



PEI Federation of Labour Newsletter February 2006 Issue

Current News

- ❑ From April 23 to 28, the CLC Atlantic Region and the Labour College of Canada will be holding a weeklong educational at the Memramcook Institute in St. Joseph, NB. The courses for this year will be Labour Law; Communications et Medias (Français); Health & Safety - New Strategies for Building Activism and Democracy, Safety and Environment; and Leadership. The Registration fee will be \$750.00 single and \$600.00 shared accommodation. For more information please contact CLC Atlantic Region at (506)858-9350; fax at (506)858-9571 or e-mail at: atlantic@clc-ctc.ca. The deadline for applications is March 29, 2006.
- ❑ On March 12 and 13 at 8:00 pm, the CBC will finally air Prairie Giant: The Tommy Douglas Story, a two-part miniseries about the founder of Canadian medicare. CBC delayed airing the miniseries until after the Jan. 23 federal election because they felt it might be interpreted as politically biased toward the NDP yet they had no qualms about broadcasting a production called Medicare Schmedicare on Dec. 8, a Passionate Eye production attacking medicare and promoting the biases of politicians favouring private health care.
- ❑ The federation is currently preparing its submission to the Employment Standards Review. The government has set March 10th, 2006 as the deadline for a written version of our oral presentation. The federation will do our presentation before the committee on March 30 at 9:00 am. Therefore, If any of our affiliates have any issues they wish us to bring to the Review Committee or if you wish to see what we have so far, please contact our office at 368-3068; fax at 368- 3192 or e-mail at: peifed@pei.aibn.com. The deadline for input has been extended to **Monday, March 6, 2006**.
- ❑ On Thursday, February 23, as per Executive Council decision, the federation submitted 5 names to the Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs, Elmer MacFadyen, for consideration for the openings on the WCB appeals Board. The names submitted were Gary Paynter (PSAC), Ghassan Kassouf (PSAC), Leo Cheverie (CUPE), Lisa Shephard

(CUPW), and Shelley Ward (UPSE).

- ❑ On Thursday, February 23, it was announced that the Province has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Emergency Medical Care Inc. to move forward on the next steps to develop a ground ambulance service on PEI. The Memorandum allows EMC to begin negotiating asset acquisition from the existing ambulance operators and allows them to begin the hiring process. It is expected that a more detailed contract will be finalized over the coming month in preparation for an April 1st start-up date. Despite the agreement, the province says it still hasn't ruled out the idea of a public system.

- ❑ On Wednesday, February 22, The P.E.I. Health Coalition, of which the federation is a member, held a press conference to coincide with the release of the Canadian Health Coalition's policy paper on a National Pharmacare program. The policy paper More for Less: A National Pharmacare Strategy, concludes that a national, universal, publicly-funded pharmacare plan would ensure equal access to prescription drugs while at the same time addressing the issues of sustainability and cost-effectiveness of the Canadian public health care system. The Coalition hopes its policy paper will have an influence on the federal-provincial task force that's currently developing a national pharmaceutical strategy right now. The task force is expected to release its recommendations at a first ministers meeting this summer. Federation President Carl Pursey spoke on behalf of the federation at the press conference. The paper is available online at <http://www.healthcoalition.ca/moreforless.pdf>.

- ❑ On Friday, February 17, it was announced that Kevin MacAdam the provincial minister of agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture has resigned from cabinet and as MLA for Morell-Fortune Bay to accept a position with the federal government. He will be going to work with Nova Scotia MP Peter MacKay on issues of concern to P.E.I. The by-election for MacAdam's seat has been set for Monday, March 20, 2006.

