

Tom Mooney

It is a favorite spot for tourists visiting San Francisco. At the baby end of Market Street sits the famous Ferry Building along the Embarcadero with its majestic clock tower modeled after a clock tower in Seville, Spain. It is one of our favorite places to visit too, where we often rendezvous with our relocated daughter and son. The trolleys jingle by as well as the trams. Select juicy strawberries from the Farmer's Market. If tired of walking, you can hire a jitney and get pedaled toward the Buena Vista and its famous Irish Coffees (although, to be honest, I use only one sugar cube and prefer Bushmills Irish Whisky because it has more bite). Or you can sit on a bench and listen the people passing by, laughing, giggling, talking in earnest about current politics or dinner plans, speaking in dozens of different languages.

Inside the Ferry building you can sit on a stool and dine on platters of shucked oysters and a cold beer or California wine. In the plaza leading to the Ferry building dozens of artists and artisans sell their watercolors, jewelry, weavings underneath white canopies.

Nearby you can still catch the ferries to take you to destinations across the bay.

I'm standing across from the plaza at the corner of Steuert and Market Streets. Dial the hands of the clock back to July 22, 1916, and right here is where a pipe bomb filled with shrapnel hidden inside a suitcase exploded, killing 10 persons and maiming 40.

Terror remains an act of the failed and bankrupt. Those who resort to terror-tactics are announcing their cause is a failed cause. They cannot achieve or succeed on the basis of sense or reason or popularity.

Terrorism and violence is nothing new in the United States. As a matter of fact, our times are relatively mild in comparison to the riots, bombings, massacres, violence that preceded us in our 21st century. How many strikers were killed in Pittsburgh, Reading, Sunbury, during the Great Railway Strike of 1877? How many died in the Haymarket bombing? How many of our Presidents have been assassinated? I remember Half-tracks and sundry military vehicles traveling back in forth in front of our family business as they ferried soldiers between Plainfield and Newark, New Jersey to suppress the riots.

You'd think we would have learnt by now? When haven't we been nation more than divided, a nation splintered into angry sharp shards. When haven't we been a nation where the leadership will bemoan our lack of unity as a nation when what they really regret is our lack of conformity to their views? Docility is rarely a commendable trait. Okay, it is fine for Labradors as guide dogs for the blind. Which is why terriers need never apply. But docility makes for a nation of sheep also. Stupidity makes us a nation of goats. I am simply stunned by how compliant our high school students were to the administration installing dozens of surveillance cameras about the school. It was, so said, for their own good, for their own protection.

The explosion occurred during the Preparedness Day Parade, a parade dedicated to supporting the entrance of the United States into World War I. The Chamber of Commerce in league with anti-union forces and the sitting government viewed the parade as a chance to reject isolationism, wave the flag of their brand of patriotism, and renounce the threat of unionism. For not all agreed with the war effort, many of the labor organizers contended that that war was nothing more than a power grab of imperialism, colonialism, profit. A rich man's war that the poor man would fight and die for. Many voices in the labor movement decried unbridled jingoism. One labor and artist magazine, called "The Masses," was shut down by the Post Office shortly after the United States sent troops to Europe because the magazine wrote against the war.

I find it fascinating how we must endure our periodic spasms of what constitutes true patriotism. Nowadays as I write it is about certain football players kneeling during the National Anthem. Oh, where is the religious community reminding our nation about flag idolatry? I admit to getting a certain perverse kick out of those who object to football players kneeling yet they wear flag ball caps, flag shirts, and drape their coolers in flag blankets -- how disrespectful is that commercialization of patriotism? Does anybody remember the days when the hippies and Students for a Democratic Society were excoriated by the hard-hat silent majority for disrespecting the flag by wearing the flag as a shirt. Hello Jerry Reuben and Abby Hoffman. Nowadays, visit any Dunkin Donuts or a NASCAR race or football stadium or country music concert and see how many folks are similarly garbed. Funny, huh?

Mostly however, I daresay those athletes kneeling are showing more respect for what our flag symbolizes and what our national anthem professes than our current president and the disrespect (indeed contempt) he shows for our US constitution and principles every day. For theological reasons that would bore most people, I haven't been able to pledge myself to the flag since sophomore year of high school. I'll stand out for the pledge of respect for those around me but there is no way I can pledge fealty to something less than ultimate. For me the pledge to allegiance contradicts the 10 commandments. Let's see if the Liberty University can figure that one out.

Two men, both radical labor leaders, were indicted and convicted for the bombing.

Falsely.

It proved convenient to the political party in charge and business bosses to get rid of Tom Mooney and Warren Billings. Mooney was sentenced to be hanged but President Wilson commuted the sentence to life imprisonment given the overwhelming evidence of his innocence.

This was hardly the first time an innocent man was sentenced for a crime he did not commit. Won't be the last. Jails and courts often are effective tools for the powerful to use when they dislike others threatening their power. Use the system to destroy trouble-makers.

Justice walks when money talks.

Tom Mooney sat in San Quentin Prison for 22 years. Only after a Democratic governor was elected in the house cleaning inspired by Roosevelt's presidency were the men pardoned, inspiring Woody Guthrie to write his song.

*It was way up in old Frisco town,
It was way up in old Frisco town,
Mr. Mooney and Billings was accused of a killing
And railroaded jail house bound.*

*Twenty two years have gone by,
Twenty two years have gone by,
And he spent the twenty two fer a crime he didn't do,
My! My! My! My!*

*Well the Truth caint be tied with a chain.
Well the Truth caint be tied with a chain.
From the cold clammy halls of the San Quentin walls,
Mister Tom Mooney is Free.*

*It was Culbert L. Olsen's decree!
It was Culbert L. Olsen's decree!
When he took that gov'nors chair, he said, I declare,
I got to set this state of California free.*