



Nova Scotia  
Federation  
of Labour, CLC

Tuesday, December 18, 2007

## **New Year's Message from Nova Scotia Federation President Rick Clarke**

On behalf of the Executive Council and staff of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, it is my pleasure to wish one and all the very best of the Festive Season and to hope all had a very enjoyable period of relaxation and pleasure with family and friends.

As we reflect on the past year, it is clear that Nova Scotians faced many challenges. The ongoing struggle to maintain working conditions and quality of life has intensified in light of the regressive policies put forward by the provincial and federal governments.

Nova Scotia Premier Rodney MacDonald and his government chose to ignore the crisis being experienced in health care, and introduced legislation to undermine and take away the collective bargaining rights of health care and community service workers.

Our government should be focusing on things that will shorten wait times and stop ER closures. Taking away their rights will make it even more difficult for Nova Scotia to attract and retain the nurses and health care workers we need.

Premier Rodney MacDonald pushed forward the legislation; knowing full well that both opposition parties would not support this regressive legislation and when it came up for second reading, he would not allow the Bill come forward for a vote.

Quite clearly, the Premier is playing politics with workers' rights and our health care system; rather than working with all concerned, to address the real problems and to better our system.

The Premier continued to ignore the problems and real solutions in the health care system; when his government made a commitment to establish standards, protection and control that will allow publicly funded, private facilities to play a clearly defined role to provide access to certain and prescribed health services.

The solutions to long wait times are to be found within the public system. We do not need to turn to the private sector for solutions—it will undermine and eventually destroy our public Medicare system.

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The premier has said that his rules for private health clinics will be aimed at protecting the public. The best way for Premier MacDonald and his Conservative government to protect the public is to address the real problems in health care. We need a strategy to train, recruit and retain more health professionals and we need to modernize how services are provided and expand the services provided.

Private solutions to the province's problems were a part of the Conservatives' recent Throne Speech. They think P3's are the way to help fix some of province's woes when we all know that previous public-private partnerships were disastrous for Nova Scotia, remember the P3 schools fiasco or the Toll Highway?

We continue to campaign for us an increase Nova Scotia's Minimum Wage to a living wage. The 2007 Child Poverty Report card points out that Nova Scotia is one of the provinces making the least progress in reducing child poverty. This province needs to get serious about poverty reduction—make child care, parenting supports, education and training for parents and affordable housing a priority.

We can say the same thing about the priorities of the Federal Conservatives, who instead of increasing spending on valuable women's program's, chose to cut 12 of 16 regional Status of Women offices, trimming \$5 million -- 40 per cent -- from its budget and scaling back funding for advocacy or lobbying. During the last federal election campaign, Harper promised "to take concrete and immediate measures to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women".

The Harper government may believe that women's equality has been achieved but we know better. Pay inequity is still the rule. Women still only make 71 cents for every dollar earned by a man. Racialized women are at 64 cents and Aboriginal women are at 46 cents. This is not equality!

Child care is either too expensive or not even available for many working parents. Harper's \$100 a month taxable child care allowance doesn't make the grade if you're paying over a \$1,000 a month for child care.

We have campaigned tirelessly on the need to increase spending for important programs. We made a presentation to the House of Commons Finance Committee recently when they were here on pre-budget consultations.

Our message is that our tax system needs to be fairer to working families. Upper income citizens and large corporations have been the major beneficiaries of the growing economy and tax cuts.

We desperately need tax reform, not in the form of cuts. We need to tax fairly and ensure that monies are allocated fairly to the provinces and that federal transfers are not just maintained, but increased.

Unemployment is still not at the top of the Federal priority list—over a million Canadians will face the holidays without a pay cheque.

According to Statistics Canada's *Labour Force Survey* for November, the ranks of unemployed workers grew by 25,100 – including new losses of 16,400 jobs in the manufacturing sector, pushing total losses to 314,600 since manufacturing employment peaked in November, 2002.

These were jobs with good salaries and benefits that helped people raise healthy families and plan for a decent retirement. They came with incomes that supported local businesses and paid for social services that raised everyone's quality of life.

Do not listen to the hype about all the jobs being created, most of them are low-paying pay much less, with few if any benefits, and very often are insecure, temporary, part-time or of the self-employed variety.

Canadian workers have had some victories and have finally won new legal protection for their wages and their pension contributions when their employer goes bankrupt. Bill C-12, a series of amendments to existing insolvency and wage protection laws, was approved by the Senate on December 13<sup>th</sup> and received Royal Assent on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Our Federation was involved in the three-year campaign to change bankruptcy laws that unfairly put workers last in line to get paid.

Working men and women lost an average of \$50 million a year in unpaid wages when companies went bankrupt while waiting for two years to receive only 15 cents on the dollar.

When we can celebrate victories like this, it justifies our optimism and makes us all the more committed to continue working for a fair, just and kind society that benefits all.

On behalf of the Executive, Staff and Affiliates of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, I wish all a safe and happy holiday season with family and friends, as well as a prosperous and Happy New Year.