

The Weekend - International Workers Day (C0078)

A: Alright everyone settle down. Let's get started. As you know, an important aspect of becoming a good citizen is understanding the genesis of our legal system. It is not enough to simply memorize our laws, it is necessary that we comprehend why and how they were formed. This brings me to our topic for today. Does anyone know what we celebrate on May first?

B: Cinco de mayo?

A: No, that's May fifth in Spanish, James, no wonder you are failing my Spanish class. No, May first is International Workers' Day.

B: Do we get a day off from school then?

A: No! It is not considered to be a national holiday here in the US, but in other countries it is.

B: Aww, man!

A: In the nineteenth century, working conditions were appalling, with workers being forced to work ten, twelve, and fourteen hours a day. Support for the eight-hour work day movement was growing rapidly, despite the indifference and hostility of many union leaders, and by April 1886, 250,000 workers were involved in the May Day movement. Previous legislative attempts to improve working conditions had failed, so labor organizers took drastic measures. They passed a resolution stating that eight hours would constitute a legal day's work. And, on May First 1886, the resolution took effect.

B: Cool! Is that why we only work eight hours now?

A: Yes! But the happy ending came at a high price. On May third, 1886, police fired into a crowd of strikers at the McCormick Reaper Works Factory, killing four and wounding many. A mass meeting was called for the next day to protest the brutality.

B: And then what happened?

A: Well, as we say, the rest is history...

Key Vocabulary

national holiday	<i>common noun, singular</i>	The day that all people in a country will be on holiday
comprehend	<i>verb</i>	understand deeply
settle down	<i>phrase</i>	relax, become calm
aspect	<i>common noun, singular</i>	part
genesis	<i>common noun, singular</i>	origin; beginning
appalling	<i>Adjective</i>	terrible, horrible, shocking
indifference	<i>common noun, non-variable</i>	showing no interest in

hostility	<i>common noun, non- variable</i>	the attitude of treating something as enemy
legislative	<i>Adjective</i>	relating to legal system
drastic	<i>Adjective</i>	sudden and severe
resolution	<i>common noun, sin- gular</i>	a formal document stating the wishes of a group
constitute	<i>verb</i>	form, consist
brutality	<i>common noun, non- variable</i>	violent treatment or behavior
fire into	<i>phrase</i>	shoot guns into a place

Supplementary Vocabulary

<i>phrase</i>	describing an event that is done to honor and remember a person or event in history/ in commemoration of
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proletariat	<i>common noun, sin- gular</i>	the lowest socioeco- nomic class; workers
rally	<i>common noun, sin- gular</i>	a public meeting of a large group of people to support or oppose something
proclamation	<i>common noun, sin- gular</i>	an official statement made by a person who has power
memorial	<i>common noun, sin- gular</i>	something like a statue, built to remember a person or event from history