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SGEU

Keeping Workers Safe

A little over ten years after the establishment of the Trade Union Act, the Ontario Factory Act was passed in 1884 amid calls from unions and activists to improve worker safety.

The act was the first piece of occupational health and safety (OH&S) legislation in Canada, setting regulations for hours of work and age of employment. It was succeeded by the Industrial Safety Act of 1964.

In 1972, Saskatchewan became the first province to pass its own OH&S act, which legally enshrined a worker's right to refuse unsafe work.

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Did You Know?

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- A National Day of Mourning is observed each year on April 28 to commemorate workers who have died, were injured, or became ill on the job.

- In 2004, the federal government amended the criminal code to make corporations and other organizations criminally liable for safety violations resulting in injury or death.

- Thirty-nine Saskatchewan workers died in work-related incidents in 2022, an increase of over 25% from 2021. Unions continue to advocate for personal protective equipment (PPE), procedures and education to keep workers safe.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

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The On-to-Ottawa Trek

In 1935, during the Great Depression, thousands of young men working in federal relief camps travelled across the country to demand work, wages and unemployment relief.

The trek was stopped short in Regina. On July 1, the RCMP raided a public meeting, resulting in the infamously oppressive Regina Riot.

Many changes the trekkers called for were eventually implemented—including the creation of an unemployment insurance program in 1940.

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Did You Know?

- A 2019 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives study found that, in 2017, though 48% of all unemployed workers qualified for employment insurance (EI), only 28% of workers earning $15 or less per hour were eligible for EI benefits.

- The Government of Canada is currently working on modernizing its EI program. Unions across the country continue to suggest ways to simplify and expand eligibility.

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Enshrining Equity

Throughout the 1970s, Canadian unions and activists mobilized to demand equity for underrepresented groups in the workplace. These efforts were led by women, 2SLGBTQIA+ workers, Indigenous workers, workers of colour, and workers with disabilities.

These demands culminated in the creation of the Employment Equity Act (EEA) in 1986 and the passing of pay equity legislation in six provinces throughout the 80s and 90s.

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Did You Know?

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- The very first agreement made between SGEU and the Government of Saskatchewan in 1945 included an equal pay for equal work provision.

- Saskatchewan is one of four provinces in Canada that do not have pay equity legislation.

- Following a review launched in 2021, the federal government has committed to make changes to the EEA, including recognizing Black people and 2SLGBTQIA+ people as designated groups under the act.

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SICK LEAVE

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Sick Days Save Lives

Though many unions have won access to paid sick leave, workers continue to fight for paid sick days for all.

The push for paid sick leave gained momentum during the pandemic, when many workers were faced with the impossible choice of sacrificing wages or going to work sick.

Some strides have been made, including legislated sick leave for the federally regulated private sector and five days of paid sick leave in B.C., but more work needs to be done to ensure that paid sick leave is available to all workers.

Did You Know?

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- The very first agreement made between SGEU and the Government of Saskatchewan included cumulative sick leave.

- Recent research from the Centre for Future Work found that paid sick days in B.C. would raise total business expenses by just 0.21%.

- In May 2022, the Government of Saskatchewan unanimously voted against providing paid sick leave for all workers in Saskatchewan. SGEU continues to advocate for sick leave for all.

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MINIMUM WAGE

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The Fight for Fifteen

Manitoba and B.C. were the first provinces to pass minimum wage legislation in 1918, followed by Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan in 1920.

In 2012, a protest led by New York City fast food workers gave rise to the 'Fight for Fifteen' movement, which called for a legislated $15 minimum wage.

The movement quickly gained momentum north of the border, championed by Canadian unions. In 2022, the Saskatchewan government announced it will be raising the minimum wage to $15 in 2024.

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Did You Know?

- Saskatchewan currently has the lowest minimum wage in Canada.

- A $15 minimum wage is no longer enough. 2022 data from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives shows that the living wage in Regina and Saskatoon is over $16 an hour.

- The majority of minimum wage earners in Canada are women, and over half of minimum wage earners in Canada are under 25 years old.

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PARENTAL LEAVE

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Supporting Parents

Since the establishment of paid maternity leave in 1971, unions have fought to make parental benefits more accessible.

In 1979, Quebec's Common Front alliance negotiated paid maternity and adoptive leave— plus five days of paternity leave! CUPW followed suit in 1981, winning paid maternity leave for Canadian postal workers.

Benefits under the federal EI program continue to improve as workers demand more support for parents across Canada.

Did You Know?

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- In 1976, 40.5% of mothers were employed. By 2021, this number had grown to 76.5%.

- Between 2012 and 2017, 2.3 million Canadians took leave from their job after the birth or adoption of a child.

- As the federal government conducts a review of its EI program, unions across Canada are pushing for accessible, flexible benefits that support all parents.

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FORTY-HOUR WORKWEEK

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Rallying for Rest

In 1872, Toronto print workers went on strike for a nine-hour workday. At that time, union activity was illegal, and their strike culminated in a rally of 10,000 workers standing in solidarity.

Though they didn't win the nine-hour workday they sought, their efforts resulted in the passing of the Trade Union Act, which legalized unions and galvanized the Canadian labour movement.

These new protections empowered unions to fight for better conditions, and 40-hour weeks were implemented in the 60s & 70s.

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Did You Know?

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- SGEU's first agreement in 1945 mandated a 37.5 hour, 6-day workweek for some employees, but many members had to continue to fight for a workweek of forty hours or less throughout the following decades.

- Though local celebrations had been held for decades, many see the 1872 print workers' strike as a defining moment in the establishment of Labour Day in Canada. Under mounting pressure from workers, Labour Day was officially designated a national holiday in 1894.

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What's Next?

- Our work is not over. As the nature of work changes, our labour movement adapts, calling for regulations on emerging issues like remote work, employee privacy, and the right to disconnect.

- We must continue to advocate for workers by calling for improved working conditions and fighting to protect the rights we've won so far!

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