



PEI Federation of Labour April Newsletter Issued on September 2, 2007

Current News In Brief

Unemployment Rate For April

□ On Sunday, May 15, it was announced that the unemployment rate on PEI for April was 9.4% down 0.9% from March's 10.3%. You currently need 525 hours to qualify for EI on PEI.

Steamfitter/Pipefitter Trade to Become a Certified Trade

□ On Monday, April 30, the Steamfitter/Pipefitter trade will become a certified trade under the P E I Apprenticeship and Trade Qualification Act. Those who work in the Steamfitter/Pipefitter trade will now be required to hold a valid certificate of qualification or be a registered apprentice. A grandparent provision in the Apprenticeship and Trade Qualifications Act provides tradespeople who have worked in the trade for five of the last seven years the opportunity to apply for a work permit without testing. Other certified trades on the Island are the Automotive Service Technician, Plumber and Construction Electrician Trades.

Nationally-Regulated Pension Funds Regain Their Health

□ On Friday, April 27, contrary to the grim picture painted by corporate Canada, the Superintendent of Financial Institutions announced that nationally-regulated pension funds have regained their health and are generally operating in the black again. The total value of the assets of all federal plans at the end of last year was 6% (nearly \$7 billion) greater than liabilities, a significant turnaround from a 10% (\$12 billion) shortfall at the end of 2005. It is estimated that about 50% of all defined benefit plans are now fully funded, double the proportion a year earlier, meaning that they can fully cover their benefit obligations. Of the remainder, most are more than 90% fully funded. Just 20% are less than 90% fully funded and only 4% are less than 80% funded. The improvements are attributed to strong investment returns, better bond yields and special payments required by pension legislation. The office supervises about 450 defined benefit plans.

American Think-Tank Recommends Increased Unionization To Fight Poverty

□ On Wednesday, April 25, the Center for American Progress (CAP) released a new

report on poverty in the United States “Entitled From Poverty to Prosperity”. The report says 37 million Americans , many of them children, now live below the official U.S. poverty threshold of \$19,971 a year (\$21,661 Cdn) for a family of four. Also more than 90 million Americans are struggling to make ends meet because their incomes are less than \$39,942 (\$43,328 Cdn) a year. To fight this, one of their key recommendations is for the US Government to ensure that workers are allowed to form unions and bargain collectively. In order to do this, they urge American Politicians to enact the Employee Free Choice Act which would require employers to recognize an union after a majority of workers signs cards authorizing union representation and establish stronger penalties for violation of employee rights. They also state that increased union representation made possible by the act would lead to better jobs and less poverty for American workers. The report is available at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/04/poverty_report.html

Bill C-278 Passes Second Reading in the House of Commons

□ On Wednesday, April 25, Bill C-278 which would amend the Employment Insurance Act to increase the number of weeks someone can receive EI sickness benefits from the present level of 15 weeks to 50 weeks passed second reading in the House of Commons by a 152-117 vote . The private member bill brought forth by Liberal MP Mark Eyking had the support of his party, the Bloc Quebecois and the NDP. All votes against came from the ruling Conservatives. However since it is legislation that involves monies, the Bill will need government support to become the law. The bill cannot proceed to third reading in June unless it has government approval.

Province Approves the First Part of Phase One of the QEH Redevelopment Process

□ On Friday, April 20, it was announced that the provincial government has approved the first part of Phase One of the QEH redevelopment process. The redevelopment process for the Emergency Department, Supply, Processing and Distribution (SPD), Materials Management and Laundry will move from planning to engineering and architectural design. Phase One of the overall QEH redevelopment project focuses on work in seven areas of the hospital including the Emergency Department, Laundry, Materials Management, Supply, Processing and Distribution, a new Ambulatory Care Centre, and updates to the main entrance and lobby, and the Day Surgery/Pre Surgery Clinic. Today’s announcement marks considerable progress in redeveloping the Emergency Department, SPD, Materials Management and Laundry Services within the facility. The estimated capital cost of the Emergency and Support Services stage of the project is \$24.19 million. The overall anticipated cost of Phase One redevelopment is \$52.23 million. Construction is anticipated to begin in the summer of 2008 and the expected completion of the first part of Phase One is in late 2010.

