

# SPRING RITUAL

**The  
San Francisco  
General Strike**

*poems  
by  
JOHN  
CURL*



**O COLUMBIA**

*Socialist Revolution*

*is shedding*

*diseased skin*

*and mending*

*the circle*

*whole again*

# SPRING RITUAL

## *The San Francisco General Strike*

### *O COLUMBIA*

**poems by**

**JOHN CURL**

also by John Curl  
INSURRECTION/RESURRECTION

O Columbia is appearing in Amerus

Like everybody else, I made up rhymes and poems as a kid. In the mid '60s I began mimeoing poems in pamphlets and broadsides to give to friends. In '72 I started putting them on walls. I did my first street reading a couple years later. I'm a woodworker too, and almost through writing Worker Cooperatives vs. Wage Slavery, a prose history.

this is number three in the sleeping gypsy series

CLOUD HOUSE

where poetry stands up to the light

Walt Whitman Breates Here

3253 16th Street, San Francisco 94103

JOHN CURL

# SPRING RITUAL

(Since the most ancient times May Day has been a festival of rebirth; in 1889 it was also declared international workers day by the International Socialist Workers' Congress, in memory and continuation of certain events which took place in the U.S. of A.)

MAY            MAY

May the buds open to the joyful sun today,  
may the grass and the children grow and be strong,  
may the stars and planets harmonize this Spring day,  
may all the lovers roll in the hay,  
may this uncut jewel be renewed,  
may we discover ourselves as flames in a great transforming fire,  
may the dancing branches round our maypoles whirl the flames higher,  
may we shed our useless winter skin  
and step forth whole again,  
unsold again this May day.

But may we first remember our wintery dead  
before we let our Spring revelry totally sweep us away.

Depression hit hard in 1873,  
just eight years after the Civil War,  
hunger prowled sullen through the countryside  
North and South,  
jobless mulled the restless city streets,  
while in the factories life was spit-cheap  
and workers' blood greased the smoking lathes,

sweating ten to eighteen hours a day  
for starvation pay six days a week.

Strike            Strike  
in the coal fields where barons ruled with iron whips and chilling fire,  
they crushed the strike and hung twenty miners, Molly Maguires.  
Then the railroads erupted coast to coast,  
engines burned, tracks overturned.  
State militias sided with the strikers,  
farmers poured out of the hills bringing food,  
general strikes in Chicago and St. Louis,  
while in Pittsburg workers took the city  
and for five days in July 1877  
a flaring sun and a wide-eyed moon  
watched down on The Pittsburg Commune.  
But the president of the board of monopoly protection  
called out the army and marines "to prevent national insurrection",  
1000 jailed, 600 cut down with slashing lead,  
and before the blood trains flowed again  
over one hundred workers were laid out dead.

So for year after mutilated depression year  
poverty and fear  
remained American workers' daily bread.

But slowly in shadow workers were starting to organize,  
roots spread in the fertile soil  
and sprouts were pushing up to the light of day  
and growing strong:  
The Knights of Labor, The American Federation,  
The International Working People's Association.

The Knights called on all workers skilled and unskilled  
of all races to unite in their One Big Union and cure  
the bosses' blight of guns and wealth,

abolish wage-slavery and transform this land  
into a workers' "Cooperative Commonwealth".  
The 7000-member International had the same goal,  
"a free society based on cooperative production",  
but wanted to go faster and further.  
The skilled-worker-only white-male-only AFL, on the other foot,  
strived only for bread and a little butter,  
and was the first union federation in America  
not to challenge to boss system's slavish roots.

But workers were angry, a new strike wave swirled,  
in 1885 the Knights rocketed to five times the size  
of the AFL, 750,000 members,  
the largest workers' organization in the world.

Then the call rang out  
through the Eight-Hour Leagues  
for a national strike on the first of May 1886  
to give all American workers an eight-hour day,  
and they'd take it (thank you boss) with no loss in pay.

From the brutal New York factories  
through the feudal stockyards of Chicago  
to the cruel docks of San Francisco Bay,  
workers caught "the eight-hour madness"  
and organized with epidemic fever  
toward that joyful and perilous day.

But the newspapers pumped out by the bosses  
screeched for a police transfusion,  
claiming that May first was really the date  
for a workers' uprising and socialist revolution.

And on May Day...  
NATIONAL STRIKE  
200,000 out!

340,000 parading:

The Knights of Labor, The Federation,  
The International Working People's Association!