- ❑ On Friday, February 17, the appeal division of the P.E.I. Supreme Court upheld a lower court decision that declared amendments to P.E.I.'s Human Rights Act in 1997 to be unconstitutional. Those amendments put a legal limit on compensation for people who lost their jobs because of political patronage. The provincial government has 60 days to decide whether to appeal the decision to the Supreme Court of Canada. If it declines to appeal, it will have to compensate 11 former provincial government employees who lost their jobs in 1996. And the government might be required to pay millions of dollars in compensation. The province has already settled more than 850 claims for political discrimination following the 1996 provincial election at a cost of over \$ 2 million.

- ❑ On Friday, February 17, it was announced that the WCB has released a Farm Safety Code of Practice for Prince Edward Island. The Farm Safety Code of Practice was

developed to provide practical guidance for farm employers and workers to meet their requirements under the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act. As of January 1, 2007, the Prince Edward Island OHS Act will apply to all workplaces, including farm operations. Each year in Canada there are, on average, 115 deaths and 1500 hospitalizations that occur as a result of farm work.

❑ On Thursday, February 16, it was announced that Quebec will introduce guaranteed wait times for procedures including some radiation treatments and cardiac surgery, as well as knee and hip replacements and cataract operations. For the elective surgeries, the maximum wait is set at six months, after which treatment will be provided at another Quebec hospital or at an outside clinic staffed by doctors working within medicare. Only if the wait stretches to nine months will the patient be sent out of province for surgery. Under the proposed plan, the prohibition on private health insurance would remain for now, except for three procedures: hip replacements, knee replacements and cataract surgery. The plan would forbid doctors from working in both the public and private systems.

❑ On Wednesday, February 15, it was announced that the Indemnities and Allowances Commission has given Premier Pat Binns an additional \$3,500 in his tax-free allowance, raising it to \$15,000 annually which now puts the premier's total salary at \$111,743/year. The commission has also decided to boost the tax-free living allowance for MLA's by \$524 annually now setting it at \$12,000/year. Salaries and pensions were not changed. All the changes come into effect April 1.

❑ On Tuesday, February 14, the P.E.I. Union of Public Sector Employees distributed over \$10,000 to community groups through its "UPSE Has a Heart" campaign. The money for the Valentine's Day display of generosity was raised through deductions from the pay cheques of each of the union's over 5,000 members. This year, they received inquiries from almost 40 groups and, in the end, agreed to provide funds to 28 of them..

❑ On Monday, February 13, it was announced that the unemployment rate on PEI for January was 10.8% down .3% from December's 11.1%. You currently need 525 hours to qualify for EI on PEI.

❑ On Wednesday, February 8, the provincial government announced a new program designed to attract more immigrants to Prince Edward Island. Under the new Immigrant Connections Program, new Canadians, recent immigrants and other Islanders can nominate a family member or a close friend for immigration as long as the potential immigrant is employable with skills in areas where there are shortages or they have the potential to start a business. Before the program was announced, newcomers needed a guaranteed job or some kind of financial backing to come to P.E.I. and families were

only allowed to sponsor close relatives, such as wives, sons and grandparents. P.E.I. hopes to attract atleast 200 new immigrants with the new rules.

❑ On Monday, February 6, it was announced that deputy leader of the Conservative Party and Central Nova MP Peter MacKay has been given the job of representing PEI in the federal cabinet. MacKay was also appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs and given responsibility for ACOA.

❑ On Saturday, February 4, it was announced that a national study released this week by the Cancer Advocacy Coalition found that Islanders have the poorest access to cancer medications in the country. The study showed that P.E.I. leads the nation by not approving or funding 13 cancer drugs. The next province to P.E.I. is Newfoundland with 8. Most other provinces are in the four to five range. The study also showed that B.C., which is the best funded and has the most timely access to cancer drugs, is leading the rest of Canada by not funding or approving just 2 of them. B.C. also has the best cancer outcomes and lowest cancer mortality rate.

