

International Workers Day

# What is International Workers Day?

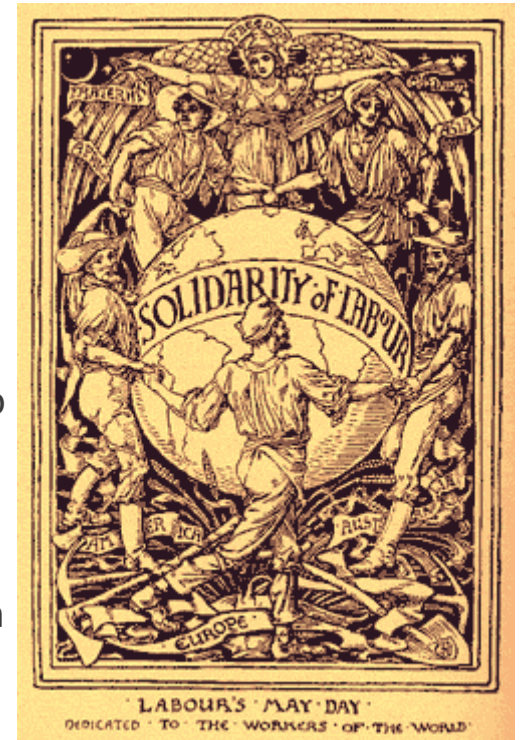
International Workers' Day ,also known as Labour Day, is celebrated annually on 1st May. It commemorates the contributions and struggles of the working classes.

In the late nineteenth century, the working class was in constant struggle to gain the 8-hour work day. Working conditions were severe and it was quite common to work 10 to 16 hour days in unsafe conditions. Death and injury were commonplace at many work places.

As early as the 1860's, working people agitated to shorten the workday without a cut in pay, but it wasn't until the late 1880's that organized labor was able to garner enough strength to declare the 8-hour workday. This proclamation was without consent of employers, yet demanded by many of the working class.

At this time, socialism was a new and attractive idea to working people, many of whom were drawn to its ideology of working class control over the production and distribution of all goods and services. Workers had seen first-hand that Capitalism benefited only their bosses, trading workers' lives for profit. Thousands of men, women and children were dying needlessly every year in the workplace, with life expectancy as low as their early twenties in some industries, and little hope but death of rising out of their destitution. Socialism offered another option.

This day is also used to raise awareness on work related issues such as health and safety, fair wages and favourable working environment.



**We should all demand that the working conditions of people from all over the world who grow our food and make the stuff we use are as good as what we would expect.**

## **How 'modern-day slavery' in the Congo powers the rechargeable battery economy**

Smartphones, computers and electric vehicles may be emblems of the modern world, but, their rechargeable batteries are frequently powered by cobalt mined by workers labouring in slave-like conditions in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Much of the DRC's cobalt is being extracted by so-called "artisanal" miners — freelance workers who do extremely dangerous labour for the equivalent of just a few dollars a day.

You have to imagine walking around some of these mining areas and dialing back our clock centuries. Women and children are also working in subhuman, grinding, degrading conditions. They use pickaxes, shovels, stretches of rebar to hack and scrounge at the earth in trenches and pits and tunnels to gather cobalt and feed it up the formal supply chain."



The mining industry has ravaged the landscape of the DRC. Millions of trees have been cut down, the air around mines is hazy with dust and grit, and the water has been contaminated with toxic effluents from the mining processing. What's more, Cobalt is toxic to touch and breathe — and there are hundreds of thousands of poor Congolese people touching and breathing it day in and day out. Young mothers with babies strapped to their backs, all breathing in this toxic cobalt dust."



We shouldn't be transitioning to the use of electric vehicles at the cost of the people and environment of one of the most downtrodden and impoverished corners of the world," he says. "The bottom of the supply chain, where almost all the world's cobalt is coming from, is a horror show.

## International Workers' Memorial Day: Why we remember the dead and fight for the living

International Workers' Day is about remembering those who lost their lives due to work across Wales and the world.



### Remember the dead

Last year in Wales, fifteen people sustained fatal injuries at work. Across Great Britain 135 died. Those are the numbers reported by employers to the authorities. However according to the Hazard's campaign, these number number do not reflect the full picture. According their analysis, at least 1,459 deaths are caused by work incidents every year in Britain.

