

according to data from Statistics Canada. Labour experts say workers' anger about being asked to bear what they see as an unfair brunt of the recession, as well as fear of losing hard-won benefits, are overcoming nervousness that striking could cause them to lose their jobs. At press time, major strikes currently underway included those by city workers in Toronto and Windsor, Ont.; miners at Vale Inco in Sudbury, Ont., Port Colborne, Ont., and Voisey's Bay, N.L.; and paramedics in B.C.

Canadians last month became deeply involved in lobby efforts in the U.S. concerning the labor-supported Employee Free Choice Act, according to news reports. Both Canadian business leaders and pro-union scholars took opposite positions in supporting the measure now pending before the U.S. Senate. Led by the AFL-CIO, the bill would make significant changes in U.S. labor law, most notably allowing workers the option of choosing majority card sign-up to unionize. Several Canadian business leaders, including executives of Bank of Montreal, Canadian Tire dealers and a leading Toronto law firm, participated in a news event sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce where they urged Congress not to "make Canada's mistake" of making it easy for unions to organize. In response, 100 Canadian scholars and professors issued a statement which supported the freedom of workers to form unions and bargain to create a healthy economy.

News from Canada's Unions

BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) praised ruling July 10 by the Supreme Court of Canada which upheld the union's right to advertise on public transit. "This is a victory for the right of teachers to speak out about conditions in the classrooms," said BCTF President Irene Lanzinger. "As teachers, we will continue to inform the public about our concerns about class size, composition and the learning conditions of students. Speaking out is part of our commitment to defend and protect public education." Union filed suit when Translink and BC Transit refused to accept ads about conditions in B.C.'s public schools because they were deemed "too political." Supreme Court upheld a 2006 B.C. Court of Appeal decision that the restrictive advertising policies of BC Transit and Translink were unconstitutional.

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers' members at Air Canada approved new 21-month labor deal, which includes consent for the company to skip a \$100-million pension payment due on July 30 and \$60 million on Aug. 14, as well as avoiding further pension bills until the spring of 2011. With all of Air Canada's unions approving similar collective agreements, company gains immediate relief from making payments toward its \$2.9-billion pension solvency deficit. As a result, Air Canada may be able to avoid its second bankruptcy filing in six years. Montreal-based carrier is also seeking at least \$600-million in loans from various lenders to help survive the recession. Air Canada's 11,700 IAM members, which include baggage handlers, cargo agents, cleaners and electricians, had originally rejected same pact in late June. IAMAW District 140 Pres. Chuck Atkinson said deal will protect pensions, benefits and jobs for the next 21 months.

Windsor, Ontario cab drivers July 14 accepted four-year contract to end strike which began April 2. More than 300 Veteran cab drivers, members of Canadian Auto Workers Local 195, took job action after negotiations broke down. "Overall, the membership was happy with what was accomplished at the bargaining table on their behalf," Gerry Farnham, CAW Local 195 president, told news media. According to Farnham, new agreement includes reduction in rental and lease rates and more vacation days, which were key strike issues. Job action, second strike in three years, started in April as Windsor was hosting thousands of coaches, spectators and others for the NCAA Final Four basketball tournament in Detroit.

United Steelworkers Provincial Negotiating Committee (PNC) opened collective bargaining July 1 with the Council on Northern Interior Employment Relations (CONIFER) in Prince George. According to the union, membership has been heavily hit by a series of layoffs in northern and southern Interior regions. Between 3,000 to 4,000 members are affected by both temporary and indefinite shutdowns. "We have not seen a set of economic circumstances that are this serious since the early 1980s," said USW Wood's Council Bob Matters in a statement. Matters heads up the committee which includes Local 1-405 president Stan McMaster, Local 1-417 president Marty Gibbons, Local 1-423 president Bruce Gardner, Local 1-424 president Frank Everitt and Local 1-425 president Bill Derbyshire. "Even if the companies had free labour they would not be able to sell more lumber in this downturn," Matters said.