

MAY 2014
Vol. 15 No. 3

NEWS FROM THE CLC, FEDERATIONS & NATIONAL UNIONS

The CLC held its 27th constitutional convention in Montreal May 5-9 and delegates debated resolutions and policy issues. At the end of the Convention the Congress developed an Action Plan based on the resolutions, committee reports and policies discussed amongst the members of the Labour

movement. Delegates also elected new officers who will serve a 3-year term. Scores of “Days of Mourning” events were held across Canada April 26-28 in memory of workers killed, injured or made sick on the job, reported the Canadian Labour Congress. “On April 28th, we mourn those who have died. However, the deaths of these workers are also a reminder that all levels of government must do more to enforce our health and safety laws and vigorously prosecute violations when a worker is killed or seriously injured. It is time for fair and equal



Day of Mourning in Cobourg, Ontario. Flickr.com photo used under Creative Commons from dblackadder.

Celebrating

AMERICAN INCOME LIFE
 insurance company
PROTECTING WORKING FAMILIES IN CANADA

in Canada

treatment before the law for workplace injuries and deaths. Together we have made good progress protecting workers’ health and safety but we have to keep fighting for safer workplaces for everyone,” the CLC declared in a statement. Unions noted that thousands of Canadians are killed or injured on the job or die from work-related diseases. According to official statistics, 979 Canadians died because of their work in 2012. “We know the numbers are higher because official figures only capture those who received workers’ compensation benefits. Hundreds more die from under-reported illnesses and occupational diseases that go unrecognized in the compensation systems,” the CLC said.

- TERRY O’SULLIVAN**, President - Laborers International Union of North America, Chairman - AIL Labour Advisory Board
- VICTOR KAMBER**, Vice President - American Income Life Insurance Company, Executive Director - AIL Labour Advisory Board
- ROGER SMITH**, Chief Executive Officer - American Income Life Insurance Company, President - AIL Labour Advisory Board
- DENISE BOWYER**, Vice President - American Income Life Insurance Company, Secretary - AIL Labour Advisory Board
- DAVE BARRETT**, Former Premier of Province of British Columbia, Honorary Member - AIL Labour Advisory Board

Canada's Building Trades

Unions supported measures in the Federal Budget that funded growth and development of a future construction workforce. The group said creating highly skilled and well-paying jobs is in the national interest. "After years of being a mere add-on to post-secondary education, apprenticeship is being noticed by our Federal Government" said Robert Blakely, the Canadian Operating officer of the Building Trades in Ottawa today. He went on to say, "The way apprentices are being treated has changed and they are now, thanks to measures introduced in the 2014 Budget, treated more like their colleagues in college and university training." Programs supported by the construction unions include the re-affirmation of the Canada Jobs Grant, the new Canadian Apprentice Loan, the employer EI top-up to apprentices in technical training and the Flexible Apprenticeship delivery pilot (FIATT).



UAW Rally. Flickr.com photo used under Creative Commons from ptmanolakos.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers

(CUPW) said postal offices around the country should begin offering services such as insurance, savings deposits and checking accounts. The union said banking services could generate much-needed income for the corporation, which recently announced the end to door-to-door delivery in response to declining demand for mail services in Canada. Parliament created the Post Office Savings Bank in 1868, only to end postal banking in 1969.

The union said rural or low-income Canadians would particularly benefit from postal banking because they are underserved by the major banking institutions. Canada Post spokeswoman Anick Losier said in a statement that the corporation studied the idea and "it became clearly evident that the challenges to make postal banking viable were insurmountable." CUPW, however, said the decision to deny Canadians postal banking services is political, not logistical, and previous post administrations were in favour of the initiative.

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR NEWS

United Auto Workers, supported by the IndustriALL Global Union, asked for assistance from the U.S. State Department in pressing its claims that Nissan Motor Co. Ltd is violating worker organizing rights in Mississippi. The UAW, which has been trying for several years to organize the Nissan plant near Jackson, said the company is using "threats, intimidation and fear" to keep the union out of the plant, which violates guidelines of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. The union wants the National Contact Point, a part of the State Department, to mediate between the union and Nissan, which has an alliance with French-based Renault SA. There are about 5,600 employees, including full-time and contract workers, at the Nissan plant in Canton, Mississippi. The UAW recently lost an election at a Volkswagen plant near Chattanooga, Tenn., after millions of dollars in outside money poured into the state to oppose the union and threats of tax penalties against VW from the Republican-led state legislature if the workers voted for the union.