Supreme Court of Canada Dismisses Wal-mart’s Challenge of the Sask. Labour

Board

□ On Thursday, April 19, it was announced that the Supreme Court of Canada has decided not to hear Wal-Mart's appeal of a November decision by the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal. In that decision the Saskatchewan Court stated that there is no evidence that the members of the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board are biased against the company. While Wal-Mart was challenging the board's fairness, the board heard an application to certify UFCW, Local 1400, at Wal-Mart's Weyburn store. The board has not made a decision yet.

Wolfville, Nova Scotia Becomes Canada's First Fair Trade Town

□ On Tuesday, April 17, it was announced that Wolfville, Nova Scotia has been officially certified by TransFair as Canada's first fair trade town. To become a Fair Trade Town, a community must attain a list of six goals; these goals encourage access to Fair Trade Certified products in the community, as well as increasing education and public awareness on the issue of Fair Trade. The town has committed to use Fair Trade Certified products (coffee, tea, sugar and other products) for the city needs. Fair trade products such as coffee or chocolate offer farmers in developing countries higher prices for their goods than they would typically receive on the world commodity markets. Money is also directed to social and environmental development and fair labour wages. In 2000, the U.K.'s Garstang became the world's first fair trade town. Since then, hundred of towns across Europe have been given official certification.

UPSE Donates Over \$16,000 Through UPSE Has A Heart Campaign

□ On Tuesday, April 17, it was announced that through this year's UPSE Has a Heart Campaign, UPSE has donated over \$16,000 to various community groups and organizations. The campaign is funded through deductions from the pay cheques of each of the union's members at a rate of 10¢ every two weeks.

Provincial Government Signs Patient Wait Times Guarantee for Radiation Therapy

□ On Wednesday, April 11, the province and the federal government signed a new Patient Wait Times Guarantee agreement for radiation therapy. As part of the agreement which is to be implemented by March 31, 2010, Islanders waiting more than 8 weeks for radiation therapy will be treated in another public health institution within the Maritimes, Quebec or Ontario. The federal government is providing the province with \$12.1 million to implement the guarantee. The province plans to purchase a second linear accelerator for the P.E.I. Cancer Treatment Centre and add staff as a first step towards reducing wait times for cancer treatment.

Coalition Holds Public Meeting on Atlantica

□ On Wednesday, April 11, a coalition of groups including the P.E.I. Federation of Labour, the Council of Canadians, Earth Action, the MacKillop Centre for Social

Justice and other social justice and environmental organizations held a public meeting at Colonel Gray Senior High School. The meeting was setup to publically discuss the recently released "Atlantica: Myths and Realities" study authored by Scott Sinclair, senior trade researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. The meeting which was well attended, featured a presentation on the study by its author, followed by a Q and A session, and a short presentation by Mike Desroches on the impact Atlantica would have on workers.

Commissionaires Ratify First Contract

☐ On Wednesday, April 4, After a seven year battle, commissionaires represented by PSAC Local 90140 voted 69 % in favour of accepting their first contract with their employer, the Corps of Commissionaires. The contract effective April 2005 to April 2009 includes a pay increase of 85 cents / hour for all members with an additional 20 cents / hour for federal workers. There will also be a wage review next year .Members will also receive an increase from 3% holiday pay to 3.5 %. Vacation pay will increase from 6 % to 8% on April 1 2008, for employees who have been with the union for eight years. The contract also includes seniority and grievance rights.

Federal Court upholds Union's Right to Collect Dues Despite Religious Beliefs

☐ On Monday, April 2, the Federal Court of Canada issued a significant ruling upholding the right of unions to collect dues from workers who benefit from collective bargaining but disagree with certain union policies because of religious beliefs. The case involved a Roman Catholic member who sought to divert the approximately \$800 a year she pays in union dues to her church because of her opposition to gay marriage. The court ruled that the fact that she opposes the union's political or social causes does not force her to act in a way contrary to her beliefs or her conscience.

