

# The Genius of Labor Day

by **George Friedman** - September 6, 2020

Labor Day became an American Federal Holiday in 1894. Most other countries celebrate Labor on May 1. That date had been a pagan celebration, but in the late 19th century, European socialists adopted it as the annual holiday devoted to labor with marches and riots.

Industrialization brought labor problems to the United States with some nasty consequences. American workers wanted more money, better working conditions and recognition. Money and better conditions were hard to give. So labor suggested a holiday, and management and Congress was enthused. A holiday not built around an armed uprising was just the thing. But May 1st was a reminder of everything they wanted the workers not to think about.

So, the first Monday in September was chosen. Being the last weekend before children returned to school, it created a three-day, family oriented holiday. Rather than marching under the red flag, families headed to the beach or lake or wherever for a final summer outing. The vendors at these places thought it was a delightful idea. And so, Labor Day became not a day to plan revolutions but a time to kick back and have a beer, and for the vacation industry to have one last summer blow-off.

Think about it. The threat was a European style revolution. The solution was a holiday, one the kids wouldn't let the workers ignore. Those making money out of summer got a three-day weekend to peddle their wares. The workers were recognized for being workers, and at least that beef was taken care of. And some of the Christian churches who were not happy with a pagan holiday being Labor Day were also appeased.

To get a sense of the difference between the U.S. and Europe when facing political and economic chaos, the American solution was to turn a revolution into a marketable event, keep the churches quiet, and let the kids call off the union meeting.

Happy Labor Day, and think about its pure genius.

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