

# Mutiny

## The Working Class Needs A Militant Labour Day

September 2nd 2024 marks the 130th anniversary of the first official Labor Day in the US and Canada. Labor Day has a long and complex history for the North American working class. Today, Labor Day appears to most workers as little more than an extra day off, if that. At most, it is a moment for the unions to organize BBQs and parades to cover for their management of worsening conditions for the wider working class. On this Labor Day, we must recognize the need for the working class to take on independent class action in response to massive economic attacks by capital and increased imperialist rivalry.

Labor Day in Canada has its origins in non-political, community parades where craft workers had their own processions. With the development of the labor movement and increasing class conflict, however, the workers of a given town or community began organizing their own parades—typically taking the form of a strike parade. In Hamilton, Ontario, in May 1872, striking workers marched through the industrial district with union banners. In the next decade, these labor parades became commonplace from small mining towns to large cities. An official, national Labor Day would not be declared in Canada until decades later in 1894. After years of unionists petitioning parliament, in addition to their more notable demands like shortening the working day, the House of Commons finally conceded and declared that the first Monday of September would be a national labor day. It was a small and easy concession to make for the government. Thus, Labor Day quickly became a staple in cities like Toronto for workers and unionists, but the battle for a shortened working day would drag on.

In the US during the 1880's, in the midst of an economic depression, unions as well as anarchist and socialist organizations grew exponentially. Unions such as the Knights of Columbus, the Central Labor Union, and the American Federation of Labor would choose separate dates to hold public parades and demonstrations and to show solidarity amongst unions. The year that Labor Day was enacted as a federal holiday was marked by pitched class struggle. Most significantly, the Pullman Strike in Chicago from May 11th to June 20th 1894 saw 4,000 railcar workers initiate a wildcat strike and boycott trains carrying Pullman cars. The state responded brutally with federal injunctions, sending in the military and company strikebreakers, and arrests. President

Grover Cleveland hoped to stifle the growing class conflict with an olive branch; only eight days after the state successfully repressed the Pullman workers, Labor Day became a federal holiday.

The first Monday of September was chosen to obstruct the memory of May Day, on which workers' organizations had organized strikes for an 8-hour work day each year starting on May 1, 1886. In Chicago, the movement's leading figures were composed mainly of anarchists, such as Albert Parsons and August Spies, both of whom were executed in the aftermath of the "Haymarket affair" when a likely saboteur threw a bomb in Haymarket Square at advancing police. The demonstrations at the square were called in response to waves of police brutality and the use of strikebreakers against striking workers at the McCormick Reaper Plant the night before, leaving two strikers dead. After this tragedy, the first of May would be formally adopted by the Second International at its first congress in 1889 and would be celebrated widely in Europe.

Today, Labor Day is little more than a gaudy celebration of labor without recognition of working class struggle, where bourgeois leaders aim to conceal the necessity of working class independence to better collaborate with the system of class exploitation. Despite these Labor Day picnics, parades, and "historic victories", real wages in the US have decreased by 6.3%. In the past 4 years, official numbers announce that the average rate of inflation in the US has been 21.4% and in Canada 17.6%. Capital is in a deep crisis of profitability and our class is expected to carry the cost. Capital and savings flew into the Canadian real estate market through government policies over the past decade and increased during the covid pandemic. Housing bubbles once regional to Toronto and Vancouver have become generalized. The Covid period saw the purchasing of homes as speculative assets to such an extent that 75% of Canadian mortgage contracts will come due in 2025 under higher interest rates which many workers will be unable to afford.

The capitalists in the United States have been grappling with the fact that recent growth has done nothing to stem the underlying economic crisis. The economy is growing too fast, unemployment is too low, and the Federal Reserve is doing its best to slow down the economy ostensibly to reel in inflation. What the US government and its economists are really trying to achieve is another round of assaults on the working class. The only way to get a "soft landing" of the economy after Covid and the inflationary period is to increase unemployment and further hit wages. One large investor, seeing that unemployment has ticked up to 3.9%, stated that this was "just what the Fed wanted." Politicians are praising the return to American manufacturing, never stating that the renewed growth of factories is based on an all-time low in working conditions and labor regulations. To ensure this plan prospers, the Republican and Democratic parties have worked hand in hand on immigration policy. Democrats provide "welcoming" rhetoric while Republicans push hard enforcement and strict conditions; this is

all ultimately aimed at creating a precarious work force and driving down wages across the board while dividing the class with racist rhetoric. Faced with this capitalist onslaught, the working class has fought to defend itself and maintain its basic living conditions. In the US, the number of striking workers increased from 120,000 in 2022 to 500,000 in 2023. However, there have not been great victories coming out of these struggles. Why? Strikes are sabotaged by the unions themselves (alongside the boss and the state) because of the dictates of capitalism. The unions have long been integrated into the state: to enforce worker discipline when the need arises, to enforce worse concessions, to prevent strikes, and to channel labor into stagnant industries for national competition. A union victory is a workers' defeat.