TILMA Comes Into Effect

☐ On Monday, April 1, the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA) between the British Columbia and Alberta governments came into effect. Shrouded in secrecy, the agreement was signed a year ago by Gordon Campbell, B.C.'s premier, and Ralph Klein, former premier of Alberta, the deal has been promoted as an agreement to eliminate internal trade barriers between provinces by harmonizing all regulations. Unfortunately for democracy, TILMA accomplishes this by stripping legislators, today and in the future, of many of the powers they previously had to control the activities of business. The agreement gives enormous power to business to challenge, via a 'disputes panel', all existing and future provincial government regulations. More importantly for PEI, it is an open-ended agreement meaning any provincial government can sign on to the agreement. During our recent Brief to Cabinet and the Opposition, the Federation informed the Provincial Cabinet and opposition members about the dangers of TILMA and urged them not to bring PEI into this dangerous agreement.

Minimum Wage Increases on PEI

□ On Monday, April 1, the minimum wage on PEI increased by 35 cents from \$7.15 to \$7.50 per hour.

Report from the Sixth Annual Provincial Day of Mourning Ceremony

□ On Saturday April 28, the PEI Federation of Labour and its affiliates in conjunction with the Workers Compensation Board and the provincial government held our Sixth Annual Provincial Day of Mourning for Workers Killed and Injured on the Job Ceremony at Province House in Charlottetown. Approximately 130 people attended this year's event.

-The solemn event started inside Province House with O Canada sung by Charlene MacInnis (Injured Workers Organizational Committee) followed next by the Invocation which was performed by Rev. Jean Ward of the Cornwall United Church. In addition to giving this year's Invocation, Rev. Ward spoke on the way that her family has been directly affected by workplace accidents as her cousin died and her father was seriously injured in separate accidents while on the job.

-Next Federation President Carl Pursey spoke on the theme for this year's ceremony "Safe and Healthy Workplaces for All Workers." Followed by Provincial Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs Elmer MacFadyen who spoke to those in attendance on behalf of the Province. Next Charlene MacInnis spoke on behalf of injured workers on PEI. And finally in recognition of the 40th Anniversary of the sinking of the Iceland II in which 10 lives were lost, Leo Cheverie (CUPE) read a poem in memory of those lost.

-Then everyone moved outside and down to in front of the Day of Mourning Monument for the wreath and rose laying ceremony as Michael Carey played a song on his Uilleann Pipes. Vaughan Davies (PSAC) acted as emcee for this ceremony. This year, there were 18 wreathes and approximately 48 roses laid in memory of Islanders who have lost their lives on the job here on PEI including the ones laid in memory of Claude "Dolph" Scully and Kenneth Duffenais who died in separate workplace accidents earlier this year.

-The Federation would like to thank all the speakers, all of the members of our Executive Council, and everyone else who put so much effort and hard work into this year's ceremony .

Federation President, Carl Pursey's Speech from the Ceremony

□ I want to thank all of you for coming here today to remember and honour those workers

who have died or who have been injured on the job.

-The theme of this year's Day of Mourning Ceremony is "Safe and Healthy Workplaces for All Workers." The PEI Federation of Labour has always firmly believed and continues to fight to ensure that all workers have the right to a safe and healthy work environment and we are fully committed to reaching the ultimate goal of eliminating all workplace fatalities on PEI including those that have not been recognized as having roots in the workplace; be it illness or occupational disease. Unfortunately as the two recent workplace fatalities have shown us, there is still a lot of work ahead before this goal will be reached. To reach this goal, it will take a strong, never ceasing commitment from the Provincial Government, unions, employers, and workers with each group having their own responsibilities.

