

## **The Labor Movement and the Haymarket Affair**

Nineteenth-century employers often expected workers to spend 12 to 14 hours a day, six days a week on the job. In the 1880s, workers' organizations, led by the Knights of Labor, joined with political radicals and reformers to organize a national effort to demand an eight-hour workday. During the first week of May 1886, 35,000 Chicago workers walked off of their jobs in massive strikes to protest their lengthy work weeks. Some of these strikes involved violent skirmishes with the police. At least two strikers were killed on May 3. In response, the next evening, roughly 1,500 people gathered at the West Randolph Street Haymarket, a market on the edge of the city where people bought hay for their horses. Although the May 4 rally featured fiery speeches from political radicals and labor leaders, it was a peaceful gathering. As the rally drew to a close, hundreds of policemen moved in to disperse the crowd. Someone threw a bomb at the police brigade, killing one officer instantly. The police responded with a barrage of bullets. An unknown number of demonstrators were killed or wounded. Sixty police officers were injured and eight eventually died. Politicians and the press blamed radicals for the violence. Although there was no evidence linking specific people to the bomb, eight men were convicted of murder on the basis of their political writings and speeches. Four men were executed; one committed suicide. The trial was later considered grossly unjust and, in 1893, the Illinois governor granted absolute pardon to the three remaining imprisoned defendants. The labor organizations, however, were severely damaged. The documents that follow include the Knights of Labor's statement of principles, a broadside advertising the Haymarket rally, and the May 15, 1886, cover of Harper's Weekly, a national political magazine.



**"Too Heavy a Load for the Trades-Unions"**

Thomas Nast. From *Harper's Weekly*, May 15, 1886.



This cover story from Harper's Weekly shows a worker carrying the bloated weight of a union "agitator."