

Labour Reporter

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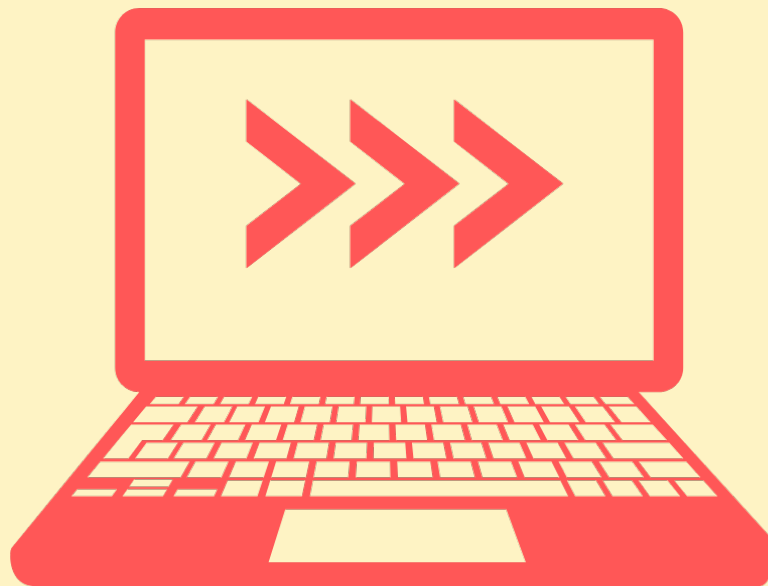
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Labour Reporter

Labour Reporter is proudly published quarterly by the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour. It is sent directly to the homes of working people and to the offices of their unions.

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SFL President Lori Johb.

Labour Day is a reminder to put workers first

Every year on Labour Day, we gather to celebrate the contributions of workers across the country. This year's Labour Day will be different once again as uncertainty around COVID-19 makes it difficult for us all to come together at our annual barbecues across the province. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic is still a part of our lives, even though we would like to be able to leave the challenges of the past 18 months behind us.

While some people, especially our provincial government, would have us believe that the pandemic is indeed behind us, and that it's time for us to return to the way things were before COVID-19, we must resist the slide backwards. It's time for us to act on the lessons we have learned, and fix what is clearly broken

“As we recover from COVID-19, we must ensure that we do not return to the status quo.”

in our province and across the country.

The pandemic has laid bare existing inequality here in Saskatchewan. Along with the devastation wrought on seniors and staff in long-term care homes, the initial lack of personal protective equipment, and other pandemic-related challenges, the impact on workers has been profound. Long-standing issues impacting low-income workers, mainly in marginalized communities, have been exposed in a way that no one can

ignore any further. A spotlight was shone on frontline workers who receive low pay and have few (if any) benefits, including paid sick days. These workers kept us fed, healthy, housed and supported during one of the most significant economic and social upheavals in recent memory. They did all of this while risking their own health and safety, and that of their families. Meanwhile, CEOs making record profits clawed back pandemic wages despite the ongoing risks.

As we recover from COVID-19, we must ensure that we do not return to the status quo. This is why we at your Federation of Labour have been calling for improvements as we start to move out of the pandemic. Workers must be at the heart of any pandemic recovery plan for it to be truly successful.

A strong pandemic recovery plan includes decent jobs to replace those lost over the last two years. These jobs must offer a living wage, benefits like paid sick leave and pensions, and a path to unionization for workers.

A strong plan also includes strengthening our social safety net, and a living wage for all. A recovery plan must include access to universal, affordable child care that works for families. These steps will help

keep us all safe and thriving when the next disaster hits, and they will help address long-standing inequality that has long plagued marginalized workers in Canada, particularly women of colour, workers with disabilities, and many others.

If we are to fully escape a sharp recession and a mammoth job-market shock with lingering effects, the government must continue to invest. We are already seeing the effects of a failure to invest, and a government that is missing in action. The last month's jobs numbers showed that Saskatchewan was the only province to lose jobs, despite dropping all health restrictions. There are 20,000 more people looking for work here than there was a year ago. Failure to address this soon will only see the situation get worse.

In the lead up to the federal election, all workers – whether they are unionized or not – must hold political leaders accountable. The beauty of our democratic system is that we, the voters, hold the cards. We can demand change from politicians by voting this fall.

Demand that your candidates address the pandemic recovery. They should have answers on how they plan to support workers and their

families, in both the short and long term. Without workers, there is no recovery. That must be our message -- on Labour Day and beyond.

