

Commentary: Put workers first this Labour Day ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Labour Day is an important day in the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour's calendar. It is the one day dedicated to celebrating and recognizing workers and their contributions to their communities, the province, and Canada. The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour (NLFL) is proud to represent 70,000 workers who live in every community in our vast province and who work in every sector of the economy.

During the past 30-plus months, workers – be they in the skilled trades, retail, or in public services – have been called upon to help us all get through a global pandemic. From front-line health care workers to the essential workers who kept our grocery stores operational, it was made abundantly clear just how essential and important these workers are, not only during a pandemic, but at all times. This Labour Day, we celebrate and thank all workers.

Our social history has proven that unions mean better wages, benefits, and working conditions for working people and their families. With unions come safer workplaces and greater respect for working people. When unions come together and raise their united voices, we see strong social programs like Employment Insurance and Old Age Security that benefit generations to come. Unions were in the forefront of the battle for parental benefits and universal child care. Collectively, unions have been strong advocates for social justice, climate action and just transition, equality, diversity, and inclusion.

The past few years exposed another reality in our communities: Growing inequality and a cost of living crisis. The result is that too many workers and their families find it difficult to make ends meet. This is a particularly hard time for those workers who find themselves in precarious, low-wage employment. There is something unjust when corporate profits can soar, yet workers (many of whom are employed by these same corporations) are barely living paycheque to paycheque.

One impact of this injustice is that more and more non-union workers see the value of joining a union. Many workers are realizing that their collective voice is louder than a lonely voice of one. Workers are always stronger when they come together. Currently in Newfoundland and Labrador, 39 per cent of all workers are unionized. With stronger labour legislation, that number would certainly grow.

We are calling on government to put workers first. The province needs to remove legislative barriers that hinder unionization. We are calling on our government to follow the lead of British Columbia and re-introduce card-check certification, whereby when the majority of workers sign a card to join a union, they should not be impeded.

Our province is one of the last to introduce pay equity legislation. Government must introduce proactive pay equity legislation as promised for public and private sector workers in all workplaces with effective transparency and oversight.

We have seen too many strikes and lockouts drag on without any proper mechanism to resolve outstanding issues. It is time the government introduced anti-scab legislation and stop employers from using replacement workers.

It is time to put an end to contract flipping whereby contracts of unionized workers at work sites are put up for re-tender, thus jeopardizing the job security of union workers.

Now is the moment to put workers and their families first and to make sure life is more affordable. Through stronger social programs such as childcare and pharmacare, and stronger labour laws that provide safer workplaces, paid sick days, a living wage, and easier access to unionization, workers can build a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities.

This Labour Day, let's celebrate the accomplishments of working people everywhere, but also commit to building a fairer society – one where no one is left behind.

As we continue to emerge from this pandemic and economic crisis, the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, our affiliates, and our 70,000 members will continue our fight for improved laws, programs, and policies that make life fairer, safer and more equal and affordable for everyone. On behalf of our Federation, I would like to wish everyone a safe and happy Labour Day.

Mary Shortall,

President, Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour

Region: Newfoundland ^[3]

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