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Labour Day 2019

Events Across Canada Uphold the Dignity of Labour and Defend the Rights of All



Prince George

Labour Day events took place across Canada with the exception of Quebec where workers recognize May Day as the international day of working class unity and struggle. A marked feature in this year's Labour

Day was to hear workers say that when they fight for their rights and their claim on what belongs to them by right, they represent not only what is required today but that their fight opens a future for the coming generations.

Recognition is widespread that in the twenty-first century workers do not want governments that say they are acting in the name of working people but in deeds represent narrow private interests. In speaking with workers at the Labour Day events, one of the concerns expressed most often was that the upcoming federal elections will once again be a fraud in which the workers have no say over the outcome whatsoever. Working people do not choose the candidates, the agenda, issues, discourse, debate or what appears in the mass media. Recognition is growing that workers themselves must democratize the political process so that they can exercise control over the decisions which affect their lives. A salient feature on the minds of many was how do workers determine in practice who is elected and how governments can be held to account for their deeds.

Workers spoke out in defence of justice, human dignity and the rights of all, for an end to exploitation and impoverishment, enslavement, environmental degradation and war.

Banners called for "Justice for Injured Workers" and for the unemployed; others said No-One Is Illegal and demanded an end to fraudulent consultations with Indigenous peoples that in fact deny them the right to give or not to give their consent to activities that affect their lives.

The slogans *Stop Paying the Rich! Increase Investments in Social Programs! Make Canada a Zone for Peace! Empower Yourself Now!* were also present at various actions.

Renewal Update is posting photos and short reports of some of the Labour Day events.

Ontario

Toronto



Thousands of workers participated in the annual Labour Day march in Toronto. The theme of the event, organized by the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, was "Organize, Educate, Resist!" the Ford Conservative government's anti-social offensive against the workers and society.

Workers from many sectors brought forward their concerns. The Amalgamated Transit Union Local 113, representing 12,000 Toronto transit workers called for the repeal of the Ford Government's Bill 107 which is aimed at privatizing the transit system. Teachers and education workers from OSSTF, OECTA and ETFO vigorously denounced the Ford government's cuts to education in Ontario and expressed their

determination to step up their resistance.

Library workers in Toronto, organized under CUPE 4948, opposed the introduction of "staffless branches" which removes the human factor in library service. Two branches in Toronto are already "staffless" despite the opposition of the staff and public.

Migrant Workers Alliance for Change brought to the fore the Canadian state's racist immigration policy which continues to deny migrant workers their basic rights to health care and education, forces them into unsafe and low paying jobs and denies them the right to stay in Canada.

The mood of the workers to change this situation was reflected in the enthusiasm with which the Labour Day statement of the Worker's Centre of the Marxist Leninist Party of Canada -- "Uphold the Dignity of Labour! Defend the Rights of All!" was received.



Hamilton



Thousands of workers marched in the Labour Day parade in Hamilton, Ontario. Through their banners and placards they stood for their right to negotiated collective agreements, pension security, and justice for all.

The annual event was disrupted when Prime Minister Trudeau attempted to join the march at the invitation of one of the unions. However, Hamilton workers do not see Trudeau as a friend of labour. They do not think that he can waltz in and wipe clean his long record of broken promises from the last election, and anti-worker actions in government, such as his government's criminalization of postal workers last November by outlawing their rotating strikes. A large blockade quickly formed and initially prevented Trudeau from joining the parade.

Grassy Narrows supporters raised the issue of the mercury poisoning of their waters and demanded action to resolve the issue and bring to account those responsible for the disaster and the ensuing decades of inaction. Anti-war and other local activists joined the blockade of Trudeau with their banners and placards. PSAC members confronted Trudeau demanding a just and swift contract settlement for their 140,000 members, many of whom have been victims of the Phoenix pay debacle. The outrage of many at Trudeau in a Hamilton Labour Day parade forced the Prime Minister to withdraw from the parade's marshalling grounds before its start. He subsequently slipped in after the rest of the contingents had left the assembly point.



Activists of the MLPC distributed the Party's Labour Day statement to all the contingents throughout the parade, which was well received.





