

August 27, 2008



Nova Scotia
Federation of Labour, CLC

Labour Day Message from the N.S. Federation of Labour President Rick Clarke

Halifax - Labour Day is a day we reflect on and celebrate the many contributions made by workers that have provided many benefits and improved society for all.

As we reflect and celebrate, it is equally important that we re-commit ourselves to the ongoing struggle to maintain the gains made over the years by and for workers and to the continuing struggle to improve the overall working conditions and quality of life for all workers, their families and Nova Scotians in general.

Over the past year, gains have been made in some very important areas, but we also have had to intensify our focus and efforts on others, such as health care.

Long wait times, coupled with the need for recruitment and retention programs of health care providers are the biggest concern in health care and yet Government is ignoring the need for a long term plan or strategy to properly address this growing crisis.

Instead, Premier Rodney MacDonald defends plans for the province's largest health district to pay a private, for-profit staffing company \$30 million over the next four years to cover shifts for nurses and other workers instead of hiring more full-time employees.

Instead of focusing on a recruitment and retention strategy to meet this growing demand, a strategy that would provide stability in our system and address the wait time concerns; the Province has chosen to focus on providing our health care dollars to a for-profit staffing company. This move is essentially saying that they do not have a solution to the shortages of health care workers in this province, clearly abdicating their responsibility to provide a quality public health care system.

We know that poverty is one of the major determinants that impact on health. The growing number of Nova Scotians living in poverty has been an ongoing concern of our Federation and we readily accepted the opportunity to participate, along with representatives of a number of community groups, on the Poverty Reduction Working Group, as mandated by Bill 94.

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This Working Group did a comprehensive review and report to the provincial government on a Poverty Reduction Strategy and we sincerely hope the government acts on the recommendations in this report, to address the many problems facing people living in poverty in Nova Scotia such as: training & education, employment supports & transition to workforce, housing and homelessness, transportation, child care, pharmacare, nutrition, affordable energy and minimum wage.

Although we have yet to achieve a minimum wage that is a living wage, gains are also being made in this area, with May 1, 2008 seeing the rate increased to \$8.10 and it is expected to be close to or at the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) with the increases in 2010.

The Minimum Wage Committee continues to meet, to monitor trends and to make recommendations to Government and we urge all to make your views and concerns known on this very crucial matter.

The positive initiatives being seen on poverty reduction and the minimum wage are clear reflections that Minority Governments can work for Nova Scotians and that meaningful consultation is a much better tool than confrontation.

We cannot relent on our lobbying efforts on all fronts and issues important to workers and their families and equality has always been at the forefront of our campaigns, because no matter how you look at it, women still earn less than men in every sector of the economy.

Women working full-time, all year earn only 70.5% as much as men (\$39,200 vs \$55,700 – based on a national average). Under the same conditions, that is working full-time all year, women of colour earn only 64% and Aboriginal women an appalling 46% as much as men.

If we look at all workers (including part-time and part-year) the gap is even greater standing at 64%.

We do know that unions make a huge difference for working women. Unions promote equality:

- on the job
- better wages, better benefits such as health plans, overtime pay and paid leaves
- Protection from discrimination and harassment
- Job training and skills development (which also means even higher wages)
- Job security
- A formal employment contract which is enforced by the union

- Equalization of the wages of male and female-dominated jobs
- Better maternity/parental leave benefits
- Flexible work schedules and family care leave

Unions Promote Equality in society

In society, unions organize and lobby for legislative changes to improve the lives of working people. Over the years, unions in Canada have worked hard to change laws to protect workers and promote equality for all workers. Unions advocate for:

- Strong human rights laws
- Public health care and pharmacare
- Pay and employment equity laws
- Better pension legislation
- Improvements to Employment Insurance
- Recognition of foreign workers' credentials
- Publicly-funded, not-for-profit, accessible, quality child care
- Funding for women's advocacy and research organizations
- Higher minimum wages
- Improved employment standards protection

So, on this Labour Day, we will pause to reflect on our efforts, knowing that unions do make a difference in everyone's lives and re-dedicate ourselves to the struggles ahead.

On behalf of the Executive Council, staff and the 70,000 affiliated union members of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour I would like to wish all an enjoyable and safe Labour Day weekend.

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For more information, please call Rick Clarke at: 454.6735 (office) or 434.5612 (home)