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## Mayday: What it was like back then...

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## Mayday: What it was like back then...

### Abstract

May Day is one of the historical days of the labour movement and to show some of the issues that were canvassed in earlier times, and some of the sentiments expressed, here are extracts taken from three of the May Day programmes from the early 1960s. The 1960s were the time of the cold war, nuclear war threats, the burgeoning peace movement as well as the usual bread and butter issues concerning working people. These articles reflect the thoughts of the activists of the time and serve to show that, while the names have changed, the targets for workers remain the same, and the system continues to keep labour costs to a minimum whilst maximising profits.

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## M A Y D A Y

### What was it like back then ...

*May Day is one of the historical days of the labour movement and to show some of the issues that were canvassed in earlier times, and some of the sentiments expressed, here are extracts taken from three of the May Day programmes from the early 1960s.*

*The 1960s were the time of the cold war, nuclear war threats, the burgeoning peace movement as well as the usual bread and butter issues concerning working people. These articles reflect the thoughts of the activists of the time and serve to show that, while the names have changed, the targets for workers remain the same, and the system continues to keep labour costs to a minimum whilst maximising profits.*

*From the 1961 May Day program:*

### A May Day Message For 1961

**(AUTHORISED BY THE MAY DAY COMMITTEE)**

May 1st is known throughout the world as the workers day, a day of International solidarity of the working people.

The origins of May Day commenced more than 70 years ago. At an International Labor Congress in Paris it was decided to organise a great international demonstration on May 1st. The resolution that was carried read as follows: 'The Congress decides to organise a great international demonstration so that in all countries and in all cities on one appointed day the toiling masses shall demand of the State authorities, the legal reduction of the working day to eight hours. Since a similar demonstration has already been decided upon for May 1, 1890 by the American Federation of Labor at its Convention in St Louis, December, 1888, this day is accepted for the international demonstration.

The workers of the various countries, must organise this demonstration according to conditions prevailing in each country.

From this, it is interesting to note, that May Day actually originated in America.

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The May 1st processions and demonstrations proved a great success. So much so that the next Congress of the International held in Brussels in 1891 further elaborated the aims of May Day. The revised resolution contained the original demand for the eight hour day, but added that the day 'must also serve as a demonstration to improve working conditions and to ensure Peace among the nations.'

Frederick Engels one of the founders of the 1st International in calling attention to the significance of the first international May Day said 'as I write these lines the proletariat (workers) of Europe and America are holding a review of its forces, it is mobilised for the first time as one army, under one flag and fighting for one immediate aim — an eight-hour working day established by legal enactment. The spectacle we are now witnessing will make the capitalists and landowners of all the lands realise that today the proletarians of all lands are in very truth united.'

Seventy years later — only a relative short period in history — we see considerable changes from the inception of May Day.

One-third of the world's population is now living in a Socialist Society; since the end of the war a whole number of the colonial countries have shattered the chains of Imperialist domination and are building up their own nations in their own way.

The Soviet Union has legally enacted the six-hour day for workers in heavy industries and hazardous occupations. In the Socialist countries May first is given particular attention and celebrations take place in every town and village. It is a public holiday and huge processions are held declaring International Solidarity with the workers of all lands. Slogans indicate the great achievement made in Socialist Construction and the desire for Peace and friendship throughout the world.

In all countries the May Day Celebrations will be sponsored by the workers and Trade Union movement with anything up to half a million people in places like France and Italy parading the streets. In many places under Fascist dictatorships like Spain and Portugal, workers will find their own methods and celebrate May Day under the most savage repression.

The May Day Celebrations are the largest of any International celebration.

The South Coast May Day Committee aims to carry forward the great traditions of the founders of May Day. In line with other countries and in co-operation with the National May Day movement in Australia, a demonstration is organised to take place on the First Monday in May.

This takes the form of a procession through the street, guest speakers representing the Labor Party, Communist Party, Trade Unions, Women and Youth organisations and the Peace movement addressing the gathering on the significance of May Day.

A sports programme for children, youths and adults is organised for the afternoon with many valuable prizes.

From small beginnings in the District, where mainly mine workers were involved, May Day has developed where most unions in this area play some part in the May Day celebrations. All the Parliamentary Representatives in the District are patrons of the May Day Committee. Thousands of Unionists participate in the Procession and Sports and many thousands of people witness the very colourful procession.

