



# Labour Letter

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## Is This Your Last Issue?

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

**“G-20 leaders failed to come up** with a concrete, co-ordinated plan which is needed to stop the world from spiralling down into a deep recession, but they have at least decided to address some of the key failures of the global financial system which got us into this mess,” said CLC President Ken Georgetti Nov. 17. Georgetti made the comments while he was in Washington as part of a group of G-20 labour leaders who met to put forth their plan for global action. Georgetti also held meetings with the heads of the IMF and the World Bank as well as President Lula of Brazil and Prime Minister Rudd of Australia. He said labour leaders expressed “the frustration of our millions of members who face huge job losses.”

**CLC’s Georgetti repeated his call for a meeting** with Prime Minister Stephen Harper concerning the economic crisis prior to his participation in the G-20 Summit with other world leaders. Although Harper met with senior banking and insurance leaders in preparation for the Summit, he failed to seek the advice of labour leaders. “The government keeps talking to the same people as if expecting a different outcome,” Georgetti said. “These are the people who got us into this market-led mess and now he wants to talk to them to get us out.” Georgetti noted that U.S. President-elect Barack Obama met with global labour leaders, including himself, prior to the G-20 meeting, but Harper did not.

**Federal government must come through** with plans to ensure that job losses in the country’s manufacturing and forestry sectors aren’t accelerated by the recent worldwide economic slump, CLC said Nov. 7. Labor group said federal government should stimulate job market “in the same way it has moved so quickly to stimulate financial markets.” CLC urged investment in new infrastructure “which is badly needed” and spur training for new skills while building a “foundation for the new, green economy of tomorrow.” Employment Insurance program also needs to be fixed “to ensure that workers who lose their jobs can still feed their families and pay their mortgages.” CLC said most significant source of new employment reported in last month’s Labour Force Survey was short-term hiring related to the federal election.

**Canadian Labour Congress recently** called for establishment of a national system of pension benefit insurance, funded by a financial transfer tax, to create a safety net for pensions. CLC noted that financial transfer taxes (also know as a Tobin Tax, after the Nobel prize-winning economist) exist in countries around the world. “Canadian pensions and RRSPs have lost almost \$100 billion since March 2008,” said CLC head Ken Georgetti. “It’s time to get tough on the looters and speculators who are playing with Canadian’s retire-

ment security as if it's a game of chess." He said a small financial transfer tax of just one-tenth of a percent would "generate billions of dollars in revenue to fund a national system of pension benefits insurance, similar to what exists for bank deposits." Fund would protect first \$60,000 in annual pension and RRSP benefits of individual Canadians. "Weakening pension funding rules...won't make pensions more secure," he said.

#### *International Labour News*

**International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine, and General Workers' Unions (ICEM)** Nov. 7 endorsed boycott of Petro-Canada products. Governing board of 20 million member global labour body, which met last month, took action in support of 260 oil-refinery workers, members of Communications, Energy, Paperworkers Union Local 175, who have been locked-out at a Petro-Canada refinery in Montréal, Québec, since November 17, 2007. CEP, Canadian Labour Congress, and the Fédération des travailleurs du Québec, major labour union federation in that province, announced national boycott of all petroleum products produced by Petro-Canada in Montréal on Oct. 28. "We want people throughout the world to know that this once patriotic and state-owned oil company has turned on workers in its own country," stated ICEM President Senzeni Zokwana, who also serves as president of the National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa.

#### *National and Political News*

**Federation of Canadian Municipalities** called on federal and provincial governments to accelerate investments for "crumbling roads, public transit and water and sewage systems" to stabilize country's economy and prevent a recession. According to research released by the municipal group, public investments in infrastructure could generate up to 11,000 new jobs across the country for each \$1 billion spent. Jobs would be created through labour needs for the new projects as well as for materials, machinery and other spinoffs, said Carl Sonnen, president of Infometrica, an economic forecasting firm which authored the study. "Traditionally, people would recognize that infrastructure gives you a lot of bang for the buck in terms of jobs," he said.

#### *News from Canada's Unions*

**Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario** rallied and called on Toronto's York University administration to resume bargaining with striking members of Canadian Union Public Employees Local 3903. Job action by 3,350 part-time teachers' assistants and contract faculty represented by CUPE Local 3903 began Nov. 6. All classes for some 50,000 students at Canada's third-largest university were canceled the same day. University officials have since refused to continue bargaining while insisting on binding arbitration to resolve dispute. Major issues concern wage increases, health care and ability of professors to sign long-term contracts. Union members had previously waged bitter eleven-week strike that ended in early 2001. Canadian Federation of Students unites more than 500,000 students across Canada at over 80 students' unions from coast to coast, including graduate students at York University, many of whom are currently on strike.

**United Food and Commercial Workers Union** won significant legal victory which could open the doors to union membership for some 32,000 Ontario farm workers. By 3-0 decision Nov. 17, Ontario Court of Appeals ruled Agricultural Employees Protection Act, which barred farm workers from collective bargaining, "substantially" impairs their right to freedom of association under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. While most Ontario workers have had the right to join unions since 1943, farm employees have been excluded because agriculture work was considered "unique." Court's ruling is result of June 2007 Supreme Court decision involving B.C. hospital workers which held collective bargaining was a constitutionally protected right.

**Some 2,100 administrative and technical workers**, represented by the Union of Postal Communications Employees, set up picket lines Nov. 17 at Canada Post buildings across nation. Strike began after union members rejected Canada Post's final four-year-offer of a 2.5 per cent raise in the first two years and 2.75 in the final two years. Alliance National President John Gordon said major obstacle is short-term disability system being offered. "They just want to protect the sick leaves and family leaves they have acquired in the past," he said. Workers who collect and deliver the mail, members of a separate union, reportedly stayed on their jobs. But news reports indicated some of them refused to cross picket lines.