

CELEBRATIONS

one stop english

International Workers' Day

Teacher's notes

Age: Adults

Level: Upper-intermediate to advanced (B2–C1)

Time: 60–90 minutes

Activity: In this lesson, students will:

1. read, discuss and discover facts about International Workers' Day;
2. complete a quiz about workers' rights and talk about workers' rights in their own countries;
3. undertake research and deliver a short presentation.

Language focus: vocabulary related to working, unemployment, labour organisations and the rights of workers and employees

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student

Procedure

1. **Warmer questions**
Briefly discuss the situation and follow-on questions on the worksheet to introduce the topic of workers' rights, trade unions and work councils.
2. **Key words**
Students find the key words in the text and write them next to the definitions. Then they read the text carefully and notice how the words are used in context.
Note: The definitions are in the order that the words appear in the text. In order to make this task easier, or if you wish students to complete this task before reading the text, write the answers on the board randomly and get the students to match them with the definitions.

Key:

1. banners
2. achievements
3. rights
4. strike
5. opened fire
6. sentenced
7. conspiracy
8. spurred
9. loyalty
10. solidarity
11. elaborate
12. parade

3. **Find the information**
In pairs, students verbally answer the questions with information from the text.

Key:

1. 1978
2. The Second International, in 1889.
3. Strike action across the USA saw between 300,000 and half a million strikers go on strike. Strikers and strike-breakers fought and police opened fire killing at least two protesters. Others were arrested and sentenced to death or many years in prison.
4. Trade unions and labour movements.
5. March through the streets holding banners in support of workers, labourers, and working classes in general. It is also often a day of protests.
6. In communist countries.
7. In 1958 US president Eisenhower officially declared May 1st was Loyalty Day in the US. During the Cold War the US wanted to encourage its citizens to show their loyalty to their own country on May 1st, instead of showing solidarity with workers in communist countries.

4. **Workers' rights quiz**
In pairs or teams, students discuss what they think the right answers are to each of the ten questions about workers' rights. They may not use their phones or look up the answers!

Key: 1b, 2c, 3a, 4b, 5a, 6a, 7b, 8a, 9a, 10c

5. **Discussion**
Students discuss what the answers to the ten questions from the quiz would be if they were to answer them with information about their country. They first work in pairs or groups of three to discuss what they think the answers are. Then, hold a whole class feedback session / discussion. Did they all come up with the same answers? If there are any discrepancies, try to ascertain the correct answer.
6. **Internet research and presentation**
Students find out more about one of the events or organisations from the article and present their findings in a five to ten minute presentation. Encourage students at higher levels to make notes rather than read from a script when presenting. This encourages fluency.

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Worksheet

Exercise 1: Warmer questions

Your company has made the following announcement:

Until further notice, every employee is required to work 15 hours of unpaid overtime each month.

- What can you do?
- Who can you contact for help and support?
- Are you a member of an organisation that represents employees?



Exercise 2: Key words

Read the text about International Worker's Day. Find the words in the article that match the definitions below.

1. Wide pieces of cloth with messages on them, often stretched between two poles. _____
2. Particular things that you have succeeded in doing. _____
3. Things that you are morally or legally allowed to do or have. _____
4. A period of time during which people refuse to work, as a protest about pay or conditions of work.

5. Started shooting a gun. (2 words) _____
6. When a judge did this, they officially stated what someone's punishment was. _____
7. A secret plan by a group of people to do something bad or illegal. _____
8. Caused or encouraged something to happen. _____
9. Support that you always give to someone or something because of your feelings of duty and love towards them. _____
10. The support that people in a group give each other because they have the same opinions or aims.

11. Used about something that has a lot of extra details or features that make it special. _____
12. A public celebration in which a large group of people move through an area, often with decorated vehicles and bands playing music. _____

Exercise 3: Find the information

Answer the questions with information from the text.

1. When did May Day become a public holiday in the UK?
2. Who declared May 1st to be International Workers' Day and when?
3. What happened on May 1st 1866?
4. The Haymarket Affair encouraged the growth of which organisations?
5. What do many working people do on International Workers' Day?
6. Where in the world are you likely to see military parades on May 1st?
7. How did 'Loyalty Day' come into existence in the USA and why?