Windsor



When speeches began after Windsor's Labour Day Parade arrived at Fogolar Furlan, the venue of its annual picnic, Dave Cassidy, President of Unifor 444 informed the crowd gathered there that Nemak had decided to close its Windsor Aluminum Plant in 2020 instead of honouring its negotiated collective agreement with the workers, in which it committed to keep the plant open until at least 2022. Because of this negotiation of the contract, Cassidy announced that the workers and leadership of Unifor Local 200 had taken over the plant. "We own the technology, we own the material, we own the tooling and Nemak owes it to our workers," he said to cheers and raised fists from the crowd.

As soon as the speeches ended, many workers from other Unifor locals and other unions headed for the Windsor Aluminum Plant on the city's west side in support of the Nemak workers' picket line.

During the last week of August Unifor National and Local 200 leaders travelled to Mexico to meet with company CEO Armando Tamez to try to get the early closure decision reversed. As it did not appear the meeting made any headway, Unifor decided to take action to put pressure on the company. It has chained the doors of the factory and the machinery inside the plant and says no one will be permitted to enter and no technology, machines or product will be allowed out. According to the union, in anticipation of closing the plant Nemak has been trying to bring in engineers from Mexico to learn the processes and familiarize themselves with the machinery at the Windsor Plant to facilitate moving production to Mexico. There are presently 270 people employed at the facility, 170 of them hourly workers who are members of Unifor Local 200. The union has set up an around-the-clock picket at the plant.



John D'Agnolo, Unifor Local 200 president, told a press conference shortly after the announcement made at the Labour Day picnic: "We shouldn't be here right now. We should be celebrating Labour Day with our families. Nemak put us in this position. We're protesting this because of Nemak and their greed. I want you to think about this: in 2016 the members had to make a decision on their futures. The company came to us and said here's the deal: we'll give you three new programs if you freeze your wages. The members ratified that agreement and the company backed out. We're here today because of this. Our members right now can't sleep. They gotta think about their futures, how they're going to take care of their children. When's enough enough?"

When asked by a reporter whether this action was legal, Jerry Dias, National Unifor president, stated: "This is absolutely as legal as what they are doing. The fact is that Nemak is operating as if there's no collective agreement, so we are now operating under the premise that there is no collective agreement. So, we accept their version, we accept that there is no agreement in place therefore this is absolutely legal."

On September 4 the company obtained an injunction from the Ontario Labour Relations Board ordering the union to cease and desist its "unlawful work stoppage." On September 5, with the workers still off the job and refusing to remove any of the barricades they put in place to block all entrances to the plant, Nemak applied for and obtained a court order. The judge ordered the workers to immediately comply with the Labour Board's ruling and further said that access to the plant "must not be impeded in any way, by any person." Unifor has said it will challenge the court order.

Over the last four years, Nemak received \$1.5 million from the provincial government and \$3 million from the federal government to keep its Windsor operations going. It is also of note that in July 2016, a grant of up to \$1.3 million to Nemak was approved by Windsor City Council under its "Economic Revitalization Community Improvement Plan." While the company reportedly has not accessed that money, it did receive \$3 million under the same plan in 2012-13. Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens who on Tuesday visited the

workers' picket line was quoted in the Windsor Star as saying Nemark's latest action represented "a slap in a lot of people's faces."

Unifor meanwhile has requested an urgent meeting with Navdeep Bains, Minister of Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, to discuss the company's decision to break the contract it signed with its workers and leave the country after it received millions of dollars in support from all levels of government, including a federal grant of \$3 million in 2017, which Bains said at the time would contribute to creating "the well-paying middle class jobs of the future."

Nemark is a subsidiary of the Mexican industrial conglomerate Alfa. Its Windsor Aluminum Plant currently supplies engine blocks to General Motors, mainly to supply its plant that produces Cadillacs in Shanghai, China. The company has indicated that its reason for deciding to close the Windsor plant in 2020 instead of 2022 was a drop-off in demand by GM's China operations. At the same time, Unifor has said that to replace this loss of work Nemark won a bid on a new contract with Fiat Chrysler. However, even though the bid along with the design and development of the new production process required was prepared by its workers in Windsor, the company has decided to send the work to a plant in Monterrey, Mexico.

