

May Day Events Bring Workers, Immigrants Together In Fight For Rights

Continuing to build and expand coalitions of allies, CWA members in cities across the nation joined tens of thousands of people Sunday for May Day events that called for immigration reform and workers' rights.



Above, CWA District 1 Vice President Chris Shelton fires up May Day ralliers in New York City. Below, May Day ralliers in New York City, CWA Local 1180's round signs were especially visible in the crowd.



In New York City, CWA District 1 President Chris Shelton addressed thousands of activists who rallied at Union Square and marched downtown to Foley Square.

"Labor and its allies have created sparks, even lightning strikes, across this country with rallies and marches, but what we need is a firestorm and May Day should be the day that we create that firestorm," Shelton said. "What we need is a peaceful but militant revolution against those people who would destroy the middle class."

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At a May Day memorial, CWA members in Chicago turned out for the 125th anniversary of the Haymarket tragedy. Pictured from left are Local 4250 President Liz VanDerWoude, Local RMC President Steve Tisza, Local 4216 President Debra Greenlee and District 4 Staff Representative Ron Honse.

In Chicago, CWA members joined other unionists and even government leaders, including the chief justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, for the re-dedication of the newly restored Haymarket Memorial.

May Day itself emerged from the Haymarket tragedy, which marked its 125th anniversary on May 4. On that day in 1886, an unknown person threw a bomb into a crowd of workers striking for the eight-hour day. Police fired on the crowd and both officers and civilians were killed. Seven men denounced as "anarchists" were convicted, on what history has shown to be largely fabricated evidence, and four were hanged.

The ceremony, "was especially meaningful given the fight we're in today," said CWA Local 4250 President Liz VanDerWoude. "I thought about a quote I read a few days before, from one of the men hanged. He said, ***'The day will come when our silence will be greater than the voices you are throttling today.' Our movement today is their legacy, and we have to keep growing stronger and louder.***"

AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka spoke to a crowd of 100,000 in Milwaukee, and discussed it with CWA members on the union's "virtual town hall" phone call Tuesday night. He said some people wonder why unions took part in the May Day events, organized by immigrant rights groups.

"The fact is that the fight for workers' rights and immigrant rights are cut of the same cloth," Trumka said on the CWA phone call. "The politicians and their CEO backers are targeting all of us, working people, immigrants, the poor, and all of us have to use the strength of our numbers to fight back."

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