

AIL Labour Letter

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News from the CLC, Federations and Councils

Canada's unemployed workers have experienced “a year from hell,” said Canadian Labour Congress Pres. Ken Georgetti. He said thousands of people have lost full-time jobs since last fall leaving their families “decimated” and their communities “hollowed out.” CLC issued the statement in response to Statistics Canada labour force figures for October 2009 which reported an 8.6 percent jobless rate for the nation. “Compared to this time last year we are in terrible shape,” Georgetti said, and repeated his charge that the government refuses to take action necessary to reform the Employment Insurance program. “Fewer than half of unemployed workers qualify for Employment Insurance and those who do get benefits are receiving an average of about \$50 a day. That’s just not right. We have asked the government again and again to fix Employment Insurance but they keep tinkering around the edges,” he said.

CLC Nov. 15 opened “20 Days-20 Postcards” campaign, telling the prime minister to “take action now” to end violence against women. Labour group asked Canadians to send one postcard a day for 20 days as a reminder that “women have been waiting” 20 years for government attention to the issue. Campaign commemorates the deaths of 14 young women killed on December 6, 1989, at the École Polytechnique in Montreal “and all the other women who have died as a result of male violence.” “Twenty years is too long. Government attention to violence against women is long overdue. A law and order agenda is not the answer. Women need economic and social security to be safe at home, at work and in our communities. We need support for women’s services and equality,” CLC said.

New government regulations dealing with federally-regulated pensions “is welcome but will have little if any immediate impact upon the pension security that Canadians are looking for,” CLC recently said. Announced by Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, new regulations deal with pensions in Crown corporations and other institutions which only account for less than 10 percent of the nation’s retirement savings. “We need comprehensive reform to protect and improve the pensions of all Canadians,” said CLC’s Georgetti, adding labour still wants a national summit on pensions. CLC called for increased benefits under the Canada Pension Plan, improved benefits under the Guaranteed Income Supplement “so that no senior lives in poverty,” and a national system of pension insurance.

International Labour News

More than 16,000 German workers struck last month at four Opel factories in Germany, including around 10,000 at the largest at Ruesselsheim near Frankfurt, in protest of plans by General Motors to cut thousands of jobs across Europe. More than 25,000 Opel workers are in Germany, roughly half of GM’s European total. GM’s decision not to sell its European operations to Canadian autoparts maker Magna International and Russia’s Sberbank dashed hopes of keeping all plants running which angered German workers. German government had lobbied hard for GM to go through with the sale. GM is now seeking aid from Germany and other European countries to carry out a three-billion-euro reorganisation which is expected to hit Germany and Belgium hardest with layoffs.

Be Union--Buy Union

National and Political News

Saskatchewan's ruling Saskatchewan Party government cut training funds by nearly \$2.3 million, nearly half of the Job Start Future Skills program. Government officials acknowledged that more than \$2.8 million has been paid out to help some 500 workers, but the fund is now empty. Employers and Opposition New Democratic Party MLA's questioned why the government cut the training funds at a time when unemployment is on the rise. "The consequence is that throughout Saskatchewan in many rural areas and in our cities as well there are individuals who may be unemployed now looking for employment. There might be a possibility of a job offer there (for unemployed workers) but without this type of support the job offer isn't there," said ND MLA Cam Broten said.

New polling released Nov. 5 showed Conservatives and Liberals are back to levels of public support that they had after last year's election. Released by the CBC, poll showed the Conservatives with 37.4 percent and Liberals at 26.8 percent. Poll indicated NDP was down by about two percentage points from its election result while the Green Party gained more than three points. NDP slipped to 16.3 percent from 16.7 percent while the Greens rose to 10 percent. Bloc Québécois had 9.4 percent support. Automated telephone survey was conducted by EKOS for the CBC and reached 3,327 people.

News from Canada's Unions

BC Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 873 paramedics protested action by the provincial Liberal government which passed Bill 21 last month ending a seven-month strike by the province's 3,500 paramedics. Legislation also imposed a one-year contract that provides a three-percent raise to paramedics and dispatchers. But union officials said the deal fails to address concerns over recruitment and retention and those problems will persist once the new contract expires next spring. "I think this is just the start of a brand-new problem that we have in B.C. with labour relations," warned Barry O'Neill, president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees BC.

Some 7,000 workers employed by Ford Motor Co. of Canada Ltd. ratified Nov. 1 new, three-year collective bargaining agreement, announced Canadian Auto Workers. According to CAW President Ken Lewenza, pact provides same wage, cost-of-living, and benefits concessions that were previously negotiated with General Motors of Canada Ltd. and Chrysler Canada Inc. "With this contract, we keep ourselves in the ballpark in the never-ending contest for new investment. And we preserve the integrity of pattern bargaining. Most important of all, we have cemented Ford's commitment to crucial products and major capital spending. Don't forget that we have fully protected our wages and our pensions, and most of our benefits," he said. In bargaining report to the membership, Lewenza said agreement provides "significant" savings for Ford to maintain its manufacturing "footprint" in Canada.

Teamsters Union Local 931 pledged "to fight" for jobs at HBC Lachine distribution Centre. Where more than 150 warehouse workers are at risk of losing their jobs. "We will be fighting to keep the warehouse open. We're not going to bargain with HBC management with a view to getting better severance packages," said Gerry Boutin, president of Teamsters Local Union 931. According to the union, management did not give any reasons for closing the distribution centre. "The announcement was a total surprise," Boutin told the news media. "On top of that, it's getting to be the holidays, and the workers feel pretty bad about this, of course." He said the union and HBC had not yet begun to renegotiate their current contract which is set to expire in 2010. According to media reports, Teamsters Union has been in communication with HBC management in Toronto and several meetings were scheduled in an effort to save jobs.

Unions from across Ontario rallied Nov. 14 outside the Toronto Dominion Centre to pressure Cadillac Fairview and its owner, the Ontario Teachers' Pension Fund, to negotiate a fair settlement with CEP Local 2003. Sixty-one CEP Local 2003 members were locked out by the giant development firm in June. Known as the "Cadillac Fairview 61", they handled maintenance and skilled trade duties at the TD Centre. According to the union, Cadillac Fairview has "terminated" the workers and contracted out their jobs to a "third party service provider." "No trade unionist should be kicked to the side of the street because they went to negotiate a collective agreement in good faith," said Supporter Sid Ryan, CUPE Ontario President.