May Day 2023: unionists committed to Yes campaign

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By Gabrielle Clark

On Sunday 30 April at Fremantle Esplanade, UnionsWA held their annual May Day celebration, including a festival and march.
Many unionists showed their commitment to supporting the Yes campaign in the upcoming Voice to ParliamentReferendum.

Our staff marched in solidarity with WA unions while holding an SSTUWA banner.

Owen Whittle, UnionsWA Secretary said the Voice to Parliament “is a natural continuation of trade union values, which aim to improve peoples’ lives.”

“Just as a collective voice in workplaces is necessary for fair pay and safety, a constitutional Voice will give First Nations Australians the ability to be heard by decision makers, which is necessary for solutions on jobs, health and education.”

May Day is celebrated annually and recognises the achievements of working people.

Highlighted and celebrated is the eight-hour workday, something that some workers today may take for granted. This was achieved as early as 1856 when on

21 April stonemasons in Melbourne downed tools and walked off the job in protest over their employers’ refusal to accept their demands for reduced working hours.

As more and more workers won the reduction in hours by solidarity and industrial action, the day was proclaimed as a holiday in all the states, known as Labour Day.

Historically, the origins of May Day date back to the 1880s in America and earlier in many other nations. However, following a long and arduous struggle, Australia's May Day activities officially began in 1890.

In 1948 the Labor Party moved the holiday to March, then abandoned the procession altogether. This is when Fremantle decided to step in, with the port's unions moving to continue the traditional event in May, which is now joined by a number of WA unions.

Since 1952 it has been one of the city's most vibrant demonstrations of solidarity.

For more information on 2023's May Day celebration click here.

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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