

## May Day in Australia

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Labour Day, also known as Eight Hours Day in Tasmania and May Day in the Northern Territory, commemorates the granting of the eight-hour working day for Australians. It also recognizes workers' contributions towards the nation's economy. It is an annual public holiday and its date varies across the states and territories.

### Background

The history of Labour Day in Australia spans over a century. It is an important annual event that remembers those who struggled and succeeded to ensure decent and fair working conditions in Australia. During the mid to late 1800s the working day was long and arduous, where some employees would work up to 12 hours a day, six days a week.

Many Australians saw the need for better working conditions and in the 1850s there was a strong push for this. On April 21, 1856, stonemasons at the University of Melbourne marched to Parliament House to push for an eight-hour working day. An agreement with employers for a 48-hour week was eventually reached and Australian workers welcomed the new eight-hour day. A victory march was held on May 12 that year and each year after that. In 1856 the new work regulations were recognized in New South Wales, followed by Queensland in 1858 and South Australia in 1873.

In 1874, Tasmania joined the other states, which were colonies at the time, in adopting the shorter eight-hour working day. In 1879 the Victorian Government made one further step towards better conditions for employees by proclaiming a paid public holiday that year. In light of the labour movement's successful push for an eight-hour day, a large May Day meeting was held in Melbourne in 1890. On May 1 that year a local newspaper made reference to that day as May Day.

One of the first May Day/Labour Day marches in Australia occurred on May 1, 1891 in Queensland. More than 1000 people participated in the march and carried banners. The leaders wore blue sashes and the Eureka flag was carried. It was reported that cheers were given for "the eight-hour day". The Labour Day date was moved from May to the second Monday in March in some parts of Australia after World War II. Since 1948, Labour Day in Western Australia has been observed on the first Monday in March. It marks the granting of the eight hour working day to Western Australians.

<http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/australia/labour-day>

**Every year the ANMF NT celebrate May Day / Labour Day by marching behind our ANMF NT Banner with other Unionists. See photos of NT Nurses and Midwives at the 2015 May Day March on the ANMF NT Website.**

***ANMF NT Organiser      Shirel Nomoa***