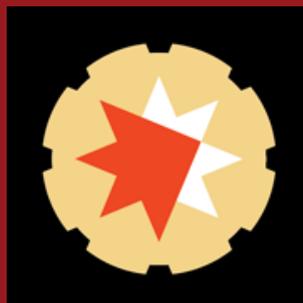


# LABOR DAY PICNIC

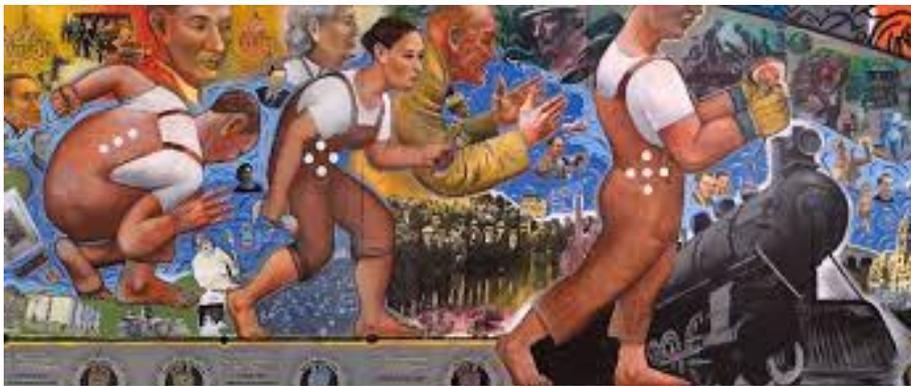
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12TH, 4PM



CELEBRATE THE  
SPIRIT OF LABOR  
DAY WITH THE  
EAST SIDE  
FREEDOM  
LIBRARY

FREE AND OPEN TO ALL

1105 GREENBRIER ST  
SAINT PAUL, MN 55106



No holiday has a more turbulent history than Labor Day. It received legal status in the late summer of 1894, in a period of intense labor conflict, one of whose centers was here on the East Side of St. Paul. That April, organized into the new American Railway Union, workers struck James J. Hill's Great Northern Railroad in opposition to wage cuts. Meeting at a fraternal benefit society hall on Payne Avenue, local strikers marched to the viaduct over the tracks and dumped garbage to interfere with the passage of scab-driven trains. Their actions were so successful that Charles Pillsbury complained to Hill that his striking workers were preventing his barrels of flour from getting to Duluth, for shipment to lucrative markets in Europe. Pillsbury's intervention brought Hill to the bargaining table, where he rescinded his wage cuts. Word spread.

Two months later, in a Chicago suburb called Pullman—a company town in which the employer owned the houses, picked the police, and controlled the schools and stores—the workers who built Pullman sleeping cars rebelled when their wages were cut 25% but their rents were not reduced. They joined the ARU, whose leader, Eugene V. Debs, called on railroad workers across the country to refuse to move any train which had a Pullman car in it. Some 125,000 railroad workers joined what became a nationwide railroad strike. President Grover Cleveland called out the National Guard to police the railroad yards and the roundhouses, but they could not force the strikers to return to work. Pullman's corporate attorney, Richard Olney, the former Attorney General of the United States, went to court for a federal injunction ordering an end to the strike. The grounds? The strikers were interfering with the shipment of the nation's mail! Most trains had not only Pullman cars but also U.S. mail cars. The federal judge issued the court order (the first ever federal injunction against a strike) and ordered Debs to call off the strike. When Debs refused, the judge found him in contempt and sent him to prison, where he spent the next eighteen months. The strike petered out.

This was the context that led President Cleveland to ask Congress to create a new holiday, making the first Monday in September "Labor Day." With one hand, he had repressed the country's most important strike, while, with the other, he created a national holiday celebrating labor. Cleveland was also seeking to direct workers' celebration away from May 1st, which had become a rallying focus for labor activists the world over since the inspirational strike for the Eight Hour Day that had emanated outwards from Chicago in 1886.

Significant segments of the American labor movement had already been claiming early September as a time to celebrate solidarity and activism. The New York City Central Labor Union had begun celebrating an early September “Labor Day” in 1882, and, over the course of the 1880s, Knights of Labor locals and local trades unions used Fall picnics, parades, and gatherings as means to weave solidarity. The Knights took in the unskilled as well as the skilled, immigrants as well as native born, women as well as men, and Black as well as white. Their motto was “An Injury to One is the Concern of All,” and, in many communities, its members actually practiced what they preached.

St. Paul was a lively location for just such activities. On September 7, 1885, local leaders of the Knights of Labor and the AFL Trades and Labor Assembly, in collaboration not only with each other but also with their counterparts in Minneapolis and Stillwater, hosted a “Labor Day” celebration in White Bear Lake. Thousands of workers and their families took an unpaid day off from work to gather and express their “Unity.”

Labor Day has continued to be a celebration of unity and solidarity.

Working people need unity and solidarity now more than ever. The percentage of workers carrying union cards is at its lowest rate in more than half a century. Yet there is new energy being generated by immigrant workers, workers of color, young workers, workers from fast food, retail, museums and education, and all those workers deemed “essential.” While there are new challenges and new opportunities, it is not clear how to mark the path ahead. As Miles Horton, the founder of the Highlander Folk Center put it, “We have to make the road by walking.”

**So, come walk with us, sit with us, talk with us—and each other. The East Side Freedom Library invites you to a Labor Day Picnic on Sunday, September 12, from 4PM-7PM on our beautiful front lawn. We will provide refreshments, entertainment (games, music), and chairs. We will follow CDC safety guidelines and ask you to wear masks except when eating.**