Unions' role to play within capitalism was clear in the aborted US rail strike, stifled by Congress using 100+ year old legislation to force a settlement under the guise of "national security". The main rail unions then pushed the workers to accept the settlement, even though it did not meet the workers' main demands. Last fall, the UAW directed workers to rotate their strikes, fragmenting workers' efforts so as to not dampen company profits and not force the union executives to dip into their war chest. In Montreal, government liquor store workers at the SAQ have been on strike since April. Despite a massive vote for a 15-day strike mandate, the union has thus far only used two, leaving the workers in limbo. Under the pressure of a hard tier system, many SAQ workers are only granted part-time hours with little job security. This is a common problem facing the wide working class, but the unions only offer the "least bad" negotiated settlement.

Instead, workers must seize the strike as their own and organize amongst themselves to determine the nature of their strikes. No force is going to do it for us: no parliamentary party, no "good" employer, and no union. In the summer of 2023, the Common Front mobilized 600,000 Quebec workers to strike. But despite playing up the national mythos of militant Quebec labor, the union front was not a front for workers. Even the most militant unions can't defend workers' basic economic conditions due to their partnership with the state and the needs for armament. Workers will need to organize on their own, in place of, and necessarily against union domination.

Faced with a profitability crisis, capitalists and their states aim to push their losses onto their rivals; this takes place through the drive towards generalized imperialist war. The meat grinder in Eastern Ukraine, the murderous siege of Gaza, the brinkmanship between Israel and Iran, and military defense treaties heating up Chinese and US tensions have been the consequences of this crisis. Entire generations of young workers from Ukraine, Russia, and Gaza are decimated, with hundreds of thousands massacred in both wars. Strikes and anti-draft demonstrations outlawed and repressed in Ukraine and Israel confirms that democracy really is the camouflage for the dictatorship of capital. Ukraine and Gaza's nightmare landscapes of muddy trenches flooded by the smell of death,

starved bodies under mountains of urban rubble, and a sharpening of the whip of capitalist exploitation at home are glimpses into the future that global capitalism is preparing for the working class everywhere.

In the Pacific, the US and China have been building economic and military infrastructure, forming and maintaining alliances, and restructuring their productive and financial institutions, anticipating a total war to determine absolute supremacy. In the Middle East, the US is increasingly off-centered by its support for Israel's war in Gaza. China gained ground by holding talks between the main parties in Palestine for a coalition government. Israel assassinated Hamas's political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran—an act of imperialist arrogance and a step towards regional war that will decimate the working class.

Unions have never been revolutionary instruments of the working class, but began as bodies of working class economic struggle outside of the capitalist state. Yet given their inherent logic of being negotiating bodies for the sale of labor-power, over time they became integrated into the legal framework of the capitalist state. In Canada this was most pronounced during the First World War when the TLC was invited into parliamentary commission bodies to oversee the organization of national labor. In the USA, Roosevelt finalized this process with the legalization of unions and by making them partners of the New Deal. The integration of unions helped to preemptively prevent strikes, whereas repressing the unions had increased the possibility of independent class activity out of the hands of the bosses and state. The legal recognition of unions helped connect them to the state by a thousand threads. Unions enforce worsening deals when negotiating under the guise of being realistic. This is since unions must maintain a respected position of an arbitrator between labor and capital, for capital. Most factions among the state and the bosses only began to repel unions again when the rate of profit began to decline with the return of the crisis of profitability.

Despite the role unions play in capitalism, we do not call for ripping up your union card tomorrow. We call upon the workers themselves to be the basis of the struggle. In Montreal, the daycare workers in Little Burgundy started doing exactly this. They organized an email chain and began determining the course of their strike beyond the union. This small example serves as a modern lesson for struggles today, but pales in comparison to the strike committees that dominated whole towns in the general strike of 1972.

But the economic struggle is not enough to challenge capitalist rule on the stage of history. For that, the working class will need to wage a political struggle against the very roots of capital. To do so, the working class must form its own political party. Not a party in a capitalist parliamentary sense, but a party of workers organized around a coherent political outlook and fighting on the front ranks of struggles, always connecting them to the struggle as a whole and pointing the way forward.



# Revolution or Reconciliation

Truth and Reconciliation Day is presented to the workers of Canada, indigenous and otherwise, as a step on the path towards making amends for the historic injustices of the colonial period. It is no secret that while some greet this occasion earnestly in the intended spirit, reason for skepticism persists, and rightly so. Centuries of broken promises and exhausted faith do not engender trust from the aggrieved party, and so it is here that we encounter the "radical" arm of indigenous activism, defiantly positioned in resistance against what they regard as the source of all their woes; white Eurocentric *settler colonialism*. The legacy

of all European thought cannot ultimately be reconciled with their traditions, so it is said, and while the concomitant implications of this ultimatum are never made clear, in the meantime an assemblage of interim demands emerge. Fund the reserves. Forswear land exploitation. Defund the police. Vacate sacred lands. Honor the treaties. There is something to recommend to various degrees in each of these, but is it enough? And if it isn't, what accounts for the timidity of the supposed bleeding edge of indigenous radicalism?

