On This May Day

Cash only, shop on Thurs. or Sat.

No School, Work, or Shopping

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May Day

History, Purpose, Celebration

Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours for what we will!

This was the cry that led to May Day, the Haymarket Affair, and worldwide movements for labor rights during the industrial revolution and Gilded Age.

Our world is again at an inflection point with technology and economy, reflecting on the history of May Day can help us in a modern Gilded Age.

You are never strong enough that you don't need help. - CESAR CHAVEZ

The Eight-Hour Workday Movement

The roots of **May Day** lie in the grueling conditions of the 19th-century Industrial Revolution and **Gilded Age**, where factory *laborers, including children, often worked 12 to 16 hours a day, sometimes reaching 100 hours a week, in hazardous environments*. This grew into a global labor movement centered on the demand for an eight-hour workday, famously championed by the motto: "**Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours for what we will.**"

One of the earliest successes occurred in 1856 when Australian stonemasons in Melbourne undertook a mass stoppage to secure an 8-hour limit, an event that inspired American workers to launch their own organized efforts. In the United States, the movement gained momentum throughout the 1860s and 1880s, eventually leading to a massive coordinated strike on **May 1, 1886**, when roughly 80,000 workers in Chicago marched arm-in-arm to demand a standardized workday

The Haymarket Affair (1886)

What began as a **peaceful demonstration** for labor rights turned into a tragedy on May 4, 1886, at Chicago's Haymarket Square. During a rally held to **protest police brutality** from previous days, an *unidentified anarchist threw a dynamite bomb* at a group of 176 police officers who were attempting to disperse the crowd. In the resulting panic and gunfire, seven policemen and at least four workers were killed, many of whom were struck by friendly fire from the police themselves. The event *triggered a national wave of xenophobia* known as the first American "**Red Scare**," leading to the arrest and trial of eight foreign-born anarchists.

Despite a lack of evidence linking them to the bomb itself, four were executed by hanging in 1887, becoming martyrs for the international labor movement and **May 1st as a day of global remembrance**.

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The 2nd Int'l and Paris Congress (1889)

In 1889, as labor and socialist parties gathered in Paris for the First Congress of the Second International, they sought a way to unify workers across borders. Following a proposal by Raymond Lavigne, the delegates adopted a resolution for a "**great international demonstration**" to be held on May 1, 1890, specifically to honor the "martyrs" of the Haymarket Affair and demand the legal establishment of an eight-hour day.

While originally intended as a one-off event, its **massive success** seen across the demonstrations occurring across Europe, the United States, Chile, and Peru led to it being *formally recognized as a permanent annual event by the 1891 congress*. By the 1904 conference in Amsterdam, it became mandatory for all proletarian organizations to **stop work on May 1st** whenever possible to demonstrate for the class demands of the proletariat and universal peace.

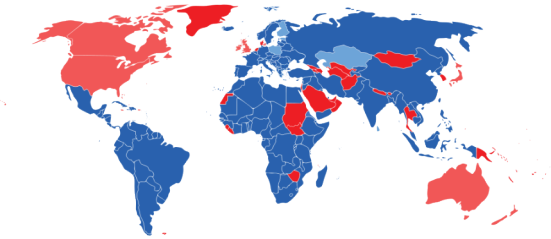
U.S. Distancing and Sept. Labor Day

Following the violence of the Haymarket incident and the **1894 Pullman Strike**, the U.S. government took deliberate steps to distance national labor celebrations from May 1st. **President Grover Cleveland** *feared that a May holiday would serve as a recurring platform for radicalism and anarchism*, choosing instead to officially establish Labor Day on the first Monday in September.

Over the decades, other attempts were made to redirect the significance of May 1st; in 1947, the Veterans of Foreign Wars established "**Loyalty Day**" to counter communist influence, and in 1958, the American Bar Association successfully campaigned for May 1st to be designated as "**Law Day**." Despite these official pivots, many American labor unions and immigrant rights groups have kept the May 1st tradition alive through rallies and local commemorations.

Global Observance and Cultural Impact

May Day is observed as a public holiday in over **95 countries**, manifesting in diverse cultural and political forms. In **France**, it is customary to offer **lily of the valley** flowers to friends and family, a tradition exempt from certain taxes to support worker organizations. **Italy** hosts a massive annual televised concert in Rome, attended by hundreds of thousands of young people, while in **Mexico**, the day is marked by large parades and is a federal holiday reflecting on the struggle for fair working conditions. In **Chile**, only store owners may attend to their shops. In **Finland**, it is celebrated as *vappu*, a carnival-style feast for students and workers alike.



Contemporary Labor and Social Justice

In recent years, May Day has evolved into a focal point for modern social struggles, including **immigrant rights** and **economic inequality**. The "*May Day Strong*" movement in 2026 represents a significant escalation, with labor unions like the NEA and various community groups organizing an "economic blackout" under the slogan "*No school, no work, no shopping*". This action is inspired by local successes, such as the Minneapolis ICE crackdown protests, and aims to hold billionaires and large corporations accountable for the "takeover" of public institutions.

Organizers in major cities **across the country** are planning massive disruptions to demand the protection of Social Security, Medicaid, and public school funding, *demonstrating that the holiday's legacy of collective action remains a potent tool for modern political change* .

The General Strike in 2026 and 2028

A *general strike* is when working people refuse their labor until demands are met. We've voted, we've protested, and still, they ignore us. **Our government refuses to meet our basic needs** while the billionaire class hoards wealth and power. Our labor is our greatest strength and when we strike together, we will win.

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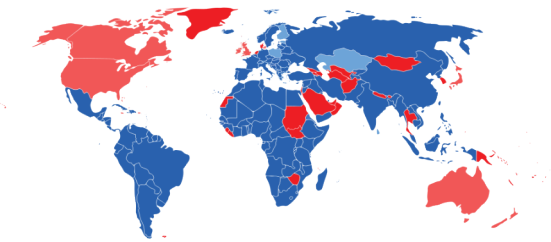

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