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1st May - International Workers' Day

International Workers' Day (also known as May Day) is a celebration of the international labour movement and left-wing movements. It commonly sees organized street demonstrations and marches by working people and their labour unions throughout most of the world. May 1 is a national holiday in more than 80 countries. It is also celebrated unofficially in many other countries.

International Workers' Day is the commemoration of the 1886 Haymarket Massacre in Chicago, when, after an unknown person threw a dynamite bomb at police as they dispersed a public meeting, Chicago police fired on workers during a general strike for the eight hour workday, killing several demonstrators and resulting in the deaths of several police officers, largely from friendly fire.

In 1889, the first congress of the Second International for the Centennial of the French Revolution and the Exposition Universelle called for international demonstrations on the anniversary of the Chicago protests. May Day was formally recognized as an annual event at the International's second congress in 1891.

Subsequently, the May Day Riots of 1894 occurred. In 1904, the International Socialist Conference called on "all Social Democratic Party organizations and trade unions of all countries to demonstrate energetically on May First for the legal establishment of the 8-hour day, for the class demands of the proletariat, and for universal peace." The congress made it "mandatory upon the proletarian organizations of all countries to stop work on May 1, wherever it is possible without injury to the workers."

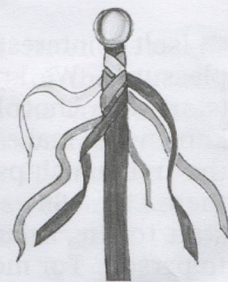
In many countries, the working classes sought to make May Day an official holiday, and their efforts largely succeeded. May Day has long been a focal point for demonstrations by various socialist, communist and anarchist groups. In some circles, bonfires are lit in commemoration of the Haymarket martyrs, usually at dawn.

May Day has been an important official holiday in Communist countries such as the People's Republic of China, Cuba and the former Soviet Union. May Day celebrations typically feature elaborate popular and military parades in these countries.

In 1955, the Catholic Church dedicated May 1 to "Saint Joseph The Worker". The Catholic Church considers Saint Joseph the patron saint of (among others) workers, craftsmen, and "people fighting communism".

Right-wing governments have traditionally sought to repress the message behind International Workers' Day, with fascist governments in Portugal, Italy, Germany and Spain abolishing the workers' holiday.

Maypole



A maypole is a tall wooden pole erected as a part of various European folk festivals, particularly on May Day. In some cases the maypole is a permanent feature that is only utilised during the festival, although in other cases it is erected specifically for the purpose before being taken down again.

Primarily found within the nations of Germanic Europe and the neighbouring areas, its origins are pagan; the tradition survived Christianisation, albeit losing any original meaning that it had. It has been a recorded practice in many parts of Europe throughout the Medieval and Early Modern periods, although it became less popular in the 18th and 19th centuries. Today, the tradition is still observed in some parts of Europe and amongst European communities in North America.

The symbolism of the maypole has been continuously debated by folklorists for centuries, although no set conclusion has ever been arrived at. One theory holds that they were a remnant of the Germanic reverence for sacred trees, as there is evidence for various sacred trees and wooden pillars that were venerated by the pagans across much of Germanic Europe. In Norse paganism cosmological views held that the universe was a world tree and that the maypole was in some way a continuance of this tradition.

Another theory has it that the maypoles were simply a part of the general rejoicing at the return of summer, and the growth of new vegetation. In this way, they bore similarities with the May Day garlands which were also a common festival practice in Britain and Ireland. If the tree is erected on the eve of 1 May, then the event is usually followed by a May dance or 'Tanz in den Mai'.

Long live Stepmother's Day!

Stepmother's Day is celebrated one week after Mother's Day. One of the things children in blended families often face is feeling "torn" between one set of parents and another. Stepmothers who are involved in the lives of their stepkids want to be recognized for what they do, but they don't want to pull the children away from their mothers on Mother's Day.

Having a separate day to honor stepmothers acknowledges the role that stepmums play in a family. They don't take the place of the children's mother, but the relationship they have with the children is an important one as well.