



Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, CLC

September 1, 2010

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

Halifax - On Labour Day we recognize and pay tribute to the many valuable social and economic achievements made by working people.

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, improved human rights, workers' compensation, social programs and job creation.

The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour continues to be deeply committed to its campaigns on these issues and to work with the three levels of government towards building a prosperous Nova Scotia, based on the principles of fairness, equity and social justice.

This summer, all Federation of Labour Presidents met in Winnipeg in conjunction with the Canadian Premiers' meeting. We called upon the premiers to take action on the unstable jobs situation, as the global economy remains unstable and Canada's economic recovery remains tenuous at best.

While there have been some optimistic reports about Canada's emergence from the recession, the recovery has not been uniform across the country. For thousands of Canadians, the recession meant a layoff from a good job with good pay and entry into a new world of low wage, temporary, part-time, or insecure jobs – precarious employment.

Those workers may be off the unemployment rolls, but they are no better off. These stop-gap solutions will see increasing numbers of Canadians slipping into low-wage work and poverty.

The bottom line is that knowledge and skills are the key to success for individuals, businesses and countries in the modern economy. Money spent on training and re-training can make unemployed workers part of the solution on the path to economic recovery. We must continue to press the Federal Government on this, to ensure the resources are available to support training and workers.

Post-secondary education, apprenticeships and skills training has to be more accessible so workers can adapt rapidly to changing economic circumstances. Also needed is a national action plan to create green jobs in energy efficiency and retrofiting, alternative energy and transit.

We must continue to press the Federal Government to solve the problem with Canada's retirement income system; a problem which has become so obvious that even bank economists have started to admit the RRSP approach has failed. There's too much risk and not enough security to ensure that, after a lifetime of work, people can retire and live out their last years in dignity.

We need to increase CPP benefits, boost low-income (GIS) public pensions so no senior lives in poverty, and introduce federal pension insurance to protect our hard-earned retirement savings.

Raising the minimum retirement income floor with more robust public pensions, combined with the guaranteed protection of additional savings offers clear benefits to everyone, including our provincial coffers and economies.

Whether retirement is just around the corner or something that's decades into the future, Labour's plan for retirement security has clear benefits for everyone, no matter where you work.

But to properly address this crisis, we need immediate action to see the CPP benefits double and phased in over the short term (7 or 8 years) and not more studies, or a 3 or 4 decade phase-in period.

Canada's Finance Ministers agree that there is a better way to save more for retirement. The best way to help Canadians save enough for retirement is by expanding the Canadian Pension Plan. The politicians need to follow through and change the laws so people can start saving more through the CPP right away.

To this end, we call upon our Provincial Finance Minister to join with other like-minded Ministers, and lead the effort to achieve this goal; the provinces working together can make it happen.

Workplace Health and Safety is also a very a serious issue. Yet, in 2009 there were 32 workplace fatalities in Nova Scotia, the most since the Westray disaster. This is not only an alarming high number of workplace fatalities, it is also reflective of an alarming trend; 29 workers lost their lives in 2008, then the most since Westray – it is abundantly clear that workplace Health and Safety must be taken more seriously in this province.

Our Health and Safety system is an Internal Responsible System (IRS), and training and education are vital required tools if it is to function as intended; but for an IRS to work it also needs strong and enforced laws and regulations.

One of labour's successes was to see Bill C-45; the Westray Bill passed in the House of Commons. This amendment to the Criminal Code of Canada basically means that anyone, including officers of companies, who either through act or neglect, contribute to or cause serious workplace injuries &/or fatalities, can be held criminally liable for their behavior and potentially face jail time. Unfortunately this change to the Criminal Code has been all but ignored for the past six years. As a result we feel many employers have not been held duly accountable for their actions or inaction.

We will continue our call for a Special Prosecutor to investigate workplace deaths and serious injuries. They would be trained in the field of workplace health and safety and in the existing laws and regulations. We are also asking that training be provided to law enforcement officers, as they are in most cases the first person on the scene of a workplace injury or fatality.

So on this Labour Day we have a lot to think about, but most importantly, as we celebrate Labour Day, let's remember we can all make a difference in making life better for Nova Scotians.

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.

“Our province, our future - working together to make it better”.

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