



# 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. 6**

**June 2009**

*News from the CLC, Federations and Councils*

**“If Prime Minister Stephen Harper** wants to fight an election over Employment Insurance he should ‘bring it on’,” Canadian Labour Congress President Ken Georgetti said last month in reaction to Conservative government’s refusal to improve EI benefits. He said the latest Statistics Canada figures on employment insurance benefits showed “shockingly low numbers” of workers who are receiving benefits “at a time when the jobless rate is skyrocketing.” According to government figures, more than 1.4 million workers are jobless but only 43.09% of unemployed Canadians receive EI regular benefits. “Most (workers) fall through the cracks of the flawed EI system when they are laid off because they do not have enough hours,” Georgetti said.

**Canadian labour observed** Workers Memorial Day April 28 to remember victims of workplace accidents or disease. Activities also stressed need to make workplaces safer and to fight for improvements in health and safety standards and workers compensation benefits in the workplace. Estimated 1,000 workers die on the job and some one million Canadians are injured in the workplace each year, nearly one compensable injury every seven seconds of each working day. In Canada, one worker is killed every two hours of each working day. Labour noted that deaths from workplace diseases go largely unrecorded and uncompensated.

**Canadian Labour Congress** praised Newfoundland & Labrador Premier Danny Williams pledge on May 1 that he will fight to make sure workers laid off by paper-maker AbitibiBowater receive the severance pay they deserve. “This is the kind of leadership that Canadians expect and, quite frankly, Canadians deserve from the governments they elect,” said CLC’s Georgetti in a letter to Williams. Georgetti noted that workers are owed between \$30,000 to \$100,000 depending on the individual case. Province recently took over the company’s hydroelectric assets, water and timber rights in the Grand Falls-Windsor area after Montreal-based AbitibiBowater announced it was shutting down a century-old mill in the central Newfoundland region, with the loss of nearly 800 jobs.

**In recognition of Earth Day 2009**, CLC recently called on nation “to make every effort to invest in the already established and new green industries of tomorrow as a vital part of a package of urgent measures necessary to combat climate change, nationally and globally.” Labour group also said existing industries should receive support to make transition to low carbon economy and “to grow new, sustainable jobs in emerging green industries, as soon as possible.” CLC warned that Canada is “not doing its fair share” to promote a strong global climate treaty when talks open in Copenhagen in December. “If our government continues along its current path, our economy will not rebound as quickly as it could and we will leave our children and grandchildren literally a dying planet,” labour warned.

*International Labour News*

**Series of protests with the motto** “Fight the crisis. Europe needs a new social deal.” begun on May 14

**To register for the on-line edition of the *AIL Canadian Labour Letter*, go to [ail.news.com](http://ail.news.com).**

*Be Union--Buy Union*

swept across the European Union as workers demanded more action from their governments to protect jobs during the recession. Up to 100,000 protestors marched through the heart of Berlin while thousands of workers from across the United Kingdom demonstrated in Birmingham for help to save the UK's manufacturing industry. Some 50,000 turned out for a protest in Madrid followed by a march in Brussels and rally in Prague that drew an estimated 20,000 workers. In Brussels, European Trade Union Confederation head John Monks told demonstrators that Europe needs an economic model "that comes with a social safety net."

### *National and Political News*

**U.S. President Barack Obama has assured** Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Mexican President Felipe Calderon that he has no intentions of reopening trade talks over NAFTA, a top Obama Administration trade official recently confirmed. As a candidate for the presidency last year, Obama publicly pledged to renegotiate new, tough environmental and labour protections into the agreement. But U.S. Trade Representative Ronald Kirk told news reporters that the Administration has no plans to ask for talks over NAFTA. "The President has said we will look at all of our options, but I think they can be addressed without having to reopen the agreement," Kirk told reporters.

### *News from Canada's Unions*

**Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union**, Canada's largest forest union, launched a national campaign May 15 demanding federal government action now to protect forest jobs and pensions. According to news reports, hundreds of forestry workers, representing thousands more across the country, demonstrated in front of AbitibiBowater headquarters in Montreal as part of a two-day conference to plan final details of a national action campaign. "Workers are not responsible for the crisis in the forest industry, but we are the ones facing demands for cuts to our wages and pensions," CEP President Dave Coles told the demonstrators. "It is totally unfair that a company like AbitibiBowater can use bankruptcy protection to avoid paying severance and making payments to the pension plan."

**United Food and Commercial Workers announced** May 12 that the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) approved a boycott of Old Dutch Snack Foods Ltd. products as a result of the company's lockout of 170 UFCW members in Calgary. In a letter to affiliated unions and labour federations, CLC head Ken Georgetti said the boycott is meant "to persuade the company to negotiate a fair and equitable collective agreement." According to UFCW Local 401 President Douglas O'Halloran, main sticking point in ratifying the new contract is a company policy that allows employees to opt out of joining the union and paying dues, even though the UFCW acts on behalf of all staff. "Alberta is one of only two provinces where people don't have to pay dues unless you negotiate it into the contract," he said.

**Canadian Auto Workers President Ken Lewenza** and Canadian Union of Postal Workers President Denis Lemelin made joint call to Canada Post Corporation to purchase Canadian-made union vehicles as part of the crown corporation's motorized fleet renewal and expansion program in the coming years. Canadian Post is expected to buy 4,500-5,500 new light vehicles to further motorize letter carrier operations. "Any opportunity to ensure tax dollars are circulated back into the Canadian economy must be taken. This is a critical step in the promotion of meaningful and sustained economic development," they said. Their news conference was held at the CAW Local 200/444 union hall in Windsor, Ontario where the Chrysler Minivan Plant is scheduled to eliminate its third shift of production, costing thousands of auto and related jobs in the region.

**Two Canadian Union of Public Employee** locals representing some 1,800 city of Windsor workers remained on strike at press time as negotiations reopened in early May. CUPE Local 82's 400 outside workers went on strike April 15 and they were joined on April 18 by Local 543's 1,400 mostly-inside workers. Union leaders were "optimistic," however, that they could find "common ground" on the issue of post-retirement benefits, major sticking point in talks, in addition to other benefit concessions demanded by management. "We don't want to go on strike, we want to get a contract. But our members are not prepared to step back and give everything back we fought for over 30 years to get for these members — and future members of the local," said Local 543 Pres. Jean Fox before the strike.