

THE WORLD- Spectator



2025



Labour Day: How the course of history in Canada changed with the struggle of Toronto workers 150 years ago

Every year, Canadians celebrate Labour Day on the first Monday of September. It is a public holiday all over Canada, and naturally we all love it as it gives us a long weekend to enjoy with our friends and family.

However, if you go back in time to its history and connect the dots to our everyday lives today, you will be surprised to note how much this day has given to us—we as modern-day workers.

Today, most of us work 8 hours a day, enjoy compulsory annual leaves, and other job-related benefits and think that this has been the norm forever, right? But many of these benefits are a relatively new phenomenon. Just over a century ago, most workers in the world used to work 10 hours to 16 hours a day; child labour

was not only common but even protected under factory laws.

History of Labour Day in Canada

Canada declared Labour Day an official holiday after a long and agonizing struggle of workers for over two decades. Canadian workers, just like workers in other countries, continued to protest against the long working hours and to make union activities legalized. Many Canadian workers lost their jobs and faced legal cases from their employers as union activity was still illegal under Canadian law.

The event that changed the course of history happened in 1872. Toronto Typographical Union (TTU) demanded a 9-hour workday; however, when the employers refused to accept the demands,

the workers went on a strike on March 25, 1872. During those times, printing workers in Toronto used to work 12 hours a day and 6 days a week. The protests continued to take place in Toronto, and on April 15, 1872, about 10,000 came on the streets—a big deployment as Toronto's population at that time was just 50,000, according to the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC).

Workers started protesting in other Canadian cities, one such protest in Ottawa also caught the attention of the federal government. These parades became an annual event in Toronto and other cities and even inspired an American labour leader, Peter McGuire—the founder of the Carpenters' Union and the American Federation of Labor. McGuire was invited to

speak at a parade in Toronto in 1882, and when he returned to the US, he organized a similar event in New York City on September 5, 1882.

For over two decades, workers in Canada and the US continued to face police crackdowns, lawsuits, and even lay down their lives, but they did not retreat from their demands. On May 4, 1886, a violent clash between workers and the police resulted in the death of several workers, which became a global symbol of the international struggle for workers' rights. The event became so important that May 1 was declared International Workers' Day in 1889, and today it is celebrated all over the world.

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1400 UFCW
your VOICE at work
CANADA
UNITED FOOD & COMMERCIAL WORKERS LOCAL 1400
A diverse and inclusive union for all workers
Celebrating Labour Day 2022 throughout Saskatchewan

A salute to all the hard-working men and women in the labour force!
It's because of you our economy continues to grow, and communities thrive.
HAPPY LABOUR DAY WEEKEND!
STEVEN BONK M.P.
SOURIS—MOOSE MOUNTAIN
steven.bonk@parl.gc.ca • 1-866-249-4697

HAPPY LABOUR DAY

As your local Saskatchewan Party MLAs, we want to recognize the hardworking people across our province. The dedication of Saskatchewan's workforce and their invaluable contributions continue to help build a bright, steady future for the benefit of everyone today and for generations to come.



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Finally, in 1894, the U.S. government accepted workers' demands for better working conditions and declared an official holiday on the first Monday of September. Canada also followed and announced a federal holiday in the same year.

However, what is noticeable is that U.S. President Grover Cleveland still wanted to avoid May 1 as Labour Day because socialist parties in Europe had been celebrating it as International Workers' Day. Today, most of the countries celebrate Labour Day on May 1, but a handful of countries like Canada and the US celebrate it on the first Monday of September.

What Labour Movements Have Given to Modern Workers?

Whether it is paid vacations, minimum annual paid leaves, or pension schemes, every kind of employee benefit that you can enjoy today has a long workers' struggle behind it. Many of these labour day struggle movements have their roots in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when Europe was witnessing rapid industrialization.

Some countries started legislation for employee benefits earlier than others, but the learning and relearning continued, and today we know most countries legally provide employment benefits to workers in one form or another.

Despite so many achievements at the global level, there are still many developing countries where workers do not even get basic facilities and employment benefits. However, all the member nations of the United Nations agree

that all workers should have basic facilities under different universal declarations.

In 1919, the International Labour Organization (ILO) came into being as part of the Treaty of Versailles, which was signed after World War I. The world leaders who gathered in Paris to sign the treaty realized that there could be no sustainable development without social justice, that is, justice in relation to the distribution of wealth and opportunities in the world.

When the United Nations was founded in 1945, the ILO became part of it so that labour laws could be implemented in all member countries. Due to the pressure of workers' campaigns around the world, the 8-hour work day was the first topic that was picked up by the ILO, and it resulted in the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919.

The ILO celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2019 with the commitment that it will continue to work to improve the working conditions of workers all over the world. This shows that the recognition of the importance of labour rights, workers' well-being, and equal opportunities for all did take over a century, but it surely got gradual acceptance in different parts of the world.

Today, there are several countries in the world that are experimenting with a 4-day week. The demand for a shorter workweek gained momentum mainly after the pandemic. In February 2022, Belgium became one of the first countries in Europe that allowed employees to work four days a week.

However, this does not mean that employees are working less or they face any loss of salary; they are just con-

densing the work load of five days in four days. More and more companies are now coming up with data that a 4-day week not only helped improve their productivity but their workers' satisfaction has also increased.

In Canada and the U.S., an overwhelming majority of workers are also in favour of a 4-day week. For instance, a massive 92% of workers in the US are in favour of a 4-day week, according to a survey by cloud-software vendor Qualtrics. Similarly, over 79% of full-time Canadian workers are also in favour of a 4-day week, according to a survey by Maru Public Opinion.

The basic idea behind all these pilot projects in countries like Iceland, the US, the UK, Germany, and Portugal, etc. is to improve work-life balance and the overall well-being of the workers. Both companies and the governments are recognizing the fact that the improvement in work-life balance of workers will directly translate into higher Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The 4-day work week is slowly gaining traction, but it may take some time before it is fully accepted in most countries of the world.

Conclusion

The struggle that the workers of Toronto started over 150 years ago did change the course of history. They did not achieve their target in the short term, but in the long term they were successful on so many fronts.

Today, most of us enjoy several employment benefits, and it was all made possible due to the struggle of those workers who dreamed to improve their working conditions. Let us keep in mind their struggles and sacrifices on this Labour Day.

sun

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UNION OF NURSES**

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Trusted experts

when you
need them
most.

**HAPPY
LABOUR
DAY!**



sasknursingcrisis.ca

IRONWORKERS

LOCAL UNION NO. 771

Strength in Membership!

The origins of Labour Day can be traced back to April 15, 1872. No matter where you find yourself this Labour Day, take a minute to think about Canada's labour pioneers. Their actions laid the foundations for future labour movements and helped workers secure the rights and benefits enjoyed today.



www.local771.ca



International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers

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The power of working people to shape this country for the better



As we mark Labour Day, we honour the working people whose efforts move this country forward every single day.

From airports and assembly lines to hospitals, long-term home care, factories, shop floors, hotels, the automotive industry and more, the 50,000 members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW), now known as the IAM Union, are the driving force behind more than 45 sectors of our economy. Our members don't just work in these industries; they build our communities, protect essential services, and care for those who need it most. They are the heart of progress and the strength behind our prosperity.

Labour Day is more than a celebration. It is a time to reflect on the hard-won battles that brought us here: the right to organize, the right to work in safe conditions, the right to earn a fair wage, and the right to be heard. These rights were not gifts. They were earned by workers who stood together and demanded better.

That fight is far from over.

In today's economy, we're seeing the cost-of-living surge while wages remain stagnant. Workers are being asked to do more with less, and short-term profits are too often placed ahead of long-term fairness. That's why the IAM Union continues to lead with a clear purpose: Justice on the Job and Service to the Community.

Our members know what solidarity means. They know that showing up for each other, whether in bargaining rooms, on the picket lines, or in Parliament, is how we protect what we've built and create a fairer future for the next generation.

This Labour Day, I urge every Canadian to reflect not just on the dignity of work, but on the power of working people to shape this country for the better.

And to our IAM members across Canada: thank you. Your skill, your determination, and your voice make a difference. Your courage makes change possible. You prove every day that the labour movement is the hope of the future and that justice on the job is never given—it is fought for.

Let's keep fighting for that future, together.

In solidarity,
David Chartrand
General Vice-President
IAM Union Canada

IAM

THANKFUL FOR ALL
WORKERS ACROSS CANADA

This Labour Day, we salute the hardworking men and women who keep our country moving.

Your efforts build our communities, support our families, and strengthen our nation.

At the IAM Union, we're proud to stand with you. With over 50,000 members across Canada in more than 45 sectors, we fight every day for fairness, safety, and respect in the workplace.

Want to join the movement for
Justice on the Job?

It's Simple & Anonymous!

Email us at: organize@iamaw.ca

A representative will reach out to you privately
and confidentially to answer your questions and
guide you through the process.

iamaw.ca

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Labour Day in Canada



Labour Day, the first Monday in September, has been a statutory holiday in Canada since 1894. It originated in the first workers' rallies of the Victorian era. Historically, workers marked the day with various activities. These included parades, speeches, games, amateur competitions and picnics. The holiday promoted working-class solidarity and belonging during a time of rapid industrialization. Since the Second World War, fewer and fewer people have participated in Labour Day activities. Nevertheless, it remains a statutory holiday. Many Canadians now devote the Labour Day holiday to leisure activity and family time.

Before the 1880s, people held sporadic festivities in connection with larger labour movements. Some historians trace the origin of Labour Day to the Nine Hour Movement (1872).

Labour organizations began to hold celebrations more frequently following a labour convention in New York in September 1882. Spurred on by this initial success, the American Federation of Labor and the Knights of Labor actively promoted workers' celebrations on the first Monday in September in the United States. The Canadian chapters of these organizations did the same. Records show similar gatherings in Toronto (1882); Hamilton and Oshawa (1883); Montreal (1886); St. Catharines (1887); Halifax (1888); Ottawa and Van-

couver (1890); and London (1892).

As the event grew more popular nationwide, labour organizations pressured governments to declare the first Monday in September a statutory holiday. Their impact was significant enough that the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital in Canada (1886-89) recommended that the federal government establish a "labour day." Before this, the day had official status in only a few municipalities. Montreal, for example, declared it a civic holiday in 1889.

In March and April 1894, more than 50 labour organizations from Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Manitoba and British Columbia petitioned parliamentarians. These groups included several regional trade and labour councils, as well as local assemblies of the Knights of Labor. They based their lobbying movement on similar initiatives from American unions. In the House of Commons, a bill sponsored by Prime Minister John Thompson prompted the debate about the holiday's legal status in May 1894. The House passed an amended holiday law without major discussion. It received royal assent on 23 July. The United States federal government also recognized the holiday in 1894.

The provinces had no choice but to adapt. For example, Quebec parliamentarians announced that the province's courts would not sit on the first Monday in September of that year. It wasn't until 1899 that the province granted the holiday legal status, ordering school boards to delay the start of classes until after the first Monday in September.

Canadians celebrated Labour Day with much ceremony on September 3, 1894. In Montreal, the city's Trades and Labour Congress played a key role in organizing events for the day. A parade set out from the Champ de Mars park at 9 a.m. Its divisions grouped together unions representing the same trade. The Grande-Hermine local assembly of the Knights of Labor led the way. It guided participants to a park where they held speeches, games and a picnic. In Quebec City, the Trades and

Labour Congress chose instead to hold a mass followed by entertainment. This included bicycle competitions, foot races and a lacrosse match.

LIUNA! Local 180
Labourers' International Union of North America



LIUNA Local 180 would like to thank the hard working people of Saskatchewan this Labour Day. Together we will continue the fight for safer working conditions and better wages

306.525.2336
www.local180.ca

LIUNA LOCAL 180
2206 E Emmett Hall Road
Regina, SK S4N 3M3



Let this Labour Day be a reminder:
every worker deserves dignity, respect and a voice.

sgeu.org/join

SGEU | Saskatchewan Government
& General Employees' Union



Labour Day and workplace safety progress in Saskatchewan

Labour Day has long symbolized the achievements of working people. Today, it also stands as a powerful reminder of the shared responsibility in ensuring every worker returns home safely. That responsibility is upheld by an enduring relationship among many—workers, employers, safety associations, labour and WorkSafe Saskatchewan, the partnership between the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) and the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety.

"You may not know that workplaces in Saskatchewan are safer now than ever," said Kevin Mooney, the WCB's vice-president of prevention and employer services. "The efforts of workers, employers, safety associations and safety leaders across our province have made Saskatchewan workplaces safer than they have ever been."

Mooney pointed to numbers that support that message. The province's total injury rate has reached a new low for the past two years, falling almost 69 per cent since WorkSafe Saskatchewan was established in 2002. In 2024, the time-loss injury rate was the lowest ever recorded. And for the fifth consecutive year, 90 per cent of Saskatchewan workplaces reported zero fatalities and zero injuries.

"These are inspiring numbers for all of us," Mooney said. "I applaud the collaboration between labour and employers across Saskatchewan who are focused on reducing workplace injury rates. But even one injury is too many, and we believe that every workplace injury is preventable."



Despite the progress, approximately 2,400 Saskatchewan workers are seriously injured and nearly 30 workers are killed due to work-related incidents every year. That's why WorkSafe Saskatchewan's 2023-2028 Fatalities and Serious Injuries Strategy is supporting industries with the highest injury rates and focusing

on the most common workplace hazards. The strategy's approach includes prevention campaigns, targeted inspections, industry partnerships and training programs designed to address risks before an incident occurs.

Part of prevention is ensuring every worker knows their rights:

- The right to know about hazards in the workplace.
- The right to participate in health and safety matters.

Employers play a key role in supporting those rights, from providing training and equipment to fostering an open culture where safety concerns are heard and addressed. In turn, workers contribute by following safe work procedures, reporting hazards and participating in safety programs.

"A safe workplace takes leadership, commitment and a culture where safety is truly valued," Mooney said. "To raise the standard of success, we must innovate and push the limits of what we currently know and do."

Labour Day is more than a holiday. It's a time to renew that shared commitment. The progress Saskatchewan has made in reducing workplace injuries shows what is possible when everyone works together. By continuing to invest in safety, respecting workplace rights and supporting one another, Saskatchewan can keep building a future where every worker goes home safely at the end of their shift. We are stronger together, and together we can make every workplace safer.

 A large, close-up photograph of a hand wearing a yellow work glove. The hand is holding a yellow hard hat. The background is dark and textured.

Today, we honour all the people in Saskatchewan who work to enrich our province.

WorkSafe
SASKATCHEWAN

worksafesask.ca

Work to live.



Looking forward to Labour Day



The meaning behind some parts of our history tends to fade from our collective memory over time. This is certainly the case for Labour Day, a holiday that has taken on a whole new significance through the years. One thing remains the same, however: Canadians continue to welcome this long weekend with open arms!

Nowadays, Labour Day signals the end of summer activities and the beginning of a new school year, and it is a time to relax before our busy fall schedules take precedence. Even though there is still a feeling of summer in the air, we become more aware that the days are getting shorter and we notice that the harvest season is around the corner, bringing fall scents like hay and wet fallen leaves.

Labour Day is a time of change in many different ways, and it provides a wonderful opportunity to roam the countryside, stocking up on freshly-picked vegetables or biting into crispy apples. It is a favourite time of year for outdoor enthusiasts of all kinds, with some people taking advantage of this three-day weekend to travel even further afield, exploring new areas of the country.

Yet there is a great deal of meaning behind this special event, which we all celebrate on the first Monday of September. It should also be a time to remember the origins of Labour Day, to remember that, without the efforts and sacrifices of the labour movement to improve working conditions during the 1880s and '90s, this holiday would not exist. That vast mobilization of the labour force, born in big cities such as Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal, grew to encompass the entire Canadian working class and became the holiday that we know today.

Labour Day is more than just another day off. This 1st of September, let's celebrate the success of the workplace and think about ways of improving every aspect of work, so that every day is safer and more fulfilling. Labour Day has been celebrated on the first Monday of September for more than a century. In fact, the first Labour Day parade was held in New York in 1882. Twelve years later, Labour Day became an official holi-

day in the United States as well as in Canada.

Picnics, fireworks and many other activities organized by unions take place during this long weekend, to remind us of the great battles that were won over the years and the challenges faced by a work environment in perpetual transition. It's the perfect occasion to make sure that safety will remain a priority and that new ways will be found to consolidate family and work.

While primarily a celebration of the working class, Labour Day is increasingly recognized as the unofficial end of summer. Therefore, take the time during this long weekend to fully enjoy summer's last effort. Make it a weekend to remember by joining in public events in the city or in the

country; celebrate with an outdoor barbecue and one last splash in the pool or the lake! During these festivities, also take a minute to fully appreciate the fact that having a job enables you to enjoy the good things in life, while building a good future for yourself and your loved ones.



**SASKATCHEWAN JOINT BOARD
RETAIL WHOLESALE AND
DEPARTMENT STORE UNION**

Workers or labourers are an inseparable part of the society, and on a larger scale, of the nation. We all are heavily dependent on the contribution of everyone surrounding us, so we also must give back to them in return. On Labour Day, May Day, or International Workers' Day, we can pay our respect to their efforts and celebrate their jobs without creating any discrimination among them.

**Sending our appreciation and respect to
the workers of every field.
Happy Labour Day!**



RWDSU

RETAIL, WHOLESALE DEPARTMENT STORE UNION

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Toll Free: 1-877-747-9378

UNION MEMBERSHIP PAYS HIGH DIVIDENDS

Such Things as:

- Higher Wages
- Job Security
- Proper Scheduling
- Sick Leave
- Family Dental Plan
- Improved Vacation
- Good Pension

- Fair Treatment
- Democratic Decision Making
- Better Health and Safety Procedures
- Proper Grievance Procedures
- Experienced Staff Working for You

FOR A BETTER FUTURE - JOIN R.W.D.S.U.

LABOUR DAY IS UBC BUILT

LOCAL 1985

2251 N Albert Street, Regina, SK S4K 0A6
(306) 585-0900

SHORTER WORK DAYS

A parade was held in solidarity with the workers of Toronto. Carpenters won a shorter work day that paved the way for the modern eight-hour workday

1872

FIRST CANADIAN UBC LOCAL UNION

The UBC was founded by carpenters led by Peter J. McGuire**. Months later, carpenters in Hamilton, ON, became the first Canadian UBC members, and Toronto carpenters joined in early 1882.

1881

OFFICIAL LABOUR DAY LAW

Prime Minister John Thompson passed a law making Labour Day official in Canada. A huge Labour Day parade took place in Winnipeg that year.

STRONG. SKILLED. AS ONE.

We continue standing up for workers' rights. Thanks to the fight for fair working conditions, you now get: paid vacation, overtime pay, weekends and holidays off.

2025

