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USA

May Day in America, is it now here to stay?

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May Day is not a holiday in the United States. In most states and cities, it is not celebrated. In some places, in schools or public parks, people put up a May pole and dance around it to celebrate the arrival of spring. We did that in my elementary school in Chicago when I was a child. The official Labor Day in the United States, which is a national holiday, is celebrated on the first Monday in September and marks the end of summer and students' return to school. But maybe this year things finally changed.

On this May 1, International Labor Day, hundreds of thousands of Americans joined scores of rallies and marches in all 50 states to protest President Donald Trump's devastating first 100 days in office. They protested the shutdown of government departments, the layoffs of hundreds of thousands of workers, the ending of food programs for children, the disabled, and the elderly, cuts in health care, the illegal deportation of immigrants, and tariffs and the trade wars, and the many other terrible things Trump has done.

This is the latest in a series of national protests against Trump and this one had a different character. When I joined the protest in New York City there were many unions present: the Transportation Workers Union that runs the city's subways, the Retail, Wholesale, Department Store Union, the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, the Communication Workers, the Professional Staff Council of the City University, and others. The presence of the unions meant that there were more Blacks and Latinos in this protest than in earlier ones. And so, the protest had a different feel, a working-class character.

Unions marching on May Day is something rare in the United States and in most places something relatively new. In 1882, before the Haymarket events in Chicago, New York unions who were fighting for the eight-hour day, organized a labor day march in September. Then the national union federation called for strikes in May to win the eight-hour day.

On May 1, 1886 German anarchists in Chicago organized prolonged workers strikes and protests in support of the eight-hour day, but on May 3 the police attacked the demonstration. The next day there was a protest rally at Haymarket Square, but police attacked it too. Then a bomb was thrown either at the police or at the workers, and eight radicals were arrested, tried and convicted of the bombing, and four eventually hanged. To honor the martyrs of Chicago, the International Socialist Conference of 1889 adopted May Day as the International Workers Holiday.

American workers then had two options, the September Labor Day, which became a national holiday in 1894, or May 1. Where the Socialist or Communist Parties had a presence, there were May Day celebrations, but in most places the September holiday prevailed. When after World War II, the Cold War broke out accompanied by an anti-Communist crusade and Senator Joseph McCarthy's persecutions of Communists, May 1 celebrations waned. President Dwight D. Eisenhower proclaimed May 1 as Law Day. At the same time, the Soviet Union turned the holiday into a demonstration of its military might with parades of tanks and missiles in Red Square in Moscow.

In the 1960s and 70s, it was Latino immigrants, Puerto Ricans in New York City and Mexicans in San Francisco and Los Angeles who began to reintroduce May Day workers rallies and marches in their communities. In 2006 in a fight for immigration reform, hundreds of thousands of Latinos demonstrated in Los Angeles and Chicago on May Day, giving the event the character of a general strike. But still the holiday didn't catch on among the rest of the population.

This year's protests against Trump, against his authoritarianism, and his reactionary agenda may have put this holiday back on the national calendar as American workers join the rest of the world's proletariat in the streets on

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May 1. We'll see next May 1.

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