OMNI NEWSLETTER #2 FOR MAY 1, MAY DAY/INTERNATIONAL WORKERS DAY, May 1, 2012, Compiled by Dick Bennett for a CULTURE OF PEACE, WE, THE PEOPLE.

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OMNI’S NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL DAYS PROJECT

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International Workers' Day
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Swedish Social Democratic Party at May Day demonstration in Stockholm, Sweden in 2006. The party has dominated Swedish politics for nearly a century. The Trade union palace in Stockholm is seen at the end of the picture.

International Workers' Day (also known as May Day) is a celebration of the international labour movement and left-wing movements. It commonly sees organized street demonstrations and marches by working people and their labour unions throughout most of the world. May 1 is a national holiday in more than 80 countries. It is also celebrated unofficially in many other countries.

[edit] History

International Workers' Day is the commemoration of the 1886 Haymarket Massacre in Chicago, when, after an unknown person threw a dynamite bomb at police as they dispersed a public meeting, Chicago police fired on workers during a general strike for the eight hour workday, killing several demonstrators and resulting in the deaths of several police officers, largely from friendly fire. In 1889, the first congress of the Second International, meeting in Paris for the centennial of the French Revolution and the Exposition Universelle, following a proposal by Raymond Lavigne, called for international demonstrations on the 1890 anniversary of the Chicago protests. May Day was formally recognized as an annual event at the International's second congress in 1891.

Subsequently, the May Day Riots of 1894 occurred. In 1904, the International Socialist Conference meeting in Amsterdam called on "all Social Democratic Party organizations and trade unions of all countries to demonstrate energetically on May First for the legal establishment of the 8-hour day, for the class demands of the proletariat, and for universal peace." The congress made it "mandatory upon the proletarian organizations of all countries to stop work on May 1, wherever it is possible without injury to the workers." In many countries, the working classes sought to make May Day an official holiday, and their efforts largely succeeded. May Day has long been a focal point for demonstrations by various socialist, communist and anarchist groups. In some circles, bonfires are lit in commemoration of the Haymarket martyrs, usually at dawn. May Day has been an important official holiday in Communist countries such as the People's Republic of China, Cuba and the former Soviet Union. May Day celebrations typically feature elaborate popular and military parades in these countries.

In the United States and Canada, however, the official holiday for workers is Labor Day in September. This day was promoted by the Central Labor Union and the Knights of Labor, who organized the first parade in New York City. After the Haymarket Square riot in May, 1886, US President Grover Cleveland feared that commemorating Labor Day on May 1 could become an opportunity to commemorate the riots. Thus he moved in 1887 to support the Labor Day that the Knights supported.

In 1955, the Catholic Church dedicated May 1 to "Saint Joseph The Worker". The Catholic Church considers Saint Joseph the patron saint of (among others) workers, craftsmen, and "people fighting
Right-wing governments have traditionally sought to repress the message behind International Workers' Day, with fascist governments in Portugal, Italy, Germany and Spain abolishing the workers' holiday, the official May 1st holiday in the US being Loyalty Day, and the Conservative party in the UK currently attempting to abolish the UK's annual May Day Bank Holiday.

Watch Coverage of May Day Events on FSTV!

Watch coverage Tuesday of May Day events around the country on FSTV. (Photo: Zach D. Roberts/GregPalast.com)

Tuesday, May 1, is International and Immigrant Workers' Day.

This May Day has a special significance, as it brings with it protests around the country, fueled by the rise in anti-immigrant legislation and enforcement, a lopsided economic recovery, and a re-emergent Occupy movement poised to challenge corporate power.

FSTV is among 25 independent media outlets belonging to The Media Consortium that are collaborating to provide coordinated, national coverage of May Day events around the country.

Tune into FSTV Tuesday for coverage at these times EST:

1-3pm Live Coverage
6-7pm LIVE Coverage
8-9pm LIVE Coverage

The Media for the 99 Percent outlets will leverage their existing platforms and reporters to provide coordinated national multimedia coverage, featuring:

An interactive Map: Find out where actions are happening across the country and follow the independent media's by-the-minute coverage with links to video, audio, photos, and blog reports.

Television and Live Stream Broadcast: FSTV will broadcast live (and live streamed) news coverage throughout the day, featuring reports from around the U.S., as well as in-studio commentary.

Curated Social Media Coverage: Using the Storify platform, Media for the 99 Percent will offer a curated narrative of breaking news via blog updates, along with photos and social media posts from reporters on the ground.

All three content tools are available for embedding by other news outlets and the public. These tools can be found here:

"This independent media collaboration will provide a perspective of May Day activities that will not be found in the corporate media," says FSTV Executive Director Don Rojas. Watch coverage at DISH Network channel 9415, DIRECTV channel 348, on the Roku box and online at freespeech.org.