CUPW Rally. Flickr.com photo used under Creative Commons from schmopinons.

The Construction Workers

National Union (Suntracs) paralysed expansion of the Panama Canal after calling for an indefinite nationwide strike April 23. Suntracs is the main construction union in the country and is demanding wage increases. The union, with an estimated membership of 100,000 workers, called the strike after negotiations failed with the Panamanian Chamber of Construction. The Chamber of Construction offered to raise wages by 20 per cent over four years but the union asked for 20 per cent per year. Across the country, 98 per cent of the construction sites were on strike, reported Suntracs. The Grupo Unidos por el Canal (GUPC), the consortium in charge of building the third set of new locks, said construction workers were heeding the strike call.

Hundreds of teachers, principals, parents and administration and support workers rallied on March 29 in Auckland to demand a “living wage” for support workers. Hundreds of people took part in a march up Queen Street to the steps of the Parliament. Primary teachers’ union NZEI said 45 per cent of the 24,000 support workers are paid much lower than the living wage. The rally was staged after a round of stop-work meetings by support staff for better pay as part of current negotiations. Among the speakers at the rally was U.S. American Federation of Teachers Union



Newly elected President of Canadian Labour Congress Hassan Yussuff. Flickr.com photo used under Creative Commons from CSA-TUCA.

President Randi Weingarten, who told the demonstrators that similar issues exist in the U.S. She said a living wage will attract better support workers, which is a key to unlocking the potential of every school-aged child.

NATIONAL & POLITICAL EVENTS

Jason Kenny, the federal employment minister, recently announced an immediate moratorium on the fast-food industry’s access to the TFWP. The federal government did “the right thing” in

suspending use of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) for employers in the fast-food restaurant sector, said the Canadian Labour Congress. “The employers have been abusing the TFWP and it is high time that the government took action,” said the CLC. According to the CLC statement they question “why it took so long, because the labour movement has been detailing these abuses and presenting them to the government for years.” According to the CLC statement, McDonald’s restaurants have imported at least 3,400 workers under the TFWP and Tim Horton’s an estimated 4,500. Yet Statistics Canada reports that in January 2014 there were 6.7 unemployed Canadian workers for each job vacancy. A recent study also found that widespread use of the TFWP in Alberta and British Columbia boosted the rate of unemployment in those provinces, particularly among young workers.

Alberta’s Occupational Health

and Safety division and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) launched an investigation into the death from workplace injuries of a young worker at the Suncor tar-sands site on Easter Sunday, April 20. Twenty-seven year-old Shane Daye was fatally injured while working near Fort McMurray. “An electrician was performing voltage testing in an area containing electric panels when he collapsed,”



AFT President Randi Weingarten. Flickr.com photo used under Creative Commons from graham.davis.

said Lisa Glover, public-affairs officer with the Government of Alberta's occupational health and safety division. Daye, an instrumentation tech, had been working for Suncor for seven years, according to his sister, Christie Daye. According to official reports, this is the second worker death at Suncor in 2014. On January 19, employee Jerry Cooper, 40, was found lifeless in a pool of sand and water after he had gone to check on a leak on a pipeline at the tar-sands site north of Fort McMurray.

A new online poll by employment website Workopolis found that about half of those polled said they had been in the same job for less than two years while 30 per cent said they had held one job for more than four years. Survey results from 1990-2000 found just 16 per cent reported holding that same job for less than two years, and fully 60 per cent who said they had been in the same job for more than four years. "The world in business and employment is shifting so quickly that there is not the stability that there used to be," said Tara Talbot, vice-president of human resources for Workopolis. "The 30-year employee, although they still exist, is not the experience that most

people have." She said today's workers appear more willing to "job hop" to find the perfect position rather than stick it out for 30 years in the same place. The survey also found that 48 per cent of those polled reported that they've had three or more separate career paths.

