Profiles in Courage : John Peter Altgeld

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US 1965

DIRECTOR : DANIEL PETRIE

(60 mins.)

written by Philip S. Goodman
directed by Daniel Petrie
guest cast :
Burgess Meredith as John Peter Altgeld
John Kerr
Howard St. John
Milton Selzer
John Cassavetes

Synopsis :

Profile of John Peter Altgeld, one-time Governor of Illinois. Shows how Governor Altgeld sacrificed his career by granting full pardon to a group of anarchists, whom he believed had been unfairly convicted in a murder conspiracy trial. Includes scenes of their trial. Traces the philosophy of anarchism in American history and examines the social pressures of the new industrialism that led to the Haymarket riots of 1886.

Inspired by John F. Kennedy’s Pulitzer Prize-winning book, the Peabody Award-winning television series PROFILES IN COURAGE examined outstanding examples of moral courage while portraying of some of the most moving episodes in American history. Among those profiled was John Peter Altgeld, who risked his career and reputation for social justice. In 1886, eight anarchists were accused of conspiracy to murder when Chicago policemen were killed during the Haymarket Riot. Four of the prisoners were hung and one committed suicide. On assuming the Illinois governorship, Altgeld (Burgess Meredith), convinced they were illegally convicted, freed the remaining prisoners despite the public outcry, heroically confronting the issues of equal justice under the law, anarchism and free speech in the face of daunting social pressure. Besides pardoning anarchists, Governor Altgeld opposed the violent suppression of strikes, favored equal pay for women, and approved several other labor laws that were very advanced for his time. The pardon ended his career.