

# AIL Labour Letter

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## Important Notice

The December 2009 issue will be your last printed edition of the AIL Canadian Labour Letter. After that date, the AIL Canadian Labour Letter will only be available online. Please go now to [ailnews.com](http://ailnews.com) to register for your online no-cost-to-you subscription. Don't miss a single edition of North America's best labor newsletter.

### *News from the CLC, Federations and Councils*

**Canadian Labour Congress said** the Conservative government's planned changes to the Employment Insurance program are "welcome" but they will not help most of the nation's jobless workers. CLC President Ken Georgetti said the proposed temporary benefits will help mostly older workers. According to Human Resources Minister Diane Finley, additional EI benefits will go only to workers who have worked and paid into EI for seven of the past ten years and who collected no more than 35 weeks of benefits in the last five years. "We have been pushing the government relentlessly to improve the EI program and it appears that they are starting to get the message," Georgetti said. "But all of the unemployed need better access to the EI system, no matter where they live and work in Canada, and they need better benefits."

**CLC head Georgetti Sept. 4 said unemployed** Canadians have "little to celebrate" this Labor Day unless the Employment Insurance system is improved to "meet the basic needs of all workers." In his Labor Day statement, Georgetti said the "clock is ticking" for unemployed workers who have been jobless since last fall. "Those workers are running out of Employment Insurance benefits and they're going to end up on provincial or municipal welfare roles and at food banks," said Georgetti. He said 483,000 full-time jobs have been lost since last fall and there are 1.6 million unemployed Canadians. "We are now almost a year into the economic crisis but jobs are not being created. The unemployed are running out of time and out of money," he warned.

**Labour called on Parliament Sept. 15** not to ratify a free trade agreement with Colombia. "If our MPs pass this legislation they will be signalling to the world the abandonment of our democratic values abroad," said CLC's Georgetti in expressing labour's opposition to Bill C-23 which would implement the deal. The bill was removed from the parliamentary agenda in June following intense lobbying by unions, human rights activists and community groups who urged Parliament to conduct an independent human rights assessment first. According to the International Trade Union Confederation, murders of trade unionists in Colombia increased 25 percent from 2007 to 2008. To date in 2009, 28 union members have been murdered.

**Nation's workers marked Labour Day Sept. 7** across Canada with parades, rallies, picnics and speeches. In Toronto, the Toronto and York Region Labor Council did not invite Mayor David Miller to their event over his mishandling of the 39-day indoor and outdoor employees' strike that almost paralyzed Ontario's capital city. But New Democrat Darrell Dexter became the first Nova Scotia premier to participate in the annual Labour Day rally in Halifax where he was given a "place of honour". With nearly one-half million workers unemployed, however, many Canadian families faced lost paychecks for the first time. "The same old thinking of Conservatives and Liberals will only make things worse," said NDP leader Jack Layton in his

Labour Day statement. “But Canadians still believe that together we can build a better future.”

### *International Labour News*

**Richard Trumka assumed the top leadership** of the AFL-CIO after his unanimous election at the 26<sup>th</sup> AFL-CIO convention held in Pittsburgh last month. He replaces John Sweeney who retired after 14 years as president. Delegates also elected Liz Schuler, of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, as Secretary-Treasurer. At 39, she is the youngest person to hold the federation’s second highest office and is the first woman elected secretary-treasurer by convention delegates. Executive Vice President Arlene Holt Baker also was reelected. They will serve four-year terms. Trumka, 60, is the former head of the United Mine Workers Union and is considered one of the most charismatic union leaders in the U.S. In his acceptance speech, he declared that unions remained the best way to lift workers into the middle class and that unions “are the people who are going to lead America” back to economic prosperity.

### *National and Political News*

**Almost one-quarter of Canadian women** raising children on their own and 14% of single older women are poor, even when taking in account government transfers and tax credits, new study revealed. Released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), study was critical of the Conservative government’s policies which it said had contributed to “the shocking poverty rates” among Canadian women. “Since coming to power in 2006, the Harper government has seriously undermined progress towards reducing women’s poverty in Canada,” said CCPA Research Associate Monica Townson. “Among a long list of policies, Harper has restricted pay equity, refuses to fix EI to prevent more unemployed women from falling into poverty, and cut funding for early learning and child care.”

### *News from Canada’s Unions*

**Some 3,000 people attended a rally** Sept. 19 in Sudbury, Ontario with labour leaders from around the world speaking out in support of thousands of union miners on strike against concessionary demands by Vale-Inco, world’s number two nickel producer. On July 13, 3,500 workers represented by United Steelworkers Locals 6500 in Sudbury and 6200 in Port Colborne struck. They were followed Aug. 1 by 450 workers of USW Local 9508 in Voiseys Bay, Labrador. “We recognise that the only way we’re going to win this strike is we’re going to need the support from our allies around the world,” said USW National Canadian Director Ken Neumann.

**Public Service Alliance of Canada** members at two museums in the Ottawa region walked off their jobs Sept. 21 over job security and contracting-out as negotiations stalled. More than 400 workers at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau and the Canadian War Museum took strike action in a demand for parity with colleagues at other museums. “Basically, what we’re demanding is similar conditions to those that you can find at the Museum of Nature and the Museum of Science and Technology,” said PSA’s Melissa Ferland. Museums remained open despite picket lines.

**Teamsters Canada President Robert Bouvier** announced Sept. 14 that the union has launched a full-scale campaign to organize Federal Express Canada Ltd. workers Teamsters represent 125,000 workers in Canada, including 14,000 workers in the courier industry. Bouvier said union workers receive significantly better wages and benefits, and fairer working conditions, than those available to the nonunion FedEx employees. “We will not tolerate interference from the employer in the unionization process,” Bouvier said. “We will be very vigilant for any attempts to prevent workers from exercising their legitimate right of association.”

**Canadian Auto Workers Local 88** members at the Ingersoll, Ontario CAMI Automotive Inc. assembly plant ratified new three-year pact with concessions to keep the plant open. Plant is jointly owned by General Motors and Suzuki. Some 2,400 hourly workers agreed to freeze wages and pensions, trim benefits, introduce a monthly health care contribution and reduce break times. Plant makes Chevrolet Equinox and GMC Terrain. Company said it will recall about 350 laid-off workers and start a third shift next month. New agreement also provides for a new model in 2014 to replace current production.