NEWS FROM CANADA'S UNIONS

The BC Federation of Labour called for a \$13 an hour minimum wage, which, if approved, would make BC the highest wage floor in Canada. BCFCL president Jim Sinclair said the federation plans to keep pushing the idea until a change is made. He said the \$13 hourly minimum wage would bring workers up to the poverty level in the province. "Poverty in this province is a disgrace; we have the highest child poverty rate in the country. We have poor kids because we have poor parents. So, we need to raise the bottom. That's who we should be worried and that's who the government should be worried about." He said a single person earning \$10.25, the current minimum, is living well below poverty even

if they work full-time. "Most people are working two or three jobs just to make ends meet," said Sinclair. According to the federation, BC's minimum wage rates are set "on an ad hoc, discretionary basis" by the province. Most other provinces automatically adjust the minimum wage every year, based on criteria like the cost of living and average wages.

Saskatchewan Government

Employees Union (SGEU) held a major rally April 11 that attracted hundreds of members and supporters who oppose the privatization of Saskatchewan public services. According to a news statement issued by the union, the government recently announced plans to sell-off food services in corrections and young offender facilities, and to close four rural public liquor stores in order to hand over that business to private franchises. "The government's plan is to quietly dismantle the public services Saskatchewan people have built over generations," said SGEU President Bob Bymoan during the noon-hour rally in front of the Premier's office in downtown Saskatoon. "They are doing it bit by bit, one program and one service at a time — thinking that Saskatchewan people won't notice." He noted the government even admits that privatizing corrections and young offender food services may not save a dime. "This is just another way to transfer public services to private interests. It puts profit ahead of the needs of rural families and communities," Bymoan said.



BCFL president Jim Sinclair. Flickr.com photo used under Creative Commons from steveleenow.

LABOUR LETTER
provided through



AMERICAN INCOME LIFE
NATIONAL INCOME LIFE
insurance companies

Protecting Working Families
www.aillife.com



Mary Shortall
President,
Newfoundland
and Labrador
Federation of
Labour

RENEW CANADA'S HEALTH ACCORD NOW

The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour represents some 65,000 unionized women and men who live and work in every single community in this vast province of ours. Every single one of them, along with the 500,000 people who make up our population, is a user in some way, shape or form, of our public health care system. Ask any one of them how important an issue it is, and you will be hard pressed to find a soul who says it's not.

Yet, something very serious is about to happen to our health care system in Canada; something that – if we are not vigilant, and prepared to challenge – could potentially lead to the destruction of this very public social program. Can you imagine a health care system where those with money have access to a high quality standard of health care, and those less fortunate have to accept a lower standard? We are not going there! And as Tommy Douglas, Canada's father of Medicare, would say: any free country that talks about the democratic process and allows this is denying the basic principles of that democracy.

For the past ten years, Newfoundland and Labrador, and indeed all Provinces and Territories in Canada have benefited from Canada's Health Accord. Signed by the first ministers in 2004, the Health Accord provided stable funding and guaranteed national standards. This historic accord expired March 31. Prime Minister Stephen Harper decided unilaterally not to renew it. We all should be concerned.

At the heart of the Accord was a re-commitment to Canada's Health Act and its requirements: public administration, universal access, comprehensive coverage, accessibility without extra charges or discrimination, and portability across provinces.

The Accord increased health care funding to the provinces and territories by the federal government by 6 per cent each year. As a result, the federal government's cash share of provincial health spending increased to 20 per cent. While this is an improvement from the 10 per cent it provided before the first health accord in 1998, it pales in comparison to the 50 per cent the federal government covered at the start of Medicare.

In return for the stable funding, goals were set to address wait times, catastrophic drug coverage, better access to diagnostic medical equipment, home care and primary health care. Important issues for all Canadians.

Thanks to the Accord, Canadians are now able to get more timely treatment for a number of important procedures. In other areas such as home care, access to drugs and primary care, more needs to be done. Canadians continue to support improvements in health care as a top priority. In brief, the need for a renewed and strengthened Health Accord remains. This will only happen if we have strong committed leaders.

The reality is Prime Minister Stephen Harper has decided without any consultation not to renew the Health Accord. Without notice or discussion, the federal government announced a "take it or leave it" health care funding plan in December 2011.

Harper's plan will keep federal health care funding on its current track until 2017, at which point major cuts will kick in. Instead of increasing at 6 per cent a year, the health transfer will be tied to economic growth or 3 per cent to 4 per cent. Also no national goals or standards are to be enforced.

According to the provinces' own research, the end of the Health Accord will result in a \$36 billion dollar cut over 10 years to public health care across Canada.