-While it is very important to have strong Occupational Health and Safety legislation, the Provincial Government must never think that their responsibility ends once that legislation is put in place. They must ensure that the penalties, resources, personnel, and political will are there to ensure that the Occupational Health and Safety Act is **properly enforced and respected, and that workers and employers are properly educated on their rights and responsibilities.**

-Also in this year when the Worker's Compensation Act is up for a full legislative review, the Province needs to look at this as an opportunity to make sure that our legislation truly meets the needs of injured workers on PEI. The province needs to go into this review with these goals in mind:

- To ensure that all Island workers have the right to be fully compensated if they are injured or become ill due to their work. No worker should ever be forced to continue working because they are denied fair compensation. The Three Day Waiting Period, currently in our Legislation, goes against this basic right and needs to be removed.
- To ensure that all work related disabilities, injuries, or illnesses, including repetitive strain and workplace stress, are covered under workers' compensation legislation and policy.
- and to ensure that the legislation provides all injured workers on PEI with fair and timely access to the benefits and rehabilitation they need as they recover from their injuries and work towards returning to their jobs. And if their injuries are too severe to allow a return to their job they should receive a pension that adequately recognizes and compensates them for their losses.

-Unions must ensure that our members know their rights and responsibilities regarding safety, that their concerns are brought to the proper authorities and are dealt with in a positive way, and that we continue to fight to ensure that strong legislation is in place to protect not only our member's safety but all Island worker's safety.

-Employers must know their responsibilities regarding their employee's safety, ensure that their employee's are provided with the education and equipment needed to avoid workplace hazards and never put profit above the safety of their employees.

-Worker's must know their rights and responsibilities under the O H and S Act, have the courage to speak out when they see unsafe conditions on the job, and always remember that in the end the most important thing they can bring safely home from work to their loved ones is not their pay cheques, it is themselves.

-As I stated earlier, our ultimate goal is to ensure that a day comes when no Islanders will ever have to go through the loss of a loved one through a workplace accident and we fully believe that if those involved in ensuring workplace safety commit strongly enough to this goal, that day will come.

-In conclusion, On this day, our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who have lost their lives on the job. We mourn their loss and we pledge to continue to fight for the living so that these tragedies never occur again.

-Once again I would like to thank everyone for their attendance today.

Highlights of the 2007 PEI Provincial Budget

□ On Tuesday, April 10, P.E.I. Provincial Treasurer Mitch Murphy delivered his 2007 Provincial Budget. Here are some of the highlights:

Health- \$30.7 million in new spending on health including:

- \$1.8 million for additional doctors to be hired
- An estimated increase in funding of \$445,000 for the neo-natal intensive care unit at Charlottetown's QEH.
- \$1 million to add new cancer drugs to the provincial lists of drugs covered by the province.
- \$2.2 million more in other drug funding.
- \$1 million for youth addictions treatment, including a previously announced youth addictions centre.

Tax cuts - Approximately \$34 million in provincial tax cuts including:

- The variable portion of the tax on gasoline and diesel will be capped at 8.7 cents per litre.
- Income tax brackets will go up by 2% in 2007 and 4% in 2008.
- Middle-income families will no longer have to pay The High Income Surtax.
- Lifetime capital gains exemption for fishermen, farmers and small-business owners climbs from \$500,000 to \$750,000.
- The small business income-tax rate is lowered from 5.4% to 4.3 % on April 1, 2007, and is to continue to drop at a rate of 1.1% per year till 2010, when it reaches one per cent.

Education - \$16.6 million in additional funding, including:

- \$2.1 million towards a plan to decrease UPEI tuition fees by 10 % for the upcoming academic year. Province will also work with UPEI to cap future tuition increases up to an annual total of 2% for the next four years.
- \$2 million to provide 6 new teachers and maintain 30 teachers as student enrolment declines;
- \$550,000 this fiscal year for UPEI's campus renewal program.
- Base funding for UPEI climbs by \$1.4 million.
- Base funding for Holland College climbs by \$1 million.
- Special needs student funding increases by \$500,000.
- \$570,000 for a new welding program at Three Oaks High School.
- Operating costs for school boards climbs by \$367,000.
- Kindergarten funding increases by \$220,000.
- \$600,000 in a workplace training program that will allow employers to train new and existing employees on the jobsite

- In relation to the budget, On April 11, CUPE PEI President Donalda MacDonald put out a press release expressing CUPE's concern that more than one million dollars is going into professional and contract services in staffing and human resources planning at the Public Services Commission while more than \$350,000 was reduced from salaries at the Commission. They are concerned that this is an indication of the Government's intention to contract out more public service jobs in this province. Last year, the Government spent \$120 million in professional and contract services.