This year the workers have many demands to campaign around, 35-hour week, Long Service Leave for casual workers, the nationalisation of the mines, steel and shipping Industries, will be highlighted and expressed through banners, floats, skits, and other features of the Procession. Each Union will place their own demands before the people. Higher living standards, controlled prices, more homes, schools, improved social services, safety measures in the Industries all being expressed in many original ways.

The Menzies Government have introduced a great deal of restrictive legislation aimed principally at the working class and the Trade Union movement. The Penal Clauses in the Arbitration Act, the Phone Tapping Legislation and the Crimes Bill are all directed against the working class. The huge monopoly groupings have also their own restrictive practices, all are a threat to the independence and freedom of movement of Trade Unions and their officials. The May Day Committee will give prominence to the campaign to defeat all anti-democratic legislation.

This year with the rapid deterioration in the economy of the country, the growth of unemployment and greater hardships for the workers and their families, the demand for the right to work will be prominently featured on May Day.

Australia's urgent need is for a greater participation by the people in determining the policy the Government should pursue. The Government instead of serving the interests of the huge monopoly groups should serve the interests of the people. The Government should be pledged to a policy of National Development by the proper utilisation of the great national resources of the country. The proper utilisation of our huge coal deposits and other minerals, our timbers and plentiful supplies of water to increase considerably the wealth of the nation.

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Overseas interests and the big monopolies must not be allowed to draw us into conflicts with other countries or suppression of the rising national movements sweeping the colonial countries. We must have our own independent foreign policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, of total disarmament, the banning of atom and hydrogen bombs. of peacefully existing side by side with other countries irrespective of their social systems and develop a policy of trade and friendly relationships on a mutual and reciprocal basis. We stand for the independence of New Guinea and full equal rights for our own aboriginal people. We are resolutely opposed to all forms of racial discrimination.

The May Day Committee in every way promotes ideas to further unite and strengthen the political and industrial sections of the whole Labor Movement, who see the need for Social change, to join together in a mighty democratic force to achieve the glorious aims of the initiators and inspirers of May Day, the abolition of exploitation and the Socialist brotherhood of man.

*This article was followed by one from Jim Steele, President of the South Coast Peace Committee, entitled:*

### ONE WORLD OR NONE

It was the best of times, It was the worst of times,' Dickens declared in a famous passage, setting the stage for 'A Tale of Two Cities.' He was writing in the year 1775. He could as aptly have been describing our own Atomic Age, for the world is crammed with contrasts even more stupid and fantastic than those of two centuries ago. For the science which has done so much, for better conditions of life, in creature comforts, travel and leisure, 'It is the best of times.' But the science which we owe so much has also pushed us to the edge of oblivion. This creates the fantastic contrast, 'It is the worst of times.'

In the world's thinking today, the power to destroy overshadows the power to create to such an extent, there can be 'One World or None.'

Therefore, Peace is one of the greatest needs of the world today, and peace is everyone's business. Every citizen must be in the struggle against war, irrespective of how he or she thinks in Politics, Religion, Art or Economics, because we stand in worse

condition and contradiction of life than Dickens in his day. In our day there can be 'One World or None.'

The most important part of these May Day Celebrations is the matter of Peace.

We talked with many Trade Union representatives at the Tokyo Peace Conference, from every part of the Globe, all voicing a deep and sincere desire for peace. We talked with the Tokyo Trade Union officials in Tokyo, and representatives of the Trade Unions in China. The burden of all these talks and discussions were seeking ways and means to break down the barriers that cause disagreement, and create an atmosphere of agreement and friendly relations. The demand of the Workers in Japan, as the first step to Peace, was the withdrawal of American Forces from Japan. The desire of the Chinese Leaders and People, everywhere we went, was for Peace, Time and Friends, and their voice to be heard in the United Nations, long overdue, but must now be granted.

I take the pleasure of linking up my greetings to the May Day Celebrations of the Workers of the South Coast District of N.S.W. with the People of China and the Workers of Japan, that your May Day Celebration may be a happy event, bringing the Workers of the World a step nearer to the World Peace conditions that the Prophet Isaiah spoke about: 'When swords would be beat into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks, and man shall learn war no more.'

### LONG LIVE PEACE

*Thomas Silcocks, former official of the Miner's Federation, was the next to pen an article and his offering was mainly confined to the history of May Day in Australia, and was as follows:*

### MAY DAY GLIMPSES

For a few years, following the turn of the century, the slowly expanding Southern Coal Mining area was receiving a steady flow of miners from the British Isles.

These hardy people brought with them, not only their ability to hew coal, but also, the traditions and experiences gained in the many bitter struggles of their native land.