For Newfoundland and Labrador the cut will be \$491 million. This is not all; equalization payments to the provinces and territories for health care will be linked to population size rather than needs. This is expected to cost the less wealthy province an additional \$16.5 billion over five years.

In addition, under the CETA agreement PM Harper has agreed to extend patent protection for prescription drugs which will keep less costly generics off the shelf for several more years. This will result in an additional \$1.5 billion in drug costs.

Overwhelmingly, Canadians want to see the public health care system strengthened. We need a national pharmaceutical strategy, an aboriginal health strategy and a seniors' health care plan. All of which requires leadership, not abandonment.

The sad fact is PM Harper's refusal to negotiate a 2014 Health Accord could result in more for-profit services and the end of universal health care for all. Canadians don't want to see one health system for the wealthy and another, cheaper system for the rest of us. It looks like we will have to fight to win this battle.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians know what is at stake and the Premier has an occasion to spell it out. So far, he and his government have been deafeningly silent.

Canadians of all political stripes support the core values of public Medicare and expect strong federal and provincial leadership to uphold it. Why are the Provinces silent on this issue? The Premiers need to force the Harper government back to the intergovernmental table in order to work together for the necessary changes to ensure universal access to quality care continues for generations to come.

And we need to do whatever we can to save our universal, public health care system, and work with our community partners to strengthen it – not tear it apart.

As Tommy Douglas would say: "We can't stand still. We can either go back or we can go forward. The choice we make today will decide the future of Medicare in Canada."

CLC 27th Constitutional Convention

The Canadian Labour Congress held its 27th Constitutional Convention at the Palais de Congrès in Montréal, Quebec May 5-9. AIL congratulates all officers who were elected. A full report on the convention will appear in the next edition of the AIL Canadian Labour Letter.

Palais de Congrès. Flickr.com photo used under Creative Commons from Raul P.



BCGEU Renews AIL Agreement

The BC Government and Service Employees' Union recently renewed its agreement with AIL. The BCGEU represents approximately 67,000 members in 550 bargaining units across British Columbia. In the photo, BCGEU Treasurer Stephanie Smith signs an agreement with AIL representatives that will bring an increased no-cost AD&D benefit to all BCGEU members. Shown are: Dan Cahill (standing), BCGEU Director of Advocacy, Administration and Finance; Jacqueline Lowe, AIL PR Manager, BC; Stephanie Smith, BCGEU Treasurer; Debbie Enstedt, AIL Vice President.



Broadbent Institute

AIL delegates recently attended the Broadbent Institute "Path to a New Prosperity" Summit in Ottawa. Shown in the photo (left to right) are Daryl Barnett, AIL Director Canadian Labour Relations; Ed Broadbent, Chair of the Broadbent Institute; and Laurie Onasch, AIL Public Relations Director. Barnett said AIL is "a proud sponsor" of the Broadbent Institute.



Nova Scotia Protests Bill 37

Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union members protesting Bill 37, the Essential Health and Community Services Act, passed by the Liberal Government. AIL in Canada supports the NSGEU in their fight against this regressive legislation.



AIL Continues Service with UFCW

United Food & Commercial Workers Canadian National President Paul Meinema (left) signs a renewal agreement for AIL No-Cost AD&D with Al Wall, AIL Public Relations Representative. AIL has been supporting the Agriculture Workers Alliance since September 2011. "AIL is proud to be working with AWA and UFCW Canada in offering this coverage to AWA members. The Policy is at no-cost to assist the Agriculture Workers Alliance in offering benefits to its members," said Wall.



NWDLC Celebrates AIL's 25 years in Canada

New Westminster and District Labour Council recently observed AIL's 25 years in Canada. In the photo are (left to right) Carolyn Rice, NWDLC Secretary Treasurer; Fran Christie, AIL Public Relations and UFCW 1518 delegate to NWDLC; Lori Mayhew, President of NWDLC. There are 123 local unions affiliated with the New Westminster & District Labour Council, representing a total membership of more than 55,000.



Jerry Dias
National President,
Unifor

Unifor Congratulates AIL

"Congratulations to American Income Life on 25 successful years in Canada. Your dedication to the communities you serve is most appreciated. We're pleased to work with you for many years to come."



AMERICAN INCOME LIFE
NATIONAL INCOME LIFE
insurance companies