. Goodman. Directed by Daniel Petrie. Produced by Gordon Oliver and Robert Saudek and Associates. Inspired by John F. Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize-winning book. **50 minutes.** Guide prepared for Social Studies School Service by Robert D. Barnes, 1983.

OBJECTIVES:

- To understand the principle of equal justice under the law.
- To examine the issues of anarchism and free speech.
- To explore the social pressures of rapid industrialization.
- To understand the meaning of moral courage.

BACKGROUND:

The 1880s were a time of rising labor unionization, growing unemployment, protracted strikes and lockouts, substantial labor gains, and violence.

Today, most people take the 8-hour day, 5-day work week, for granted. In the 1880s most laborers worked a 10-hour day, 6 days a week. It was the struggle for the 8-hour day that led to one of the most dramatic events in U.S. history, the incident known as the Haymarket Affair.

Labor organizations in the U.S. and Canada had designated May 1, 1886, as the day to push, through speeches, parades, and demonstrations, for the 8-hour day. In Chicago, where newspapers and business leaders were unanimously opposed to this "radical" concept, 30,000 people marched on May 1 without incident. Two days later there was violence at the McCormick Harvester factory, and one death occurred when police fired on strikers battling "scabs." An evening meeting was called "to denounce the latest

atrocious acts of the police." The meeting had been small and peaceful, though some in the crowd were anarchists who saw violent confrontation with the authorities as the only solution.

As the meeting was breaking up, 180 Chicago policemen arrived and Captain Ward announced:

"In the name of the people of the state of Illinois, I command this meeting immediately and peaceably to disperse."

Without warning, a dynamite bomb flew through the air and exploded in front of the police. Seven policemen were killed and 70 injured. In the police gunfire that followed, two workers were killed and 60 injured.

While the bomb thrower was never identified, the public and the press blamed "radicals, socialists, aliens, and anarchists." On May 5, *The New York Times* declared that anarchists were guilty of the bomb throwing. Thirty-one persons were indicted and nine were prosecuted. The atmosphere in Chicago was so hostile that "the color red, symbolic of revolution, was cut out of street advertisements."

SYNOPSIS:

We watch scenes from the trial for murder of the anarchists convicted on the basis of what they said, not what they did. We see anarchist Albert Parsons refuse to ask for mercy on the grounds that he had not committed any crime, and go to his death to prove that it was his judges who were guilty of murder and not he.

We see, several years later, John Peter Altgeld, Governor of Illinois, reading the transcripts of the trial and deciding that the anarchists have not been "proven guilty."

Finally, we watch as Altgeld signs full pardons for the surviving anarchists, declaring:

"There comes a time in life when you find yourself doing something, or not doing something, and suddenly your whole character is exposed with frightening clarity. And you look at it, whatever it is, and know that that's what you always were and are, and what you always will be."

VOCABULARY:

The following words and phrases appear in the program. Teachers may wish to check for student understanding:

Haymarket	clemency	futile
anarchist	anathema	ninny
vindicate	coalition	malice
strike breakers	atheists	amnesty
Pinkertons	penology	alien
conspiracy	socialist	tainted
insinuations	accessory	lackey
hair shirt	precedent	stigma
indictment	fanatical	pardon
allegations	absolute	legacy
burned in effigy	bludgeon	emulate
Vachel Lindsay	demagogue	

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. "Albert, there still may be a chance; plead for clemency," George Schilling advises Parsons. Why does condemned anarchist Albert Parsons reject this idea?
2. What did William Lloyd Garrison, the famous abolitionist, mean when he said to his friend Wendell Phillips, "...I'm sorry to see you out there"?
3. Why does Buck Hinrichsen's "way of talking" rankle Schilling and Altgeld? Does it offend you? Explain.
4. What is wrong with Altgeld's logic when, in discussing the condemned anarchists, he says, "...if nothing else, these men have a long history of preaching hate for the law and violence"?
5. What excuses does Altgeld give for not speaking out for the anarchists? Have you heard people express some of these same rationaliza-

tions? Explain.

6. What groups did Hinrichsen include in his list of the "coalition" that propelled Altgeld into the state house? What problems might be inherent in managing a political coalition?
7. What convinces Altgeld that the anarchists are worthy of a full pardon? Give specific examples.
8. Why was Altgeld, a reform governor and labor sympathizer, willing to use the militia at Lemont? How did the Democratic Party react to the way he handled the crisis?

ACTIVITY:

Ask each member of the class to read and digest Parsons's letter to his children. Urge your students to discuss the letter and the program with their parents. In a class discussion evaluate the qualities of the man, Albert Parsons.

"To my darling, precious children: As I write this word I blot your names with a tear. We never meet again. Oh my children, how deeply, dearly, your papa loves you. We show our love by living for our loved ones. We also prove our love by dying, when necessary, for them.

Of my life, and the course of my unnatural and cruel death, you will learn from others. Your father is a self-offered sacrifice upon the altar of liberty and happiness. To you, I leave the legacy of an honest name and duty done. Preserve it, emulate it, be true to yourselves, you cannot then be false to others. Your mother is the greatest, noblest of women. Love and honor her. Bless you my precious ones. Farewell."

FOR RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION:

1. Examine the case of Sacco and Vanzetti, America's most famous anarchists. What parallels can you draw? Don't miss their letters to Sacco's son, Dante!
2. Find out what interpretations and limitations are placed on our First Amendment right to "free speech." When does the speech of an anarchist cross the line? Give examples.