

May 1st, above all, Workers' Day!

May Day is often referred to as Labour Day, but this is to overlook the very basis of the day...

At the end of the 19th century, in homage to the American trade unionists who had obtained the eight-hour day, the Europeans instituted an "international workers' day" or "Workers' Day".

Improperly called "Labour Day", it is commemorated by a day off on 1 May in France and in most countries... but not in all.

Historical reminder:

This international holiday was born out of the workers' struggle to obtain the 8-hour day at the end of the 19th century

It took two years for the American trade unions to force the bosses to limit the working day and it was on May 1st (the date on which many companies started their accounting year) that the American trade unions decided to launch their action. Thus on 1 May 1886, a general strike was widely followed by about 340,000 people throughout the country.

On 3 May 1886, three workers lost their lives in Chicago during a demonstration. The next day, a bomb exploded in front of the police force, killing one policeman and killing seven others in the ensuing fight.

In retaliation for this attack, 5 anarchist syndicalists were sentenced to death (four of them were hanged on Friday 11 November 1887 (known since then as Black Friday)

Three years later, in 1889, the first congress of the Second Socialist International (or Workers' International), which was meeting in Paris, decided that May Day would henceforth be a day of struggle for workers throughout the world. This day has been celebrated in France since 1890.

Naturally, May Day 1890 was celebrated for the first time in most countries:

In 1920, Bolshevik Russia decided that May Day would henceforth be a holiday and would become the legal workers' day¹⁰.

In North America, following the distinction between Labour Day and Workers' Day, May Day is not a public holiday, although it is widely celebrated by trade unions and left-wing parties, groups and organisations; it is seen as a day of celebration of the working class.

In Quebec, the major trade union centres and some left-wing parties and organisations demonstrate on May Day. More recently, Quebec trade union institutions have tended to celebrate Workers' Day with festive rallies on the Saturday or Sunday before or after May Day, rather than on the day itself when it falls on a working day. Despite this new trend, demonstrations are scrupulously organised on May Day every year by anti-capitalist collectives and organisations.

Since 1894, Labour Day in the United States has been held on the first Monday in September.

In the Dominican Republic, "Workers' Day" is celebrated on 1 May and is a public holiday. According to the law of 19 June 1997, its celebration is postponed to the nearest Monday when May 1st falls between Tuesday and Friday.

In Cuba, el día del trabajadores is celebrated on 1 May and is a public holiday. On this day, many workers' parades take place in the streets of the country.

In Mexico, in the state of Sinaloa, May 1st marks the summer festival with the end of the tomato harvest and other agricultural products.

In Paraguay, in 2002, the head of state tried to replace May Day with the first Monday in May (in the British style). However, public opinion rejected this reform and May Day is still celebrated as "el día del trabajador" (the worker's day): on this day, employers invite their employees to share an "asado" (a kind of barbecue).

In Germany, May Day is a holiday. Traditionally, a red carnation is worn in the lapel on Labour Day (Tag der Arbeit). This tradition dates back to 1 May 1890, when, in response to the call of the Second International, despite the ban on demonstrations laid down in the Sozialistengesetz, activists decided to meet in parks wearing a red carnation as a sign of recognition.

In Switzerland, May Day was only celebrated in certain cantons (Basel, Jura, Neuchâtel, Schaffhausen, Solothurn, Ticino, Thurgau, Zurich) or districts. The unions organise marches in the afternoon or at the end of the day in the cantons where this day is not a holiday.

Since 1990, the Italian trade unions CGIL, CISL and UIL, in collaboration with the municipality of Rome, have organised an annual concert to celebrate May Day each year in the presence of hundreds of thousands of people.

In Belgium (and Luxembourg), May Day is a public holiday and the socialist parties take advantage of it to march and reaffirm their left-wing roots.

The Spanish, like the Greeks, have high unemployment. In recent years, Labour Day has become an opportunity to express the opposition of many Spaniards to the government's austerity policy.

In the Netherlands, 1 May is usually a working day.

In Poland and the Czech Republic, May Day is still a holiday, but parades, which were almost compulsory under the communist regime, are no longer popular.

In the United Kingdom, May Day is not celebrated on May Day but on the first Monday in May, which allows employees to enjoy an extended weekend each year.

In Ghana, the festival was banned between 1966 and 1972 following a military coup.

In Senegal, a procession of similarly dressed demonstrators normally celebrates labour with whistles and drums on 1 May in the streets of Dakar, the capital of Senegal. In this African state, "the tradition is that after the parade, the workers (through the most representative trade unions) hand the head of state a book of grievances". A document 'in which they list a long list of demands which, if settled, would contribute to a significant improvement in their living and working conditions'.

If there are also marches in Côte d'Ivoire, we also see in Abidjan employees of large companies meeting around their bosses for "team building" sessions, these playful activities designed to take employees out of the professional framework and supposed to bind teams together... under the control of their superiors. An approach that is the antithesis of the May Day spirit.

In Australia, some socialist or communist unions march on May Day. But Labour Day is officially commemorated on other dates: 4 March in Western Australia, 11 March in Victoria, 6 May in Queensland and the Northern Territory, 7 October in Canberra (the capital), New South Wales (Sydney) and South Australia.

Latin America - including Brazil - commemorates Labour Day by taking May Day off. But, as elsewhere, union marches have largely given way to fun activities: picnics, football....

In Israel, there is no May Day holiday, even though the Jewish state was founded by socialist activists.

The Japanese do not celebrate Labour Day, but the first week of May, known as "Golden Week", is a time for festivities and days off.

Whatever your nationality, the Union warmly invites you to join us on Monday 1 May to celebrate Workers' Day in the right way!

(source: <https://www.herodote.net/>; Wikipedia, ouestfrance)