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Worksheet

International Workers' Day



International Workers' Day – also known as Labour Day – is celebrated on May 1st in a large number of countries around the world. In many towns and cities, people march through the streets with banners and speeches are made to celebrate the achievements of workers, labourers and the working classes. It is also a day of protests, as many political and workforce campaigners use this day to voice their concerns, complaints and demands.

International Workers' Day has its roots in the US, and in Chicago in particular. The day commemorates the so-called Haymarket Affair of 1886 (when a peaceful meeting turned violent), and the introduction of the eight-hour working day. Before this, workers often had to work up to 16 hours a day in unsafe conditions, and their rights were practically non-existent.

On May 1st 1866, between 200,000 and half a million US workers went on strike all over the country. In Chicago alone, around 40,000 strikers protested about their poor working conditions. Here, a fight broke out between strikers and strike-breakers at the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company and police opened fire on the protesters, causing at least two deaths. Seven protesters were sentenced to death for conspiracy, and an eighth was sent to prison for 15 years. Even though the eight-hour working day did not become law in the USA until 1916, this event spurred the growth of the trade union and labour movements.

The Second International, the then world-wide organisation for workers and socialists, declared in 1889 that from then on May 1st would be an international holiday for labour, in commemoration of the Haymarket Affair. It is now widely known as International Workers' Day.

In 1978, May 1st (or the Monday following May 1st) was turned into a bank holiday in the UK by the Labour government and here it is known as 'May Day'.

During the Cold War in 1958, US President Eisenhower officially declared May 1st to be the new 'Loyalty Day' in the US. This was done to encourage Americans to show their loyalty to the USA on May 1st, instead of showing solidarity with workers in communist countries. 'Labor Day' is celebrated on the first Monday of September in the USA.

International Workers' Day is one of the most important holidays in communist countries. Celebrations in these countries often include elaborate workforce parades and displays of military strength.

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Worksheet

Exercise 4: Workers' rights quiz

- In Germany, the minimum hourly wage for workers over the age of 18 is:
 - €6.84
 - €8.84
 - €10.84
- In Germany, the minimum hourly wage for employees under the age of 18 is:
 - €6.84
 - €8.84
 - There is no minimum wage.
- Not counting bank holidays, in Mexico, a full-time worker has an annual holiday entitlement of at least:
 - 6 days
 - 18 days
 - 28 days
- In Mexico, the maximum number of hours your employer can ask you to work before paying you overtime is:
 - 42 hours a week
 - 48 hours a week
 - 60 hours a week
- In the USA, your employer does not have to pay you for:
 - the time you take for your lunch break
 - overtime hours you have worked
 - work you take home with you
- In the USA, the majority of employers can terminate your contract (fire you):
 - immediately
 - by giving you just one week's notice
 - at the end of the current month
- In Spain, when a female employee has a baby, she is entitled to a minimum of:
 - 4 weeks of maternity leave
 - 16 weeks of maternity leave
 - 26 weeks of maternity leave
- In Spain, when his partner has a baby, a male employee is entitled to:
 - 4 weeks of paternity leave
 - 8 weeks of paternity leave
 - 12 weeks of paternity leave
- In the UK, employees aged 18 or over who work for more than 6 hours a day are entitled to a rest break of at least:
 - 20 minutes during each working day
 - 30 minutes during each working day
 - 60 minutes during each working day
- Workers in the UK:
 - must join a trade union
 - are not allowed to join a trade union
 - can decide whether they want to join a trade union

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Exercise 5: Discussion

Discuss how you would answer the quiz questions with information about workers' rights in your country. Make notes of your answers.

E.g. 1. In my country the minimum wage for people over the age of 25 is ... / There is no minimum wage.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Exercise 6: Internet research and presentation

Do some research and then hold a 5–10 minute presentation on one of the following:

- The Haymarket Affair
- The Second International
- Loyalty Day