That first day passed in jubilation and peace...  
which didn't soothe the indigestion of the bosses  
or satisfy the hungry clubs of their police  
And when on the third day the strike began to even grow and spread,  
they kicked their cops out of bed  
and in Chicago at McCormick Harvester they attacked:  
six workers fell with bullets in the back.

Next evening a protest meeting  
was held in the chill drizzle in Haymarket Square;  
the police were there  
and marched in with guns and clubs  
demanding the workers disperse,  
when a bomb ripped their air  
from no one knows where.

Through the fiery cloud  
the cops fired wildly around them into the crowd.

A reign of terror flashed across the country,  
smashing the strike:  
thousands beaten, hundreds jailed,  
Knight leaders in four cities  
charged with conspiracy.

Chicago: at least twenty-eight workers dead,  
five more framed in show-trials and executed;  
one was a Knight and a leader of the Eight-Hour League,  
all were members of the Working People's Association.

The Knight shattered beyond repair;  
the International blasted into boiling air;



but they just harmed a few loose hairs  
of the now-running-scared bread-and-butter Federation.

Since then the tamed AFL bureaucracy  
has been monopoly's Loyal Opposition.

May we remember our wintry dead on this May Spring day:

1886 May Day National Strike:	33 workers dead
1887 sugar fieldworkers strike:	40 workers dead
1892 steel strike:	10 workers dead
1892 silver miners strike:	25 workers dead
1894 railroad strike:	25 workers dead
1905 teamsters strike:	20 workers dead
1909 garment workers strike:	10 workers dead
1913 copper strike:	73 workers dead

and the reign of terror grinds on...

1914 coal strike:	34 workers dead
1919 steel strike:	22 workers dead
1922 sharecroppers union drive:	105 workers dead
1934-5-6 strike wave:	88 workers dead
1937 steel strike:	10 more workers dead

and the reign of terror writhes on...

Parsons framed and executed,  
Spies framed and executed,  
Fisher, Engel, Lingg framed and executed,  
Joe Hill framed and executed,  
Frank Little, Wesley Everest executed,  
Vanzetti, Sacco, Rosenburgs framed and executed,  
Juan de la Cruz, Malcolm,  
Martin executed while helping lead a garbage strike,  
Fred Hampton, George Jackson,

and the reign of terror groans on...

MAY THE RAIN OF TERROR END  
MAY THE SNOW OF TERROR END

May the winter end,  
may the buds open to the joyful sun,

may we step forth renewed on this day once again,  
may the working people of the world come together today,  
may we turn a corner in our lives and in our history,  
may we throw off our oppressions,  
resolve our pain,  
hug the children,  
touch each other again and again,  
may we be totally alive today,  
say things to each other we've never said before today,  
may we love each other's race,  
glimpse a planet harmonized in eternally alive space,  
may our collective spirit rise round the world  
and help set our collective body free,  
may energy return to the people,  
new life spring forth from the people this day,  
may all lovers roll in the hay,  
may this uncut jewel be renewed,  
may the land return to the people,  
the tools return to the people,  
may the power return to the people this May day,  
may we celebrate our bodies joy-joined in creation,  
re-creation, preservation of this same conscious spark-in-flesh  
that was our greatgrandparents since the first rocks began to dance  
and will be our greatgrandchildren until energy never ends,  
you the mother of the world, you the father of creation,  
channels in an infinite living stream,  
may we glimpse beyond the frosted seas of death  
and wake from bad dreaming,  
may all wounded flesh and hearts heal,  
may the last hungry child be fed and kissed  
and stop screaming,  
may this uncut jewel be renewed,  
may we discover ourselves as flames in a great transforming fire,  
may the dancing branches round our maypoles whirl the flames higher,  
may we step forth whole again  
unsold again this May Day.

# the san francisco general strike

In '34 the longshoremen of San Francisco  
were grossing about ten dollars weekly pay;  
the bosses wrung your sweat  
twenty-four to thirty-six hours in a single shift,  
then they'd dump you out of work  
for three or four days.

You had to  
leave your loves alone  
in the dawnless hours,  
never knowing when you'd be back home:  
it was, shape up at the dock  
hoping they'd finger you from the pack  
while the chill fog sliced down your back  
and burned like acid into your bones.

The shipping bosses  
wouldn't even talk to the maritime unions,  
so thirty-five thousand up and down the coast  
voted strike;  
with mass pickets in every port  
from San Diego to Bellingham and Seattle,  
we plugged the Pacific basin uptight.