Better Choice 2007 Campaign Begins

□ On Thursday, April 5, the Better Choice 2007 campaign was launched. Better Choice 2007 is the labour movement's national campaign to mobilize its members on key federal

election issues. The PEI Federation of Labour in association with the CLC has distributed approximately 8,000 Better Choice 2007 leaflets to Island unions on PEI.

-The main goal of the campaign is to move forward a series of issues that are important to working people, their families and their communities, with the view of putting them squarely on the next federal election's agenda of making them vote-determining.

-We as working people need to make sure that the candidates in the next federal election hear the issues that are important to us and our families so that we can determine where they stand on those issues, From there we need to determine which candidate will best represent working people if they are elected and therefore deserves to earn our vote.

-If we do this, we can determine who's on our side and make the better choice when the next federal election comes.

-Better Choice 2007 centres on five issues. They are:

1. protect jobs and wages for working people;
2. create skills training opportunities for workers and our children;
3. make sure you get the pension you have earned;
4. make prescription drugs more affordable;
5. ensure quality child care and early learning opportunities for workers and their kids.

-For more details, information and backgrounders on the issues, the campaign web site is located at www.betterchoice.ca. The Federation would like to thank our Secretary Bev MacLean for all of her efforts in helping to arrange the distribution of the leaflets.

The New Apprenticeship Incentive Grant

□ On January 1, the Federal Government introduced a new Apprenticeship Training Incentive Grant for "Red Seal" Inter-provincial Trades which include: Appliance Service Technician, Carpenter, Construction and Industrial Electrician, Electronics Technician, Plumber, Steamfitter/Pipefitter, Welder and Electric Motor Systems Technician among others.

-The Grant which provides a taxable cash grant of \$1,000 per year (up to a maximum of \$2,000 per person) to registered apprentices once they have successfully completed their first or second year level of an apprenticeship program in one of the Red Seal trades. It was established with the intent to help apprentices cover some of the expenses related to tuition, travel and tools and encourage them to complete their apprenticeship program

and get their Red Seal.

To be eligible for the grant, you must be:

- a Canadian citizen, permanent resident or protected person out of the secondary school system
- a registered apprentice with an employer, training trust fund, union training centre, joint apprenticeship training committee, or apprenticeship authority.
- registered in a designated Red Seal trade in the province or territory where you are a registered apprentice
- able to show progress within an eligible apprenticeship program by proving that you have successfully completed either the first or second year (level), based on supporting documents

-Apprentices that qualify can complete an application and submit it along with a copy of the cover page and page 4 of the apprentice's log book, issued by the Government of PEI, Department of Education and a signed copy of the "Apprenticeship Incentive Grant" letter provided by the Apprenticeship training manager. You must then submit your application form and supporting documents to Service Canada. Service Canada will determine eligibility.

-For more information on the grant and obtain an application form the website is [http](http://)

Important Dates

Provincial Budget	Tuesday, April 10, 2007	
Public Meeting on "Atlantica: Myths and Realities" with Scott Sinclair.	April 11, 2007	At 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m at the Lecture Theater, Colonel Gray Senior High School, 175 Spring Park Road, Charlottetown
Workers Compensation Board's 8th Annual Workplace Health and Safety Conference	April 25-26, 2007	Delta Prince Edward, Charlottetown

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CLC Atlantic Region and Labour College of Canada Weeklong Educational	April 22 to 27, 2007	Memramcook Institute St. Joseph, NB Deadline March 28, 2007
Sixth Annual Provincial Day of Mourning for Workers Killed and Injured on the Job	Saturday, April 28, 2007	at 1:00 P.M. at Province House
Deadline for Written Submissions to the Worker's Compensation Legislative Advisory Committee	Wednesday, May 2nd, 2007	
27th Annual CUPE Prince Edward Island Division Convention	May 17 - 18, 2007	Loyalist Lakeview Resort, Summerside