



American Origins of May Day and its Modern Celebrations

What will we be learning today?

- Struggles for a Shorter Workday
- A Day of Revolt
- Modern Celebrations & Actions



Struggles for a Shorter Workday

10 Hour Movement

The struggle for a shorter working day is as old as the country itself.

- First strike for a 10 hour day, 1791 Philadelphia Carpenters' Strike

- Unsuccessful strikes in Boston & Philadelphia in 1827

- Circular from the Boston strike:

“We have been too long subjected to the odious, cruel, unjust and tyrannical system which compels the operative mechanic to exhaust his physical and mental powers. We have rights and duties to perform as American citizens and members of society, which forbid us to dispose of more than ten hours for a day’s work.”

- This circular would go on to inspire the 1835 Philadelphia General Strike.

10 Hour Movement

The struggle for a shorter working day is as old as the country itself.

- 1835 Philadelphia General Strike won workers the 10 hour day and an advance in wages.
- Gains were reversed due to depression from 1837-1841
- Movement continued, 10-Hours laws were passed in many states, though they were largely ineffectual.
- The struggle for a shorter work day would turn into an 8-Hour movement in 1863 when the Machinists' & Blacksmiths' Union endorsed the 8-Hour day at their Convention.

Transition to the 8 Hour Movement



Ira Steward, member of the Machinists' & Blacksmiths' Union, developed the main ideas for the 8-hour Movement. He contended "Labor's demands were small, because long hours gave the workers little chance to realize that they needed more. A worker who labored 14 hours a day had neither the imagination nor the energy to demand higher wages. He was so debased by excessive toil that he could think only of food and sleep."

"Out of the death of slavery, a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours' agitation, that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California."

Transition to the 8 Hour Movement



National Labor Union resolution, “The first and great necessity of the present to free the labor of this country from capitalistic slavery is the passing of a law by which eight hours shall be the normal working day in all states of the American Union.”

International Workingmen’s Association Resolution Adopted at Geneva Congress: “ As this limitation represents the general demand of the workers of the North-American United States, the Congress transforms this demand into the general platform of the Workers of the World.

Passage of Toothless 8 Hour Laws

8-Hour laws were enacted in 6 states by 1868, all of them included loopholes that allowed for contracts stipulating longer working days.

In 1868, a federal 8-Hour law was passed.

- In many cases wages were reduced with the shortened day.
- US Attorney General ruled the 8-Hour law didn't apply to government contracts.
- In 1877, SCOTUS unanimously upheld AG's decision.
- By the 1880s, House Committee on Education & Labor declared the law a "dead-end".



A Day of Revolt!

A Day of Revolt!

Federation of Organized Trades & Labor Unions 1884 Resolution on 8-Hour Day:
“Resolved ... that eight hours shall constitute a legal day’s labor from and after May 1, 1886, and that we recommend to labor organizations throughout this district that they so direct their laws as to conform to this resolution by the time named.”

The Federation made several attempts to join forces with the Knights of Labor to build a coalition on establishing the 8-Hour day, but KOL was vehemently anti-strike. KOL Grandmaster Workman, Terrence Powderly, instead called on KOL members to write essays on the working day.

- While National leadership was against the campaign, many local assemblies signed on in support.
- Powderly issues a March circular demanding KOL assemblies don’t strike.
- Divided membership of the KOL,

A Day of Revolt!

While the KOL ranks were dividing over the movement, THE majority of FOTLU member unions supported the strike movement.

- Called on unions not striking to support those who were.
- Drafted an agreement framework for 8-Hour Agreements with employers.
- Strikes would only take place as a backup plan.
- Union continued agitation and organizing for a May 1 strike.

“Arouse, ye toilers of America! Lay down your tools on May 1, 1886, cease your labor, close the factories, mills and mines—for one day in the year. One day of revolt—not of rest! A day not ordained by the bragging spokesmen of institutions holding the world of labor in bondage. A day on which labor makes its own laws and has the power to execute them! All without the consent or approval of those who oppress and rule. A day on which in tremendous force the unity of the army of toilers is arrayed against the powers that today hold sway over the destinies of the people of all nations. A day of protest against oppression and tyranny, against ignorance and war of any kind. A day on which to begin to enjoy ‘eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what we will.’ ”

A Day of Revolt!

Planning and coordination of was largely lead by local coalitions, as FOTLU did not yet have the ability to lead a National Campaign.