Noam Chomsky, “May Day
Reader Supported News, April 29, 2012
Chomsky writes: "If you're a serious revolutionary, then you are not looking for an autocratic revolution, but a popular one which will move towards freedom and democracy."
READ MORE http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/441-occupy/11190-may-day

Organizing caregivers along with care receivers might change the world. Discusses the Caring Across Generations Campaign.

Northwest Arkansas Workers’ Justice Center

Each day, thousands of workers in the Northwest Arkansas clean, bone and trim hundreds of turkeys and chickens. They do risky, repetitive jobs to put popular specialty cuts on our nation's tables. Their work returns millions in profits to the companies that employ them and yet you'd think that would mean something, but it doesn't. These workers are no more than disposable assets working over 12 hours a day and with little or no bathroom breaks. Weak regulations and slack enforcement have made it easy for a dangerous industry to exploit workers, underreport injuries and manipulate a regulatory system that essentially lets companies police themselves.

The bottom line is that the government does as little as possible to protect poultry workers from mangled hands and musculoskeletal disorders. Workers who have no way to speak out pay the price in pain and in injuries that leave them disfigured and unable to do simple tasks.

As a community based organization that seeks to improve working conditions of employment and protect low-income workers from exploitation, the Northwest Arkansas Workers’ Justice Center offers support to poultry workers who face retaliation when reporting unsafe working conditions or who are victims of workplace violence. Part of our work lies in educating our community of their labor rights, but also educating on Labor history. May 1st is regarded as the International Workers’ Day throughout the world where communities come together to remember that we must continue the fight for safe working conditions. The work was ignited by The American Federation of Labor who passed a resolution which asserted that "eight hours shall constitute a legal day's work from and after May 1, 1886, and that we recommend to labor organizations throughout this district that they so direct their laws as to conform to this resolution".

As a nonprofit human and workers’ rights organization, we see the dire need to continue building an education campaign to protect workers across the state. One of the many current challenges we face is the USDA new policy push to increase the line speed in poultry processing plants thus raising the bar in worker injuries. Join us as we celebrate May 1st and make a call for respect, dignity and safe working conditions of workers in food chain.
We live in a society where individuals are the focus of everything. We are told that as individuals we can do anything, be anything. We are encouraged to think of ourselves and our lives on an individual basis—what we wear, what music we like, what we consume. The dominant economic philosophy of our day tells us that selfishness and accumulation is the path to human freedom, prosperity, and happiness. We are also taught to think of our political agency as a series of individual, personal, private, choices between pre-selected options on a ready-made list. As Americans, we are proud because we are free, we can say what we want, read what we want, believe what we want, and choose our own destinies. As members of a nation, we share a powerful sense of belonging together with millions of people we have never met, but we still see ourselves primarily as a nation of individuals, freely pursuing our personal aims in a free market.

But there is something missing, something we are never told. It is a truth that is constantly, deliberately hidden. We are not individuals, first and foremost; we are interdependent, interconnected, part of a collective. It was always this way. We cannot survive on our own and we wouldn’t want to. And our political power is not limited to individual action. We are hardly aware that collective action is the most powerful force of social change on the planet. We are so much stronger when we stand together, and so much weaker, and so more miserable, on our own, no matter how much money we have. The power of collective action is one of the biggest secrets in the world. We all know about the first amendment, but we pay very little attention to the part about assembly, or the right to collectively organize, even though collective action, not individual action, is how humans make history. It toppled colonialism in Africa, South Asia, and in Latin America. It was also the basis of the Civil Rights movement in the US, and it is the engine that drives Occupy Wall Street. Many of these struggles were examples of the power of non-violent collective action. The Arab Spring is a recent, stunning example of ordinary people taking to the street to reclaim democracy and reinvigorate the spirit of human freedom and dignity in the face of oppression and what seemed like overwhelming odds.

In the modern era, labor unions have been perhaps the single most important form of collective action. Unions are without a doubt, the most powerful potential form of resistance to corporations who want to pay low wages, overwork their employees, and offer measly benefits to workers. This is as true in the sweltering banana plantations in Colombia and it is in the mind numbingly ordinary checkout lines at Wal-Mart where those bananas are sold at super low prices that make most of us forget about the suffering involved in
their production and distribution.

Unions not only represent the collective interests of workers, they constitute one of the only forms of power outside the company’s control and the only check on management prerogatives. Typical union demands include a larger share of the company’s profits; lighter and more realistic workloads; more predictable schedules; full-time employment, and overtime pay. Unions can exercise their power through collective bargaining, work slowdowns, boycotts, and strikes. Unions are based in the idea that working people deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. They believe in minimum wages that allow working people to live with a basic standard of self-worth, comfort, and security. Sadly, too many corporations see workers as expendable, and they see workers’ rights as an obstacle to their profits and their stock price.

