



Labour Letter

Morton Bahr, Chairman – AIL Labor Advisory Board

Jules Pagano, Vice President – American Income Life Insurance Company and Executive Director – AIL Labor Advisory Board

Bernard Rapoport, President – AIL Labor Advisory Board – Founder, American Income Life Insurance Company

Roger Smith, Chief Executive Officer and President, American Income Life Insurance Company

David Barrett – Canadian Member



Vol. 10 No. 1

January 2009

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News from the CLC, Federations and Councils

Canadian labour reacted negatively to the shutdown of Parliament and failure of the Governor General to form a new coalition government. Canadian Labour Congress Pres. Ken Georgetti said closing Parliament will cost jobs and delay “much-needed action” to deal with nation’s economic crisis. “Our country is standing on the edge of an economic crisis. People are losing their jobs and watching their retirement savings evaporate. While governments around the world are taking action to stimulate their economies our Prime Minister has shut Parliament down. This is not what the country needs. We need Parliament to get to work,” said Georgetti. Georgetti compared Prime Minister Stephen Harper “to an employer trying to avoid signing a collective agreement.” He said Harper has “locked-out” members of Parliament who are seeking solutions to economic downturn but “now they can’t do that.”

“Last month, while Mr. Harper and his finance Minister were preparing an overly optimistic economic statement, 75,000 Canadians lost their jobs, more than any single month in recent history. At the same time that the Prime Minister was telling Canadians there was no need for further economic stimulus, another 42,000 manufacturing jobs disappeared,” said CLC head Georgetti in response to new jobless figures. Recent Statistics Canada report showed unemployment rate rose from 6.2% to 6.3%, led by a loss of 42,000 manufacturing jobs and 26,000 related transportation and warehousing jobs. In Ontario, jobless rate leapt from 6.5% to 7.1%. “We are the only G-20 nation that has failed to take the kind of bold action required to deal with the global economic crisis. Our country is at risk of being left behind and here we are, waiting for the Prime Minister to get his act together,” said Georgetti.

Observing 60th anniversary of United Nation’s Declaration of Human Right, CLC called for end to pay discrimination of any kind in the nation’s workplaces. “Despite the unanimous support for the Declaration and despite it being front and centre now for six decades, more and more workers are facing an important struggle for their rights-the right to equal pay for equal work,” CLC said. Labour pointed out 22% of Canadian workers now hold jobs that are part-time, temporary, seasonal or “temp agency” jobs which are exempt from pay discrimination laws. “For the first time ever, more Canadians now work in the services sector than work in manufacturing....As the economy slows, the proportion of part-time and temporary jobs is growing. Clearly, part-time and temp workers in Canada face discrimination in the workplace-simply because they are part-time or temporary,” CLC said.

Be Union--Buy Union

International Labour News

United Nation's International Labour Organisation recently reported that average wage growth worldwide is expected to slow in 2009 as the financial crisis begins to impact on the real economy, with workers in industrialized nations likely to see a decline in their wages. ILO said that, based on the latest economic growth figures from the International Monetary Fund, global growth in real wages "will at best" reach 1.1 percent in 2009 compared to 1.7 percent in 2008. "For the world's 1.5 billion wage earners, difficult times lie ahead," declared ILO Director-General Juan Somavia. "Slow or negative economic growth, combined with highly volatile food and energy prices, will erode the real wages of many workers, particularly the low-wage and poorer households. The middle class will also be seriously affected." ILO's Manuela Tomei also predicted more wage disputes worldwide as lower wage growth translates in lower purchasing power.

National and Political News

Liberals, New Democrats and Bloc Quebecois parties, which together control majority in Parliament, pledged to seek a "no confidence vote" on the Conservatives' minority when Parliament reconvenes January 26. Unprecedented developments have sparked what many observers consider to be Canada's worst Parliamentary crisis in history. Governor General Michaëlle Jean agreed to suspend Parliament at the request of PM Stephen Harper to avoid planned "no confidence" vote which he would have lost. No Canadian government has ever been ousted in a confidence vote and replaced by an opposition coalition without an intervening election. Nor has a governor general ever suspended Parliament to delay an ouster vote when it was clear the government didn't have the confidence of a majority of legislators.

News from Canada's Unions

United Food & Commercial Workers Union announced that two Wal-Mart stores were organized in Dec. On Dec. 17, Quebec Labour Board awarded bargaining rights to the UFCW for more than 150 Wal-Mart workers in Hull, Que. On Dec. 8, Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board (SLRB) certified UFCW at Wal-Mart in Weyburn, near Regina. Applications for two other Saskatchewan Wal-Mart locations are also before the SLRB. Saskatchewan decision came after six years of legal wrangling by the company while the Quebec ruling was issued after three-and-a-half years of delays. "After nine times, the message coming from Wal-Mart workers in Canada to Wal-Mart executives in Bentonville, Arkansas, couldn't be louder or clearer: Canadian Wal-Mart workers want to be union members," said UFCW Canada National President Wayne Hanley. "It's high time for Wal-Mart to start respecting Canadian traditions and the Charter rights of its workers..."

Canadian Auto Workers union blasted Conservative government for failing to address problems in the auto industry. "This isn't about Canadian Auto Workers' wages and benefits, this is about a global financial crisis," said union President Ken Lewenza. Union said Finance Minister Jim Flaherty failed "miserably" at a recent meeting in Toronto the union called to discuss the slumping auto sector. Industry Minister Tony Clement also was lambasted for suggesting the federal government would not aid the auto sector if the CAW would not agree to wage concessions. "If the industry goes down, one in seven jobs in Canada is in jeopardy," warned Lewenza. CAW leaders reacted strongly to the U.S. Senate's decision to abandon a financial lifeline for the North American automakers. "Millions of Americans and Canadians depend on this industry for their livelihood, and we must focus on keeping it in business," Lewenza said.

Striking teaching assistants and their student supporters Dec. 18 entered fifth week of a sit-in outside office of York University president in effort to persuade him to intervene in negotiations and host a public forum on the strike in January. At press time, no talks were scheduled to end strike that has shutdown Canada's third-largest university since Nov. 6. First term for some 50,000 students was destined to drift into the New Year. Legislature refused to order an end to the strike before it closed for holidays and it will not resume until February. Canadian Union of Public Employees 3903 also refused binding arbitration to settle dispute. Union is seeking 8 per cent pay raise over two years, plus better job security and restored funding for such benefits as child care and professional development. CUPE Local 3903 represents more than 3,400 members, including 1,800 teaching assistants, 900 contract faculty and 800 graduate students at York University.