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UNION OF PUBLIC & PRIVATE EMPLOYEES**

The Labour that went into Labour Day

A Foolish®, Absurd® and Unreasonable® That's what employers called a demand made by the Toronto Printers' Union in 1872 to reduce the working day from 12 hours to nine.

The Printers went on strike to back their demand. Some 2,000 workers from 27 unions paraded through Toronto to show solidarity with the strikers. By the time the parade reached Queen's Park, the sympathetic crowd had grown to 10,000.

Newspaper owner and politician George Brown fought back against the strikers by bringing in scabs from small towns and launching a legal action against the union for A conspiracy®. Brown's lawsuit revealed the astonishing fact that under laws dating back to 1792, union activity was considered a criminal offence in Canada. Police moved in and jailed 24 members of the strike committee.

Brown's political rival, Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, saw an opportunity to capitalize with voters. He came to the rescue of the imprisoned strike leaders and, on June 14, 1872, passed a Trade Union Act, which legalized and protected union activity.

Many of the striking printers still ended up losing their jobs. However, their fight had a lasting legacy. Almost all unions started demanding a 54-hour week. And the parades held in support of the strike and the A nine-hour movement® turned into an annual celebration. On July 23, 1894, the Canadian government officially made Labour Day, the first Monday in September, a national holiday.

So this Monday, when you're at the cottage or having an end-of-the-summer barbecue with friends, take a moment to reflect on the heroes who created the holiday that we now all take for granted.

Happy Labour Day everyone!

NOTE 1: If you want to join a Labour Day parade, there will be one Monday, September 4, 2006, at 11 a.m. starting at the South Commons in Halifax.

NOTE 2: For many more details on Labour Day, check out this book: A The Workers' Festival: A History of Labour Day in Canada,® by Craig Heron and Steve Penfold, University of Toronto Press, 2005.

NOTE 3: The Did You Know? series is general information only. For advice specific to your workplace or personal circumstances, please contact a union representative. Comments are welcome at nsupe@ns.sympatico.ca. For back issues of Did You Know?, look under A News® on the NSUPE website: www.nsupe.ca.