- Over 250,000 workers had joined the struggle by April.
- Pressure was mounting on employers & approx. 30,000 workers has gained a shortened work day by then.
- Cities started granting 8-Hour days to Municipal workers.

Still not all unions supported the movement, Grand Chief of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLET) detested the 8-Hour Movement, : “two hours less work means two hours more loafing about the corners and two hours claiming more for drink.”

Boston Carpenters’ Union rallying cry: “That this is the workingman’s hour, and affrighted capital begins to understand that labor has rights which it is bound to respect—giving promise that the hour is at hand when the producer of wealth shall claim his own, and freely share in the gains and honors of advanced civilization.”

A Day of Revolt!

May 1, 1886 saw a massive strike wave throughout the US.

- At least 400,000 workers struck for the 8-Hour Day
- Large cities had big turnouts such as New York, Baltimore, Washington, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and the largest being Chicago.
- In addition many smaller cities and rural towns held significant strikes & demonstrations: Montclair, NJ; Duluth, MN; Argentine, KS; South Gardiner, ME; Mobile, AL; Galveston, TX and many others.
- One notable town was Troy, NY which had 5,000 workers on strike.
- Many strikes continued past May 1

Tragedies of the Movement



Chicago: May 3, McCormick Harvester & May 4, Haymarket Affair

- Chicago saw tragedy on May 3 as police open fire on striking workers at the McCormick Harvester Plant killing 4 workers.
- In response, a rally was called for the following day in Haymarket Square to protest the police brutality.
- The rally was mostly uneventful. Bomb thrown as Police moved to disperse crowd during the final speech.
- 7 policeman were killed, 70 wounded, Police opened fire on crowd killing at least 1, wounding many others.

Tragedies of the Movement

Milwaukee: May 5, North Chicago Rolling Mill

- Strikers had been striking for 4 days, successfully closing all factories, except the North Chicago Rolling Mill.
- Striking workers marched, as they had in the days before, to close down the factories.
- As workers neared the factory, a single inaudible order to stop was issued, when the workers continued police open fire filling 9 workers.
- No charges were levied against the police, but nearly 50 workers were charged with “riot and conspiracy” or “riot and unlawful assembly” and served 6 to 9 month sentences.



Modern Celebrations of May Day

Modern Celebration of May Day



World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)

May Day Declaration 2023

The World Federation of Trade Unions, the militant, class-oriented voice, representing 105 million workers who live, work, and struggle in 133 countries of the 5 continents, honors the 137th anniversary of the struggle of workers in Chicago in 1886 that constituted a lasting milestone of the working class and a bright beacon for the struggles of today and tomorrow for stable work with rights, social security, free public, and universal health and education, dignified life.

Nowadays the crisis of capitalism is deepening in the length and breadth of the globe, resulting in the open violation of democratic and trade union rights, the deterioration of working and living conditions, and the dramatic widening of social inequalities, poverty, and exploitation. The big capital and its political representatives were using the pretext of the capitalist crisis of all kinds to attack even the most fundamental democratic and trade union rights, like the right to strike, to demonstrate, and to organize. They do whatever they can to transfer the consequences of the crisis to the shoulders of the working class, the pensioners, the farmers, and to the poorer part of the self-employed people...

WFTU May Day Declaration 2023, cont.

We fight to stop the economic wars and sanctions as a means of promotion of foreign imperialist interests in sovereign and independent countries. We demand an immediate end to the criminal embargos against socialist Cuba and the continuous crime against the Palestinian people. Our most powerful weapons are INTERNATIONALISM and SOLIDARITY. No worker must feel alone.

The WFTU on the occasion of 2023 International Workers Day conveys its warm, internationalist, militant, and class greetings to all struggling workers and to all militant trade unions that tirelessly and decisively conduct the daily fight for dignity, for the satisfaction of the contemporary need of the working class and the popular strata. We intensify our common actions in every sector, in every country, in every continent, for the emancipation of the working class, to meet our own class interests and needs; against the root cause of poverty, misery, wars, and refugees; to build a just human-centered society with dignified living and working conditions for every human being, a society free of the capitalist barbarity and man-by-man exploitation...

