

A Labour Day message from AUPE President Guy Smith



While many of us take the Labour Day long weekend to get in a last camping trip of the summer, fire up the grill, or throw around a football, it is important to reflect on the purpose of the holiday as well.

The Alberta Union of Provincial Employees along with our 75,000 members province-wide has made great strides in the past year standing up for all Albertans.

For example, it has been one year since AUPE launched the campaign to stop the Alberta government from closing much-needed acute psychiatric care beds at Alberta Hospital Edmonton. This would have seen hundreds of vulnerable individuals left with nowhere to go. Many in Alberta found this truly shameful and joined in AUPE's call to stop this from occurring. Today, we continue to advocate for capital funding to ensure the hospital will serve Albertans' mental health needs.

In addition to AHE, AUPE has supported Albertans in important campaigns to stop the reduction and dismantling of services the people of our province rely upon. Whether it be in direct government services, education, health care or the many other services proudly provided by AUPE members, we have stood up strongly for the AUPE members who do those jobs and for all Albertans. Remember, it's your province – we just look after it for you.

Our advocacy and defense of these services would not have been possible without our right to collective bargaining and our right to organize workers. Without these rights, we wouldn't have been able to take on these battles. These rights, which empower workers to stand up and speak out on important issues, are what Labour Day is really about.

We have our brothers and sisters of past struggles to thank for the strength of the union movement today. They battled to win us these rights. It was those same organized workers who fought to have the Canadian government recognize Labour Day as a national holiday in 1894 – a holiday everyone can enjoy.

Labour Day is also a time to reflect on those who are unemployed or underemployed in our society. Many Albertans continue to feel the effects of the economic downturn. People across the province are losing their homes and losing their jobs and it is up to us in the labour movement to continue to call attention to this.

Unfortunately, some employers are using this crisis to their advantage by trying to force workers to accept concessions at the negotiating table and induce fear through the media. Well, workers are learning quickly not to be afraid or be bullied. Workers are also refusing to accept responsibility for an economic crisis that was orchestrated by Wall Street, Bay Street and corporate greed. Instead, workers in Alberta and worldwide are standing up for their rights and for the stabilization and the return to economic growth that re-investment in public services will bring.

Although many struggles continue this Labour Day, I would encourage you to remember a few of organized labour's many achievements to help build equality, safety, opportunity, and stability in today's society.

On behalf of AUPE and myself, I wish you and your family a very happy and safe Labour Day.

In solidarity,