Viewed historically, there can be no missing the conjunction of this indigenous

radical tradition with liberal academia, which would account for much of the performative, underwhelming action that characterizes said radicalism. This is no condemnation of the rich history of indigenous philosophy; indeed, it further emphasizes the extent of the brutal dispossession this culture has experienced, that it would be so prone to incorporation. What is often forgotten in the rush to commend the durability of a tradition that has survived such dispossession is precisely how the brush with annihilation compromises it, and even the most undamaged philosophical traditions seldom remain unchanged.

Nevertheless, we observe a tragic irony here, where the routine exceptions granted to European thought that have become in effect the rule meet their limits; a hostility to the Marxist tradition exceeding any other. Again, do we detect the limiting hand of the bourgeois liberal here, amplifying the most disunifying voices, insisting that the organization of the working class menaces indigenous traditions with the very marginalization they have already inflicted upon it?

From the moment there has been a communism to aspire to, the workers who have aspired towards it have been no monolith, and the grand history of indigenous workers who have toiled, agitated and risked their lives alongside their other coworkers forms part of that tapestry. The abolition of wage labor, the capital and class society presents the only substantial way to achieve any of the ultimate aims of the stated demands of the indigenous radical, not the false promises of a concordat with a state, settler or otherwise, that has no higher duty than to capital. It is not the poisoned bait of a distinct nationhood for indigenous people, with borders to garrison and markets to protect, that will realize the efforts of cultural restorationists, nor the cozy sinecures of well-compensated academics of indigenous extraction that will win the dignity they seek; it is in their condition as workers with nothing to sell but their labor, indigenous or not, that the most vivid and pressing tradition of our present moment is shaped, and it is on these grounds alone that the liberation of all those same workers, together, can be won.



## Decant the Strike from Union Control

It has been two months since the two day walk out of the SAQ workers at the end of April of 2024. Since then the strike has been effectively stalled as the union indefinitely 'negotiates'. Despite a fifteen day strike mandate overwhelmingly approved by the workers, the union seems entirely disinterested in pursuing any real militant action, leaving the workers themselves in a state of limbo. But in the face of a cost of living crisis, perhaps represented best by 70% of SAQ workers having part time status, it's clear that what is required is militant working class action.

Indeed, workers in Canada and the world over continue to be hit with an ever-deepening economic crisis, and wages for the vast majority of the class continue to be chipped away bit by bit. The current struggle by SAQ workers reflects this ever-deepening precarity, particularly through the ways in which the tier system imperils the vast majority of its workforce. The tiers ensure that access to liveable wages is always in the control of quotas and middle management, which, through the necessity of capital to maximize the returns on labour, ensures that it will always be profitable to hire more laborers at lower tiers. Tolerable wages therefore remain for the select few who managed to tough it out for nearly a decade, as access to the highest tier for cashiers averages out to 12 years of continuous full-time employment. It is one of many mechanisms which service workers in particular are faced with that make their conditions more precarious, and the SAQ workers are not the only ones in the past couple of years who have taken to fighting against measures imposed by the bosses.

For instance, at the beginning of July 2024 in Ontario the LCBO workers also went on strike. Their demands were based on the points of wages, part time status, and the conservative government's



policy on beer and wine distribution. The strike would end on concessions on all these points, however, the new contract only determined an 8% raise over the next 3 years, which will not even return the real wages to the point they were prior to the state of inflation let alone match the projected current rate. The Casino and BANQ workers all faced similar outcomes in recent strikes. This is just one of many examples of the union framework undermining the real needs of workers, and how real progress can only be leveraged by the self organization of the strike itself. In place of such negotiations behind closed doors, we workers must organize amongst ourselves to determine the direction and demands of the strike. Lessons can be taken from the FTQ daycare workers in Little Burgundy, who, in 2021, organized an email chain amongst themselves and went to the CSN and CSQ pickets against the FTQs wishes.

The workers of the SAQ organizing the strike beyond union control would not only position themselves better to achieve their demands but could also serve as a reference point for the wider working

class in the face of this general crisis. It is only on the basis of a class-wide, active and political struggle that workers can truly combat the massive assaults of capital.

### What Does Klasbatalo Fight For?

We fight for the political independence of the working class, which means we reject all cross-class alliances with the capitalist class, including its left-wing. We believe the working class must fight on its own terrain: first, to defend itself against the bosses' attacks; and, second, to achieve its ultimate task, that of establishing the world communist future which will rid the planet of exploitation, oppression, and war. It is towards this goal that we fight for the creation of the world communist party, whose purpose is to clarify the confusions among the class and to unify it towards its ultimate end; we believe this party to be the most potent weapon of our class. While we are for the party, we do not believe ourselves to be the party, nor do we believe that our organization alone will become it; rather, we see it as the product of both the wider class struggle, and of the real work of revolutionaries, of which we see ourselves as only one of many elements. We do not see this party as a government-in-waiting, for the emancipation of humanity depends on the active struggle of the whole working class, and this struggle cannot be replaced by the dictates of a minority.

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