

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' DAY - MAY 1



"The people united will never be divided."
-- Cesar Chavez

A nation's well-being depends on those who work to provide the goods and services that allow its citizens to lead productive and healthy lives. Often throughout history, societies have been divided into different classes, with one class typically having to do much of the work that keeps that society running. Employers and governments have not always treated the working classes well – often workers had to work long hours, in hazardous conditions for little pay.

The labor movement arose in Europe during the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and early 19th centuries, beginning with working people organizing into groups called labor unions and trade unions. With strength in numbers, workers had a better chance to convince employers and governments to treat them more fairly. The movement met with great resistance from the privileged classes. But by the late 1800s it began to grow into a worldwide movement after Pope Leo XIII advocated reforms for the working class, including the elimination of child labor, the right for workers to organize into unions, to have shorter work days and liveable wages.

Although some workers are still forced into sweatshops and other inhumane working conditions, the labor movement has won numerous victories that many of us take for granted, such as the 5-day work week, 8-hour work day, paid holidays and the end of child labor.

Most of the world celebrates May 1 as International Workers' Day, a time to celebrate the victories that have been won to make many workers' lives safer and more sustainable, and to rally around workers' rights to insist that all workers are treated fairly. Even though this date commemorates the US labor movement's demand for an eight-hour work day to come into effect on May 1, 1886, in the United States the labor force is celebrated on Labor Day on the first Monday in September.

Do One Thing for a Better World

1. Find out more about historical labor leaders, labor victories, and ongoing labor injustice
2. Hold an event to raise awareness about sweatshops & other violations of workers' rights
3. Support organizations working to defend workers' rights

Labor Links

- AFL-CIO (aflcio.org)
- Fair Labor Association (fairlabor.org)
- International Labour Organisation (ilo.org)
- Jobs With Justice (jwj.org)
- LaborNet (labornet.org)
- National Labor Committee (nlcnet.org)
- US Dept of Labor (dol.gov)

DO ONE THING

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