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From these migrants came some of the foremost leaders in the then established Coal Mining Unions.

It was during this period, came the late Albert Charles Willis, from the South Wales Coalfields.

He had been a John Ruskins Scholar, and had a deeply trained knowledge of working class history and trade union functions.

The miners quickly recognised his ability and sincerity, and he was elected to an executive position in the then Southern Miner's Union.

About this time, quite a number of mine union members annually gathered together in Wollongong to celebrate their May Day.

On these occasions, almost every brogue and British dialect could be heard at the bar counter.

Union leaders gave encouragement to these small annual gatherings, although they were not a recognised function of the organised union. Willis gave these simple celebrations his patronage.

At this stage, the Northern, Western and Southern Miners' Union were separate unions and almost entirely independent of each other.

Willis realised the weakness of this situation. With the support of the late J. Mc. Badderly, then President of the Northern Miners, he designed a plan to federate these district unions. The miners agreed to the plan and the foundations of the Coal and Shale Workers' Federation of Australia, as we know it today, were established. Badderly became the first President and Willis the first General Secretary of the Federation.

Just as the Miners' Federation evolved out of 'bits and pieces', so also did the miners' attachment to the ancient May Day grow.

The employers were requested to exchange one of the existing holidays, and let the men have May Day in its place. The men's request received a mixed reception and was finally rejected. Willis, as the men's advocate, knew that the Union men were determined.

The employers were immediately advised that the men would in future make it a holiday themselves. In later years, the owners agreed to the adjustment.

Thus it followed that the Southern Miners' May Day Celebrations became the spectacular demonstration we see every year in the City of Greater Wollongong.

From the early Miners' May Day, it has become the Trade Union expression of the Illawarra workers.

The May Day of that time being a Miners' day, its banners and slogans stressed the much needed reforms and working class hardships of the Coal Mining Industry.



In the changed world of today, the display emphasises both national and international thinking, and with particular reference to the common man's desire for peace and international friendship and understanding with people of all lands.

When a worker attends the May Day Celebrations, he does so on the common bond of Trade Union brotherhood.

The Day knows no creed, no colour, cast or political party.

On the Day, he, as a worker, meets in friendly demonstration, his fellow worker, and by their attendance, they pay tribute to the philosophy that May Day stands for — 'A Nation's wealth is measured by the number of its contented and happy homes.'

*There was even a Ladies Broom Throwing Contest.*

*The last article in this 1961 program was from the then Secretary of the International Womens' Day Committee, Irene Arrowsmith, and was entitled:*

### WOMEN AND MAY DAY

'...They advanced like a moving rainbow ... rejoicing the cause they revered — a new life to working men and women. Dockers in their rough working clothes and sandwiched between them hundreds of gentlemen compositors, kidgloved and tophatted ... then came large contingents of women — rope workers, match makers and others. Looked on from above they advanced like a moving rainbow for all wore the huge feathers of many colours which the East End lass loves to sport when she is out for the day.'

That is how the London Star wrote describing the procession of 100,000 people who marched to Hyde Park on May Day, 1890 — the first International Day of Labour.

From the very beginning of modern May Day, women have played a big part. Today the marchers no longer are confined to women who work in industry. They are joined these days with their sisters from the homes, the professions and the arts. In fact, in this area, the housewives form the main body of women marchers. Unfortunately, the women who work in industry and are so badly exploited (particularly the textile trades) do not so far participate as part of Trade Union contingents but this will undoubtedly alter within the next few years and we will see large sections of women industrial workers with banners aloft setting

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out their demands for equal rights, equal pay and better working conditions.

In more recent years the great cause of world peace and friendship between all countries has become the key note of May Day festivities, an ideal which all decent thinking people, especially women, can strongly support.

This year men, women and children all over the world will be marching again; in Socialist countries with a gaiety which seems to echo the spirit of older May Day rejoicings around the May Pole and village green and in our own country with hope, confidence and certainty that the cause is just, and victory the certain harvest of the new growth of people's action for peace and happiness."

Speakers at the Showground following the parade were Jim Kenny representing the ACTU, Lance Sharkey of the Communist Party, Ray Wetherell of the ALP and Sally Bowen representing women's organisations.

*The articles published in the 1962 program were as follows:*

### **MAY DAY — 1962** **introduction by J. SAYWELL** **President, May Day Committee**

May Day is a very important day in the working class and Trade Union Movement. It has a long and rich tradition of militant activity. It has been instrumental in bringing forward the demands of the workers for many years.

