



Speak Out Now

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May Day: Celebrate Workers Power and Possibilities

May Day was established as an international holiday in 1889 to honor the struggles and sacrifices of the international working class. It is a recognition of its historic mission — to liberate humanity from the exploitation and oppression caused by the capitalist system. Today, more than ever, working people need to remember our history, as an inspiration and also a guide to the fights we need to make today. This is why we celebrate May 1st, International Workers Day — the international holiday of the working class.

The story of International Workers Day begins in the 1880s. Workers in the U.S. worked for 10 hours, 12 hours, sometimes 14 or 16 hours, leaving no time for other activity. Workers began to organize for an eight hour work day — under the slogan “Eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, eight hours for what we will!” This was not just a movement for better wages and time off, the leaders of the movement, especially in Chicago where the working class was most conscious, were revolutionary socialists and anarchists. They believed that workers should win hours of their lives back from the workday in order to better prepare to change the whole system. They fought for a working class revolution, an international revolution to create a socialist world where every human being could live life to the fullest.

In 1886, May 1 was chosen as a national day of strikes to win the 8-hour day. On that day, strikes broke out across the country, involving 340,000 workers in 12,000 work places. Many strikes were victorious, winning reductions in the workday if not the full 8-hour demand. A general strike was called in Chicago. After a couple days of demonstrations, a bomb was thrown into the crowd. The capitalists took their revenge, charging eight revolutionary leaders in Chicago with inciting violence. Four were sentenced and executed, one took his own life rather than giving the capitalists the pleasure. The others were eventually pardoned.

The attempt of the capitalists to terrorize the working class didn't work. Workers' organizations all over the world, chose May 1, to honor the workers

movements. Since that time May 1 has been a time for workers all over the world to demonstrate their power.

Today the capitalist system continues to generate prejudice, economic degradation, unending war, and climate disruption. The capitalists have made a wreck of the world. Russia's war in Ukraine threatens a global conflict. The U.S. and Chinese governments make threatening moves against each other. Racism, prejudice, and reactionary ideas are on the rise. Their wars and the pillage of the natural world threaten to bring global destruction. Climate disruption is creating extreme weather events: floods, droughts, sea rise, storms, and huge temperature shifts.

Around the world, the economic crises and inflation is pushing more workers into poverty. And the working class is responding. In Iran, mass struggles have broken out against that oppressive regime. In China, workers struck and protested against the government's Covid lockdown of factory workers and others. In England, ongoing strikes have been waged by healthcare workers, teachers, transit workers. German workers brought that country to a standstill, demanding wage increases. In France, a massive struggle is underway, that has mobilized millions in four months of demonstrations and strikes against the government's plan to raise the age of retirement by two years, to 64.

We can't wait for politicians to fix things for us. The system they represent cannot work for us. It is based on our exploitation. The working class produces everything, runs all of the systems and services that keep the world economy going. We are united through the economy and face the same ruling class.

We don't need their governments that run the world in the interest of the corporations and banks of the 1%. Our skills can be used to run the economy in the interests of the majority — the 99% — leaving no one behind. Then we will begin to enjoy the fruits of our labor in a world free of the wanton destruction of this system that dominates our lives.

May Day is a day that we can celebrate our past and our hopes for our future — a socialist future.