

Workers use Labour Day parades to send message



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TORONTO — After a year of seeing their troops battered by decimated tourism and beef industries, strikes and layoffs, thousands of workers converged in solidarity Monday at Labour Day events across the country.



Clad in brightly stenciled t-shirts bearing the names and local numbers of dozens of unions, workers - from nurses to teachers to bricklayers to engineers - marched in Toronto's Labour Day parade to send a message to the province and people of Ontario. "Unions are here to stay," said Dale McInnis, a worker with the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union.

"We're here, we're strong and no one is going to make us go away."

As Ontario braces for a provincial election, Labour Day celebrations across the province turned into rallying cries by many labour movements to vote out the current Conservative government.

United Steelworkers international president Leo Gerard challenged union members to get angry, and if they couldn't get angry, to think of "Inco, and Ernie Eves ..."

Steelworkers at Inco Ltd.'s Sudbury operations will return to work Tuesday after having been on strike for the last three months.

With a minority government in place in Nova Scotia, union leaders there expressed optimism Monday that the year ahead would be a good one for workers.

"I think a minority government's going to be good for us," said Rick Clarke, president of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, at a barbecue for workers.

"We've got to try and convince politicians to think outside the box. Workers all contribute to the economy and if they don't have the security and wages to do it, then our economy suffers too."

In Edmonton, about 50,000 people were expected to chow down on 12,000 kilograms of free beef Monday as part of BBQ Canada, an initiative by Kinsmen clubs across the country to help struggling cattle producers hit hard by the mad cow crisis.

The Kinsmen hope to enter the barbecue into the Guinness Book of Records as the world's largest national barbecue.

In a different part of Edmonton, thousands of unemployed and working poor turned out at the annual Edmonton and District Labour Council barbecue.

Alberta New Democrat Brian Mason called for the province to raise its minimum wage of \$5.90 per hour to \$7 per hour, with another increase of \$1 in a year. The last time it was raised was in October 1999.

"Two people working full time at \$8 per hour earn a yearly income that is still \$3,000 below the poverty line for a family of four," Mason said.

Present at the Toronto parade were workers from as far away as South America, Pakistan and Korea.

Workers have been celebrating their contributions to Canada since the late 1800's. In 1894, the Canadian government passed a law proclaiming the first Monday in September as Labour Day.

"Unions make a difference; their existence is as meaningful now to the well-being of Canadian workers as it was when Canada industrialized and workers fought for the right to have a collective voice," said Buzz Hargrove, president of the Canadian Auto Workers Union, in his annual Labour Day message.

"This Labour Day unions need to celebrate but also to rededicate themselves to resistance and renewal."

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