

NEWS FROM THE CLC, FEDERATIONS & NATIONAL UNIONS

Canadian unions joined the international labour movement April 28 in observing the National Day of Mourning for those killed or injured on the job or those who have died from work-related diseases. The Canadian Labour Congress used the event to urge Canadians to elect a new federal government this year that will be dedicated to job safety and health. According to the CLC, an average of four workers die each day in Canada, and that number has been steadily rising over the past 15 years. “Every year, thousands of Canadians are killed or injured on the job or die from work-related diseases. Yet, this is something few of us think about when we mark our ballots at election time,” said the CLC’s Hassan Yussuff. Hassan noted that workers are four times more likely to die because of something that happens to them at work than to be murdered. “Let’s make sure that the people we vote for will go to Parliament and ensure the next government will properly enforce health and safety laws, including the criminal code when necessary,” he said.

Federal unions objected to the latest omnibus budget bill which gives the government unilateral power to impose sick leave changes to the public service. Bill C-59 authorizes the Treasury

Board minister to ignore provisions of the Public Service Labour Relations Act and unilaterally change the terms and conditions of sick leave in the public service and create a new short-term disability program. “The government has decided to completely throw out any pretense that they intend to respect the collective bargaining rights of its workers,” said Robyn Benson, President of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the largest of 17

federal unions. “This attack on our members’ rights will seriously harm public services by forcing people to go to work sick, and cause irreparable damage to labour relations. We will take every available action in our power to challenge the legislation.” Unions fiercely oppose the new short-term disability plan because it would replace existing sick-leave benefits, as well as the 15 million days of unused sick days public servants have banked over the years.



Robyn Benson, President of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. Flickr.com photo used under Creative Commons from CCPA Monitor.



Alfred de Zayas on the United Nations. Flickr.com photo used under Creative Commons from SACOM HK.

Canadian labour cited a new report which detailed the essential policy to build the middle class is unionization. The study was released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives on May 1. According to the report's co-author, economist Hugh Mackenzie, union representation affects a worker's ability to move up the middle class ladder. Holding a union card also buffered workers from the devastating effects of hard economic times and offered greater access to upward mobility. "The findings suggest that there is a huge opportunity cost for workers who lose a unionized position, especially during recessionary periods," said Mackenzie. "Conversely, workers represented by a union tend to move a notch or two up the income ladder. They're not only better positioned to weather economic storms — they're more likely to experience the Canadian middle class dream — upward income mobility." He said policies should facilitate the rise of collective bargaining in Canada because "the health of the middle class depends on it."

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR NEWS

Alfred de Zayas, a UN human rights campaigner, called for a moratorium on Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) talks between

Europe and the U.S. because the inclusion of a system of secret courts used by major corporations would undermine human rights. Under the proposed agreement, companies will be allowed to appeal against regulations or legislation that depress profits, resulting in fears that multinationals could stop governments reversing privatisations of parts of the health service, for instance, he said. De Zayas is the UN's special rapporteur on promotion of a democratic and equitable international order. He warned that adoption of a separate legal system for the benefit of multinational corporations was a threat to basic human rights.

More than 1,000 workers at a local clothing factory in the southern Chinese province of Guangdong took to the streets in protest on May 1 for the return of two months' missed pay checks, reported Radio Free Asia. Beating drums and holding banners, workers at the Houhong Garment Factory in the manufacturing city of Dongguan staged the walkout to coincide with International Workers' Day, a striking worker surnamed Fang told RFA. "The police, security guards and riot police are all here, holding their shields, and wearing bullet-proof vests, and they have police dogs," Fang said. "It's really over the top." She said four people detained by police during the stand-off weren't even the



Chinese workers protesting. Flickr.com photo used under Creative Commons from SACOM HK.



CLC President Hassan Yussuff. Flickr.com photo used under Creative Commons from USW.

strike leaders, RFA reported. Chen Mao, founder of the Shenzhen-based Migrant Workers' Centre, said that workers are often exploited by bosses of financially pressed companies who drain cash from the business before it goes bankrupt and disappear, leaving the workers unpaid.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) recently called for a \$27 hike in the weekly minimum wage, an increase from \$640.90 a week to \$667.90 weekly. In a submission to the Fair Work Commission as part of the regulator's annual wage review, ACTU said a \$27 per week increase to the minimum wage will deliver a \$3.1 billion per year economic stimulus. If approved by the commission, the country's lowest-paid workers would go from \$16.87 hourly to \$17.58. "This is a pay rise for our cleaners, for people that work in shops and restaurants," ACTU secretary Dave Oliver said. "They are the lowest paid workers in the country and they certainly deserve a pay rise. Labour productivity is high, profits are high, CEOs' salaries are certainly going up, yet the gains of these productivity improvements are not going to the pockets of workers." More than 1.8 million people are on the minimum wage.