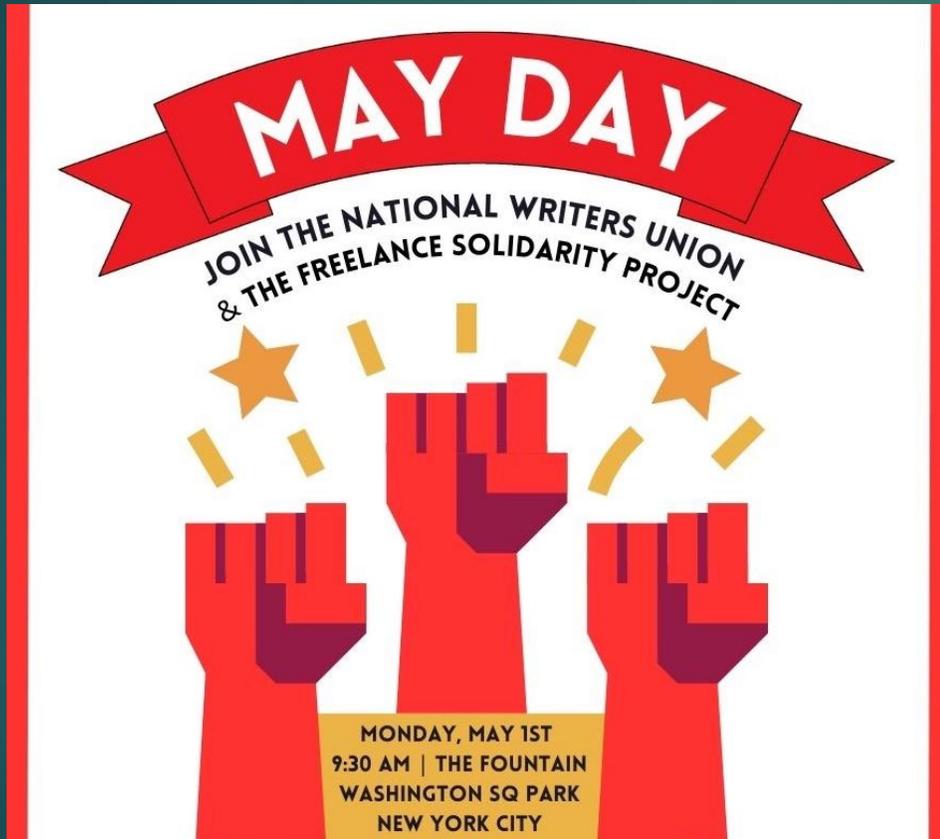
WFTU May Day Declaration 2023, cont.

We call upon all the affiliates and friends of WFTU to honor the International Workers Day under the slogans and banners of the WFTU:

- Internationalist solidarity: the weapon of the working class
- We refuse to pay for their crisis
- Stop imperialist blockades and economic wars

Modern Celebration of May Day

NYC:



RALLY @ 2pm
Union Square Pk
Worker Educational Circles
14TH STREET

MARCH @ 5pm
Union Square Pk
Step-Off

MONDAY **1** 2023
MAY DAY
WORKERS RIGHTS ARE MORAL RIGHTS

For: Housing/Food Healthcare w/Dignity Women/Seniors Environment
Organizing/Voting Rights Fair Contracts Now LGBTQ Equality Public Safety

Unity Is Our Strength

Sponsors:
Coalition of Black Trade Unionist, NY Chapter, Chris Silveira-Teamsters Local 808, December 12th Movement, Workers Assembly Against Racism,
Coalition of Labor Union Women, Building Trades for workers Democracy...List still in formation / Call in to endorse May Day
Contact info:
Charles Jenkins (646) 523-8484 / Chris Silveira (718) 389-4800 / Michelle Keller (917) 858-4278 / Omowale Clay (718) 398-1766 / Larry Holmes (917) 825-2302

Modern Celebration of May Day

NJ: Monday, May 1st at 7PM, the museum will host its Annual May Day Festival. Admission is \$10 per person. The festival will be moved indoors in the case of inclement weather. The museum and store will be open to visitors.

