

A historical record of how Canada’s political parties have helped or hindered Canadian workers

For simplicity, the names “Conservative”, “Liberal”, and “NDP” are used to identify both the current parties and their predecessors.

Year	Party	Event	Significance
1872	Conservative (Sir John A. MacDonald)	Trade Unions Act	Following the violent suppression of a strike by Toronto typographers, the government legalized the formation of trade unions in Canada, clarifying that unions are not criminal conspiracies as some business owners had argued at the time.
1900	Liberal (Sir Wilfred Laurier)	Department of Labour established	The establishment of a Canadian Labour ministry included responsibility for conciliation of labour disputes.
1919	Conservative (Robert Borden)	Winnipeg General Strike	In May 1919 30,000 Winnipeg workers, including many returned WW1 veterans, walked off the job in a General Strike to protest working conditions and unemployment. RCMP on horseback charged a group of strikers on Main Street, wounding 30 and killing one.
1926	Liberal and NDP (Mackenzie King)	Establishment of Canadian Old Age Pension	The pension was introduced by the government of Mackenzie King (Liberal), following parliamentary committee advocacy by J.S. Wordsworth and A.A. Heaps (organizers of what later became the NDP). The maximum Old Age Pension was set at \$240 per year.
1935	Conservative (R,B, Bennett)	Regina Riot	In the depth of the Great Depression a large group of “On to Ottawa” protesters rode a freight train from B.C., intending to take their plea for help to find work to parliament. When the train reached Regina, the RCMP under orders from Ottawa attacked and arrested the leaders; one police officer died and dozens of protesters were wounded.
1940	Liberal (Mackenzie King)	Establishment of Unemployment Insurance	In response to the many protests of unemployment and poverty of the 1930s, the government implemented a national unemployment insurance scheme – a social safety net for those out of work.
1943	Liberal (Mackenzie King)	Appointment of Justice Ivan Rand to Supreme Court	Justice Rand, who came from a working class background, was appointed to the Supreme Court by the King government. Following a strike by Ford car plant workers in 1946, Rand ruled that because all employees covered by a collective agreement receive the benefits of the agreement, all must therefore contribute union dues. Rand further clarified that joining a union is voluntary, but paying dues is not. This ruling, often referred to as the Rand Formula, remains a cornerstone of Canadian labour law.

1944	Liberal (Mackenzie King)	Wartime Labour Relations regulations	This Order in Council of the King government set out regulations for the certification of unions, and defined the legal responsibility of employers and unions to bargain in good faith. After the war the ideas were incorporated in provincial labour legislation across Canada.
1944	NDP (Saskatchewan, Tommy Douglas)	Election of first NDP government (then called CCF) in Saskatchewan	The party was formed by farmers and workers who had endured the Great Depression and believed in public ownership of key industries, universal pensions, child care allowances, and better access to health care for all.
1944	NDP (Saskatchewan, Tommy Douglas)	Trade Union Act	Saskatchewan was the first province to give public sector employees the right to unionize.
1947	NDP (Saskatchewan, Tommy Douglas)	Hospital Insurance Act	Legislation by NDP (then called CCF) guaranteed citizens hospital care without a fee – the first such jurisdiction in North America. The idea was adopted by Alberta in 1950 and other provinces in subsequent years.
1956	Relevant information	Founding of Canadian Labour Congress	The mid fifties marked a sustained period of growth for Canadian unions, driven in part by many Canadian government construction projects, such as the Trans-Canada highway, CBC television, the Avro Arrow, the DEW Line, and the Trans-Canada microwave network for long distance calling.
1961	Relevant information	Founding of the New Democratic Party	The former Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and the Canadian Labour Congress merged to form the NDP party, dedicated to social democracy and the protection of worker interests.
1962	NDP (Saskatchewan, Woodrow Lloyd)	Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Act	The Act gave universal public medical insurance to all citizens without charge. The Saskatchewan plan became the model for Canadian Medicare.
1965	Liberal (Lester Pearson)	Canada Pension Plan (CPP)	Pearson's government established a mandatory defined benefit pension plan, the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), for all salaried employees based on lifetime earnings. The program was intended to be one of three pillars of retirement support for Canadians – the other two being the Old Age Pension and the employer's private pension. Despite the warnings of critics, the CPP has proven in its 50-year history to be actuarially sound and many leaders now advocate expansion of the CPP program. The pillar that has proven to be the least reliable is the employer's private pension, as employers in recent years have sacrificed quality pension programs to cut costs.