Every year on International Workers' Memorial Day (28 April), trade unionists pause to remember everyone who's lost their lives due to work.

TUC has established an online Workers Memorial Wall to remember those killed at work. The testimony of family and loved ones is very moving. You are welcome to add information about your own loved ones to the Memorial Wall.

### Increased risks from climate change

This year the International Labour Organisation will be linking its commemoration to the increased risk faced by workers as a result of climate change.

Here in Wales we have seen those dangers increase. In 2022 we were exposed to severe heatwaves in June, July and August, which saw a rise in grass and forest fires. In February 2020, Storm Dennis hit south Wales, with the region's fire service taking 1,400 calls in twelve hours. As we look to the future, the predictions are for further and more frequent extreme weather events.

At a UK level, the TUC has called for a national commission to plan a just transition to a net-zero economy. It has published *A just transition to a greener, fairer economy*, a report setting out the principles of a just transition. It says that unions and workers need to have a central voice in how the transition to the new net-zero economy is achieved.

It is important that large scale industrial transformation is something that is done with, not to workers. This must happen if we are to avoid the mistakes of the past, when communities were left behind by industrial change. Something which we are all too aware of in Wales.

## 50 years of TUC Cymru: A guiding light for Welsh devolution

50 years ago, the union movement in Wales gathered in Aberystwyth to enact a plan that had been years in the making. The outcome of this meeting would reshape the trade union movement in the UK, and be a guiding light for the path of Wales as a nation.

As a key crucible of trade unionism and socialist radicalism for generations, trade unionists in Wales had a unique identity. An identity that sometimes felt out of step with UK union structures. Growing out of this gap between Wales and the wider UK movement, came a burgeoning sense that Wales needed its own national forum. It needed its own union structure to properly address the challenges facing workers in Wales.

### Bringing power closer to the people works

Through disquiet and fierce opposition from all sides, trade union activists in Wales campaigned relentlessly for the establishment of a Wales TUC. Their hard work and perseverance was rewarded in the creation of Wales TUC in 1974.

Their legacy is a strong and enduring organisation that brings together unions in Wales to fight for workers across the nation. As pivotal as this moment was, Wales TUC went beyond carving out a place for itself in constitutional union structures. It proved and continues to prove that bringing power closer to the people works.

It enables the union movement in Wales to feel the heat of worker issues and to adapt and react better than a union bureaucracy entrenched in an office hundreds of miles away.

### Putting Wales on the map

Wales TUC also became totemic to the cause of devolution, demonstrating how devolving power can be successful. Commenting on its significance, George Wright, later elected as the first Wales TUC General Secretary, said: 5 years before the failed 1979 devolution referendum and long before the 1999 referendum, Wales TUC had secured devolved power and shown Wales and the rest of the UK that it could be done. Bold, pioneering, and determined, the creation of a Wales TUC was an important event, not only in trade



George Wright 1974 was the first Welsh TUC General Secretary

union history, but for the history of Wales.

From the dust, toil and filth of Victorian era industry, to the precarious, technology-driven work of the 21st Century, there has and will always be a need for a worker voice. To fight injustice and injury done to workers. To uphold decency and dignity at work. And to keep pushing for a better tomorrow for working people everywhere.

This is as true today as it was on that pivotal day in Aberystwyth in 1974. The challenges we face may have changed, but the challenge itself remains. So as we celebrate 50 years of Wales TUC, we give thanks to those dauntless trade unionists who paved the way. We take inspiration from their fight and continue to stand up for workers and be the voice for Wales at work.



