

This Labour Day, reflect on what we have – and what we want to keep

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Labour Day is a great time for workers and employers to stop and consider where we came from, where we stand, and how we can continue to move forward.

Despite all the work we have done together, and how far we have come, workers continue to fight to protect fundamental democratic values, traditions and institutions.

The current federal government has shown flagrant disregard for basic rights that we too often take for granted. Under the Harper government, we've seen attacks on independent watchdogs such as Elections Canada and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission; the refusal to repatriate a Canadian child-soldier who has been illegally detained and tortured by the U.S. for more than six years; attempts to pass legislation based purely on narrow ideology; and pressure to privatize Canada's public services. Out of 143 countries, Canada was one of only four countries that refused to adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Canadians are aware that inaction on greenhouse gas emissions could lead to devastating climate change. In 2002, Harper called the Kyoto protocol "a socialist scheme to suck money out of wealth-producing nations". This is not an acceptable response for the thousands of lower income households and vulnerable communities who will be especially hurt by the impact of climate change.

For many workers across Canada, this has been a year fraught with stress and financial insecurity. Thousands of manufacturing jobs have been lost, impacting upon countless workers and their communities.

Today, as we reflect on all of the things that make us proud Canadian workers, we must also consider how hard we are willing to fight to keep it that way.

- It's time for the Harper government to reverse its failed policy of tax cuts for wealthy corporations and start eradicating the \$100 billion-plus deficit in Canadian public infrastructure. Investment in public infrastructure generates high rates of return and is vital to rebuilding communities and the economy.
- A national economy is only as strong as its workforce. It's time to start investing in national programs that support our labour market. For working families, we need a pan-Canadian, public early-learning and child care program. On the job, we need to invest in training, including literacy programs. We can't sit and watch

our economy sink while high-skill positions remain empty and poorly qualified workers stay underemployed.

- In the ongoing discussions on interprovincial trade in the country, CUPE will continue to counter the threat of TILMA-like agreements that would allow corporations to sue governments for any loss of profit caused by a difference in regulations.
- The single most important task for workers may be resisting the wave of privatization of public services. Continuous research and advocacy is exposing so-called public private partnerships for what they are – bottomless money pits for private corporations.
- Canadians must remain vigilant in protecting public health care, a founding block of Canadian social justice. It's time to learn from the failed systems of the U.S. and Great Britain. The solutions are well known: they include a public-sector only wait time strategy, a national pharmacare program and a national long-term care program.
- Labour must continue to counter corporate globalization by linking arms with its brothers and sisters around the world. This summer, four of Canada's public sector union leaders toured Colombia to examine human and labour rights in view of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement. That Canada would even contemplate such an agreement with a country where one trade unionist is murdered every few days is a gross violation of Canadian values.

This Labour Day, we celebrate the incredible strength and dedication of our brothers and sisters in Canada and around the world. It is a time to consider the stability and security that our unions have worked hard to build for Canadian workers. As we reflect upon all that we have won, we also need to consider the road ahead, and how hard we need to work together to keep our workplaces democratic, and our services positively public.