❑ On Thursday, February 2, Arbitrator Guy Dulude ordered the “suspension and postponement” of any further action toward the closure of the mail processing plant in Quebec City. Dulude ruled that Canada Post had violated the postal workers’ collective agreement by not releasing adequate information or consulting with (CUPW) about the Quebec City closure. CUPW is calling on the prime-minister-designate, Stephen Harper, to instruct Canada Post to stop the closure of the Quebec City Processing Plant. The Conservative Party has stated its opposition to the closure and pledged to review the decision.

❑ On Thursday, February 2, it was announced that the provincial government has approved a million-dollar loan to Garden Province Meats for the installation of new value-added equipment. The new equipment will enable GPM to increase revenues through expanded markets and the development of higher value products. The loan is for seven years and is capital only, not to be used for repairs or maintenance. Also part of the loan is that Garden Province Meats must remain in full operation during the term of the loan. There is no job loss expected with the new development plan.

New OH and S Regulations to Be Brought in as of May 1, 2006

❑ On Tuesday, February 7, it was announced that as of May 1, 2006, the WCB will be bringing in new OH and S Act regulations for Island employees who work alone particularly in the hospitality and retail sectors as well as updated amendments for Scaffolding and Hoisting Apparatus.

- The Violence in the Workplace and Working Alone amendments require employers to conduct a risk assessment of the workplace to determine whether or not a risk of injury to workers from violence arising out of their employment may be present. Where risk is identified by the assessment, the employer will be required to take steps to eliminate or minimize the risk. In the case of a worker having to work alone, the employer is required to develop and implement written procedures to ensure the worker's health and safety and provide a training program for workers in these situations.
- In regards to Hoisting Apparatus, it will now be mandatory to have yearly inspections of all hoists and lift equipment in the province. This new regulation comes as the direct result of a workplace death two years ago in which a worker died when a van he was working on fell on him.
- And the Scaffolding amendments will now take into account the use of new methods and devices the construction industry utilizes.

Highlights of the Federation's 2006 Brief to the Provincial Cabinet and The Opposition

□ On Tuesday, February 21, representatives from the Federation of labour presented our annual brief to Premier Pat Binns and most of the Provincial Cabinet. The 21 page brief was also presented that afternoon to the opposition during a meeting with Leader of the of the Opposition Robert Ghiz and Liberal MLA Richard Brown. The Federation has asked both the Government and the Opposition for a written response to the issues contained in the brief and we hope to receive them in the near future.

-Here are the highlights of the Brief as presented. A full copy of the brief will be available shortly on our website.

□ **First Collective Agreement Legislation** - In order to provide a disincentive to employer conduct aimed at undermining collective bargaining and to provide an incentive to the parties to bargain a first collective agreement in a timely manner, We urged the provincial government to finally proclaim First Collective Agreement Legislation.

□ **Pensions Legislation** - With PEI being the only province in Canada without Pension Legislation, we urged the government to finally proclaim this very important legislation and allow Island workers who have pension plans the protection and rights that they deserve.

- ❑ **Pay Equity**-The PEI Federation has always been opposed to wage discrimination based on sex. We feel that its very important that all workers are paid equal wages for work of equal or comparative value. Therefore, we recommended that the criteria of duties, services, education and experience be included in P.E.I's Pay Equity Legislation and that it be extended to the private sector as it is in Ontario and Quebec.

- ❑ **Raising the Occupational Health and Safety Maximum Fine** - We asked the provincial government to act on the Occupational Health and Safety Council's recommendation to increase the maximum fine in PEI's Occupational Health and Safety Act from its current level of \$50,000 to \$250,000. We also asked the government to recommit itself to ensuring that the resources, manpower, and political will necessary to enforce and educate employers and employees about the Occupational Health and Safety Act are there.

- ❑ **Provincial Fair Wages for Construction Sector**- In order to stem the out flux of skilled tradesmen from PEI and because in general construction workers on PEI are the lowest paid in Canada by a significant amount, we urged the provincial government to institute provincial fair wage legislation on all provincially funded construction projects and to base those wages so union wages are not undermined by contractors paying low wages and providing little or no benefits.