NATIONAL & POLITICAL EVENTS

The shocking results in the Alberta provincial elections have analysts still wondering whether the results were

an anomaly or a harbinger of bigger victories ahead for the New Democrats. In the meanwhile, Rachel Notley's Alberta New Democrats will form a majority government for the first time in its history while the Wildrose Party under new leader Brian Jean remained the official opposition. The Progressive Labour Party, in power for 44 years, dropped to third. Canadian Labour Congress President Hassan Yussuff called the results "an historic, tremendous

change in a direction that, I think, offers real hope to Canadians in other provinces looking for the same kind of change and the election of a progressive national government later this year." In other Canadian provincial elections, Prince Edward Island Liberals retained their majority but with fewer seats falling from 20 to 18.

Changes to Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) went into effect April 30 that now allow employers who can't find qualified workers locally for a given position to recruit foreign workers on a temporary basis. Canadian employers must first obtain an authorization from Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) before work permits will be issued to foreign nationals. The changes set up a high- and low-wage stream with different requirements and wage levels for both depending on the province or territory. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has vowed the government doesn't want to create a permanent underclass in Canada because of problems with the temporary foreign worker program.



Protesting Prime Minister Harper. Flickr.com photo used under Creative Commons from ItzaFineDay.

Massive layoffs at Target Can-

ada began this spring as the giant retailer turned off the lights at its 823 stores around Canada. About half of the 17,600 or so Canadian employees Target laid off were let go in April after the chain shut down 133 stores. Liquidation sales continued into May before the company left Canada. While many workers will be able to find work again with Target's competitors, the layoffs are anticipated to affect the jobless numbers. According to RBC Economics, job losses are projected to see employment in the retail sector drop by about 12,000 jobs, Statistics Canada recently reported that Canada lost 19,700 jobs in April on the biggest drop in part-time work in four years, reflecting declines in retailing and construction. The jobless rate remained 6.8 per cent for a third month but economists surveyed by Bloomberg News projected a 5,000 job decrease and a jobless rate rising to 6.9 per cent, according to median forecasts.



LOCAL NEWS FROM CANADA'S UNIONS

By more than a 3-1 margin,

Ontarians oppose the privatization of Hydro One proposed by the Liberals, a new public opinion poll revealed. A poll of 1,000 Ontario residents by StratCom Communications found that 63 per cent are against the Liberal government's plan to sell shares in the provincial electricity transmission system while fewer than 20 per cent were in favour. "The people of Ontario don't want to lose control of their electricity system," said Warren (Smokey) Thomas, president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, which commissioned the poll. "They expect hydro rates to go up under privatization. They know the province will lose revenue if it sells Hydro One. They know they will see poorer service and less oversight when private investors are calling the shots." The poll also found that the more people learn about the plan, the more they dislike it. Opposition has jumped by six points since a similar poll was taken six months ago.

The Toronto and York Region

Labour Council organized a morning solidarity picket on May Day with striking Crown Metal Packaging workers outside of Ontario's Ministry of Labour in Toronto. The 120 crown workers, members of United Steel Workers Local 9176, have been on strike for more than 19 months and the demonstrators urged government intervention to end the dispute. Crown makes cans for more than 120 kinds of beer, ranging from Molson, Labatt and Coors to Steam Whistle, Budweiser and Creemore. They also produce cans for PC Cola and Cott foods. The plant is owned by Crown Holdings in Philadelphia. The dispute began when bargaining opened in September 2013 and the company demanded a continuation of a 9-year wage and pension freeze, elimination of the annual cost-of-living increases and a two-tiered wage scheme to hire new workers 42 per cent lower than existing ones. The workers were forced on strike and replaced by scabs, some of whom the company says will be permanent replacements.

Service Employees Interna-

tional Union West reported that support workers with the Southeast Cornerstone

School Division in Saskatchewan May 7 rejected the school division's latest offer. The union vowed to continue picketing at the school division offices in Weyburn. The union walked off the job on April 22 after a 48-hour strike notice and a mandatory 14-day cooling off period. According to the union, 58 per cent of workers who voted rejected the deal. The offer included a three per cent wage increase in the first year and one per cent in the second. SEIU-West represents approximately 250 employees with the school division in positions such as educational assistants, custodians, bus drivers and administrative staff.

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Jim Iker
President
BC Teachers'
Federation

PUBLIC EDUCATION IS WORTH THE FIGHT

In the spring and fall of 2014, BC's 41,000 public school teachers went on an unprecedented five-week strike. We did it because we believe public education is worth fighting for, and governments must end their pattern of underfunding and stepping on workers' rights.

In 2002, the government of the day in BC passed legislation that imposed a new collective agreement on teachers and stripped many of our working condition clauses. This legislation removed language limiting class sizes, guaranteeing support levels for children with special needs, and staffing ratios for specialist teachers.

The results? Bigger classes, 3500 fewer teaching positions, and worsening class composition — the student make-up of a class. The whole scheme allowed the government to begin an era of drastic underfunding to education.

