

NEWS FROM THE CLC AND LABOUR FEDERATIONS

Canadian labour called on government leaders to continue the economic stimulus measures that “saved Canada from sinking into an even deeper recession than it has experienced.” In a letter to elected MPs, premiers, finance ministers, CLC Pres. Ken Georgetti said he is concerned that some government representatives have suggested deep cuts to social programs, public services, and public sector jobs as a means to quickly balance budgets. “Now is time for investment in good public infrastructure and good public services as key drivers of private sector productivity in the future,” he said. Georgetti says that many economic forecasters and the Bank of Canada agree that continued government stimulus remains necessary to maintain growth and help Canada avoid recession.

Creation of good jobs must be a priority in the new budget which will be introduced in March, said Canadian Labour Congress. CLC’s Georgetti said both the number of and quality of jobs are big issues for workers, noting that January’s unemployment rate remains 8.5 percent. “The income of most Canadian workers has dropped in the past decade, even while corporate executives saw their pay



outpace inflation by 70%. Too many other Canadians are surviving on poorly paid and part-time jobs. The middle class is taking a beating and we have to turn that around,” he said. He noted 1.57 million Canadians are jobless while youth unemployment is 16.1%. “Workers have had a dismal year and we’re not out of the woods yet,” he said.

Canadian Labour Congress and the leading advocacy group for seniors, known as CARP, vowed “no-holds-barred” campaigns to persuade the Harper government to commit to pension reform

in its March throne speech and to keep provincial governments on the case. Both groups warned that federal and provincial governments will pay “a political price” if they fail to turn December’s commitment to pursue pension reform into a concrete plan to improve Canadians’ retirement savings, said reform advocates. CLC head Ken Georgetti said he was “disappointed” by the noncommittal nature of the meeting of Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and his provincial counterparts in December in Whitehorse. He predicted pension reform will be a major issue in all future federal and provincial elections.

With the number of unemployed Canadian workers not receiving Employment Insurance up to 777,400 by October 2009, Canadian Labour Congress chief economist Andrew Jackson predicted that up to half a million workers will exhaust their claims during 2010. Jackson worried that many of those 500,000 Canadians who lose their EI will also lose their homes and savings while some will be forced to accept income assistance. In a paper co-authored with Sylvain Schetagne, Jackson called for a single national eligibility standard of 360 hours of employment. Currently, eligibility varies across the nation from 420 to 700 hours. He also called for other changes, particularly a special 26-week emergency extension of benefits. “The bottom line is that our new EI system has not been tested by a recession since its inception,” he said.

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INTERNATIONAL LABOUR NEWS

Spanish unions Feb. 12 called for nationwide demonstrations against a plan to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67 as part of the government's plan to cut its huge budget deficit. World markets have been rattled recently by the prospect of Spain having a debt crisis similar to Greece. But unions are resisting government's action to raise retirement age and change its pension formula. General Workers Union leader Candido Mendez called for series of rallies to protest the government's decision. The first was held Feb. 23 in about 10 cities including Madrid, Barcelona and Valencia. In Spain, as in many countries including the USA, real estate prices soared after 2000. But when the bubble burst, Spain was left with reduced domestic demand and growing budget deficits.

New U.S. government report identified Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Brazil, China and the Philippines as the "top six countries" linked to products that use child or forced labour. U.S. Department of Labor for the first time as a result of legislation passed by the U.S. Congress released a report listing goods produced by child or forced labourers in foreign countries. Department looked at 122 products in 58 countries and found children and forced labourers are mining gold, sewing clothing and harvesting cocoa around the world. India is the source for the biggest number of products made by these workers, reported the Reuters news service.

NATIONAL & POLITICAL EVENTS

NDP leader Jack Layton called on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to "instruct" federal Labour Minister Lisa Raitt to get Vale Inco and more than 3,000 striking Steelworkers back to the bargaining table. Layton said the seven-month old strike is "damaging" the economics of Sudbury and other parts of Canada that rely on Vale Inco. "We urge you to instruct Minister of Labour Lisa Raitt to

immediately engage in dialogue with Vale Inco and USW, with the aim of bringing both sides back to the negotiating table at the earliest opportunity," he wrote in a letter to Harper. "Vale Inco has set a negative precedent by bringing in replacement workers and resuming production during the strike," he added. More than 3,000 USW members have been on strike since last summer in a dispute over pensions, the nickel price bonus and transfer rights.

REGIONAL & LOCAL UNION NEWS

Amalgamated Transit Union Local 113 announced this month that it will hold series of town hall meetings with Toronto Transit Co. customers. ATU Local 113 President Bob Kinnear told news media the purpose of the town hall meetings will be to "repair" the union's reputation as a result of a recent strike. "As a union, we will be prepared to listen to constructive criticism and take it to heart," said Kinnear. Kinnear reported that TTC riders are harassing and insulting transit workers, often calling them "overpaid" or "lazy." He also criticized TTC Chief General Manager Gary Webster for failing to take responsibility for managerial decisions that also angered many customers such as staff cutbacks and underfunding.

Canadian Auto Workers Feb. 10 signed \$57 million interim settlement agreement with Nortel that will provide continued protection of benefits, pension payments and an advance on severance pay for retirees, active employees, those on long-term disability and terminated employees. According to the union, settlement agreement is expected to be approved in court on March 3. When Nortel Networks filed for bankruptcy protection last year, pensioners were set to receive less than 70 percent of the money they were promised while ex-Nortel employees entitled to severance payments and employees on long-term disability would only receive 10 percent of the money they are owed. Under agreement, benefits will continue and Nortel will make regular contributions

to the pension plan until Sept. 30 when the Financial Services commission of Ontario will appoint a new administrator.

Service Employees International Union raised concerns over food safety at Vancouver's Winter Olympics. Union called on Sodexo, caterer for the Olympic Games, to ensure food safety and increase its "transparency" about food safety issues. "Sodexo is providing catering services for athletes during this key moment in their sporting careers, and we're concerned about the food they will be providing," SEIU said in a press statement. According to the union, questions have been raised about Sodexo in regards to what suppliers they use and the process in which food is "cooked." As an example, SEIU said Sodexo has been "under the microscope" with 79 records of food safety noncompliance between December 2005 and September 2009, at a facility in Tennessee where it prepared meals that were provided to U.S. Marines.

United Steelworkers (USW) and the Telecommunications Workers Union (TWU) signed a Strategic Alliance to work together on issues of common interest in Canada and globally. According to both unions, the alliance will allow the two unions to benefit from each other's expertise, resources and programs, and to pursue joint initiatives in areas such as member education, political action and lobbying. Both unions, however, will remain independent and autonomous while seeking to "increase our cooperation in many ways to better serve our members," they said. Telecommunications Workers Union represents telecommunications workers and workers in related fields in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Québec.

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