Unions have a bad reputation, mostly because are sorely misunderstood, shrouded behind lies promulgated by powerful, private interests who do not want us to even know about, much less tap into, our collective power. They are afraid because they benefit from a system that benefits the few at the expense of the many, the multitude. They talk about workers’ rights or dignity, but they do so only in a very selective and deceptive manner. They tell us that unions are anti-democratic, authoritarian, self-interested thugs who are greedy and only exist to leech off the efforts of working people. They say they destroy jobs, create conflict, and rob workers of their freedom, that they are anti-American. When they talk about how unions reduce individual choices, they ignore the positive benefits unions bring to workers as whole, the benefits they bring to the group, even benefitting people who do not participate in unions. Most major corporations deride unions as unnecessary intrusions and threats to the bottom line, and Wal-Mart is perhaps the most anti-union corporation in the world today. Sadly, most Americans believe them. As an important side note, the way that governments talk about and react to autonomous social movements of poor and excluded people mirrors the way that corporations talk about unions. In many parts of the world, these movements are repressed through violent means.

Unfortunately, corporations have won the PR war and have used their victory to steadily undermine the legal right to collectively organize into unions. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935, which granted workers the right to collective bargaining, was intended to allow employees to freely choose whether or not form a union. The law also made it illegal to retaliate against or threaten workers with the loss of their job if they wanted to join; both these practices were labeled as unfair economic coercion. This New Deal law explicitly forbade bosses from taking a public stance regarding their employees’ decision to unionize. This led to an upswing in union organization. The Taft-Hartley act of 1947, however, undermined many of the Wagner Act’s provisions through several restrictive measures: prohibiting other unions to launch “sympathy” strikes or boycott; enabling right-to-work laws that allowed states to ban unions
collecting dues from all employees at a unionized shop; and permitting employers to mount counter-union propaganda scare campaigns in the workplace.

Less than seven percent of the national private workforce is unionized. This is largely a result of the outsourcing of manufacturing and the automation of the workplace. Corporate titans and shareholders who were tired of sharing their profits with working people were able to successfully leverage the IMF and the World Bank to coerce other countries to change their laws in ways that allowed them to move their production overseas to places with no unions, no worker protections, and low wages. In the US, corporations moved to “right to work states” like Arkansas to avoid unions. A variation on outsourcing was bringing in immigrant populations who expect lower wages, fear deportation, are not organized into unions—basically, workers who do not have any rights. Now workers all over the world, instead of uniting together for dignity and respect, are expected to compete with each other, including the poorest, most vulnerable workers in the world, to have the lowest wages and lowest expectations. Corporate profits are at an all-time high. The decline in unions is a large part of the reason our country has become so unequal—other aspects include debt regimes and a history of inequality that was never resolved.

But it is not just outsourcing and technology that has decreased unionization. According to a Human Rights Watch report about Wal-Mart’s anti-union practices, a large part of the decline of unionization is due to “unbalanced US labor laws that tilt the playing field decidedly in favor of anti-union agitation” (5). Collective action is so powerful, that people whose power depends on repressing the majority of the world are deathly afraid of it. They demonize it, treat it as a threat to the nation, and try to make laws against it. They have been very successful in turning us against the form of power that we possess.

Malcolm X once issued a warning: “If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.” This is absolutely true with regards to unions. Unions are so demonized today, that it is almost impossible to hear the word without hearing the word “thug” right after. Sadly, our corporate dominated media—not just Fox News and talk radio—often repeats corporate anti-union propaganda as if it were a neutral reporting of the facts. As I mentioned, unions are described as anti-democratic, because collective action is seen as a threat to individuals in the group. This ignores that collective action increases the individual liberty of all the members of the group, even if certain individuals involved might not agree with every aspect of what the unions do. Anti-union rhetoric applies a standard to union that it never applies to corporations, which are private tyrannies, bureaucratic top-down and anti-democratic. Their desires to turn profits for stockholders and upper management are at direct odds with their respect for workers’
Wal-Mart is one of the most anti-worker companies in the world, even as they sing the praises of their associates and talk up their humble attitude. WM pays the lowest wages in retail and offers the worst benefits in the industry. They squeeze every penny out of their hourly employees and almost never give overtime hours, even if the workload demands it. Instead of treating their employees better, WM has perfected the art and science of union busting. They have a lot of techniques to stop unions. Managers are told to watch for “Early Warning Signs” of union activity: “increased curiosity in benefits and policies”; “associates receiving unusual attention from other associates”; “slowdown in work productivity”; mistakes; reports of employee conflict; and an increase in complaints and confrontations with management. More advanced signs include: “strangers’ spending an unusual amount of time in the associates’ parking areas at the beginning or end of shifts;” “associates spending an abnormal amount of time in the parking lot before and after work;” “frequent meetings at associates’ homes;” “associates coming back to the facility to talk to associates on other shifts;” “associates leaving work areas on a frequent basis to talk to other associates.” The final stages include open signs of union activity such as literature, membership cards, and frank discussions about unions.