DC:

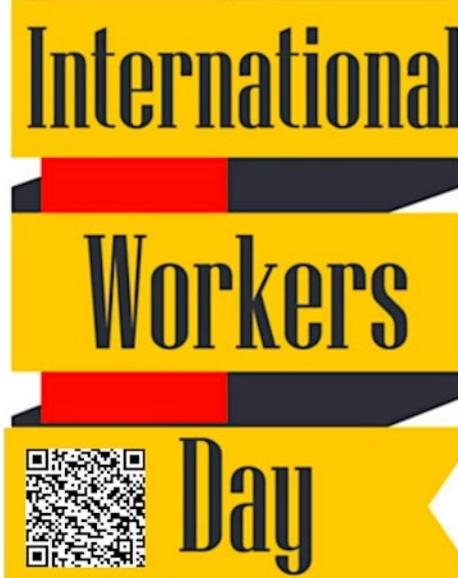
FEATURING

**GEORGE MANN,
MARTY CONFURIUS &
AL PODBER**

**BEV GRANT &
CAROLANN SOLBELLO**

ANNAMARIA STEFFANELLI

**NEW JERSEY
INDUSTRIAL UNION COUNCIL
SOLIDARITY SINGERS**



May 1st is International Workers' Day!

Monday, May 1 2023 - 4-7pm

A day for us to celebrate ourselves as working class people!

To dream of a better world!

One without borders, injustice, and exploitation!

MALCOLM X PARK
(16th and Euclid St NW DC)

Modern Celebration of May Day

MN:

March for Immigrant & Worker's Rights!

May Day March

Monday, May 1st 4pm

MPS Adult Education Center
(2015 East Lake Street)
to Roof Depot (1860 E. 28th Street)

Please wear a mask!

Organized by:

MO:

MAY DAY

1 MAY, 2023
3 PM TO 8 PM
MILL CREEK PARK W 43RD ST
& BROADWAY BLVD,
KANSAS CITY, MO

COME CELEBRATE THE ORIGINAL LABOR DAY WITH THE MOVEMENT FOR PEOPLES DEMOCRACY.

GAMES!! SNACKS!!

WORKING CLASS SOLIDARTY

Modern Celebration of May Day

OR:

Join us on:

Sunday, April 30
noon - 5pm

for a fair with music, art, food, and
a chance to learn about local
union and labor struggles on...



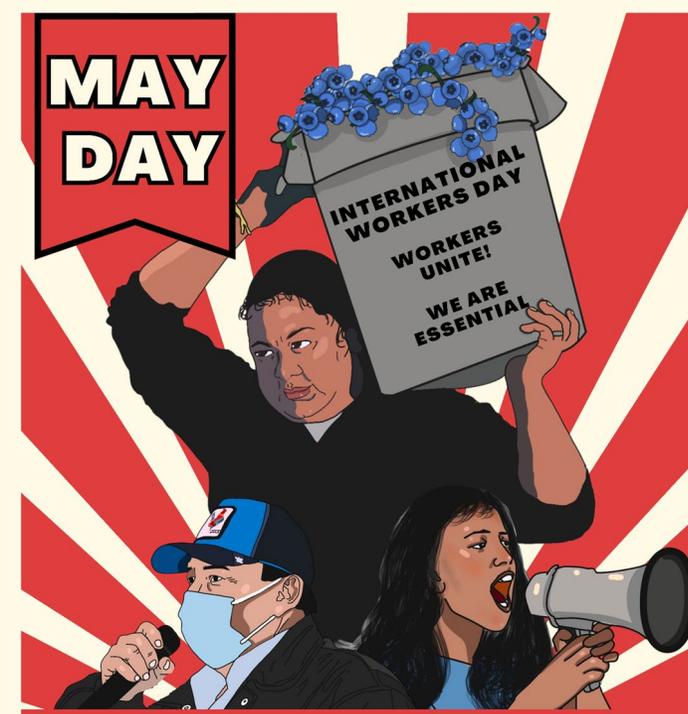
May Day 2023

Downtown Park Blocks

8th Ave and Oak St.

screenprinting • May Pole • games
activities for kids • speakers
and more TBA!

More info at zugenmayday.org
hosted by the May Day Coalition! Printing labor donated.



MAY DAY

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS DAY
WORKERS UNITE!
WE ARE ESSENTIAL

MARCH | CELEBRATION | SPEAKERS | MUSIC

**MONDAY
MAY 1ST**

**SALEM CAPITOL
12 PM**
900 Court St NW Salem, OR 97301



Modern Celebration of May Day

CA: SEIU Local 99 May Day March at 11th & Broadway Streets in Downtown LA at 4pm



CA: May Day Rally from 12:30pm to 2:30pm at the ILWU Local 10 Union Hall, San Francisco



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