

**IN South Africa the government refuses to recognise May Day as a paid public holiday.**

Instead it has imposed "worker day (first Friday in May) on South African workers. But millions of workers refuse to accept the government imposed holiday, calling it "Botha Day". The NUM and Cosatu has demanded May Day as a paid public holiday.

But although mining magnates who own other industries have granted workers in some factories May Day, they refuse to do this in the mining industry.

### May Day is Ours

May Day is Ours! Mineworkers must reclaim the day and take our holiday along with other workers throughout the world.

The first time May Day was celebrated in South Africa was in 1904 when a group of socialists took over Market Square in Johannesburg.

The force that was to put May Day firmly on the calendar in South Africa was the International Socialist League (which dissolved in 1921 to form the Communist Party of South Africa).

### Down with colour bars

Up to this point May Day celebrations in South Africa had been strictly white. The ISL took up the difficult challenge of uniting the working class across colour lines.

The bosses realised the advantages of a working class split across colour lines and fostered divisions. For example in factories African workers were paid far less while on the mines there was job reservation.

In 1917 the May Day celebrations included an African speaker for the first time. He was Horatio Mbele, a Transvaal activist in the young African National Congress.

### Rand revolt

The demand for May Day as a paid public holiday grew. But the Rand Revolt of 1922 set back the chances of non racial unity for many years.

White workers revolted against mine owners because their privileged position was threatened. The strike was viciously crushed by the government, army and air force.

But the pressure for May Day continued. In 1925 Clements Kadalie, general secretary of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of South Africa, wrote to the all-white South African Trade Union Congress and informed them of the ICU decision to take part in May Day celebrations.

In the early 1930s May Day was celebrated in different ways. The white registered unions sup-

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ported May Day - but such meetings were closed to African workers.

At the same time there were the militant mass meetings called by the Communist Party.

The economic depression weakened the Communist Party and labour movement for much of the 1930s and few celebrations took place. May Day, 1937 once more heralded massive celebrations, and the same for 1938 and 1939.

It was during the 1940's that May Day was most often observed - the focus being during the war on promoting internationalism and fighting fascism.

The Council of Non-European Trade Unions (CNETU) played a significant role during this period uniting workers under the slogans of "we want bread" and "work for wages".

### Freedom Day strike

CNETU (trade union congress), the ANC, the Natal Indian Congress and the Transvaal Indian Congress called for a general stayaway and demonstrations to fight the Suppression of Communism Bill and to support demands for higher wages and better working conditions.

The Nationalist government - which had been in power for two years - mobilised all its resources. Meetings were banned and the army patrolled the streets.

Despite the harassment, however, the stayaway was widely observed. May Day 1950 was South Africa's first mass worker stayaway - it had become a day of mass political struggle against exploitation and oppression.

After the freedom strike the tradition of May Day declined in the face of growing state repression. In the 1950's the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) and the Congress movement struggled to keep the May Day celebrations alive.

### Period of silence

The 1960s were also a period of silence. May Day left the streets, along with the organisations that had been unable to withstand the attack of the bosses and government.

It was only with the growth of the progressive trade union movement in the 1970s and 1980s that the tradition of May Day was recovered.



May Day in Namibia: a celebration of worker power

## May Day unity on worker Act

**WORKERS** at May Day rallies across the country have decided to write a new workers' Labour Relations Act and present it to the bosses. NUM members throughout the country joined other COSATU affiliates at rallies and meetings on 1 May.

Speaking in the Orange Free State, Comrade President James Motlatsi said: "The bosses have made the Labour Relations Act to try and break our unions." "Let us break this chain. Let us draw up our own Labour Relations Act that speaks about the needs and demands of the workers."

Comrade Motlatsi said the Workers Summit had recommended workers countrywide should draw up their own Act - which covers all sectors of our class including farm, domestic, forestry and public sector workers.

"After we have submitted our own Act, we will give the bosses 30 days to respond to our demands. If they refuse to make positive progress towards meeting our demands, workers will call a national dispute."

He said the lesson to be learnt from the history of May Day was that organisation, unity and democracy were the pillars of our struggle.

Among other places, rallies were held at Sowe o, Phalaborwa, Secunda, Rustenoerg, and Kimberley.

MAY Day is celebrated by millions of workers in countries across the world. It is a celebration of working class power and culture on May 1.

May Day started as a struggle for an eight hour day. The idea of a special workers' day started in Australia in 1856. Workers saw it as a way of uniting around their demands for a shorter working day and better working conditions.

The idea of a self-proclaimed workers holiday spread to other countries. In 1886 American workers decided to hold a general strike in support of the demand for an eight hour day.

Like bosses the world over, American farm and mine owners forced men, women and children to labour for 18 hours a day six days a week. Conditions were dangerous and wages low.

### The beginning

After months of organising on May 1, 1886, 350 000 workers in 11 562 places of work went on strike. They won a big victory as nearly half were granted an eight hour day while others won a nine or ten hour day (but still a six day week).

However the strike took its toll. The bosses took their revenge and on May 3 six workers were gunned down by police. Four worker leaders were charged and executed.

### International day

The Second International, an international socialist organisation started in 1889 supported the idea of a workers day. It called for a "great international demonstration so that in all countries and in all cities on our appointed day, the toiling masses shall demand the legal reduction of the working day to eight hours."

May 1 was the chosen day. The first international Labour Day took place celebrated by workers in Austria, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Britain and the United States.

From that day May Day became an important feature in the struggle of workers for both improved conditions and socialism. May Day symbolised the class struggle and the exploitation of workers. It also showed the strength and power of the working class to change history.

### Unites across borders

What is also important about May Day is that it unites the working class across national borders.

In the Soviet Union the Bolshevik revolution brought the Russian working class into power in 1917. May Day became an official state holiday.