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PRESS RELEASE from
Nova Scotia
Federation of Labour, CLC

Federation President urges HRM to vote again on binding arbitration

Halifax, N.S. - The Nova Scotia Federation of Labour (NSFL) is continuing to call on HRM Mayor Peter Kelly to explain what councillors were led to believe before they rejected ATU 508's offer of binding arbitration.

The mayor says councillors rejected the offer because of the provincial government's willingness to stage a third round of conciliation.

"But the mayor is leaving out an important detail that he should have known and probably did," says NSFL President Rick Clarke. "His employees at Metro Transit had not agreed to yet more conciliation.

"I have great respect for the conciliation process, but at this table, it's already failed twice," says Clarke. "The transit employees have been much more flexible than the mayor's PR would lead you to believe. Out of respect for themselves and the people they serve, these transit employees are not willing to bear any more of the brunt and no amount of conciliation will change that.

"Unless the city is willing to back away from this clawback, arbitration is the only answer."

Clarke says the mayor's explanation of how council came to reject arbitration leaves two significant questions unanswered:

Did council fully understand that by rejecting arbitration, they would be prolonging the strike for weeks, and prolonging for weeks the suffering and hardship endured by thousands of their constituents?

Did council fully understand that by endorsing the mayor's conciliation gambit, they were subjecting the families of 736 tax-paying Haligonians to weeks more financial and emotional hardship simply because their fathers, mothers, sisters, or brothers want to defend their Charter right to a say in their working conditions?

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“We’ll never know the answer to these questions because the mayor chose to hold the debate in secret and refuses to tell us how many voted to reject their employees’ offer,” Clarke says. “Would any of those votes have changed if the facts were more clear?”

Clarke says he and his 70,000 NSFL members across Nova Scotia are calling on council to do the right thing and hold the vote again.

“Collective bargaining depends on honesty, openness, and respect,” says Clarke. “This employer needs to show more of it. Until they do, the public and these 736 Haligonians are will continue to suffer needlessly.”

Clarke adds that there are implications to this kind of employer behaviour far beyond ATU, noting that the city’s water workers are suffering the same disrespect at the table and are now poised on the edge of their own job action, not to mention the dozens of other public service contracts being and about to be negotiated across the province.

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