



Nova Scotia
Federation
of Labour, CLC

Friday, September 4, 2009

A Labour Day Message from Rick Clarke, President of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour

Halifax - Labour Day is a day that we have the occasion to spend with family and friends as we recognize, pay tribute to, and celebrate the many valuable social and economic achievements made by working people; achievements that have provided many benefits and improved society for all.

Unions and workers in Canada were celebrating Labour Day, decades before it was a national holiday, for the first time on September 4, 1894. Over the past 115 years, working people around the world mark either the first of May or the first Monday of September as a day to celebrate their economic and social achievements.

Workers and their organizations have been at the forefront in the fight for better health care, accessible and affordable education, housing, pensions, a realistic minimum wage, and improved human rights; all of which have benefited all and enhance our well being and our society.

We have been deeply committed to improving on all these areas, in the interest of all Nova Scotians, but progress has been slow, due to a succession of regressive Provincial Governments that did not support our efforts and principles of fairness, equity, and social justice.

Because of this clash of principles, much of our time has been focused on fighting cuts and trying to regain losses in important areas such as workers' compensation, occupational health and safety, health care, education, social programs, employment insurance, equity, equality, anti-poverty measures and unemployment/job creation.

Before us we now have, with a new government in place, a chance to work towards building a prosperous Nova Scotia, based on the principles of fairness, equity, and social justice. This will require the participation of all Nova Scotians, including workers and the organizations that represent them.

We believe the labour movement and other like representative bodies in Nova Scotia are fully prepared to work cooperatively with government to make our province a better place to live and work.

But Nova Scotia cannot do it alone. We need the Federal Government to be behind us. A good start would be action on three key issues now— **Jobs, Employment Insurance (EI) and Pensions.**

More than half a million Canadians lost their jobs last year. Many more lost their life savings because of the economic crisis they had nothing to do with. Working people paid the price.

The Federal Government has to act quickly on federal and provincial infrastructure investment. Post-secondary education, apprenticeships and skills training have to be more accessible so workers can adapt rapidly to changing economic circumstances. A “Buy Canadian” Policy is a must for effective and real job creation.

Employment Insurance (EI) is a critically important program for Canadian workers, especially in tough times like we face today. Laid-off workers obviously need adequate benefits to support themselves and their families while they search for a new job.

Less than half of all unemployed workers today qualify for benefits, and the average weekly benefit is less than \$350.00. The average worker on an EI claim today qualifies for only 35 weeks in benefits; this means that thousands of workers will have to turn to provincial assistance programs.

The Federal Government has to fix the EI Program so it works the way it was supposed to. We need uniform entrance requirements of 360 hours of work across the country so that more workers would qualify if they are laid off, longer benefits of up to 50 weeks so fewer unemployed workers exhaust a claim, and higher weekly benefits based on the best 12 weeks of earnings before a layoff and a replacement rate of 60% of insured earnings.

EI has to be fixed so that people, who are self-employed, work part-time or on contract are not left out in the cold.

It is also time to fix the way we plan for retirement. Working people have the right to retire from their job with dignity and security. Today, that right is under threat.

Over 60% of working Canadians don't have a workplace pension plan. Those who do live with the threat that they could lose all their pension money because our bankruptcy laws, do not adequately protect workers' benefits when their companies go into bankruptcy protection.

It is time to change these laws. It is time to invest in more programs like the Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security. It is time for working people to have the right to retire from their job with dignity and security.

There is a lot of talk about an impending federal election. If you are one of the countless Canadians who wants an answer to why working people don't get their priorities dealt with, why good jobs are not being protected, why there's still a shortage of affordable child care and why women still earn just 70½ cents for every dollar men get when they work, think about who you need to elect to finally make your priorities the priorities of your government.

Each of us must talk about how everyday working people can push their priorities to the top of the political agenda - and get results.

We must be ready and committed to fight for and to vote for, that for which we fight for every day; issues that are important for workers, their families and their communities.

We need to elect a government that cares about equality, protecting good jobs, affordable child care, and a promising future for our youth.

We need to elect MP's that stand for principles, not ones who sit on their hands or are conveniently absent for crucial votes.

We need to elect more MP's that stand side by side with us, and for us on the streets and in the Commons, on matters important to workers and their families. We need more MP'S that care and that make a difference.

As we celebrate Labour Day, let's remember we can all make a difference in making life better for Nova Scotians - it can be done.

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

For more information, please contact Rick Clarke at 454.6735 (office) 434.5612 (home)

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