

May Day history lessons

Goals

1. Acquaint audience with the history of May Day
2. Acquaint audience with the values of May Day
3. Build for mass action on but also before May Day 2028
4. Grow class consciousness and the antifascist movement

Questions for discussion after screening

1. Acquaint audience with the history of May Day

What events occurred in 1886 – 1889 leading to the May Day holiday?

What are some similarities between then and now?

Why was May Day never adopted as an official holiday in the United States?

Why has May Day nonetheless never gone away?

What has caused May Day to make a comeback over the past ten or so years?

2. Acquaint audience with the values of May Day

What was the goal of the call for a general strike on May 1, 1886?

Was that goal achieved? If so, when?

What is the definition of “solidarity” for the workers’ movement?

Why is it essential to labor movement success?

3. Build for mass action on May Day 2028

What is the purpose of a strike?

What is a general strike?

Why are we talking about one now?

Have general strikes happened before? Where and when?

Could a general strike happen now?

What does it take to make one happen?

What might be the purpose of a general strike in the United States today?

4. Grow class consciousness and the antifascist movement

What was the impact of the repression following the Haymarket bombing?

Who did the repression target?

Are there any parallels between what happened then and now?

Does knowing the history of May Day help you to think about May Day 2028? If so, how?

Why are immigrant worker rights important for all workers, not just immigrants?

Short essay question (for classrooms):

Is it possible, or even desirable, that a general strike could occur today in a major city or industry? Refer to the lessons of the 1934 and 1946 general strikes, and compare working class consciousness, culture, organization, and politics then and now. You may also analyze or refer to more recent general strikes in other countries, the call of Occupy Oakland for a general strike in November 2011, the big marches and demonstrations for immigrant rights on May 1, 2006, and/or recent statewide general strikes in public education.