

# MAY DAY 2028



You can find a streaming version of the video at this site:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4e4Aw2IL5gl>

# WHAT CAN THE HISTORY OF A HOLIDAY TEACH US ABOUT WORKER POWER & SOLIDARITY?



Here are some introductory remarks for this slide:

We are here under the shadow of a gathering fascism. When we say that, it's not about historical analogy with Germany or Italy in the 1930s. It's about clearly recognizing what's happening now: the assault on civil liberties for marginalized groups, especially immigrants; the destruction of collective bargaining rights for federal workers; defunding and dismantling the helping agencies of government, while massively increasing the budget for the repressive apparatus; putting the United States military into the streets of American cities against the will of the people; attacks on free speech in universities, on the justice system, on the media; and the ongoing threat and reality of war. And all of this will get worse if it doesn't get stopped.

May Day has something to say about all this. We are here today to talk, among other things, about the proposal by a United States labor leader to organize for a general strike on May Day 2028.

# MAY DAY HAS BEEN A HOLIDAY OF:

- honoring workers
- taking collective action, including mass strikes
- demanding immigrant justice
  
- employer resistance to workers' demands & needs
- scapegoating immigrants to divide workers
- political manipulation



Remarks for this slide:

You'll get the history of May Day in the video, so I won't say a lot about that now. I'd just like to underscore a few points before we watch.

- 1) The May Day holiday is historically associated with a few positive ideas:
  - It honors workers
  - It's about winning the eight-hour workday
  - It's about collective action, including mass strikes, to achieve these goals
  - And especially, as appropriate for an international holiday, it's about immigrant worker rights.
  
- 2) May Day is also connected with a few negative associations:
  - Employer resistance to worker needs and demands
  - Scapegoating attacks on immigrant workers to divide and conquer the working class on behalf of wealthy employers
  - The nation's first red scare, and consequent efforts by American authorities to make the holiday seem like a scary thing, especially during the Cold War.

The first and only national general strike in US history was called for May 1, 1886 in an attempt to win the eight-hour workday. It was not very successful. We have only had about fifteen citywide general strikes, and none since 1946. This is not a record inspiring confidence that we can pull off such an effort.

And yet, for the first time since then, a realistic idea of a general strike is in the air. You'll see the video briefly laying out the four things it takes to have a general strike: a generalized anger in the working class; the structure to organize it; leadership willing to call it; and a spark.

United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain said this in 2024:

**“We missed the opportunity [in 1981 to support air traffic controllers fired by Ronald Reagan], but we’re not going to miss it in 2028. That’s the plan. We want a general strike. We want everybody walking out just like they do in other countries [on May Day].”**

What are your thoughts on this call to action?



Quote comes from this article: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/jan/22/autoworkers-ua-w-shawn-fain-may-2028-national-strike>

Read the quote to folks and give them a minute to talk with each other or think on their own.

Remarks for this slide:

Let’s note that Shawn Fain is the first national labor leader in more than a generation to issue a credible call to organize a general strike. I use that term, “organize”, precisely. Anyone can call a general strike; many do. No general strike follows. The call to organize a general strike must occur under conditions that make it possible. Fain said that all unions should line up their contracts to expire together on May first 2028. That’s really the first step in organizing a general strike; not, let’s have one, but let’s start with a concrete action that will help create conditions for it to happen.

Fain issued his challenge a year before Trump was elected. The condition of the working class—especially the density of unions in the workforce—has been deteriorating for decades under Republicans and Democrats alike. So Fain was essentially saying workers need to assert some direct control over their lives. We didn’t get the rights that are crumbling now by being meek and asking for them, pretty please. We got them by organizing, by matching power for workers against the power of capitalists. We’ve been losing those rights by forgetting how to act together in our own interests as the working class.

There’s nothing like a dose of fascism to concentrate the mind of workers’ organizations. Around

the country unions have been passing resolutions to figure out how we line up our local contracts to expire on May 1 2028, and explore using other events along the way to build the power of that moment.

I wouldn't say that this is an ideal situation. The other side holds most of the cards. But we can take heart from the fact that this was true in the 1930s and 40s when most of the general strikes occurred. Before we watch the film I'll leave you with three more encouraging thoughts.

First, unions are more popular than in half a century: when we fight we win, and the public loves an underdog winner. We've had more strikes in the past several years than we've seen in decades. General strikes don't arise in a vacuum; they tend to occur as the crest of a strike wave.

Second, the generalized anger in the working class—one of the preconditions for a general strike—is growing daily as Trump and his MAGA movement tear up our democracy.

