



## Editorial

# MAYDAY IN HISTORY

In 1886 there was no working class in this country called South Africa, but in 1886, gold was discovered. In the same year, on 1 May, 350,000 workers in the United States went on strike for an 8-hour working day.

Now, 101 years later, the gold mines are the heartbeat of South African capitalism and workers in South Africa are demanding an 8-hour working day, **and** they are demanding a paid holiday on the **first** of May every year. This day would be called May Day.

*WHAT IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WORKERS' DEMANDS AND ACTIONS ON MAY DAY IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1886 AND WORKERS' DEMANDS ON MAYDAY IN SOUTH AFRICA IN 1987?*

The connection is their common oppression in a system which has spread around the globe in the last 100 years. This system began in Europe, but its heartbeat is now in the United States. In every country in the world, the local capitalists work hand-in-glove with U.S. companies. Coca-cola, Shell, Barclays, Ford are house-hold names in South Africa and all around the world.

However, worker traditions of resistance and organisation have also spread to all the countries of the world in the last 100 years. Of these traditions, May Day is one of the most important. From its first

celebration in Australia 157 years ago, May Day — 1 May — has been celebrated everywhere there is an organised working class.

In 1889, worker organisations from many countries came together and committed themselves to fight for this day and all it represents.



On May 1, 1886, workers in the United States staged a general strike for the eight-hour day. But when two days later police and agents of the Pinkerton Private Security Agency attacked demonstrators outside a Chicago factory, a mass demonstration was called in the town's Haymarket Square.

Unknown people (believed to be police provocateurs) threw a bomb and the police opened fire on the crowd. Eight radicals and labour leaders were framed on conspiracy charges, four were executed and one died mysteriously in his cell.

## THE RED FLAG

*The people's flag is deepest red;  
It often covered our martyred dead,  
And before their limbs grew stiff and cold  
Their heart's blood dyed its every fold.*

### CHORUS:

*Then raise the scarlet standard high!  
Within its shade we'll live or die.  
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,  
We'll keep the red flag flying here.*

*With heads uncovered, swear we all  
To bear it onward till we fall;  
Come dungeons dark, or gallows grim,  
This song shall be our parting hymn.*

### CHORUS:

*Then raise the scarlet standard high!  
Within its shade we'll live or die;  
Though cowards flinch and traitors sneer,  
We'll keep the red flag flying here.*