- ❑ **Recognizing the National Building Code Across PEI** - We urged the government to institute the National Building Code island wide, return Inspection of Electrical installations to compulsory rather than random, and make sure that there are sufficient resources and penalties in place to ensure that these codes are enforceable.

- ❑ **Caribou Ferry Service Ferry Replacement** - We urged the provincial government to do what it can to ensure that the federal government takes steps to replace the Holiday Island and when Transport Canada does decide to do a replacement, we asked that the provincial government do what it can to make sure any work that can be done on the Island during construction of the replacement is done here.

- ❑ **Minimum Wage Should Be a Living Wage** - We urged the government to do what it can to eliminate the working poor on PEI and ensure that all working Islanders can afford to live on the wages they work so hard to earn.

- ❑ **Anti-Scab Legislation** - We asked the provincial government to show their support for a fairer collective bargaining process by enacting Anti-Scab Legislation here on PEI as soon as possible

- ❑ **Overtime Exemptions** - We urged the Provincial government to remove all overtime

exemptions from the Employment Standards Act.

☐Standard Work Week - We asked the Provincial government to change overtime rules in the Employment Standards Act from requiring overtime be paid after 48 hours have been worked to requiring overtime be paid after over 8 hours per day or 40 hours per week have been worked in order to bring PEI more in line with the majority of Canada.

☐Right to Refuse Overtime - We asked the provincial government to add an employee's right to refuse overtime into PEI's employment standards similar to Saskatchewan's provisions.

☐Statutory Holidays - In order to bring PEI more in line with all other Canadian jurisdictions outside of Atlantic Canada, we requested that the provincial government add Victoria Day and Thanksgiving Day as statutory holidays.

☐Child Care - The federation expressed its disappointment that the provincial government has announced that it will not fight to keep the child-care deal it signed with the federal government. We urged the provincial government to change its position and fight hard to make sure that the child care deal they signed on November 24, 2005 remains in place.

☐Human Rights Education - With recent incidents involving publication of cartoons, the issue of the Noodle House restaurant and other racial incidents on PEI, we asked that the funding cut to the education programs of the PEI Human Rights Commission be rescinded and that more programs be worked into our education system to address these issues.

☐Literacy - We urged the Province to ensure that adequate levels of funding exists for the delivery of workplace education for all Island workers and that they should explore instituting a payroll education tax so that employer's are encouraged to voluntarily reinvest in their worker's education.

☐Emigration and Immigration - We asked the government to start addressing the issues that force workers to leave PEI for work and to make sure that the social and educational supports needed by new immigrants are in place and that their skills are recognized.

☐Education - With an education report released recently, we showed support for the recommendation that the kindergarten system eventually become integrated into the public school system and expressed our concern with the recommendations regarding standardized testing in the school system and with the recommendations giving greater

power to the School Boards to determine the fate of small schools.

☐ **Growth Works** - As a sponsor of the fund with the other Federations of Labour in the Atlantic Region, we asked the provincial government to approve a provincial tax credit to PEI residents of atleast 20% to coincide with Nova Scotia.

Important Dates

International Women's Day	Wednesday, March 8, 2006	
CLC Atlantic Region and PEI Federation Educational	Thursday, March 9, 2006	8:30am - 5:00pm Howard Johnson Dutch Inn, Charlottetown
The Tommy Douglas Story	March 12 and 13	at 8:00 pm on the CBC
Presentation to Employment Standards Review	Thursday, March 30th, 2006	at 9:00 a.m.
CLC Atlantic Region and Labour College of Canada Weeklong Educational	April 23 to 28, 2006	Memramcook Institute St. Joseph, NB Deadline March 29, 2006
National Day of Mourning for Workers Injured or Killed on the Job	Friday, April 28, 2006	
PEI Federation of Labour's Spring Luncheon for Labour Reps and Media.	Monday, May 1, 2006	at Noon at the Inn on the Hill in Charlottetown (Quality Inns)