

Battered but unbowed, labour marches

By GAY ABBATE
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Toronto — They were laid off or their work hours were dramatically cut as the city's tourism industry was devastated by the SARS outbreak. And they are still fighting for compensation for lost wages.

But yesterday, as the summer that Toronto residents would sooner forget comes to an unofficial close with the start of school, more than 1,000 hospitality workers swelled the ranks of the city's annual Labour Day parade. Their numbers helped make this year's parade one of the largest in the 132 years it has been staged.

Their presence, along with that of beleaguered health-care workers who were at the front line of the fight against severe acute respiratory syndrome, show that union people are incredibly proud of Toronto, said John Cartwright, president of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, which organized the parade.

"People are actually reaffirming their own sense of what union members do in this society and how important the services they provide are," he said in an interview as an estimated 28,000 union members passed by.

Many other unions whose members have suffered financially because of SARS also made their presence felt. They included actors, stage hands and make-up artists who lost jobs when shows closed this summer because audiences stayed home.

Mr. Cartwright said his council is working with all unions representing the entertainment industry to try to obtain federal funds "to turn the industry around so Toronto can again be Hollywood North."

Wearing a kaleidoscope of coloured T-shirts printed with their union logo, many unionists



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waited several hours for their turn to march. [REDACTED]
They pushed strollers, handed out flyers, sang,
danced to a variety of music and generally had
a great party.

But there was serious business behind the festive atmosphere.

After years of unions in this city fighting for their very lives, the movement has momentum, energy and a renewed determination, Mr. Cartwright said.

The large turnout may have something to do with both municipal and provincial elections this year. The local election is Nov. 10. A provincial election announcement is expected tomorrow with voters going to the polls Oct. 2.

The labour council has endorsed Councillor David Miller in his bid to become the city's next mayor. It invited Mr. Miller to speak briefly before the start of the parade and he and his supporters joined the marchers.

Mr. Miller addressed some of the political issues that were of obvious interest to many of the marchers who waved placards advocating the closing of the island airport, a cleaner environment, and keeping public services in public hands.

Mr. Miller received a big round of applause when he said that "when I'm mayor of Toronto, Toronto Hydro will never ever be privatized."

He praised the unions, saying that they are the ones who built this city and continue to make it grow.

Marchers were also urged to throw out the Progressive Conservative government in the provincial election. Some chanted "Ernie Eves has to go."

The large turnout proves that the union movement is alive and well, Mr. Cartwright said.

Pattie Huard, a postal worker in Scarborough who gussied up a van for the parade and provided doughnuts to marchers, said that without unions, "we'd be in bad shape."

John Sims, a member of the Steelworkers' union for 25 years, said he is happy to see the labour movement grow because so many companies are unwilling to pay their employees properly. "Without the unions many people would lose their jobs," he said.

Harvey Ward said he would not work for any company that was not unionized. Although long retired, the 83-year-old has marched in the past 35 parades, only quitting last year because of the heat. This year, he watched and applauded from the sidelines.

A TTC driver for 39 years, during which he helped bring in an employee-assistance program, Mr. Ward said that "a lot of people have enjoyed what the unions have won."