Nemark has 38 plants in 16 countries. Its revenues in 2018 were reported as U.S. \$4.7 billion. Starting in 1996 Ford Motor Company's Essex and Windsor Aluminum Plants were operated as a joint venture between Ford and Nemark. Ford eventually pulled out and Nemark assumed ownership of both. In 2008 Nemark closed the Essex Aluminum Plant, throwing 600 out of work. The Windsor Aluminum Plant is its last remaining Canadian operation.

Other Ontario Cities and Towns

Ottawa



Sudbury



Sault Ste Marie



Alberta

Calgary



Edmonton



British Columbia

Vancouver and Surrey



The New Westminster and District Labour Council held its annual Labour Day Picnic on September 2 at Holland Park in Surrey.

Various community organizations and unions including the International Longshoremen and Warehouse Union (ILWU), Carpenters Union, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Canadian Union of Public Employees, United Food and Commercial Workers and the Federation of Post Secondary Educators set up information booths. The ILWU served hot dogs. An area was set aside for children's games and entertainment.

The secretary-treasurer of the Labour Council, Janet Andrews, welcomed everyone by acknowledging that the picnic was taking place on unceded Indigenous land. She stated the labour movement is committed to true reconciliation and is working to get the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous

Peoples implemented. According to Andrews the Labour Council represents 60,000 workers in 100 union locals covering 14 municipalities. She concluded by saying that members of Unite Here Local 40 may soon be taking strike action against several hotels.

The Left Coast Labour Chorus sang a number of union songs followed by a family of Indigenous drummers who sang several songs, one of which was sung in English telling how Indigenous peoples have always lived in harmony with Mother Nature, protecting the land and environment. The main speaker was BC Labour Minister Harry Bains who is also a Surrey MLA. He stated that Labour Day belongs to millions of workers "who built this province" and waged many hard fought struggles to get the labour movement to where it is today.

Activists of MLPC distributed copies of *Renewal Update* "Labour Day 2019 Uphold the Dignity of Labour! Defend the Rights of All!," engaged workers in discussion and invited them to subscribe to *Renewal Update*. Later they distributed *Renewal Update* at the Vancouver and District Labour Council Labour Day rally and picnic at Jack Poole Plaza in downtown Vancouver.

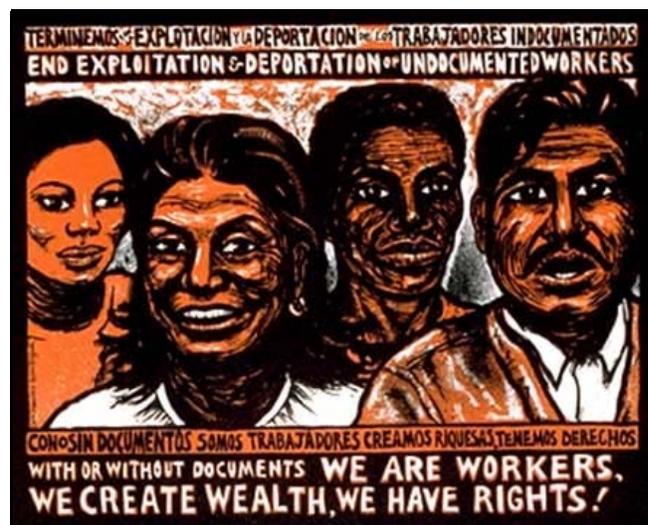


Vancouver

More than 400 organizations and individuals have signed an open letter to the Attorney General of British Columbia, David Eby, and other federal and provincial government leaders, condemning the Canadian Border Services raid on the Hastings Racecourse on August 19, which resulted in the arrest of 26 migrant workers.

About a hundred people rallied on Labour Day outside the Hastings Racecourse where thousands of people were attending the final day of the Pacific National Exhibition. Speakers at the rally explained that seven workers have been sent to their home countries and barred from entering Canada for five years on the grounds that they allegedly had false registration cards. An employee of the BC Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch is under investigation with regards to the case.