The “Early Warning Signs” reveal a lot about the retailer’s vision of an ideal employee. The ideal employee works hard. They avoid other associates. They do not complain, never call in sick, and always work quickly and without mistakes. They would neither argue nor overly-fraternize with other employees or managers, and they do not spend too much time in the bathroom. They would be unlikely to complain, and they would never challenge the authority of a manager. They are also not looking for a sense of belonging with their peers, a “solidarity” based in their collective identities as workers. Rather, they are individuals who maintain a loyalty to the company first. Wal-Mart is interested in what “docile bodies”: industrious, loyal, obedient, and complacent workers. They also prefer to deal with “individuals” rather than “collectives” or “associations” of employees, because individuals are easier to control. The only collective, non-individual feeling tolerated is the sense of belonging together, of allegiance to the store; anything else is a potential threat.

Another technique is to force employees to undergo a campaign and listen to a lot of anti-union propaganda. Although it is illegal to threaten workers with a loss of a job, sometimes this happens, and even when it’s not stated the message is read through the lines by many workers. In the few instances where unions have formed, Wal-Mart has engaged in extraordinary, scorched-earth tactics in order to clamp down on its potential power. In Jonquière, Canada, where the laws are much more favorable to union organizing, Wal-Mart simply
shut down a popular store rather than allow a union that had been voted in to exist. Although this remains a singular instance, it served as a threatening reminder to employees everywhere that Wal-Mart will not tolerate a union.

A 2007 report by the watchdog group Human Rights Watch provides a comprehensive overview of labor law violations and, specifically, union-related infractions at Wal-Mart. They conclude that though Wal-Mart “largely compl[ies]” with the laws in the United States, they nevertheless “create a work environment so hostile to union formation that they coercively interfere with workers’ internationally recognized right to decide freely for themselves whether to organize” (5). Wal-Mart’s anti-union tactics outmaneuver legal protections for labor.

One form of individual resistance to WM’s labor practices is to quit. But WM actually prefers high turnover rates, because they can pay new employees even less.

Even worse than their in-store practices is their relentless squeeze of their suppliers for low prices that almost guarantees abysmal working conditions in foreign manufacturing. Sweatshops, child labor, injuries, paltry wages, etc. Conventional wisdom assures us that in poor countries, these jobs are better than no jobs at all. This might be true, but what never occurs to many of us, is that we could change these conditions if corporations agreed to universal standards for workers’ rights. The idea that we can’t improve is just not true.

The goal here is not to single out Wal-Mart. They are one symptom of a regulatory framework that rewards corporate greed and tramples worker dignity. However, Wal-Mart has played a leading role, alongside other corporations, in shaping this legal environment.

Degrading working conditions, environmental destruction, violence, greed, warfare—we face immense challenges that threaten the very existence of life on this planet. As worried and frustrated as we are, many of us are unaware our true power. We have believed the lies. We have come to accept a life without dignity or hope as normal and inevitable. Even as the anti-union, anti-regulatory, anti-collective action message seems to have partially reshaped our commonsense understandings of what is possible, there are signs of newfound interest in unions and collective action in general. Wisconsin is one example, along with the Arab Spring, social movements in Latin America, South Asia, and Africa, and OWS. These movements, which are all affirmations of human dignity, are proof of the possibility of alternatives. We have the power to create a more just, democratic, and sustainable world. But we must first be willing to refuse the commodified, self-centered identities that have been marketed to us, to make the secret public, break out of our
individual cages, and pursue freedom collectivity. Only then will we be able to solve our collective predicament. Only then we will know true happiness.

Why This May Day Matters
Sarah van Gelder, Op-Ed., NationofChange April 29, 2012 “And most recently, the U.S. immigrants right movement has used May 1st for massive street demonstrations and strikes aimed at reforming laws and policies that result in imprisonment, deportation, and discrimination against undocumented people. This May Day, the Occupy movement is getting involved, calling it “The day without the 99 percent.” What will May Day look like with so many traditions riding on it?” READ | DISCUSS | SHARE  
http://www.nationofchange.org/why-may-day-matters-1335701342