



# **New Year's Message**

## **from Nova Scotia Federation of Labour**

### **President Rick Clarke**

December 21, 2006

Each year at this time, while we look to the New Year, we reflect on the challenges we faced over the past months in the struggles to improve the well-being of workers, their families and Nova Scotians, at times it seems I find myself stating or restating the same general areas of concern that must be addressed if we are to again to see a fair, just and kind society, one that benefits all.

But we must continue to focus on the important issues that we have been actively working on this past year as we strive to ensure the best quality of work and life for all Nova Scotians.

As always, our efforts are still very much focused on seeing our health care system revitalized through proper and sustained funding; as well as proper restructuring to meet the needs of all Nova Scotians, through a publicly-funded and publicly-provided system.

While we continue to push for a public health care system, our provincial government keeps pushing back with their call for or backing of more privatization, which is evident with the recently tabled private health care facilities legislation. Do not believe those who say it is impossible to reduce wait times within the public system—this is possible; all that is really needed is the political will to make it happen. The Federal Advisor on Wait Times concluded in his final report released in June, 2006 that we need to fix wait times in the public health care system rather than encourage the growth of a parallel, for-profit health care.

It is important to keep in mind that the government is not honouring their commitment to start with an extensive public consultation phase. This Bill clearly assumes and establishes a role for private, for-profit delivery of health services (both insured and uninsured) without providing any substantive rationale for such a move.

Along with health care, Workers' Compensation is still a priority for this Federation. Our Federation and other Stakeholders in the system continue to meet on number of fronts: chronic pain, Workplace Stakeholder Advocacy System, and prevention initiatives. From the statistics before us, it is alarmingly clear that we have so much more to do on prevention, if we are to truly reduce the pain and suffering from workplace accidents and illness.

Despite the alarming statistics outlining the continuing unacceptable high numbers of injuries and fatalities being experienced in Nova Scotia workplaces; Government continues in its snail pace approach to much-needed legislative and/or regulatory support or reform.

The way government is handling the long-awaited and much-needed Workplace Violence Regulations is a perfect example of this lethargic approach to providing worker protection.

This matter has been under discussion, review and consultation for years now, with three sets of draft Violence in the Workplace Regulations submitted to date, with the first draft tabled in 1999.

Government's response to this urgent matter is to put out a paper entitled "Addressing the Risk of Workplace Violence in Nova Scotia".

Do the continuing and often increasing incidents of injuries and fatalities not send a clear message that action, not more discussion is what is needed to reinforce workers' rights and protection through much needed legislative and/or regulatory support and workplace training?

The workers of today and tomorrow are depending on us to ensure that every measure is taken, every resource provided and every authority given or put in place to enable them to return home from work at the end of the day safe and healthy.

We have also intensified our campaign to increase Nova Scotia's Minimum Wage, the need for which is painfully evident when you look at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - Nova Scotia's recently published Child Poverty Report Card, which cites statistics for 2004. The report underscores that families are currently facing severe income shortfalls. Close to 60 per cent of women earners in our province earn less than \$20,000 a year and over 40 per cent of men also find themselves in low-wage jobs. Nova Scotia's child poverty rate was 18.1 per cent in 2004 as compared to 16 per cent in 1989.

The cost of necessities and utilities, tax on these items, an increase in precarious employment (casual, part-time, self-employment), lack of well paid jobs, and the high cost of post-secondary education contribute to the concerns of the working poor. In addition to minimum wage, other strategies must be pursued to help alleviate poverty such as: increases in the basic personal income tax exemption for low income earners; education subsidies; affordable housing; and child.

If we truly want to make a difference, if there is the political will to do so; a targeted and multi-focused approach is required to effectively combat poverty, similar to the approach taken by government with respect to deficit and debt reduction.

This multi-focused approach has worked elsewhere and it can work here.

We are committed to a fair and just society and as such are committed to these issues and so many more, and to act on them in the interest of all Nova Scotians. We sincerely believe the current balance of government is good for Nova Scotians and their communities, and it's good for democracy and we are committed to supporting and working with this balance so we can achieve our goals.

On behalf of the Executive, Staff and Affiliates of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, I wish all a safe and festive holiday season with family and friends, as well as a prosperous and Happy New Year.

-30-

For more information, please call Rick Clarke: 434.5612 (home)

Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, CLC, 3700 Kempt Rd., Suite 225, Halifax, N.S., B3K 4X8  
902.454.6735 **phone** 902.454.7671 **fax** [nsfl@ns.aliantzinc.ca](mailto:nsfl@ns.aliantzinc.ca) **email** [www.nsfl.ns.ca](http://www.nsfl.ns.ca) **web site**

CAW Local 4005