Did you know that Labour Day started out as May Day?

May Day or Workers’ Day or International Workers’ Day is still observed in many countries, but the day we set aside to commemorate the struggles of workers has been held on the first Monday of September in Canada and the U.S. for almost 150 years.

Today we take things like paid vacation, safe workplaces, medical care, unemployment insurance, and fair hours of work and wages, for granted. Rarely do we stop and think about the hardship and hard work that went into gaining these rights. Labour Day provides us the opportunity to look back with gratitude to all those whose hard efforts led to the benefits and opportunities we now enjoy.

Labour Day began in Canada on April 15, 1872, only five years after Confederation, when the Toronto Trades Assembly, the original central labour body in Canada, organized the country's first significant workers demonstration. At the time, trade unions were still illegal, but the Assembly already had a membership of 27 unions. It spoke out on behalf of working people, encouraged union organization and acted on behalf of exploited workers.

The struggle continues to this day, with labour organizations across Canada and around the world maintaining the fight to provide and protect workers’ rights. While we now enjoy many of these rights here in Canada, we must never forget the blood and sweat that bought them for us nor cease the battle to maintain those rights here and work to encourage them around the world.