In the city of Francisco, the gentle saint  
who spoke to beasts and birds  
of love for all the wonders of creation,  
the Employers Industrial Association  
was backroom king of the hills,  
and enforced their regal will

with gangs of dogs and packs of sharks:  
when they nodded the papers snapped in unison,  
when they whistled the police growled and barked.

They ordered their troops to the Embarcadero:  
-Don't drag your tails back here till that strike's dead!-  
On the morning of July third, nineteen thirty-four,  
the steel doors  
of Pier Thirty-eight  
clanged open  
and a scab convoy roared out,  
eight squadcars bristling with guns  
at their head.

Thousands of us were massed and ready,  
and when we saw them we surged and stopped them cold;  
from behind us they attacked on horseback,  
bouncing clubs off skulls and making brains unfold:  
we dragged them off their nags  
and made them a little less bold.

Then foot squadrans charged tossing teargas bombs;  
we were forced to meet force with force:  
an old brick will do just fine;  
we had two-by-fours stapled to our picket signs;  
anything we could find and lift  
we hurled at them:  
the Embarcadero was a scramble of fighting men.

For two hot days the battle rampaged;  
workers swelled our lines from every union in town;  
the Employers Association  
and the Chamber of Commerce screamed:  
-This is a communist insurrection  
and must be put down!-

Then they upped the ante on us:  
vomit gas knocked us in the gutter by scores;  
shotgun pellets sprayed into our arms and faces,  
we couldn't hold our places;

we carried hundreds off bleeding to the emergency wards;  
Nick Bordoise and Harry Sperry  
we carried off bleeding to the morgue.  
Forty-seven hundred National Guards  
stormed the waterfront  
under orders from Governor Stooze,  
and sealed it off with bayonets,  
barbed wire, machinegun nests,  
and commands to shoot to kill  
anyone who dared  
try to stop the high-paid scabs  
from unloading the stolen gold  
from the holds of their pirate ships.

All across the city  
livingrooms and union halls  
rumbled with the same alarmed thought:  
if the bosses get away with this  
all the unions will be lost.

Painters Local 1158  
sent out the call for a general sympathetic strike;  
unions all over the city began to vote  
while the Chairman of the Board of the AFL  
yelled he forbid it  
and most of the Central Labor Council resisted.  
But the real union's not the bureaucracy's playpennd child  
but the living collective of the rank-and-file,  
and we can take direct power  
any time we choose:  
on the morning of July fifteenth, nineteen thirty-four,  
the stores were silent,  
the factories were locked,  
the streetcars were dead,  
the highways were blocked:

one hundred thirty thousand out and for four days  
nothing moved in the city  
without permission of the strike committee.  
Except the vigilantee packs  
who skulked around like pier rats hunting meat,  
suddenly appearing at union halls  
and socialist periodicals,  
clubbing everyone they saw  
and smashing everything they could reach  
under the smiling-eyed escort of the police  
who waited outside till the plainclothes boys  
fled down some back street,  
then swaggered in  
and busted all  
of us for resisting being beat.

-Now,- some shouted, -End it now,  
before more are dead  
and all San Francisco's under martial law!-

Others cried, -End it? We've got to  
spread it! Workers all over know  
if the bosses  
get away with this here  
they'll try it in thousands of other places too.  
We can win! By shutting down all America  
if we need to!-

As the Central Labor Council struggled over the course  
Oakland and Portland voted general strike in our support.  
But in a close vote the Council chose  
to end the strike  
and see how the bosses would requite.  
If they didn't change their tune  
we could always choose to go out again  
real soon.

But now the Employers Association wasn't strutting so tough;  
four days of workers' solidarity, they decided,  
was taste enough;  
they sent their suit-and-tie boys to the maritime unions  
with the message that  
they'd like to get together (at your convenience of course)  
for a little friendly chat.

Soon all maritime workers had won union recognition.  
Longshoremen had a thirty hour week and a six hour day,  
a democratic rotary hiring system  
and time and a half overtime pay.

All during the strike and after,  
the bosses' spokesmen  
and their newsmen doubles  
lashed out again and again  
that communists were causing and leading  
all the trouble.

And I wouldn't deny  
some of the guys'  
blood was running pretty red those days.

But how could it be any other way?  
Socialists have pounded the lines  
in every big America strike  
since

wage-slavery's shackles first clanked  
on American workers' ankles.  
And socialists will be there in every big strike  
until monopoly's lock is cracked,  
their slave train de-tracked,  
and liberated workers begin to drive  
America's economy  
for our equal needs, democratically,  
just like it always should have been,  
cause socialism only means real freedom for working people  
and communists are just workers fighting to win.

