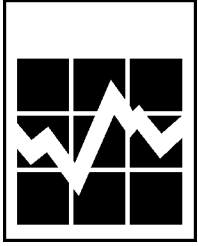


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PERSPECTIVES

ON LABOUR AND INCOME

AUGUST 2001

Vol. 2, No. 8

■ TIME LOST DUE TO
INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES



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Highlights

In this issue

■ Time lost due to industrial disputes

- Work stoppages and the resulting workdays lost due to labour disputes have generally declined over the past two decades. Strikes and lockouts in Canada totalled 1,028 in 1980, but dropped to 377 in 2000.
- The number of workdays lost per 1,000 employees (the time-loss ratio) fell from 953 in 1980 to 133 in 2000.

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Time lost due to industrial disputes

Ernest B. Akyeampong

STATISTICS ON TIME LOST due to industrial disputes (strikes and lockouts) have always attracted widespread attention. Such time losses have several ramifications: they tend to reduce overall economic output, as well as corporate and government revenues; they tend to reduce the earnings, and hence spending power, of workers directly or even indirectly involved in the dispute; and they can also lead to social unrest.

With increasing economic globalization and trade liberalization (for example, the North American Free Trade Agreement), interest in this type of information has lately assumed an added dimension, since international differences may now play a role in corporate decisions on plant or office location (see *International work-stoppage statistics*).

To offer some historical perspective on industrial strife in Canada, this study combines Statistics Canada data with information compiled by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC, 2001) on workdays lost due to strikes and lockouts over the past two decades.

Days lost have trended down over the past two decades

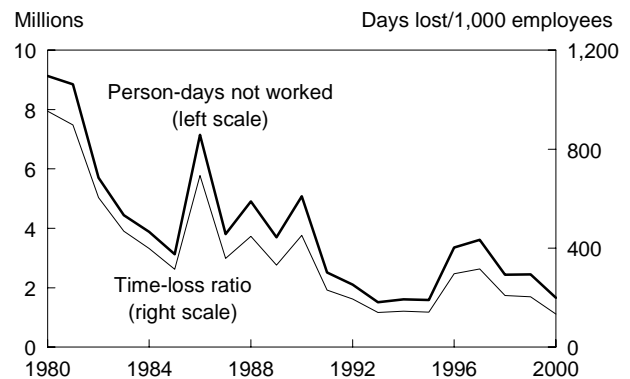
Analysis of year-over-year changes and trends in labour-dispute statistics is not straightforward. The annual data are affected by the collective bargaining timetables (in particular, the number and length of collective agreements), the size of the unions involved, the duration of the stoppages, the state of the economy, as well as any changes in industrial relations legislation.

Nevertheless, the available data for the past 20 years do reveal overall downward trends in both the number of industrial disputes and the resulting days

lost (Chart). The average annual number of work stoppages in Canada due to strikes and lockouts in the 1980s was almost double that of the 1990s (754 versus 394). The resulting workdays lost averaged 5.5 million annually in the 1980s, more than double the 2.6 million of the 1990s (Table). Using a *time-loss ratio* (the number of workdays lost due to strikes and lockouts per 1,000 employees) enables a meaningful comparison of the industrial dispute statistics. The annual average ratio fell from 547 in the 1980s to 233 in the 1990s.

A comparison of the 2000 data with those of 1980 reveals an even more dramatic decline. In 1980, work stoppages due to strikes and lockouts totalled 1,028; in the year 2000, the corresponding number was just 377. Similarly in 1980, the resulting person-days not worked amounted to 9.1 million; in 2000 they totalled 1.7 million. The time-loss ratio in 1980 was estimated to be 953; in the year 2000, the corresponding figure was 133, only one-seventh the 1980 level.

Chart: Person-days not worked due to labour disputes and the time-loss ratio have both trended down over the past two decades.



Sources: Human Resources Development Canada, Workplace Information Directorate; Labour Force Survey

Ernest B. Akyeampong is with the Labour and Household Surveys Analysis Division. He can be reached at (613) 951-4624 or ernest.akyeampong@statcan.ca.