The eight-hour day was the major ambition of the founders of May Day. At that time 12, 14 and 16 hours a day were a common practice and this applied to young and old and both sexes alike.

The eight-hour day is now almost universal. With mechanisation and automation applied to production, the shorter working week and increased leisure time is now the demand in this day and age.

Many attacks have been made on May Day ever since its inception over 70 years ago. But May Day has been able to survive these attacks and today the May Day Celebrations are the largest of any international gathering.

This year will be no exception. The procession will be more colourful and spectacular with many unions sponsoring a May Queen.

The Banners being carried will contain slogans for the Right to Work the 35-hour week, Nationalisation of the Monopoly Industries.

A call will be made for World Peace and general disarmament and the abolition of nuclear weapons.

The May Day Committee have critically examined shortcomings of previous years and taken steps to overcome them, which should result in a great improvement in the procession and programme of entertainment at the Showground.

The Committee this year is now part of the South Coast Labor Council and officially recognised by the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

The May Day Booklet is again up to the standard of previous years and all Unionists will find the Booklet as a handy guide to Train and Bus time tables, the Programme of Events and the messages submitted by various leaders of the Trade Union Movement.

I take this opportunity of thanking these people for their contributions and to our advertisers who made the production of this booklet possible.

BE PROUD TO MARCH WITH YOUR MATES ON MAY DAY.

*There was no mention of any broom throwing so that may have been one of the events dropped from the program. The next item was contributed by Bill Parkinson, General President of the Miners' Federation, and was headed:*

### MAY DAY MESSAGE

The origin of May Day goes back to the beginnings of class society and is of interest when considered in connection with the growth of May Day protests against class rule.

As a matter of fact, the word 'May' literally means 'growth' in the sense that it applies to nature in the Spring (Europe) when the days were growing longer and the flowers starting to bloom.

It is very easy then to connect May Day with the growth of a

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new society which will replace the present form of capitalism with its horrors of war, chronic scarcity of the essentials of life and struggle to make ends meet.

The working class movement looks on May Day as an occasion for taking a census of the growth of ideas in the minds of the working class and developing the organisation to achieve the better life which is rightfully ours.

The idea of giving May Day a modern fighting content in keeping with the class-struggle conditions of capitalism, was conceived at a conference of the Federation of Trade Unions of America and Canada in 1884 and it is well to remember this as too many people, purporting to be sons of the working class today continually refer to May Day as being a Communist day.

This particular Federation of Trades and Labor unions of America and Canada in 1884 decided to launch a campaign for the eight-hour day.

It was to culminate in widespread strike struggles on 1st May, 1886. On that day thousands of workers, not only in America and Canada, but throughout the world, downed tools. Thus was given birth May Day as we know it today.

Sporadic demonstrations of successful May Days following 1886 led to the Paris Congress of the First International in 1889 deciding on an international demonstration each year to propagate the idea of international trade union unity around specific demands.

Is not this then obviously the ideal and desires of the international working class? So what answer have the 'knockers' of May Day got for this?

May Day has gathered meaning with the passage of the years, with the international working class demonstrating in unity for peace, higher living standards and economic security and raising each year the outstanding immediate economic demands.

With the growth of monopoly capital, and in its drive for maximum profit, May Day becomes more and more a demonstration against this monopoly growth, against inevitable attacks on wages and conditions and becomes a rallying point for workers to unite in struggle to achieve their demands.

Side by side with the growth of monopoly capital is the ever foreboding threat of war initiated by the enemies of the working class — imperialism.

Consequently, May Day in 1962 becomes a focal point of the Labor movement which, of course, includes the trade union movement in their genuine desire to avert such a tragedy and war today in 1962 would be a human catastrophe.

Each succeeding May Day should be bigger and better as the

years pass on and it is nothing short of outstanding to be able to witness the enthusiasm of the working people in the socialist countries when they celebrate their May Day because May Day to these peoples who have achieved socialism is a day of rejoicing at their achievements — a day of rejoicing which, in effect, celebrates 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'.

In conclusion, it is always well to remember that May Day is not the prerogative of any particular party. May Day is an international workers' day. But, by the same token, workers throughout the world expect and look upon the holding of May Day as obligatory, and in fact a duty by each and every international political party that purports to represent the working class.

*The next article in this 1962 booklet was by the then secretary of the Southern Districts Combined Women's Auxiliaries, Mary Smales, and was as follows:*

### WOMEN AND MAY DAY

May Day 1962 and once again the Banners are unfurled — the Workers unite and march, demanding their just rights — 'the right not only to live, but the right to live at the highest level.'