I'd also like to take a moment to note all of the work we've been up to at the SFL over the summer. Despite the pandemic, we have been able to connect with more workers than ever through our online conferences and digital engagement tools. We were able to bring working women across the country together at our online Prairie School for Union Women, teamed up with the CLC to deliver a virtual Spring School, and are busy lobbying the provincial government for an affordable childcare plan, and changes to occupational health and safety legislation that keep contract workers safe.

Looking to Fall, we are planning for the launch of our new website and new tools for online engagement, including the launch of a mobile app that helps young workers understand their rights while on the job.

Of course, we are also busy planning for our fall convention, held online October 21-22. After last year's cancellation, I can't wait to be able to get together with workers from across the province in solidarity. I hope to "see" you there!



Election 2021: The NDP stands with workers

Canada will likely head to the polls again this fall, as the Trudeau Liberals make an attempt to secure a majority government after the 2019 election fell short and delivered them a minority. Working people are once again being courted by all three of Canada's major political parties- making promises that they claim will make the lives of working people and their families better and more affordable. But which party actually stands with Canadian workers? A closer look at the Liberals, Conservatives, and the NDP shows that the NDP is the only party has a credible record and a plan that puts workers first.

The Liberal Party

Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party swept to power in 2015 with a majority government promising "real change,"

"The Liberals have made many commitments to working people, but have too often failed to follow through with their promises."

and a series of social reforms they pledged to implement that would make the lives of working people better: Investments in infrastructure to create good jobs, a national pharmacare plan, expanded CPP, affordable child care, and respect for bargaining rights and the work of unionized public servants. Many workers were relieved to have a change in government after a decade of Conservative rule that saw nothing but disrespect and outright hostility towards unions and work-

ing people. While the Liberals have moved forward on key promises, including, at last, a start at a national childcare program, the Liberals have made many commitments to working people but too often have failed to follow through with their promises.

A national pharmacare plan, for example, has been promised for years but never delivered on, despite years of lobbying and pressure from Canada's unions. They have been hesitant to initiate any sort of wealth tax on the super rich to help pay for public services, while working people are facing a rising cost of living. The Liberals have also, like the Harper Conservatives before them, not hesitated to enact illegal back-to-work legislation on workers exercising their charter right to strike.

After six years in power, unions are finding the "seat at the table" they were promised by the Liberals in 2015 is no longer there.

The Conservative Party

There isn't anything good to say about the Conservative Party of Canada and their despicable record when it comes to working people, but with their leader Erin O'Toole attempting to win over union workers to make up for his

sinking poll numbers and shrinking support within his own party, it's worth going over a quick summary of the disaster electing a Conservative government would be for workers.

Like the last Conservative government, an elected Conservative party would certainly make big cuts to health care and public services. A national childcare plan, and plans for Pharmacare would be immediately scrapped, and vital social supports would be slashed and burned. The Conservatives would continue to be the party of big business, favouring tax breaks for corporations and their wealthy donors. There is also no question that the Conservatives would put forward anti-worker legislation in an attempt to weaken our labour movement and worker's rights. As working people in a province where all current MPs are Conservatives, we must remind our coworkers, friends and family the damage that electing them to power would do.

The New Democratic Party

The NDP has long been the party of working people, but have struggled over the last several elections to connect with workers. However, the party's proposals and success at pressuring the Trudeau Liber-

als to do better for workers during the pandemic has given the party traction, as recent polls have NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh within a few points of the Conservatives. From expanding and extending CERB benefits, the wage subsidy, and instating federal paid sick leave, the NDP has had worker's backs throughout the pandemic- forcing the Liberals to do the right thing. They are the only party presenting a solid pandemic recovery plan that benefits workers by investing in healthcare and public services, pharmacare and childcare, and a credible plan to address climate change while creating good jobs. They are also the only party proposing a wealth tax to make sure that the wealthiest in this country pay their fair share.

While both the Liberals and Conservatives may seem different, they both represent the same politics as usual. The pandemic has shown us that we need to do something different. Life for working people under successive Liberal and Conservative governments has only gotten harder and more unaffordable, while the wealthiest few keep getting richer. Our economy only works if it works for everyday people, and Jagmeet Singh and the NDP are the only ones with a plan for workers.

CUPE rallies against Sask. Party Education Cuts



CUPE Saskatchewan members gather in front of the Saskatoon Public School Board office to rally against Sask. Party cuts to education.

Earlier this summer, CUPE Education workers in Saskatoon rallied at the Saskatoon Board of Education office and the Saskatoon cabinet office to take a stand against the Sask. Party's continued underfunding of education in the province, which has led to an \$8 million shortfall at Saskatoon's public schools, who had eliminate 60 positions to balance their budget, including Education Assistants and Librarians.

