



## Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, CLC

September, 2013

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

Our Federation can look back on the past year and know that we worked hard in our workplaces and communities to make life better for all Nova Scotians.

Labour Day isn't just an opportunity to honour workers with a day off – it is a time to reflect on the many contributions labour has made and makes towards building a better country.

Today we are pleased to join with the Canadian Labour Congress to launch labour's new **"together FAIRNESS WORKS"** campaign. This campaign is vital to the future, as it signifies that we are ramping up our efforts to win significant improvements to vital programs like the Canada Pension Plan – which will help every Canadian when they retire – regardless of whether they are a union member or not.

Employment Insurance - Unions helped create Unemployment- now known as the Employment Insurance which successive Conservative and Liberal Governments have tried to destroy. Harpers latest changes, which came into effect this past January are possibly the worst.

Of all the negative changes to the EI System, quite possibly the most diabolical single change was that which saw the Harper federal government abolish the system of EI appeals based on a national network of Boards of Referees, and replaced it with an appointed much smaller and centralized appeal system lacking entirely in local representation – those who have been or believe to have been wronged have had their right to appeal undermined or eroded to at best but a paper review? – a far cry from the balanced respected local Appeal Board and process it replaces.

Earlier this year we held public meetings across the province to hear what people had to say about Harper's changes to EI. It was very clear the changes are devastating to workers across Nova Scotia and we heard this over and over again from the hundreds of people who showed up at our Town Hall meetings to discuss EI. It was also clear that people are willing to fight to hold on to what we fought for and improve it.

The Harper government's relentless push to sign a new Canada-EU free trade deal would undermine the rights of federal, provincial and municipal governments to manage public spending over goods and services; it would threaten or lead to privatize public services like drinking water, prevent us from adopting strong measures to combat climate change and wipe out up to 150,000 Canadian jobs, among a long list of additional concerns.

And we only have to take one look at Harper's Action Plan for 2013 to see that is action.....action against organized labour.

The Harper government has a clear plan to attack unions. The government has undermined collective bargaining in the federal sector, and emboldened employers to drive down wages and attack pensions in the private sector– creating or driving us into a low wage economy. In addition through legislation like Bill 377, the Harper Conservatives are attempting to rob unions of the ability to use their resources to defend their members and civil society.

Bill 377 is an anti-union bill that is back before the House of Commons. Initially it was passed on to the Senate where amendments were made and referred back to the House. Our Provincial Labour Minister appeared before a committee of the Senate asking the bill to be struck down. The Federal Government will have to spend nearly \$20 million in taxpayers' money each year to receive and process the massive volume of data generated.

The Canadian Bar Association and Privacy Commissioner have said Bill C-377 also contravenes federal and provincial privacy laws which protect individuals' most intimate personal and confidential information. I encourage you send these MPs and Senators a message to give them encouragement in standing against this anti-union, unnecessary and un-Canadian piece of legislation.

A section of this omnibus 2013 budget gives the federal cabinet the explicit power to give Crown corporations orders as to how they should negotiate with employees, both unionized and non-unionized, and would give the government the power to have a Treasury Board official sit in on collective bargaining sessions at Crown corporations.

We along with the other Federations and the CLC are still pushing the Conservative Government to improve its Temporary Foreign Worker Program which in its current form is exploitation. These workers, most of whom are desperate and seeking a better life, are being used to create an underclass to drive down the wages and working conditions of Canadians. It's not fair or just to them or to Canadian co-workers. The recent decision of The Harper Conservatives had even allowed employers to pay temporary foreign workers 15% less is a blatant example of its low-wage strategy.

With 1.3 million unemployed and several hundred thousand more discouraged or underemployed Canadians, our focus should be on providing opportunities for Canada's unemployed and underemployed.

The Federation of Labour Presidents were in Niagara-on-the Lake in conjunction with the Premiers, to urge them to lobby the Federal Government on these and many other issues. We urged Premier Dexter to raise concerns of importance to Nova Scotia and to **continue** to be a champion for public health care, the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Employment Insurance (EI) and skills training, which he did.

But, typically, Harper ignored the Premiers and refused to meet with them on any issue.

But, we will continue to denounce this low-wage agenda and stand up for the best interest of working people, because it is abundantly clear that the reason why income inequality has grown in Canada over the last 30 years is because government and corporations have attacked labour rights and unions, taken a hands-off approach to economic development and eliminated tax fairness and attacked quality public services.

We need continued and enhanced Government services that are universally accessible - health care, education and public, affordable and quality childcare – all provided by public sector workers. We need the specialized skills and valuable experience of public employees to make sure we all get good services and value for the long term. Public employees do important work every day tackling disadvantage, extending opportunity, building stronger communities, dealing with emergencies, improving everyone's quality of life.

But here in Nova Scotia, we have an NDP Government who shares our vision of building better communities across this province.

In Nova Scotia, the work of the Minimum Wage Review Committee ongoing and this year, Minimum Wage hit \$10.30 and it is tied to a low income cut-off. Minimum wage alone cannot alleviate poverty, but it is an important means of addressing it. In 2003, it was \$6.00.

We are involved in numerous government committees and councils which all allow our voice to be heard. Just a few to mention:

- Premier's Advisory Council on the Economy
- Labour Management Review Committee
- Workers' Compensation Board
- Minimum Wage Review Committee
- Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Council
- Immigration Advisory Committee
- Apprenticeship Advisory Panel
- Apprenticeship Reference Committee
- Ships Start Here!

And the Budget update released on August 19<sup>th</sup>, shows that the NDP government is putting people first and that Nova Scotia is on track for a balanced budget this fiscal year thanks to the hard work of the NDP.

Now that the province's finances are on the right track, previous damaging cuts the Liberals made to the children's dental program and the Senior Citizens Assistance Programs are being reversed.

Returning to balance has allowed the government to make strategic investments in children's dental care, mental health care, support for seniors, and skills training.

The NDP are intent on repairing our social safety net broken by decades of Liberal and Conservative governments.

We know the NDP, through their commitment and focus, is the only party that understands fairness and balance and who will fight for workers and our families. After 150 years of Liberal and Conservative governments, why would we ever go back?

As we celebrate Labour Day, let's remember we can all make a difference in making life better for Nova Scotians. We can do this at our workplaces and our communities.

The Federation of Labour and our affiliates are involved in so many community initiatives, including:

- Christmas Daddies
- Africville Genealogy Society Annual Picnic
- Pride Parade
- Women's Groups
- May Works
- Anti-Poverty initiatives
- United Way
- Feed Nova Scotia and numerous other charitable activities and programs
- Threads of Life

We are also incredibly proud of the work we do on behalf of injured workers in this province through our Office of the Worker Counsellor, a program going into its 6<sup>th</sup> year. Not only do they assist workers with their claims right up to the appeal process, they also have put on numerous schools to help workers, non-union AND union, to navigate the Workers' Compensation System.

Our Literacy program is still strong, and is in its 15<sup>th</sup> year. We now give out 6 annual bursaries to children of union members or union members themselves for post-secondary education.

So on this Labour Day we have a lot to be proud of, and a lot to do.

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.