Among the marchers, as always, we see the Miners Women's Auxiliaries — only a few in number, but strong and confident in purpose. Proudly we join our menfolk in full support of all the aims of the Miners' Federation. With unemployment rising on the coalfields, yet an ever-increasing production of coal — for the security of our homes and families, we make our demands. Nationalisation, Coal Utilisation, a 35-hour week, and having in mind the recent fatal accidents in the Southern District, and knowing the ever-present dangerous conditions under which our menfolk work, we demand greater safety measures. The Miner's families are the ones who really know that all too often the cost of 'Black Diamonds' is Life itself. Full utilisation of coal would mean that our children need not look away from home to find employment, and the lowering of prices of many of the by-products of coal now imported into Australia.

#### CALL FOR DISARMAMENT

On this May Day, we, the women of the coalfields, applaud

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the recent Women's World Assembly for Disarmament held in Vienna, where women from 60 countries, including a delegate from Australia, called for Complete and Total Disarmament — we applaud the American Women with their 'Strike for Peace Movement', and their calling for the Banning of Nuclear Weapons Tests — we make the strongest possible protest at the move to make Christmas Island yet another 'Factory of Death'. In the name of Humanity we join with women throughout the world in the call for Peace — as women who give life we have the right to say 'Life must not be destroyed'.

### EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

As the May Day March continues, our thoughts travel too — the treatment of our own Aboriginal People is foremost in our minds, and we say that they must be given full and equal citizenship rights without further delay. All people throughout the World, regardless of their colour, must be treated as human beings and given equal opportunities. The Right to Work for All, Equal Pay for Women, Free and Higher Education for the children, Free Medical Treatment and Free Hospitalisation, Homes for All — these are the things which should be ours.

With the closing of May Day we send our message: 'Women, you are half the world, and the voice of half the world must be raised loud and clear. Join your Auxiliaries and let your voice be heard that your children may live in a World of Peace, Happiness and Security.'

*Jack Martin, Hon. State Secretary of the Retired Mineworkers, then made his*

### MAY DAY APPEAL

*and after advising his members of the transport timetables went on to say:*

... We are calling on our members to march on May Day as it is the great day when the working class of all countries in the world unite to win their respective demands for their just rights and a better standard of living.

The Mine Pensioners have been demanding from the NSW State Government an increase in mine pension payments and demanding that the Government put our Pension Scheme on a sound basis.

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For three years we have been campaigning for our log of claims and have not made much progress. Only by the solid backing of our rank and file members can we hope to win; so that is why we are making this appeal on this great Labour Day.

The Mineworkers will be demonstrating on May 1st for the 7-hour day.

The Waterside Workers' Federation will be demonstrating in all cities against the Penalties in their Long Service Leave Award.

The Metal Trade Workers and all progressive workers will be marching on May Day in the campaign to win their demands.

We the Retired Mineworkers are the Pioneers of many of the struggles that took place to win many of the advantages, workers are enjoying today.

We know that May Day has always been the great International Labor Day and right through all our activities in the great Trade Union Movement we have always marched with pride on May Day knowing that our International brothers were doing the same thing all over the world.

Much progress has been made in the struggle of the workers in many countries since the pioneers in 1895 laid down that May Day is the day when the great labour movement would review their forces on that day every year to what progress has been made.

Southern District Mineworkers — march on May Day and help fight with the other workers to win the right, to live in peace, demand jobs for all unemployed, demand an increase in all social service payments, demand full employment for all our boys and girls as they leave school, both in town, city and country.

*The guest speaker at the rally was respected ex-POW Tom Uren MHR and he was supported by J.R. Hughes, a member of the Communist Party, and by a representative of the ACTU whose name had not been disclosed at the time of the printing of the booklet.*

*Also visiting Wollongong for the celebrations was the BWIU's fraternal delegate from the USSR.*

*The following year, 1963, saw the intensifying of the call for Peace and for a Socialist society and opened with a poem written by Mary Gilmore entitled 'The Union Man'.*

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### The Union Man

One voice to speak,  
One step to take,  
A thousand men as one-  
As like a wall  
Lest one should fall  
They stand till all is won.  
These are the men  
Who, foot by foot,  
Beat down the right of wrong,  
And now hold fast  
In case the past  
Should rise again, still strong.  
No evil dies,  
It only lies  
In silent, seeming sleep,  
Waiting the hour, Once more in power,  
Over the world to sweep.  
A thousand men,  
No two alike,  
And yet they stand as one!  
While so they stand  
No alien hand  
Can bring them down undone.

