



Nova Scotia
Federation
of Labour, CLC

Wednesday, December 24, 2008

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.

The past year has clearly given all Nova Scotians and Canadians, many challenges to face and much to reflect on as we prepare to embark into a New Year, one filled with great uncertainty and challenges.

Although the ongoing struggle to maintain working conditions and quality of life has intensified due to regressive policies put forward by the provincial and federal governments; the ongoing crisis in the manufacturing and forestry sectors is now magnified by the current economic crisis which will prove to be our greatest challenge in the coming months.

Although it is anticipated, the current Economic Crisis will be a major focus of energies and action in the coming months and quite possibly, throughout the year - we cannot relent on our efforts on all fronts and issues important to workers and their families.

We are and will continue to be committed to those issues that are so important to Nova Scotians, such as strong human rights laws; a publicly-funded, owned and operated health care system; expanded and strengthened pharmacare; progressive pay and employment equity laws; better pension legislation; dramatic improvements to Employment Insurance; publicly-funded, not-for-profit, accessible, quality child care; funding for women's advocacy and research organizations; higher minimum wages; greater focus on poverty reduction; Occupational Health and Safety and Workers' Compensation; educational and employment opportunities for our youth and for improved employment standards protection.

In the waning days of 2008, one has to think and wonder what 2009 may have in store for us, as we again find ourselves in yet another recession; brought about by the ongoing crisis in our manufacturing and forestry sectors coupled with the current global economic crisis.

Canada is in an economic crisis. In November 2008 we lost 75,000 good paying, mostly manufacturing jobs alone. Our economy has lost over 400,000 manufacturing and forestry jobs since 2002, a fair number of them in Nova Scotia.

This federal government could have introduced economic policies to stimulate the economy and help laid off vulnerable workers and pensioners. They failed in their pre-budget economic update that led to this current political crisis and then they close the House for seven weeks “to put together a plan”.

Although there have been recent announcements regarding support for some sectors and/or industries, Canada still lags behind what other nations are doing to stimulate their respective economies.

There are other factors that would indicate, unlike previous recessions, we are not prepared for the one we face. In the last two recessions of the early '80s and '90s; when our national unemployment rate rose sharply from about 7.5% to over 11%, our EI program was much better structured to deal with the crisis than the system is today. In 2006-07 only four in ten workers and even fewer women, qualified for EI, due to the very difficult qualifying standards and those who do qualify are, on average, eligible for just 32 weeks of benefits, about seven months.

We can make a difference if we act together and in the interest of working people, their families and their communities. All levels of government and all parties must set aside differences and work together in the interest of our provincial and national economies.

A recession is not a time for Government to focus on restraint or belt-tightening. It is the time for investing in the economy and in people. And although initially there will be a cost to this investment there will be a return for that investment when all is said and done.

We have been and will continue to be active participants in “Labour’s Plan to Deal with the Economic Crisis” lead by the Canadian Labour Congress, which clearly points out what Canada needs:

- Increased access and benefits to Employment Insurance benefits to help the growing number of unemployed and provide better training programs for new jobs.

- A national public infrastructure strategy to create jobs and build new industries for the future.
- Help for the automotive and forestry sector.
- Protect pensions by creating a pension guarantee fund and increase Old Age Security to protect the increase of retired people.

We sincerely believe by working together we can and will make a difference; through acting in the best interest of people and our economy, we can help ease the impact of the recession while at the same time better prepare us for future challenges.

Our Federal and Provincial Governments must act and act quickly in your best interest; you deserve nothing less; and this we are committed to.

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.

Rick Clarke, President, Nova Scotia Federation of Labour

CAW Local 4005