

In celebration of labour



By Nate Smelle

By the time you are reading this, most of you will have already begun contemplating the implications of the unofficial end of summer, also known as the Labour Day weekend. In Canada, Labour Day has been celebrated on the first Monday of September since 1894; the same year that our other local newspaper, The Bancroft Times was founded. In an article published in the Sept. 2, 1897 edition of The Bancroft Times "just three years and one day after the first ever Labour Day celebration in Canada" Reverend Dr. Thomas De Witt Talmage spoke of the many labour strikes going on in both Canada and the U.S. at the time. Explaining in detail what he called the "diabolical" nature of the capitalist free markets law of supply and demand, Dr. Talmage pointed out how the economic system did not fit with the philosophy of "loving thy neighbour" put forth in the Christian Bible. He wrote: "The greatest war the world has ever seen is between capital and labour. The strife is not like that which in history is called the Thirty Years' War, for it is a war of centuries; it is a war of the five continents; it is a war hemispheric. The middle classes in this country, upon whom the nation has depended for holding the balance of power and for acting as mediators between the two extremes, are diminishing, and if things go on at the same ratio as they are now going, it will not be very long before there will be no middle class in this country, but all will be very rich or very poor, princes or paupers, and the country will be given up to palaces and hovels." Although penned more than 126 years ago, Dr. Talmage's words hold true today. In fact, they appear to be somewhat prophetic, considering that in 2024 the still ever-widening gap between the so-called "rich and the poor" has never been so big. According to the UBS Global Wealth Report, in 2023 "the world's richest one per cent, those with more than \$1 million, owned 47.5 per cent of all the world's wealth" equivalent to roughly \$214 trillion." The same report also showed that despite the fact that adults with less than \$10,000 to their name make up nearly 40 per cent of the world's population, they only possess less than one per cent of the world's wealth. Throughout Canada's history, the labour movement has worked diligently to improve the quality of workers' everyday lives. With organized labour leading the charge, workers in Canada are now legally entitled to overtime pay, better workplace safety standards, maternity and parental leave, vacation pay, and protection from discrimination and harassment. Thanks largely to the labour movement's persistence in the fight for fair wages in Canada, the federal minimum wage increased from \$16.65 to \$17.30 per hour on April 1, 2024. In spite of these strides forward, there is still much work to be done. One of the modern day labour movement's greatest challenges today is the fight to protect social programs that help people keep working, such as health care and child care. As we know, the push to privatize these programs from those on the right of the political spectrum seems to be never-ending. That is why it is so rare to hear pro-privatization politicians answer questions about our public health care system. That is why there only ever seems to be cuts made in the name of "efficiency" to health care, child care, and education "all key programs that help establish a healthy and resilient economy and society" and very little investment in these public institutions. Recently I tuned into an "interview" on Twitter [aka X] between the "richest man in the world" and a former U.S. president and traitor running to take back the White House this November. In this very telling conversation, the two gloated about their abuse of workers' rights, with the con-man candidate praising the "richest" man in the world as being "the greatest cutter." "You're the greatest cutter," the

candidate said. 'I mean, I look at what you do. You walk in, you just say: 'You want to quit?' They go on strike ' I won't mention the name of the company ' but they go on strike. And you say: 'That's okay, you're all gone.' Imagine the catastrophic level of hubris within someone running for office that proudly broadcasts to millions of people online that they admired the 'richest' man in the world for firing workers that want to be paid fairly for their work. Now, every time you hear politicians talk about cutting our public services for the sake of efficiency, think about this conversation between the 'richest' man in the world and quite possibly the greediest. When they try to sell you something, or convince you of what's best for you, remember who they are really looking out for ' themselves! This Labour Day weekend as you sit on the dock, by the fire, or wherever you may be celebrating the fruits of your labour and the 'end of summer', make sure to raise a glass or two in solidarity with those who are fighting for fair wages, better working conditions, and our actual best interests. Happy Labour Day weekend!