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Releases

Canada’s Top Labour Leaders Call on Premiers to Show the Unity and Leadership Harper Has Failed to Deliver

ST. JOHN’S, NL– At the kickoff of the Council of the Federation meeting, Canada’s labour leaders called on the provincial and territorial premiers to come together with unprecedented unity to set a new agenda for Canada.

“The Harper government will go down in history as one of the most undemocratic and divisive ones in Canadian History. Every important issue facing Canadians, our provinces and our territories, has been flattened under the bulldozer of Harper’s uncompromising ideological agenda,” said Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour President, Mary Shortall. “Canadians are counting on our Premiers to provide the balance and leadership that Harper has failed to deliver.”

While the Premiers gather for their annual Council of the Federation meeting in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador, the presidents of Canada’s provincial and territorial labour federations are hosting parallel meetings where jobs, pensions, childcare, health care and climate change are the big-ticket items. However, with a federal election scheduled for October 19, 2015, this meeting of the Council of the Federation is the last opportunity for Canada’s Premiers to establish a national consensus and raise expectations on any party vying to form government.

The labour leaders called on the provinces and territories to lay out the building blocks for a ‘caring society’ – one that provides a fair minimum wage and dignity in retirement; one that supports parents through affordable national child care and takes care of us when we are sick; and one that protects jobs and the environment for future generations through a green economy.

Under the Stephen Harper’s majority government, Canada has been undergoing a shift towards a low-wage economy, in which cuts to Employment Insurance and growth of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program have been used to drive down wages for every worker. Parents across the country have been burdened by impossible childcare costs that have kept many women, in particular, out of the workforce. Meanwhile, two thirds of Canadian workers don’t have a workplace pension plan and 10 percent of Canadians 65 and older live in poverty. Harper’s refusal to renew the Canada Health Accord last year has led to deep cuts to hospitals and health care across the country and paved the way for a patchwork of provincial and territorial systems that provide differential access based on where people live and their ability to pay. His staunch rejection of international climate change agreements has earned Canada a reputation as an impediment to progress.

The labour federation presidents called on the Premiers to draft an agreement endorsing:
• $15/hour minimum wage across the country;
• doubling of the Canada Pension Plan;
• creation of an affordable national childcare program;
• the revival of the Canada Health Accord;
• comprehensive immigration strategy with a pathway to citizenship;
• establishment of a Green Jobs agenda for Canada.

“Canada’s economic policy can no longer simply serve the partisan interests of the Harper government and his corporate backers. We need an economy that serves every Canadian,” said Manitoba Federation of Labour President, Kevin Rebeck. “The shift to a green economy, with fair wages and strong public services supporting Canadians, will guarantee a future of good jobs that cannot be exported oversees, a thriving workforce and a planet that can support the generations to come.”

Together, Canada’s provincial and territorial labour federations give voice to over three million workers, represented by the:

Alberta Federation of Labour

British Columbia Federation of Labour

Canadian Labour Congress

Manitoba Federation of Labour

New Brunswick Federation of Labour

Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour

Northern Territories Federation of Labour

Nova Scotia Federation of Labour

Ontario Federation of Labour

Prince Edward Island Federation of Labour

Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec

Saskatchewan Federation of Labour

Yukon Federation of Labour