



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Toronto workers strike for nine-hour work day (Printers' Strike), Canada, 1872

25 March

1872

to: April

1872

**Country:** Canada

**Location City/State/Province:** Toronto, Ontario

**Goals:**

To decrease work days to nine-hours (some workers were expected to labour as long as 12 hours).

The printers took the initiative for the shorter workday, commonly called in those days the "nine hour movement," viz., the Saturday afternoon holiday... Big money was offered to the men in lieu of the short time. But it was Saturday afternoon holiday that was wanted and not an increase of wages. - John Armstrong

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 4th segment:**

- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 106. Industry strike

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 039. Parades
- 106. Industry strike

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 010. Newspapers and journals

**Notes on Methods:**

Editorials were printed on the campaign in The Leader, an ally newspaper of the striking printers, by James Beaty.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Economic Justice

Human Rights

**Group characterization:**

- Print Workers
- Toronto Typographical Union
- Urban Working Class

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Toronto Typographical Union, 24 member strike committee, John Hewitt, John Armstrong

**Partners:**

Not known

**External allies:**

MP James Beaty

**Involvement of social elites:**

MP James Beaty

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

- Urban Working Class

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 4 days*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

George Brown, The Globe, All Toronto-based newspapers

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

Not known

**Repressive Violence:**

Throwing union members in jail

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

0 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

During the campaign the number of supporters increased drastically. Though the campaign did not meet its goals, it still had positive outcomes including the legalization of unions and the members of this campaign were pioneers for others that followed in the struggle for shorter workweeks.

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The Toronto's Printer's Strike was part of the Nine-Hour movement. The Nine-Hour movement was an international worker's movement striving for shorter workdays in the 1870s.

In January 1872 in Hamilton, Ontario, railroad workers as well as other craft workers formed Nine Hour Leagues. Nine hours was normally a reduction of two to three hours off a regular shift. The workers explained that society as a whole would benefit from shorter workdays because individuals would have more time for family and community.

From Hamilton, the movement spread to other parts of Canada, notably Toronto, Ontario and Montreal, Quebec. The movement gained support from smaller Ontario towns as well including Sarnia and Perth, and from regions as far east as Halifax, Nova Scotia. This came to be known as Canada's first mass worker's movement.

Toronto is important to the Nine-Hour movement because it was there that words were transformed into action. The demands that had started in Hamilton, Ontario were taken up by the Toronto Typographical Union. When these demands were not met the printers threatened to strike. The employers stated that the demands of the union were "foolish."

The printers went on strike 25 March 1872. They focused on Liberal George Brown and his newspaper the *Globe* but engulfed all newspapers based out of Toronto. The one exception was the *Leader*. The owner and editor of this paper, Tory MP James Beatty, stated that, "[t]he shortening of the hours of labour is one of the most commendable movements inaugurated by working men." Beatty was said to have been keen to see George Brown suffer as a result of this strike.

On 15 April 1872 the printers led a parade through Toronto, starting at the Trades Assembly Hall on King Street, marching down Yonge to College and finishing at Queen's Park. The parade included marching bands and signs proclaiming the demands of the printers. The group started the march with 2000 individuals and by the time they had made in to Queen's Park the crowd (made up mostly of working class individuals) had grown to around 10,000. At the time, the population of Toronto was 100,000.

The employers fought back in several ways. They brought in replacement workers from small towns to fill the positions of the workers on strike. They also started an association that opposed the movement called the Master Printers' Association. George

Brown was recognized as leader.

The Master Printers' Association launched legal action against the Toronto Typographical Union for "conspiracy." At the time, the activity of unions was considered to be a criminal offense (a law dating back to 1792).

One day after the parade to Queen's Park, police arrested the 24 members of the strike committee and threw them in jail. Those arrested included John Hewitt and John Armstrong, leader of the Toronto Typographical Union.

Hours after the arrest, citizens met in Market Square to denounce the Master Printer's Association. Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, seeking support from the workers and seeing an opportunity to embarrass his political rival, Brown, introduced and passed the Trade Union Act on April 18, 1872. The Act legalized and protected union activity.

The Printer's Strike did not lead to nine-hour workdays. In the short-term the strike was damaging to the strikers. Many lost their jobs and had to leave Toronto to find work elsewhere.

The strike also led to many positive outcomes. Unions were legalized and the public showed that they were interested in their own affairs. After the strike of 1872 almost all unions began to demand 54-hour weeks for their workers. The printers of Toronto were indeed pioneers in the struggle for shorter workweeks.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

The Printer's Strike influenced unions in Ontario to demand shorter workweeks. It took until the turn of the century for the movement to reach places such as Chicago or New York.

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