*Mary Gilmore*

*Next was an article from the then General Secretary of the Australian Railways Union, Mick O'Brien, which was entitled:*

### Peace — Friendship — Security

Sir Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia, who does not hesitate to commit Australia to Military Pacts and alliances — without the approval of Parliament — which could involve Australia in war, was eligible to join the AIF in World War I.

Did he do so? No.

The reason why ... Speaking in Parliament on 20th April, 1939, he said:



That when he was faced with the position of making up his mind as to whether or not he would go to the Great War between 1914–1918 he arrived at the decision that it was the business of no one but himself whether he went overseas and fought in the war or whether he stayed home.

He continued ...

He found himself in exactly the same position as any other person who had to answer the extremely important questions ...

Is it my duty to go to war?  
Or is it my duty not to go?

He added ...

The answer to those questions cannot be made on a public platform. Those questions relate to a man's intimate, personal and family affairs and in consequence I, facing those problems, problems of intense difficulty, found myself, for reasons which were and are compelling, unable to join the Infantry of the Australian Military Forces.

It is important to keep the statement of Sir Robert in mind, because he, and his Government, are trying to take from you the liberty of thought and action he claimed for himself between 1914–1918.

The vote of the people who rejected the Conscription proposals of the National Government — led by Mr W.M. Hughes, who had been expelled from the Labour Party — saved the then R.G. Menzies from the horrors of war.

The vast expenditure on armaments, the creation of foreign military bases in Australia — which he approves — means preparation for war.

### THIS IS CONTRARY TO THE SPIRIT OF MAY DAY

Day by day our liberties are being restricted by those who want to maintain their privileged position in society.

Attempts to restrict the liberty of the people must be resisted.

May Day would lose its significance if on that day we did not demand that our rights as citizens of Australia and as members of the working class movement must not be curtailed or interfered with by the representatives of monopoly capitalism whose authority and influence is receding before the march of Socialism, which now embraces over one-third of the world.

How better can I express the need to defend our liberties than to quote from an article by the famous Irish Socialist, James

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Connelly, which appeared in 'The Workers' Republic' on 5th June, 1915. Dealing with our disappearing liberties he wrote:-

On every side we see fresh inroads made upon our liberties  
... but no matter what the risk be, we who essay the voice,  
the hopes and defend the cause of Labour dare not be silent.

The needs of the multitude call for expression ... If fresh  
chains are forged for the Workers it shall not be sure that  
we by our silence allowed those who trusted us to remain  
ignorant of the fact that the chains were in preparation ...

War or no War, none of our hard won rights should be,  
or will be, surrendered without a struggle ...

Not only did James Connelly write and speak in support of  
the rights of the common people to freedom of thought,  
expression, and assembly, he died for it as well. His execution  
by a British Firing Squad in 1916 shows the length to which  
those in privileged positions will go to defend their rights and  
property against the Working Class and its Leaders.

History is replete with such sacrifices.

One such sacrifice which must not be forgotten is that of the  
... 'TOLPUDDLE MARTYRS'. You know their history ... let us  
sing their song:

'God is our guide; from field from wave,  
From plough, from anvil and from loom,  
We come, our country's to save,  
And speak the tyrant faction's doom;  
We raise the watchword "Liberty",  
We will, we will, we will be free.  
God is our guide: No sword we draw,  
We kindle not war's battle fires,  
By reason, union, justice, law,  
We claim the birthright of our sires;  
We raise the watchword "Liberty"  
We will, we will, we will be free.'

### **MAY DAY IS AN INSPIRATION**

The future belongs to us. The answer we give to those who  
want to embroil us in War against the common people of other  
lands with whom we have no quarrel; the sacrifices we are  
prepared to make to defend and extend our liberties; the extent  
to which we can say we left the world a better place than we  
found it; will decide how future generations will judge us.

Will our actions and activities be quoted with approval or denounced with scorn?

The pioneers of the Labour Movement have shown the way.

Have we the courage, and the will, to continue to advance the cause of socialism?

History will provide the answer which rest with ... YOU.

*Following that stirring article came another from the well-known peace fighter Ex-Senator Bill Morrow and he exhorted the readers to demonstrate for their demands in the following manner:*

May Day has a long history. In fact, it existed long before Capitalism was born, but it did not have the same significance as it has today. May Day grew from the economics of the people. In those times, there was no scientific agricultural knowledge as exists today. There were no machines to produce goods. The people had a hard struggle to survive.

