

Jamaica Labour Day

Labour Day is an annual holiday to celebrate the economic and social achievements of workers.

Labor Day in Jamaica is held on a fixed date annually which is May 23 and changes only if it falls on a Saturday or Sunday, to next working day.

History shows that after the emancipation of slavery, the free people were still experiencing struggles, oppression, extreme conditions, racism and abuse and this resulting in the formation of "The International Labor Day" movement.

In Jamaica this was first called Empire Day and was celebrated on May 24 before the year 1961. This was in honor of the day when the slaves were emancipated in Jamaica and the anniversary of Queen Victoria's Birth. This day would feature the singing of patriotic songs and the raising of the flag in celebration of the British Empire and England.

This date was later changed in 1961 and the Empire Day was eliminated. There was a replacement that was decided on by Norman Manley and the Jamaican Parliament for a new date that would be celebrated on May 23 in honoring the anniversary of the movement that was started in Jamaica on May 23, 1938. But this was not met with the celebration that was expected from the Jamaican population.

This lack of participation by the majority of Jamaicans continued until the year 1971, it was celebrated for the most part by the trade unions. They would have public marches and rallies, but even this was not a festive affair as sometimes opposing members would clash. Eventually things changed in the year 1972, the then Prime Minister, Michael Manley introduced new features to this holiday.

He urged the Jamaicans to add new meaning to the holiday and remember that the importance is for the improvement of Jamaica and make it day for voluntary labor. He highlighted his commitments to the Labor Day movement by designing a project of planting trees and clearing land on the Palisadoes Road in Kingston, in an attempt to beautify the area.

Today, Labor Day in Jamaica is the day when individuals, clubs, organizations and groups do voluntary work or projects in all the communities across the island. This proves beneficial for everyone and the country at large as a lot of work is done on this day, some projects would include the repair, building and painting of community centers, basic schools, older persons home, churches or public areas.

The focal point of the Labor Day holiday was for improving the self-respect of labor by stimulating community spirit for development, enhancing the environment and promoting the attitude of sharing and togetherness, this has continue to happen today in Jamaica.