



ANDERSONS
S O L I C I T O R S

LawTalk Blog



May Day - a staunch reminder of hard fought workers' rights

Date: Friday April 28, 2017

May Day is an event celebrated on 1 May annually. It commemorates the granting of the eight hour working day and is a time to remember the important contributions of all workers and unions to the economy and the nation as a whole.

In South Australia, we don't receive a public holiday for May Day. Rather we celebrate Labour Day in October and we usually spend this public holiday relaxing with family and friends. Because of the leisure activities generally associated with this public holiday, it is easy to forget that it is an important occasion to remember those who struggled and succeeded to ensure fair, safe and decent working conditions for all Australian workers.

But although we do not receive a public holiday for May Day, actually in May, it is still an extremely important occasion with interesting historical foundations.

May Day originated in the United States of America in the late 19th century. On the 1st of May 1886 many workers and their unions from all across the country participated in a strike. They stopped work and demanded that the standard working day be shortened to eight hours. The strike turned violent and riots erupted.

On 4 May, a bomb was thrown into a crowd in Chicago causing the deaths of dozens of people and serious injuries to many more, including the workers on strike and police officers. The police officers responded to the bombing by firing directly at the workers, killing many of them.

Although the strikes eventually ended without obvious success, they did pave the way for the eight hour working day becoming standard. Since then, May Day has remained as a staunch reminder every year of those who fought so hard to improve the working lives of all of us.

But industrial rights don't just stop at the eight hour day. The strength of the union movement and the solidarity of workers have lead to many other industrial improvements that we often take for granted, including:

- public holidays;
- personal leave including sick leave, carer's leave and annual leave;
- penalty rates for working on holidays and at unsocial times;
- safe working environments;
- workers compensation;
- maternity and paternity leave; and
- many others industrial improvements.

And the fight for improvements to workers rights continues, especially when governments adopt anti-worker and anti-union policies aimed at undermining the very protections that many have fought so hard to achieve.

So no matter your political persuasion, there can be no denying that the work of unions and their members has often led to safer, fairer and more decent workplaces across the country.

At Andersons, we have a proud history of working with our clients and affiliated unions to ensure that workers receive their workplace entitlements. We will fight to protect workers' rights and we always promote safe and fair working environments.

That is why Andersons has long supported the May Day commemorations including the annual May Day Dinner and May Day March.

We will be attending the May Day Dinner this year to be held on Monday 1 May 2017.

We also look forward to participating in the annual May Day March which will be held this year from 10.00 am on Saturday 6 May 2017, where we'll march from Victoria Square in Adelaide city centre to Light Square.

Please note, this Blog is posted in Adelaide, South Australia by Andersons Solicitors. It relates to Australian Federal legislation. Andersons Solicitors is a medium sized law firm servicing metropolitan Adelaide and regional South Australia across all areas of law for individuals and businesses.