

MAY DAY IN SA

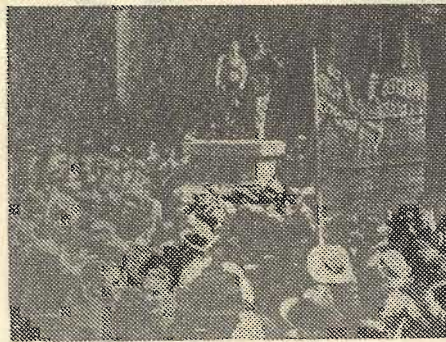
1904 - MAY DAY IS AN INDEPENDENT WORKERS' DAY

The first May Day celebration in South Africa was in 1904, long before the radical political parties were formed. It was organised in Johannesburg by the Rand and Pretoria Trades Councils, The Transvaal Miners' Association and 14 societies. 2 000 workers marched down Commissioner Street to Market Square to listen to speakers calling for South African workers to show their solidarity with workers in other countries.

May Day was again celebrated —
1906 Durban
1917 Johannesburg
1919 Johannesburg
1921 Durban and Johannesburg
1926 Sections of workers were able to get May Day included as a workers' paid holiday in their Industrial Council Agreements.

1931 - MAY DAY IS A DAY FOR THE SOLIDARITY OF ALL WORKERS — IRRESPECTIVE OF RACE

Massive unemployment in 1931 united black and white workers. On May Day 1931 2 000 workers marched to the city hall in Johannesburg. As the speeches ended a mixed crowd of around 1 000 workers marched to the Carlton Hotel shouting — "We want work, we want bread".



MAY DAY 1938



From this point on, with ups and downs, black and white workers held united demonstrations and social events until the Nationalist Government acted against them in the 1950's.

MAY DAY 1944 MEI DAG



1940's - MAY DAY IS A WORKERS' HOLIDAY

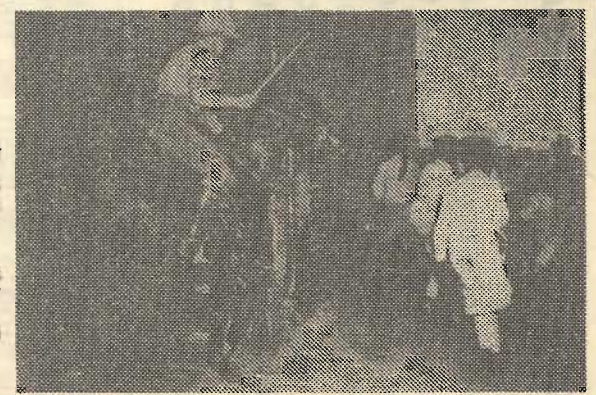
The Garment Workers' Union won May Day as a paid holiday in 1945. On May Day the Union used to hold a picnic for its members at Victoria Lake.

Even today the Garment Workers have a paid holiday — but today it is called an "unspecified holiday" because in the 1950's the government announced it was "not government policy to approve of wage determinations and Industrial Council agreements which provide for May Day as a public holiday."

1950 - MAY DAY HAS MEANT STRUGGLE AND SACRIFICE FOR WORKERS

In 1950 May Day was supported by many opposition groups. But the government banned all meetings on that day. So a stay-away was called which many workers responded to. In the evening police broke up a gathering in Benoni with fixed bayonets. 18 people were killed and 30 were seriously injured.

In Cape Town 6 000 people listened to speeches on the parade and then marched up Adderly Street, shouting "Down with Apartheid. We want freedom." In Durban, 10 000 people demonstrated against the Suppression of Communism Bill.



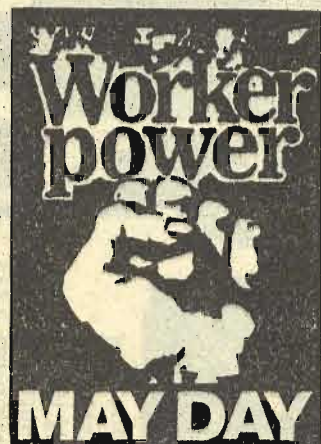
1980's — With the rebirth of trade unions May Day celebrations have again been held - 1982, 1983 and 1984 - throughout the country. Now workers are again demanding May Day as a paid holiday.

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AIMS AND OBJECTS OF WORKING CLASS ORGANISATIONS

- To secure social and economic justice for all workers.
- To strive for the building of a united working class movement regardless of race, colour or creed.
- To encourage all workers to join trade unions and to develop a spirit of solidarity among all workers.
- To secure just standards of living, social security and fair conditions of work for the working class as a whole.
- To facilitate education and training of all workers so as to further the interests of the working class.
- To change, advance or oppose any law, action or policy of the government or any other grouping in the interests of the working class.

There will be a May Day meeting in your area. Contact your union to find out when and where it is.



Co-ordinating Committee of Trade Unions, Lektan House, Wanderers Street, Johannesburg.

1st MAY — WORKERS' DAY

May 1st is a day when workers express their solidarity with brothers and sisters around the world. It is an important day in the workers' struggle where workers meet to build unity amongst all workers.

May Day started in Australia over 130 years ago. Australian workers held a work stoppage and meetings to try and win an 8 hour working day. At that time workers everywhere were working 12, 14, 16 and sometimes even 18 hours a day.

The first May Day celebration in South Africa was in 1904 when 2 000 workers marched down Commissioner Street in Johannesburg to Market Square. There they listened to speakers talking about the unity and the goals of the working class throughout the world.

May Day symbolizes worker demands for:

- full employment
- a shorter working week
- a society in which workers have a say over their own lives.

Today we are 3 million workers unemployed in South Africa.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Today millions of workers are without jobs. This is because of:

- Pass laws that legally refuse people to leave hunger in the bantustans to seek employment in the towns and cities;
- Bosses retrench and force the remaining workers to work long hours or so-called overtime;
- Money that could be used to create more jobs is being used by the APARTHEID government to buy guns and hippos;
- Money that could have been used to create more jobs is being used to bribe bantustan 'LEADERS' and councillors.

May Day is a special workers' day, and workers are now demanding it as a paid public holiday.

It is usual in South Africa to celebrate a number of days as public holidays. These days are chosen by the government. They are also a number of other days chosen by organisations opposed to the present government. They are usually marked by the holding of meetings and other activities. Examples are Sharpeville Day, June 16th, Womens' Day, October 19th and Heros Day. But of all these, there is only one that is especially for workers and that is May 1st. This year as a sign of worker unity, all unions have decided to join together and hold meetings to celebrate May Day.

S.A. HISTORY ARCHIVE
1992-06-17
Lab. 79

single
AL2446/1261