The open letter entitled "Solidarity with Migrant Workers in Racecourse Raid," which was endorsed by speakers at the rally, points out that the migrant workers, many of whom have been coming to Canada for many years, believed that the documents they had been given were legitimate and they do not deserve to be punished for the alleged actions of others.



The letter says, "In situations of investigations, workers -- especially vulnerable workers -- should not be punished or harmed for the actions of others. The provincial and federal government must protect these workers through open work permits and temporary resident permits, and allow them re-entry into Canada to continue to work." The letter calls on all levels of government to reject military style raids and actions that fuel the forces of racism and xenophobia against migrant workers.

The letter concludes with the the demand for "the right to permanent landing status upon arrival for migrant workers, and full and equal access to social programs and employment standards.... We call on all levels of government to not divide workers from each other, to not leave any worker behind, to affirm decent work and universal quality services, and to ensure the protection of all workers."

Vancouver Island



The Campbell River, Courtenay and District Labour Council organized a lively Labour Day Picnic at the Merville Hall. Steelworkers, miners, ferry workers, education, health care workers, many retirees and their families attended. They enjoyed a salmon barbecue and listened to speeches by Labour Council President Andrea Craddock, Comox Valley MLA Ronna-Rae Leonard and North Island-Powell River MP Rachel Blaney. Music celebrating the struggles of workers for their rights was provided by Art Farquharson.

A common thread in the speeches and discussions during the day was the need for unity in action against employers who trample on workers' rights and are attempting to take away gains that unions have achieved over many years. This is the situation facing forestry workers and miners in the region. Health care and education workers, including BC teachers, are also demanding increased funding for social programs and the reversal of the effects of the government attacks during the two decades long anti-social offensive of the ruling elite.

The current fight of BC Coastal Forestry workers, members of United Steelworkers Local 1-1937 was on everyone's mind. Two thousand and six hundred members of the Local have been on strike against Western Forest Products since July 1. The company, which had net profit of \$74.4 million and \$69.2 million in 2017 and 2018 respectively, wants workers to accept a two-tier pay system for new employees, elimination of the current pension plan and other rollbacks of working conditions negotiated in the past. Steelworkers and their supporters at the picnic, expressed their determination to defeat this attack on their rights and the rights of all workers.

Prince George

A successful Labour Day march and celebration was held in Prince George, BC, at the Canada Games Plaza. The event was organized by the Labour Day Organizing Committee and was sponsored by over 30 unions, labour organizations and community groups. It began with a march through downtown by 150

union and community members carrying picket signs and banners. Chants included "Fight for the Rights of All;" "Workers Unite, Keep Up the Fight;" "Manufacturing Yes, Mill Closures No;" "Our logs, Our Jobs;" "Who Decides, We Decide;" "Public Services Yes, Privatization No;" and "A Fair Canada for Everyone."



The march was followed up with the celebration which began at 12 noon. In the course of the day, an estimated 2,000 people participated. The celebration included speakers, free food and snacks, music, games for kids, and display tables for unions, businesses, community groups, and political parties.

The event was chaired by co-hosts Heather Sapergia and Matt Baker from the Labour Day Organizing Committee. It started off with a performance by the Khas'tan Drummers and was followed by welcomes by elder Darlene McIntosh, from the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation, and Lyn Hall, mayor of Prince George, who noted the presence of Prince George city councilors Frank Everitt, Murry Krause, Terry McConachie, Cori Ramsay, and Susan Scott.

Throughout the afternoon, the bands Cottonwood and Far From Linear, along with folksinger Kevin Hutchings, entertained the crowd with popular, folk and labour songs.

Speakers included Natalie Fletcher from North Central Labour Council, Peter Ewart from the Labour Day Organizing Committee, Brian O'Rourke, president of USW Local 2017, and Sussanne Skidmore, Secretary-Treasurer of the BC Federation of Labour.

Activities and discussion carried on for several hours after the presentations, with organizers already planning for next year's Labour Day.

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