A History of Labour's Achievements

YORK UNIVERSITY STAFF ASSOCIATION
YUSA
ASSOCIATION DU PERSONNEL DE L'UNIVERSITÉ YORK

Working people today sometimes forget the huge gains we have made over the last century and a half. Remembering these historical victories and the courageous people who won them not only teaches us lessons from the past, but renews our commitment to struggles in the future. Here we look back at some of Canada's most significant achievements in labour history.

1872

The Nine Hours Movement, the first cross-occupational labour organization, is founded in Hamilton. Two dozen labour leaders in Toronto are arrested for going on strike. The first Labour Day is celebrated in Canada.

1910

Union membership soars in Canada during the opening years of the 20th century and reaches nearly 160,000 by the end of the first decade.

1918

Due to massive strike action and labour union pressure, the eight-hour workday becomes standard and the first minimum wage legislation is passed by Manitoba and British Columbia.

1919

The Winnipeg General Strike sees over 22,000 public and private sector workers walk off the job. The government retaliates with violence. Hundreds are injured. One striker is killed.

The Great Depression

Massive unemployment radicalizes the North American working class, who look to labour unions and political action. World War II begins, and Rosie the Riveter symbolizes the millions of women who enter the industrial workforce for the first time.

1946

Because of a militant CAW strike at a Windsor Ford plant, Supreme Court of Canada Justice Ivan Rand rules on the automatic dues check off, where the payment of union dues is mandatory for all workers, regardless of their status within the organization.

1962

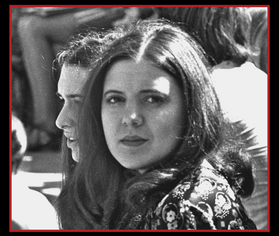
The first universal health care system in North America is established by the NDP government of Saskatchewan. Trade unions and labour activists play a vital role of educating the masses about the benefits of public health care against a multi-million dollar propaganda campaign by the insurance industry.

1968

The Confederation of Canadian Unions is founded by labour organizers Madeleine Parent and Kent Rowley.

1972

Due to extensive labour union activism, the first Occupational Health Act is passed by the NDP government of Saskatchewan. It established for the first time the workers' right to refuse dangerous work. The legislation becomes a model for the rest of the country.



1975

The York University Staff Association is certified and wins its first collective agreement a year later.

1986

The Employment Equity Act is passed, mandating federally regulated private employers with 100 or more employees to develop and implement equity plans that eliminate workplace barriers to women, Aboriginal Peoples, persons with disabilities and visible minorities.

1987

Because of pressure from labour unions and organizations such as the Equal Pay Coalition, Ontario becomes the first jurisdiction in the world to pass pay equity legislation for both public and private sector workers.

1988

During the Federal Election, the labour movement leads the fight against the US – Canada Free Trade Agreement. It is later passed by the Mulroney government, and hundreds of thousands of jobs, many of them unionized and in the manufacturing sector, are lost during the following years.

1991

For the first time in Canada, activists organize a gay and lesbian rights committee within a union. A year later, unions begin court action to guarantee pensions for same-sex couples.