

What about Labor Day?

Labor Day — picnics, barbecues, massive department store sales — what has this got to do with work?

Has the country collectively lost sight of the meaning of one of its most enduring holidays?

Maybe Labor Day has always been a little misunderstood. Seven days after President Grover Cleveland signed a bill designating the first Monday in September as a national holiday honoring workers, he sent the Army to quell a rebellion by striking Pullman workers.

Thirteen strikers were killed by the soldiers; union activist Eugene Debs went to jail because he refused to call a halt to the American Railway Workers' strike in Chicago.

How about the date of that strikebreaking action? July 4, 1894, Independence Day, just two months before the first official national Labor Day was celebrated.

However, Labor Day certainly was not an idea sprung from the head of Congress and shoved under the pen of President Cleveland.

Matthew Maguire, a New Jersey machinist, and Peter J. McGuire, a New York carpenter who co-founded the precursor to the American Federation of Labor (AFL), decided something should be done to mark the strides already made toward creating a better workplace in America.

Working with the Central Labor Union of New York, Maguire and McGuire

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organized the country's first Labor Day parade — 10,000 people took to the streets of New York City on September 5, 1882, and the holiday was born, at least unofficially.

Our local celebration started in 1886 at Princeton, Indiana. The Princeton band met the Bosse band August 2, 1886 at 4 a.m. along with several railroad coaches full of union brothers and sisters and marched to the fairgrounds — this was our first Labor Day Parade.

Union organizing was always a little rocky — organizers, like the fellows who arrived in Matewan, West Virginia, to organize coal miners, were likely to end up dead.

The strikes like the Chicago Pullman strike of 1894 — were often met with violence. Employers sometimes used tragic means to keep unions from gaining a toehold in their companies.

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911 cost 146 people, almost all women, their lives.

The reason? Many of the sweatshop's doors were locked, standard procedure to keep annoying union organizers out and employees under strict control.

In the United States today, the labor movement is a love it or hate it thing.

Companies have fought them with a passion, spending millions of dollars trying to keep people from forming unions, instead of bargaining with their employees.

So, as this long weekend rolls around, it could be good to remember a few of the gains that might not have come around if labor unions hadn't been fighting so hard for people and their families.

Social Security, health insurance, worker's compensation, unemployment insurance, pensions, vacations and holidays — to name just a few — are all benefits organized labor has given to working men and women.

Why not take the time to celebrate and honor those who have fought so hard for us. We are not, for the most part, asked to give up our lives to have a unionized work place.

But we are asking you and your family to come and march with your local unions on Monday, September 3 at 9 a.m.

We ask you to also come and enjoy the activities over Labor Day Weekend at the Gibson County 4-H Fairgrounds in Princeton.

Whatever you do and wherever you go, take time to remember who made it possible — The American worker. Happy Labor Day!

The City of Princeton
Welcomes The 2007

**Labor Day
Celebration**



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