Table: Strikes and lockouts and person-days not worked

	Work stoppages	Person-days not worked	Employees	Time-loss ratio*
		'000	'000	
1980	1,028	9,130	9,584	953
1981	1,049	8,850	9,854	898
1982	679	5,702	9,443	604
1983	645	4,441	9,476	469
1984	716	3,883	9,731	399
1985	829	3,126	9,932	315
1986	748	7,151	10,323	693
1987	668	3,810	10,625	359
1988	548	4,901	10,938	448
1989	627	3,701	11,183	331
1990	579	5,079	11,241	452
1991	463	2,516	10,963	230
1992	404	2,110	10,841	195
1993	381	1,517	10,830	140
1994	374	1,607	11,076	145
1995	328	1,583	11,259	141
1996	330	3,352	11,293	297
1997	284	3,610	11,421	316
1998	381	2,444	11,715	209
1999	413	2,446	12,066	203
2000	377	1,662	12,488	133

Sources: Human Resources Development Canada, Workplace Information Directorate; Labour Force Survey

* The number of workdays lost due to strikes and lockouts per 1,000 employees.

Workdays lost to date in 2001 have changed little from 2000

The 90 strikes and lockouts during the first five months of 2001 were less than the 207 recorded during the same period in the preceding year. The 855,000 workdays lost from the stoppages during 2001, however, were slightly higher than the 827,000 of the year before, reflecting in part longer strike durations in 2001. Ten major strikes in Newfoundland, Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia accounted for approximately 75% of total time lost during the first five months of 2001.¹ In spite of the slightly greater work time lost in 2001, the time-loss ratio remained unchanged at around 68 in both periods because of a higher employee count in 2001.

International work-stoppage statistics

Because of differences in definitions and statistical coverage, international comparisons of labour dispute statistics must be made with caution.

Many countries rely on voluntary notification of a dispute to a national or local government department. In Canada, the data reflect all work stoppages that come to the notice of Human Resources Development Canada's Workplace Information Directorate. Also, many countries, including Canada, do not measure work time lost at establishments whose employees are not involved in a dispute but are unable to work because of a shortage of materials supplied by establishments that are on strike.

In addition, significant differences exist between countries on the threshold used to determine whether a particular stoppage should be entered in the official records. Most countries exclude small stoppages (judged by the number of workers involved, the length of the dispute, or the number of days lost) from the statistics. In particular, the threshold for inclusion is very high in the United States (1,000 workers), and so is the threshold of 100 workdays lost in Denmark. In Canada, the threshold for inclusion is 10 or more person-days lost.

Some countries also exclude disputes in certain industrial sectors. For example, Portugal excludes public sector strikes. Several others exclude certain types of disputes: Portugal excludes general strikes from work-stoppage statistics, Japan excludes days lost in unofficial disputes, and the United Kingdom excludes so-called political work stoppages. No such exclusions exist in Canada.

Finally, the inclusion or omission of workers indirectly involved in a stoppage, namely those who are unable to work because others at their workplace are on strike, varies between countries. The United States, together with many other countries such as the United Kingdom, France and Australia, attempts to include them. Canada, along with countries such as Germany and Italy, excludes them from the statistics. A complete description of these international coverage and definitional differences is contained in "A Technical note on coverage and methodology comparability of Labour Dispute Statistics" in the British journal, *Labour Market Trends* 109, no. 4.

Summary

Canada's record on time lost due to industrial disputes has improved over the years. The average annual number of workdays lost per 1,000 employees (the time-loss ratio) fell from 547 in the 1980s to 233 in the 1990s. Moreover, the ratio of 133 recorded in 2000 was the lowest since 1980.

Time lost due to industrial disputes

■ Note

1 Major strikes January to May 2001:

Province	Workers	Workdays lost
Newfoundland	Hospital support staff	24,180
	Provincial general service staff	16,900
Quebec	La compagnie minière	
	Québec-Cartier	37,990
	Camco Inc.	17,330
Ontario	Toronto District School Board	247,000
	Falconbridge Ltd., Sudbury	43,710
	McMaster University, Hamilton	42,900
	Toronto Star	33,330
Alberta	Calgary Transit	70,200
British Columbia	Coast Mountain/TransLink	107,250

■ References

Human Resources Development Canada. *Workplace Gazette* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 40-44.

United Kingdom National Statistics Office. "International comparisons of labour disputes in 1999," *Labour Market Trends* 109, no. 4: 195-201.

For the most recent data on unionization, see the fact-sheet available through "Key labour and income facts."