## Rise of the Quarrymen:

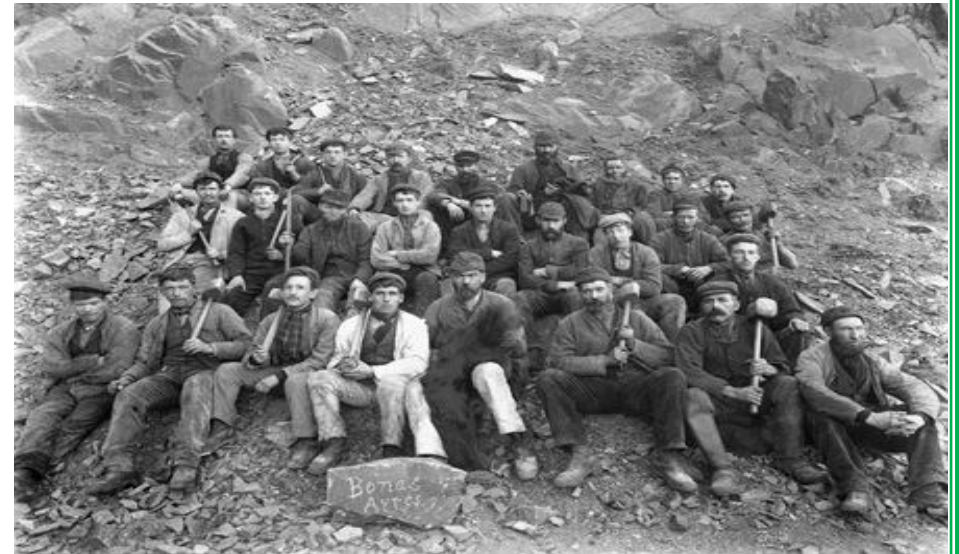
Trade union development in the 1870's was founded on changes that occurred in methods of production, capital investment, business organisation, transport and marketing, which transformed the slate industry from 1830-1870. The quarrymen came to realise that they were the masters of an immensely complicated and delicate craft, and a craft that only they could exercise.

In a situation where the quarry owner ruled as an absolute or a benevolent monarch, there was, to put it simply, no provision for the workers to register their dissatisfaction over working conditions. In the face of continued victimisation the only road open to workers was collective action.

There was substantial discontent with conditions in many of the larger quarries, Even though the quarries were isolated, the men could still read about English disputes and trade unionism in such papers as *Yr Herald Cymraeg* or *Baner ac Amserau Cymru*. In 1859-60, builders in London went on strike for a nine hour day, and the employers replied with an attempt to force workers to sign a written guarantee that they would not belong to any society that interfered in any way at all with arrangements made between an employer and his workmen.

The quarrymen strike events of 1865 and 1869-70 created the impetus for founding a Union and a meeting was held at Caernarfon in March 1874. At that meeting it was decided to found the North Wales Quarrymen's Union.

Its membership had reached 8,297 by 1877. Such a decision was bound to have repercussions as far as the owners were concerned, but the seeds were sown....



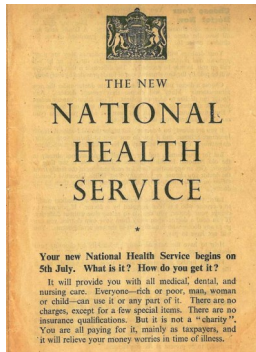
## **Safwn gyda'n gilydd' Standing together.**

We're not asking for charity or favours either,  
What we ask for are our dues for a day's work!  
For the sake of those who were sacrificed to the dust of the blue slate,  
For the sake of those who struggled on the rock, the soil and the face.

We'll stand together - stand together as one.

Another week goes by without a payslip,  
We must stand on the picket line and live off fresh air,  
We mustn't be fainthearted or break under the strain -  
From the arms of faithful friends comes the strength to carry on.

We'll stand together - stand together as one.



## The Establishment of the NHS:

Clement Attlee came to power in 1945 and Aneurin Bevan became Health Minister. It was Bevan who embarked on the campaign to bring about the NHS in the form we are now familiar with. This project was said to be based on three ideas which Bevan expressed in the launch on 5th July 1948. These essential values were:

- ⇒ that the services helped everyone;
- ⇒ healthcare was free and finally,
- ⇒ that care would be provided based on need rather than ability to pay.

## What is privatisation of the NHS?

**Keep Our NHS Public** defines the privatisation of the NHS as:

- The involvement of private organisations in the provision of NHS services and finances
- The removal of public ownership and Governmental responsibility for the NHS
- Charging for healthcare beyond National Insurance contributions
- Rationing of healthcare.



Keep Our NHS Public also condemns the underfunding of NHS services, particularly when done to cynically promote the unnecessary need for privatisation of services.

Our definition is based on a World Health Organisation definition of privatisation of healthcare that was published in 1995 and has been used by health economists and policy commentators ever since. It reads:

“...a process in which non-government actors become increasingly involved in the financing and/or provision of health care services.”