1966	Liberal (Lester Pearson)	Canada Health Act	<p>Following the example set by Saskatchewan, the Act enabled joint Federal-Provincial funding for hospital services with common federal standards in all provinces, accessible to all Canadians, with extra billing forbidden.</p> <p>The resulting Canadian health system has been criticized for excluding many necessary services such as Home Care, dentistry and prescription drugs, but even so, it is widely regarded as Canada's most valuable social program. The Harper government in recent years has acted to weaken the effect of the Canada Health Act, saying that health care is provincial and the only responsibility of the federal government is to transfer money to the provinces .</p>
1967	Liberal (Lester Pearson)	Federal Public Service Staff Relations Act	The Act extended the right of collective bargaining to public service workers.
1969	NDP (Manitoba. Ed Schreyer)	Election of first NDP government in Manitoba and introduction of new programs	The newly elected government implemented a number of programs affecting Manitoba workers, including new Hydro construction, new public housing, amalgamation of City of Winnipeg, introduction of public auto insurance, and reduction of Medicare premiums.
1972	NDP (Saskatchewan, Alan Blakeney)	Occupational Health Act (Saskatchewan)	The Act made health and safety the joint legal responsibility of employers and workers – first legislation of its kind in North America and an idea later adopted by other provinces.
1982	Liberal (Pierre Trudeau)	Bill C-124 Public Sector Compensation Restraint Act	Suspended right of collective bargaining for 200,000 public sector workers for two years,
1990	Conservative (Manitoba, Gary Filmon)	Bill 12 Labour Relations Amendment Act	The Act eliminated Final offer Selection as a means of resolving labour disputes. Under Final Offer Selection, an arbitrator evaluates the final offer of the union and the final offer of the management, then makes a binding decision choosing one of the two.
1992	Conservative (Manitoba, Gary Filmon)	Bill 85 Labour Relations Amendment Act	The Amendment increased the difficulty of forming unions. Employers were given a new right to make critical comments about unions and to talk to employees during a union organizing drive.
1996	Conservative (Manitoba, Gary Filmon)	Bill 26 Act to Amend the Labour Relations Act	The Amendment further increased the difficulty of forming unions by eliminating automatic certification for a new union where a majority of workers had signed cards.
1996	Conservative (Manitoba, Gary Filmon)	Manitoba Telephone System Reorganization and Consequential Amendments Act	After repeated denials of intent, the Filmon government without warning sold provincial telecommunications Crown Corporation MTS to private investors.

2002	Liberal (Jean Chretien)	Expansion of Temporary Foreign Workers program	The Chretien government introduced a new "low skilled workers" category. Previously the program was intended to alleviate temporary shortages of Doctors and other professionals. The new category provided a ready supply of low wage workers unfamiliar with their rights and unlikely to form unions, complain about wages, overtime, or benefits.
2003	Relevant information	Appointment of Gary Filmon to MTS Board	After privatizing MTS, and after resigning in 2000 as leader of the Conservative party following the electoral defeat of the party in 1999, Filmon was appointed to the MTS Board. He was paid approx. \$140,000 annually to sit on the Board until his retirement eleven years later.
2006	Conservative (Stephen Harper)	Fast tracking for Foreign Temporary Workers applications	The newly elected Harper government expanded the supply of Temporary Foreign Workers by fast tracking employer applications. Approximately 500,000 Temporary Foreign Workers were brought to Canada between 2006 and 2014 under the program. The Canadian Labour Congress estimated that 65% of net new jobs created between 2008 and 2011 were held by Temporary Foreign Workers. Industry Canada disputed this finding.
2007	Conservative (Stephen Harper)	C-46 Railway Continuation Act	The Act forced striking CN workers back to work.
2009	Conservative (Stephen Harper)	C-10 Expenditure Restraint Act	The Act capped the salaries of public sector workers, forbade non-salary improvements, rolled back some negotiated wage increases, and forbade collective pay equity complaints with the Human Rights Commission, with a \$50,000 fine for non-complying unions.
2011	Conservative (Stephen Harper)	C-6 The Restoring Mail Delivery for Canadians Act	The Act forced 48,000 locked-out postal workers back to work with wages lower than those offered by management.
2012	Conservative (Stephen Harper)	C-33 Protecting Air Service Act and C-39 Act to provide for the continuation and resumption of rail service	Bill C-33 imposed settlement during collective bargaining at Air Canada, and forbade a strike by airline staff. Bill C-39 forced settlement after the sixth day of a strike by CP rail employees.
2012	Conservative (Stephen Harper)	2012 Budget OAS age of eligibility raised	The Harper government raised the age of eligibility for the Old Age Supplement from 65 to 67. In this 2015 election, both the NDP and Liberal parties promised to restore the eligibility age to 65 if elected.
2012	Relevant Information	Rand Formula questioned	Ontario Conservative opposition leader Tim Hudak and federal Conservative Minister Pierre Poilievre separately questioned the fairness and application of the Rand formula. In the United States, a number of Republican State governments imposed "Right to Work" laws, making payment of union dues voluntary.

2014	Conservative (Stephen Harper)	C-525 Employees' Voting Rights Act	The Act increased the difficulty of certifying a new union. Previously a union could be certified if over 50% of the workers signed cards. The Act requires employees first to sign cards, then schedule a written vote, giving employers a new opportunity and time to dissuade union supporters.
2015	Conservative (Stephen Harper)	C-377 Act to Amend the Income Tax Act Passed, to be implemented	This Act requires unions to make frequent time-consuming public financial reports far more detailed than those required for private businesses. The ostensible purpose of the legislation is to ensure that union members are informed, but the real intent may be seen as harassment of unions, as unions already must report their finances to members. The new rules do not apply to other tax exempt business organizations like the Fraser Institute or Chambers of Commerce.
2015	Conservative (Stephen Harper)	C-51, the Anti-Terrorism Act Passed, to be implemented	C-51 has the laudable purpose of improving Canadian security, but by questionable means. It reduces the oversight of Canada's Secret Police, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), giving them new powers to spy on Canadian citizens and to forcibly detain those they suspect without charge or warrant. The Bill makes it a crime to promote a terrorist offence without defining what promoting a terrorist offence means. Taking part in certain formerly legal protests or strikes, for example, could conceivably qualify as promoting terrorism, putting a chill on free speech. Liberal leader Justin Trudeau noted the Bill's lack of oversight of CSIS and problems in the legislation, but voted in favour nevertheless. NDP leader Thomas Mulcair voted against the Bill, calling it dangerous and ineffective, and has promised to repeal the legislation if elected.