

## DCFPI Remembers May Day

By Amy Lieber

On May 1, 1886, hundreds of thousands of workers across the country launched a strike for an eight-hour workday. This request for worker dignity was met with violence, when a striker was killed in an altercation with police and strikebreakers at the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company. In response, strikers met on May 4<sup>th</sup> for a rally in Haymarket Square. In what became known as [The Haymarket Affair](#) (or Haymarket Riot), the demonstration turned violent when a bomb went off and police fired at the crowd, leading to at least 11 deaths and dozens of injuries. In the following days, labor leaders and sympathizers were rounded up and executed for causing the chaos, and there was a clampdown on union activity.

May 1<sup>st</sup>—May Day—was chosen to commemorate the strike for the eight-hour workday and the events that followed. Also called International Worker’s Day, this celebration of labor and the working classes is now held in 66 countries around the world. Even though it started here, the United States ironically does not celebrate its Labor Day on this date.

Even so, May Day is a great time to learn about labor history and to recognize the work we still have to do to create equitable labor policies for all workers. Today, around the world and in the District, we continue to fight for fair and equitable working conditions. In 2016, for example, the DC Council passed the Universal Paid Leave Act to provide paid time off for new parents and those helping a sick family member, [ensuring stability and reducing worker stress](#). Although paid family leave is the norm around the world, DC’s paid family leave program faced [enormous resistance](#) and efforts to repeal and replace it. The repeal efforts were stopped, fortunately, and workers will be able to start taking paid time off to care for a new child or ill relative in July 2020.



Also in 2016, the Council approved increasing the DC minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2020, while the federal minimum wage remains mired at just \$7.25. While helpful, even a \$15 minimum wage is not a livable wage in an expensive city like DC. [The Washington Post](#) reported that DC’s median income of \$70,848 was about \$9,000 below what is required to “live comfortably” in the city; those working full-time minimum wage jobs make much less than the median income.

Other efforts to help workers who struggle to make ends meet have not been successful in DC. Last fall, for example, the Council repealed Initiative 77, passed by DC voters, which would have eliminated the \$4 subminimum wage paid to tipped workers. In DC and across the country, many tipped workers in

restaurants and other industries [face very low and uneven incomes](#), with the greatest harms falling on workers of color.

Beyond these policy imperatives, May Day is an important time to remember that historic and ongoing racism have denied opportunities to get a quality education or good job to Black residents, immigrants, and other residents of color. We see those impacts today, in [much higher unemployment rates](#) in predominantly Black Wards 7 and 8 and other economic indicators. This means there is a long way to go to [support all workers](#) in the city and to stop the [growing displacement of Black residents](#).