And third, May Day—deliberately associated by employers with violent anarchism and then Communism for nearly a century and a half, and therefore shunned by organized labor—is now being embraced by a coalition of the labor movement and the left. For decades few in American labor would touch this holiday with a ten-foot pole. Now it's understood, once more, as a platform for united action for worker rights. On May Day 2025 hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated; in 2026 it will be millions. But with any luck, and the right organizing, that might be just a stepping stone toward even larger demonstrations of worker power on May First 2028.

The movie is 30 minutes. Let's watch it and have a good discussion afterward.

# WHAT CAN MAY DAY TEACH US ABOUT BUILDING & USING SOLIDARITY TO MAKE CHANGE?

## We Mean to Make Things Over: A History of May Day.

The video link is embedded in this slide. Please review the next slide with participants before showing the first video segment.

**Questions to consider for our conversation after we view this video :**

- 1.** How and why did the meaning of May Day transform over time?
- 2.** What did it take to finally win the 8 hour day?
- 3.** What would it take to make a general strike happen today?
- 4.** Why is solidarity essential to labor movement success?
- 5.** Why are immigrant worker rights important for all workers?

These questions are intended to prime participants for noting particular concepts and events discussed in the video. Return to this slide after viewing the film to engage participants in conversation.

In addition, here are questions that can be used in post-viewing conversation:

1. Acquaint union members 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 union members 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 would 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?

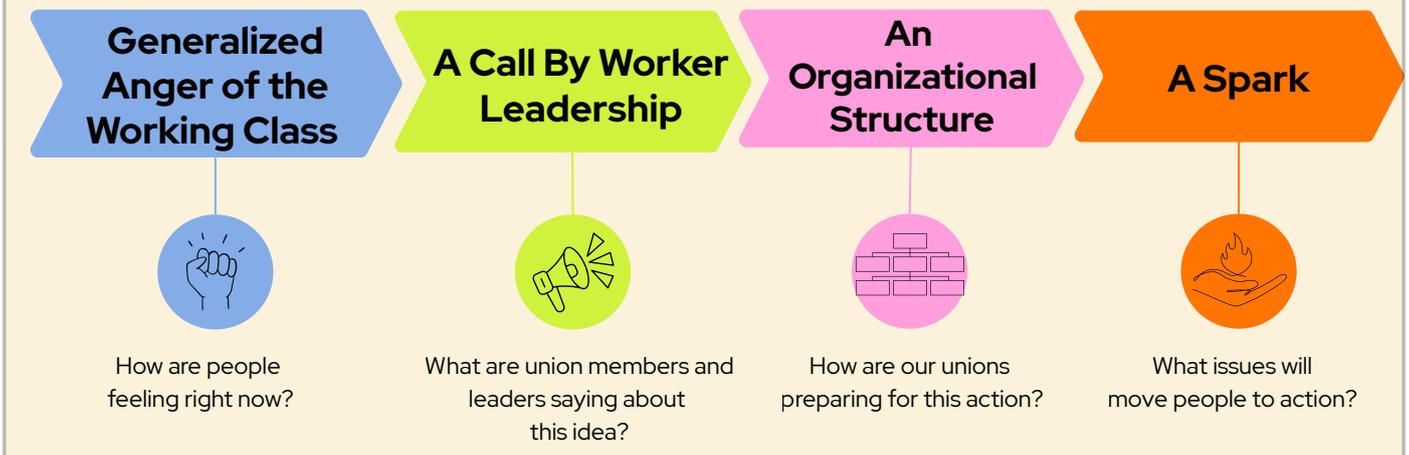
Who did the repression target?

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?

# WHAT PIECES ARE IN PLACE ALREADY FOR MAY DAY 2028? WHAT NEEDS TO BE DEVELOPED?



A few options here depending on the size and energy of the group:

1. Break participants up into four groups to address each question from their perspectives. They can then share out with the larger group.
2. Whole group conversation with some charting by facilitator to document responses.
3. Put up each of the four questions at the bottom of the slide on chart paper and give folks markers to write their responses under each one.

Whichever option works best for your group, review with folks which pieces are already in place and which need to be developed.

# **WHAT ARE THE STEPS WE NEED TO TAKE IN PREPARATION FOR MAY DAY 2028? WHAT CAN YOU AND YOUR ORGANIZATION DO TO SUPPORT THE ACTION?**

Ask participants- What can we do as individuals/community/union members to help build towards a 2028 General Strike?

Chart the responses. Encourage people to take photographs of the chart paper when the group is done talking.



**THIS STRATEGY HAS WORKED IN THE PAST. WE CAN USE IT AGAIN TO MAKE THE CHANGE WE NEED.**

Begin wrap up here with appreciation for participants and hosts.

This is the time to offer further resources and support for moving this conversation beyond this space and doing the work to build 2028.

# MAY DAY 2028



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