# O COLUMBIA

O COLUMBIA

this is the temple  
these endless waves of trees  
this wolfbirch dawn  
these rivers of light bursting through crevices of cloud  
this sweet fogdamp wombsky  
this starry flight of geese  
this is the temple  
this forestdrenched sunset  
this symphony of clover  
these antelope mesas rainrumbling  
these snowloving islands  
this threethousandmile bouquet of grainflowers  
returning to seedwarmth  
this moondamp redwood knowledge  
this thrushmelody shimmering through this golden spine  
this marriage of root and earth  
this revealing of oceangreen valleysecrets  
these clustered mountaintops singing to the dawn  
this holy gift of rabbit leaf and wind  
this joyous drifting continent  
this is the temple  
but the moneychangers have seized the temple  
this cancer salesman  
this tv news disguise  
this shattered glass betrayal  
this genocide of falcons

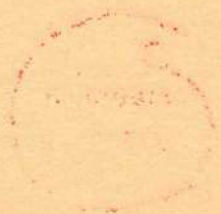
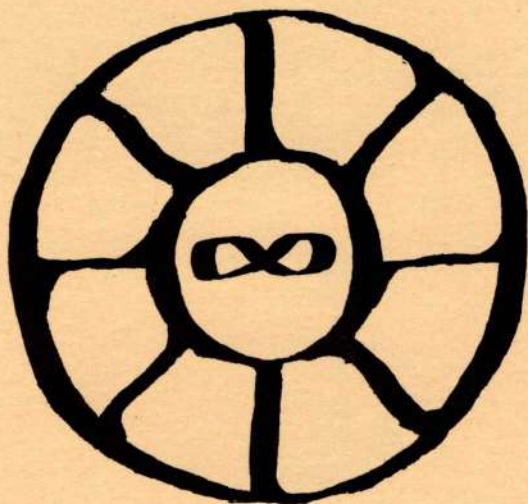


this prison corporation factory torture  
this wageslave firing squad  
this starvation graft insurance noose  
this money infection  
this poisoned barbedwire bank  
this groaning captivity  
this gangster orgy  
this chairmen of the board conspiracy  
this wagecut Rockefeller heartattack  
this stockholder deathship speedup  
these neutron Carter embalming  
this incorporated lobotomy  
these brokenhearted bleedingroots  
this crucifixion of robins  
this burning lake  
this storm of nails

the moneychangers have seized the temple

0 these selfevident truths  
0 these alienated rights  
0 this consciousness streaming  
0 this vast comingtogether  
0 this great castingout  
0 this refusal to obey orders  
0 this national strike  
0 this army rebellion  
0 this wilderness insurrection  
0 these marching saints  
0 this deep plowing  
0 this whip of cords  
0 this drivingout of the moneychangers  
0 this dissolving of the corporations  
0 this cleansing of the temple  
0 this tearingoff of uniforms

0 this bomb dismantling  
0 this fence downtearing  
0 this prison unlocking  
0 this mind unblinding  
0 this hurtlover healing  
0 this return to foreststars  
0 this rebirth of our crystal hearts  
0 this sunburst of workerlove  
0 this seagull marriage  
0 this rebuilding of the temple  
0 this collective jewel  
0 this thought of love among us  
0 this emerald thunder  
0 this tongue on your perfect lips  
0 this raven's shout  
0 this festival of our ancestors  
0 this ceremony of dawnfamily  
0 this communal money  
0 this collective land  
0 these socialized machines  
0 this economic democracy  
0 this joyful workers' power  
0 this rainbow cooperation  
0 this circle of love around us  
0 these laughing children  
0 these joined genitals shining  
0 this infinite sharing  
0 this living prophesy  
0 this love among the races  
0 this harmony of light  
0 this kiss blown from the sun to the moon  
0 this ocean of hearts  
0 COLUMBIA



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Being Kept on the Surface
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Forthcoming Voices Cloud House; WHAT IS REAL?

CLOUD HOUSE

Door: Experiments Walt Whitman

Breathing "A perfect writer would make words sing, dance, kiss, do the male and female act, bear children, weep, bleed, rage, stab, steal, fire cannon, steer ships, sack cities, charge with cavalry or infantry, or do any thing, that man or woman or the natural powers can do."

Door: Gives Poetry A Place To Live  
Poetry Being Breath Visions / Breath Feelings  
Therefore Airs Visions  
Therefore Activates Breath Feeling Thought

