

## Labor Day Comments

In 1894, following the deaths of workers by the U. S. Army and Federal Marshalls during the Pullman strike and six days after the strike ended, President Cleveland signed the legislation creating the Federal Holiday of Labor Day. ~~There are various opinions on where the idea for a day celebrating the achievements of Labor in reforming society originated but the choice of the first Monday of September as the holiday is associated with the parade organized by the Central Labor Council of New York on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 1882.~~ By the time the Federal Government established the holiday, it was already celebrated in thirty states.

For those early members of the Labor movement, the reason for creating it was not just another paid day off. Just like today, the ability to take the day off and be paid is still subject to an agreement with a worker's employer. It was not just a day to celebrate the accomplishments of the past. It was a day to also grow and recommit to a movement making a true difference for working people. It came at a time when class warfare in its truest form was ~~still~~ happening. Working men were being killed but so were owners and their supporters. The times were just beginning to work out how negotiations with worker organizations could replace the violence of strike ~~and strike breaking~~. Celebration yes, but also dedication was being observed.

In the following years some of the bloodiest days of the labor movement would occur. Labor would add many new members to the rolls to be remembered on Labor Day. Gradually, laws were passed to move the warfare from the strike line to the negotiating table changing guns into words. Labor Day saw fewer and fewer workers needing to be grieved. Management found that working with Unions could improve productivity. With prosperity growing and the average wellbeing of workers improving, Labor Day moved more into a socializing event rather than an organizing event.

Monday we will celebrate the holiday with a Picnic sponsored by The Central Labor Council of Humboldt and Del Norte Counties. It will be attended by workers and their families, retirees, politicians and the general public. Each will have their own reason to attend. For some, it will be the comradery of their fellow workers. Others will share the stories of past experiences. There will be speeches reminding us of labor issues and actions. There may be speeches by politicians looking for support- that is more likely next year. Some will come just for the food. The one idea that will be shared is that when working people stand together they can achieve fairness for each individual worker. The basic reason to celebrate Labor Day is just this that working together we can overcome the unequal playing field. This way we can create an environment where both the employee and employer work and grow together to reach prosperity each deserves.

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