May Day was the signal for celebration among the people, because it was at that time of the year that vegetation, nuts, berries, crops and other edibles were ripening and ready for harvesting.

People were happy at that time of the year since the food became more plentiful. There were great feasts and celebrations, such as dancing, the singing of folk songs paying tribute to the harvest. There were expressions of joy on this day. It was from such occasions that the May Pole dance as we now know originated.

May Day was the symbol for the betterment of economic conditions, for Peace, joy and happiness among the people.

When, on the discovery how to harness steam to work machines, a new era was introduced, hence the industrial revolution in England from which grew and developed the present system known as Capitalism.

The new method of production drove many workers off the land into the factories. The worker in the factory had nothing to sell but his labour power. This brought about bitter struggles for their survival. The bargaining power of the individual worker was almost nil, so the workers were obliged to remodel their organisations known as Guilds, etc., and adopted new forms of organisations which developed into Trade Unions as we know them today.

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The workers of the world adopted a banner in the form of a flag. The colour of the flag is said to be red, but it is not really red, it symbolises the colour of the workers' blood which had flown freely in their struggles for survival. Among the true Labor people the colour is still recognised. Hence the colour of the rosettes we wear today.

Capitalism negated feudalism and became the new system in many parts of the world. Whilst markets were available the new system assisted progress, but since markets for consumable goods in the capitalist countries are dwindling the system is becoming a fetter on industry, causing much anxiety to industrialists.

To maintain their profits the owners of industry have switched their machines to producing arms, ammunition and war materials, thus entering into a cold war.

Unemployment is on the increase throughout the capitalist world.

The living standards of the wage and salary workers and those on fixed incomes are falling. Houses of the people are not sufficient. Employment for many is hard to obtain.

The capitalist world is heading for another world crisis, since peace is hanging on by a slender thread, and should an economic crisis occur, and the subsequent loss of privilege and profits by the big industrialists, the situation could become dangerous, and in the frenzy of the industrialists a war could be triggered off either by a mistake, accident or design.

Workers, through their Trade Unions, their Labor Councils, must recognise the dangers facing humanity today.

The people can remove those dangers if they will only take the situation in their own hands and become active in their support of the cause of peace. **Remember, war is not inevitable. Peace can be maintained.**

May Day presents an occasion to call on the people to be on guard to prevent a catastrophe, by combining to work for peace and forcing those in authority to follow a peaceful road rather than support cold war and war itself. Remember, the power is in the possession of the people. May Day can be an instrument in helping to maintain peace.

*The next article in this 1963 booklet was an historically informative, unaccredited, item called*

## MAY DAY IN AUSTRALIA

One of the first May Day Celebrations in Australia took place in Queensland in 1891.

The 'Sydney Morning Herald' of May 2nd, 1891, carried a report from the Barcaldine correspondent which said in part:

The feature of today has been the great demonstration made by the Unionists in which 1340 men took part, of this number 618 were mounted. Not included in the count was the Oddfellows Band which headed the procession.

A waggon drawn by six horses exhibited a group of shearers and rouseabouts, the former operating on three sheep and the latter with brooms and a tarpot.

Behind the banner of the Shearers Union walked men with shears and wands, dressed with wool ... Then came the Union Band and behind it footmen and horsemen walking four abreast.

There was a large crowd in the streets ... when the procession reached the Union office, cheers were given for the Union.

At a meeting held after the march the Chairman of the Strike Committee said that, as the proposals for arbitration had been accepted by the joint committees of the bush unions but declined by the pastoralists, they would make no more overtures for a settlement but fight the matter out to the end.

On May 1st, 1893, the first march and meeting was held in Melbourne. A brass band played the Marseillaise, two Red Flags were unfurled and a meeting carried a resolution which said:

This meeting sends fraternal greetings to the workers of all lands and rejoices that the celebration of Labor Day by the workers of the world has become a bond of international brotherhood.

May Day continued yearly, on the first Sunday in May, until the First World War.

In 1924 a committee of over 100 delegates from Unions and Labor Party Branches in Victoria, was brought together as the May Day Committee and printed and distributed over 100,000 leaflets printed free of charge by workers in three printing shops.

In 1925 several dismissed ex-police strikers marched and the Police Department was notified their services would not be

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required for the day as the May Day Committee had their own ex-police contingent.

1937 saw the largest May Day demonstration in Melbourne up to that time.

