



Nova Scotia  
Federation  
of Labour, CLC

Thursday, August 31, 2006

## Labour Day Message from N.S. Federation of Labour President Rick Clarke

Halifax, N.S. - On this Labour Day I find myself once again reflecting on a busy year during which our Federation had been front and centre in the struggle to better conditions for workers and their families, defending the gains we have made in the past. And we have made gains.

Although founded earlier, the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, as a chartered body of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), is marking its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

We, along with the other Federations of Labour, have worked with the Canadian Labour Congress in fighting for better wages, health care, pensions and health and safety in the workplace, (un)employment insurance along with many other rights and benefits for workers and their families.

As put by the President of the CLC, Ken Georgetti, in his Labour Day message:

“Over the span of two generations, the unions of the Canadian Labour Congress have improved the way we work and how we live.

Many of the benefits that were first bargained in collective agreements one workplace at a time are now enjoyed by all Canadians and their families. In fact, they have become so much a part of everyday life that most of us simply take them for granted.

Thus, today Canadians enjoy the security of the Canada Pension Plan, overtime and holiday pay, or universal public Medicare. But in 1956, these were only dreams for most workers unless they belonged to a strong union.

The same is true for laws promoting health and safety in the workplace, including the right to refuse dangerous work. Laws to protect people against harassment and discrimination, maternity and parental leaves, student loans and, most recently, protection against bankruptcy – all won through the political action of a united labour movement.”

As we celebrate our accomplishments, we at the same time commit ourselves to the ongoing struggle to maintain and improve on these gains for as we all, know there is always more to be done.

This is not an easy task and it takes the hard work and commitment of all; for there are those in our society who not only attempt to block progressive change, but they are also dedicated to the erosion of the gains and benefits enjoyed and valued by workers, their families and their communities.

Our struggles continue because our economic development and trade policies favour corporations, helping erode the supports that provided workers with some protection and security and the government has played a key role.

On a daily basis we fight against cuts to health care, Workers' Compensation, occupational health and safety, social programs, pensions, Employment Insurance and we continue to push for fairness and justice in such human rights areas as equality, pay equity, anti-racism and the elimination of poverty.

There are far too many workplace accidents and deaths, not to mention the untold and/or unrecognized numbers who are sick or who have died due to an occupational disease, such as many forms of cancer.

Yet, we are still fighting for a better regulatory process for occupational health and safety - a regulatory process that has all but stagnated and that is not acceptable.

Workers' Compensation is a huge challenge for us and we are front and centre in the campaign to eliminate the unfairness and discrimination in chronic pain claims and to ensure workers are treated fairly when they apply for benefits.

Our battle against the privatization of Medicare has intensified like never before. I would urge you to join the campaign, write your MLA and MP, tell them that we must preserve that which was fought for, universal and accessible Medicare for every single Canadian.

There are hundreds if not thousands of workers in our fine province; many of whom work directly for our government, who do not have the clear right to join a union - while others are in workplaces that are excluded from coverage provided by other labour laws.

This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it is time our legislators and employers realized this; how can we/they criticize what is happening in developing countries when they are in fact part of the problem.

There are still thousands of Nova Scotians who depend on food banks as the gap between the rich and poor grows in a time of unprecedented wealth in our society.

Our youth face the highest post-secondary costs in the country and once they graduate, there are not enough decent jobs to keep them in Nova Scotia.

Now that we are again have a minority government, we are in a good position to make gains for working people and their families.

We have a chance to work co-operatively for better labour legislation and higher minimum wage that will benefit all workers, not just union members.

The more Nova Scotians who earn a decent wage, the better our economy will be - the math is simple.

So as we approach this Labour Day, we will celebrate the gains workers have made and re-energize for the challenges ahead.

We will continue our work of the advancement of justice, fairness and equal opportunity for everyone.

On behalf of the Executive Council 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.

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