Now, 13 years later, British Columbia funds education \$1,000 less per student than the Canadian average. That means an entire generation of BC kids have been shortchanged as compared to students in other provinces. However, teachers have been fighting back and we've had some important wins.

In 2011 we scored our first huge victory. The BC Supreme Court ruled that the law passed in 2002 was unconstitutional. The contract stripping violated the Canadian Charter of Rights as the government failed to respect teachers' freedom of association.

The government never appealed that decision, but in 2012 they tried again, bringing in new legislation that replicated many of the unconstitutional provisions. Two years later, the BC Supreme Court once again ruled that they had acted unconstitutionally and even bargained in bad faith. As I write, we are awaiting the BC Court of Appeal's decision following the government's appeal. Battling for our rights in court has been expensive, but necessary.

Now in 2015, we have been heartened to see the Supreme Court of Canada further strengthen the right to freedom of association in decisions like the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour and RCMP cases.

One of the biggest reasons our strike lasted as long as it did was because the government kept tabling collective agreement language that would undo our court wins and jeopardize potential future wins.

We didn't go on strike just for a pay raise. We went on strike for better working conditions and learning conditions because we care passionately about public education and our students.

And now, as we look east to Ontario, teacher unions there are potentially set to strike in their own fight for quality public education. Just as they were there for us in solidarity, teachers in BC will be there for our Ontario sisters and brothers.

During our strike, we learned six important lessons that can help Ontario teachers and other unions across Canada.

First, start training your members on social media now. Our teachers dominated online and changed the way the mainstream media covered the story. Social media allowed teachers to use their own voices and tell their own stories.

Second, you will need to disrupt the government's agenda. By the time our strike entered the third week, BC Premier Christy Clark and her government could not escape teachers or their supporters. Partisan fund-raisers were disrupted, and policy announcements were accompanied by loud protests everywhere the Premier went. It eventually forced her to get personally involved in the dispute.

Of course, for unions in the education sector, you will also need the support of parents. That's number three. It's hard because they're worried about their children's education and don't like the disruption, but they also know what's at stake. Parents need to know what is missing from education, and what your bargaining objectives will achieve for their children.

Fourth, you will need member unity and the commitment to fight back against the inevitable government attacks. That means quick, accurate, and open communication with your members. We used Livestream technology to broadcast every single news conference to teachers, no matter where they were. We also emailed our members regularly, giving them up to date information and ideas for pushing back against the government.

Fifth, the labour movement needs to stand together and show solid support for those who do take job action. For us, the BC Federation of Labour as well as teacher unions across Canada supported us on the picket lines and financially. It lifted teachers' spirits and showed the government we were not alone.

Finally you'll need solutions. The union needs to be identified publicly as the party moving forward, looking for solutions. Every step of the way, it was clear that teachers were the ones trying to move bargaining forward. Our job action was staged, we held regular votes, we escalated only when necessary, we called for mediation, and even pushed for binding arbitration. The public saw that we were doing more than the government and that kept the pressure up.

Ultimately, we did get a negotiated settlement. It wasn't perfect, but we fought off unacceptable concessions and did make some important gains. We fought hard because education is too important to let governments continue to underfund it and undermine our children's opportunities. Workers' rights, which are under increasing attack not only in the education sector but across society, must be defended.



New CUPE Provincial Office

AIL celebrated the opening of the new CUPE Newfoundland and Labrador provincial head office. Randy Stockley (left) AIL Public Relations presents a congratulatory cake to Provincial CUPE President, Wayne Lucas.



AFL Convention Film

The Alberta Federation of Labour was presented a cheque for \$1,500 from AIL as a sponsorship of the convention film screening of the "African Grandmothers Tribunal: Seeking Justice at the Frontlines of the AIDS Crisis." Shown in the photo are (left to right) Siobhan Vipond, AFL Secretary Treasurer; Gil McGowan, AFL President and AIL's Debbie Boles.



Broadbent Institute Conference

The Broadbent Institute's second annual Progress Summit, held recently in Ottawa, brought together more than 800 delegates, conference organizers reported. AIL was one of the corporate sponsors of the three-day event which featured leading progressive thinkers, policy experts and union leaders. Among the keynote speakers was AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka who later met with AIL conference participants. Shown in the photo are (left to right, front), Richard Trumka, Pres., AFL-CIO and Donald Lafleur, CLC Exec. V.P., (back row) AIL Western Canada Public Relations Manager Jackie Lowe, PR Rep Chas Robinson and AIL Canada PR Director Laurie Onasch.



LIUNA Scholarship Contribution

Joseph Mancinelli, LIUNA International Vice-President (right) and Central and Eastern Canada Regional Manager, and Cosmo Mannella, Business Manager LIUNA OPDC received an American Income Life Scholarship cheque from AIL's Al Wall (centre).



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