



For many, the first Monday in September has come to symbolize the end of the summer season and the beginning of a new school year. However, the first Monday in September is so much more. This is the day when American workers are celebrated and the accomplishments of the labor movement are recognized. This is **Labor Day**!

The history of American labor is rich and varied. Safe working conditions, fair wages, the eight hour workday, and restrictions on child labor were not always the standard they are now. American labor goes to work knowing these are guarantees because of the efforts of organized labor and their unions.

A **labor union**, also known as a trade union, is an organized group of workers who gather to negotiate decisions about conditions impacting their work and



advocate for their implementation. There are all types of unions that cover a range of industries in the United States. For example, there are teachers, carpenters, police, and firefighter unions. Truck drivers, auto workers, and machinists have unions. There are even unions for actors and writers. There are many state and federal unions in the United States, representing over 14 million workers throughout the country. In each instance, these respective unions are working to secure better working conditions and pay for their members.

One of the most significant legislative victories for labor unions was the passage of the **Fair Labor Standards Act** (FLSA) in 1938. This Act established many of the provisions still used on the job today, such as:

**Minimum Wage** - The Fair Labor Standards Act was amended in 2009 to establish the minimum wage to \$7.25 per hour. Individual states also have minimum wage laws. Employers must follow both the minimum wage rules laid out in the FLSA and the state laws.

**Overtime Pay** - The FLSA explains the way an employee should be paid if they work more than the maximum allowable hours in their job. Generally, this means when someone works over 40 hours in one week, they receive at least one and one-half times their regular rate of pay, though there are **certain exceptions**, such as salaried workers.

**Child Labor** - The FLSA outlines the types of jobs children under the age of 18 may work and for how many hours. For example, the Act limits the number of hours 14 and 15 year-olds may work to make sure teenagers are able to attend a full day of school. The Act also outlines the specific types of jobs minors, people under the age of 18, may work on a farm and in other industries.

**To Think and To Do:** Think about the career you would like to have in the future. Research the history of that field of work. How has that industry or field impacted the United States? What labor unions will you find in that industry or field?

**Learn MORE** about Labor Day and unions.  
Free registration may be required.

- [Labor Day](#), from History Channel
- [Labor Matters](#), from Teaching Tolerance
- [Brief History of Unions](#), from the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO

