



Labour Day - Yesterday and Today

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Each year we celebrate Labour Day in a number of countries. For most of us, it is merely a long weekend that signals the end of the summer season. Its roots, however, were ones that involved struggle.

In Toronto in the mid eighteenth hundreds there was a new industrialized economy where machines began to replace employees. Workers lost their power and therefore faced long working hours, poor benefits and deplorable working conditions. This situation led to a need for solidarity by the workers. They began staging protests and parades that were attended by crowds of up to 10,000 supporters. Over time, they gained the attention of society and the government.

It was the workers who actually set up an annual celebration for workers' rights. The first Labour Day that was recognized by government as a national holiday was declared by Prime Minister Sir John Thompson in 1894.

According to Statistics Canada, the employment rate in Canada in May 2011 was only 60.9%. This year there are still many who are not working for a number of reasons:

1. Age - Our laws prevent children from legally being employed until they are fourteen years old. The demographic bubble that resulted from Canada's "baby boom" after World War II has increased the proportion of the population who are now receiving pensions or have accumulated financial means to retire early.
2. Injury or illness - Many are not physically or mentally able to work. Onsite or personal accidents, disease or mental conditions might have put them in a situation where their health does not allow them to hold a job.
3. Economy - Over the past couple of years, the oil and gas industry has declined to the point that thousands of workers from that field are now unemployed. This situation has had a trickle-down effect on the rest of society. Some businesses have failed and others are struggling to the point that layoffs and hiring freezes have been put in place. There are therefore not as many available job openings.
4. Lack of skills - Not having English, computer or other marketable skills can prevent individuals from starting or changing careers.
5. Education - Many employers have minimum standards that prospective employees are missing.
6. Resources - Some people do not have the information or supports to help them learn about or secure employment.
7. Apathy - As much as we might not like to admit it, there is a small percentage of the population that do not want to work.

Labour Day is not just an extra holiday to end the summer season. It is a time to reflect on those individuals who were determined to fight for change that affects employment conditions across Canada to this day!

We do not have to be employed in order to respect and enjoy Labour Day. In fact, just knowing how it originated should give each of us a feeling of gratitude.