Two hundred miners from Wonthaggi led the march, protesting at the fatal explosion at Shaft 20 which killed 13 miners. The miners who wore working clothes and mining caps marched behind the Wonthaggi Citizens' Band and were followed by 50 miners' wives.

### **MAY DAY IN SYDNEY**

In 1891 the Sydney Trades & Labor Council, in association with the Amateur Athletics Association and the Cyclists Union, organised a sports carnival on May Day and the day finished with a traditional May Pole dance.

1892 saw a large meeting in the Sydney Domain under the auspices of the Australian Socialist League and the General Labourers Union of Australasia, whose organising secretary, Mr L.D. Petrie, moved a resolution of support for the May Day call of the International Labor Congress in Paris in 1889.

The meeting also carried a resolution that throughout the colonies the 8-hour demonstration should be held on May 1st. Speakers at the meeting stressed the need for socialism and the meeting resolved:

That the workers for once and all should declare socialism is that which alone can secure them the full fruits of their labor.

*At the time that these articles were printed, the Trade Unions and left-wing organisations in general were under severe attack from reactionary forces. The next article was a warning from long-serving, life member and secretary of the May Day Committee, Martin Lacey, advising those reactionaries to keep their ...*

### **HANDS OFF MAY DAY**

May Day once again presents us with its task of demonstrating in unity for Peace and Progress, bringing the message of International Working Class Solidarity.

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This Day has played its important part in the Trade Union Movement of Australia, as in other parts of the world.

May Day on the South Coast here has a history, and all those people who have been associated with it, giving financial and moral support, can be very proud of their achievement.

The Southern Miners paved the way for our May Day, and it has all been done the hard way. From early as 1912, the Miners of the South Coast took May Day as a holiday, against the consent of the coal owners. After years of stubborn fighting, the Miners won this Day as a paid holiday, written into their Award.

All through the years there have been hostile forces opposing the celebration of May Day.

In the early '20s, Local Government also made it difficult for us to assemble and hold our Procession, as they would not grant us a permit. They called the police to stop our Procession and batons were drawn on the leaders of the March (this took place where the traffic lights now stand, at the Crown and Keira Streets intersection). Some leaders were arrested and later sentenced to Long Bay for terms of imprisonment. Two of these courageous men are now deceased — Paddy Molloy and Paul Martin. They played their part, like many others, that May Day will live.

So we see today a broader May Day, uniting still wider sections of the trade union movement and the community, giving a lead to a life of Peace, Justice, the Right to Work and a Better Standard of Living.

Still we have forces inside and outside the Labour Movement who do not want a progressive May Day. They wish to turn it back and are not giving any assistance in determining the progressive policy that we try to force on our governments.

In all countries of the world, the workers and their trade unions celebrate Workers' Day. There is no good reason why the leadership of ANY union should not take part in this glorious Day with its splendid traditions.

The South Coast Labour Council May Day Committee will carry forward the objectives of the founders of this Day, which is marching for Progress, for Socialism and Peace, for the Right to Work and Live.

*And finally the last word goes to that stalwart of workers' rights, a battler for peace, equality for women and a myriad of other progressive programs, Sally Bowen. Sally's article is entitled:*

### WOMEN AND MAY DAY

PEACE, PEACE — the word repeated on the May Day banners all over the world expresses the dearest wish of all women.

Tramp, Tramp, pass marching workers. The men and women of all lands defending Peace and demanding a better life for humanity.

On May Day we can celebrate the advancement of women in the socialised countries, where they enjoy complete equality of status, and opportunity, with men, and we can renew our claims for such recognition from our own Government.

Much useful and creative energy is wasted today in the large percentage of unemployed in our district. Many girls and boys leave school and have no hope of securing work, so our banners call: 'Full Employment for All'.

We must congratulate the women of the Unanderra Woollen Mills, who, by their courage and unity in struggle, not only won their own demands, but showed the way forward for all workers.

May Day, the workers' day, belongs to us all. Let us defend our rights, build our numbers, and in unity of purpose. march forward to a Peaceful World and a Socialist Australia.

*These then are the messages espoused 30-odd years ago telling us of the trials and tribulations that were prevalent then.*

*If we analyse the offerings we find that we are not much further advanced, if at all, than our early comrades. Unemployment, attacks on the unions, a general lowering of standards for the disadvantaged. No, capitalism still grinds on its nasty incidious way, still finding more and more ways to make bigger and bigger profits out of the toil of the workers.*

WHEN WILL WE EVER LEARN

**Neville Arrowsmith**