

May Day: Workers' Struggles, International Solidarity, Political Aspirations

By [Socialist Project](#)

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For more than 100 years, May Day has symbolized the common struggles of workers around the globe. Why is it largely ignored in North America? The answer lies in part in American labour's long repression of its own radical past, out of which international May Day was actually born a century ago.

It is more important than ever, in the face of relentless capitalist austerity and emerging authoritarian forces on the right, that the North American labour movement reconnect with this history and forge linkages with the international labour movement in the remaking of a socialism for our times.

This pamphlet is the latest in the Socialist Interventions series (May 2016).

Excerpts



Rosa Luxemburg

We have not come to do the work of political parties, but we have come here in the cause of labour, in its own defence, to demand its own rights. I can remember when we came in handfuls of a few dozen to Hyde Park to

demand an Eight Hours' Bill, but the dozens have grown to hundreds, and the hundreds to thousands, until we have this magnificent demonstration that fills the

park today. We are standing face to face with another demonstration, but I am glad to see that the great masses of the people are on our side. Those of us who have gone through all the worry of the Dock Strike, and especially the Gasworkers' Strike, and have seen the men, women and children stand round us, have had enough of strikes, and we are determined to secure an eight hours' day by legal enactment; unless we do so, it will be taken from us at the first opportunity. We will only have ourselves to blame if we do not achieve the victory which this great day could so easily give us.

Eleanor Marx: Speech on the first May Day, Hyde Park, 4 May 1890

The happy idea of using a proletarian holiday celebration as a means to attain the eighthour day was first born in Australia. The workers there decided in 1856 to organize a day of complete stoppage together with meetings and entertainment as a demonstration in favor of the eighthour day. The day of this celebration was to be April 21. At first, the Australian workers intended this only for the year 1856. But this first celebration had such a strong effect on the proletarian masses of Australia, enlivening them and leading to new agitation, that it was decided to repeat the celebration every year.

Rosa Luxemburg, What Are the Origins of May Day? 1894

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