"Community School Education Assistant III (EA) is a classification specifically designated to work within community schools to bridge the gap between students, their families and the broader community," said Dene Nicholson, president, CUPE 8443. "By completely eliminating this position, Saskatoon Public Schools is cutting from the most vulnerable to balance their budget." "We've heard firsthand from

members about the deep connection they have to students and the community. They are in absolute shock that this position is being cut," said Nicholson. "Several of the impacted members are Indigenous and play a vital role in providing culturally sensitive educational practices and have built long-term relationships with family members."

Saskatoon Public Schools is the latest school division to make devastating cuts that hurt kids. Regina Public Schools and Prairie South School Division have all been forced to make deep cuts in order to balance their budgets, a direct result of continued underfunding by the Sask. Party government, who have for years cut funding for education as a way to cover up their massive deficits and financial mismanagement.





It's time to fix the childcare crisis in Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan needs affordable, accessible childcare

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the extent to which our economy depends on child care. Schools, camps and most child care facilities have had to close. Parents have had to take on a heavy load of unpaid care work.

This all while balancing paid work at home or in essential services. Some parents are also dealing with an unexpected job loss or reduced work time. There's no respite in sight.

Families across the province were already facing a child care crisis. Saskatchewan is last in Canada when it comes to accessing regulated child care spaces. Only 18% of children under 5 years old have access to licensed child care but over 70% of mothers with children under 5 years old are working.

The federal government's announcement earlier this year of \$30 billion towards a national childcare program is a generational opportunity to make lives

“Saskatchewan is last in the country when it comes to accessing regulated childcare spaces.”

better for working women and their families. Several provinces, including British Columbia and Nova Scotia, have already reached agreements with the federal government for childcare programs to use their share of federal funding.

However, while Premier Scott Moe and the Sask. Party Government have submitted a plan for \$10-a-day child care to the federal government, they won't tell anyone what is in that plan and they didn't talk to any of the child care advocates and policy experts in the community when they drafted it. Families in Saskatchewan deserve to know what the government's plan is for safe, quality and affordable child care in the province.

We need to make sure that Scott Moe hears that any plan for child care must be accessible and affordable. It also needs to make sure child care workers can make a fair wage. Childcare Now Saskatchewan, an advocacy group that has been calling for a national child-care program for over 30 years is spear-heading a campaign calling for the Sask. Party to share their plan, and to consult and listen to parents, communities, child care advocates and policy experts. Sign and send a letter to Scott Moe on their website at <http://saskatchewan.childcarenow.ca> and tell the Sask. Party that we need a plan that works for families in Saskatchewan.

Families shouldn't have to choose between work and their children's well being. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed society's gendered expectations. Women often perform the majority of caregiving responsibilities. Women should not have to exit or defer re-entering the workforce because they need to care for their kids. It's time to build a system of high-quality, affordable and inclusive child care here in Saskatchewan and across the country. There can be no economic recovery without it.

SFL News Briefs

SFL welcomes new staff

The SFL is pleased to announce a staffing change that has occurred in our office over the past few months.

Jessica Boyer recently joined the officer as the Administrative Assistant-Human Rights. Jessica is a longtime activist who has been involved in Saskatchewan's labour movement for the past decade, most recently serving on the SFL Executive Council as Vice President for the Solidarity and Pride Committee, and was active in her union, COPE Local 397.

We welcome Jessica to our office and her new role!

Longtime SFL staff retires

Earlier this summer we said farewell to Donna Smith, who retired after 18 years at the SFL and over 40 years in Saskatchewan's labour movement.

Donna has been a fierce union activist, community volunteer, advocate for women and fighter for LBGTQ2S+ rights. We're proud to have been able to call Donna our coworker, union sister, and our friend.

We wish Donna all the best in her retirement!

SFL launching new mobile app

Last year, the SFL received funding from the WCB to design a mobile application to help young workers understand their rights when on the job. Working closely with SFL Ready for Work Coordinator Taylor Apperley, we were able to hire a local company to complete the design. The app has just completed its final stages of testing and will be launched in early fall, in time to be used in conjunction with Ready for Work presentations across the province. Stay tuned for more information about when the app will be available for download!

See you at convention!

The SFL staff are hard at work preparing for our first (and hopefully last) online convention. The theme for this year's convention is "Putting Workers First." As we look towards recovery after COVID-19, we must all come together as working people and fight for a real pandemic recovery that puts workers first.

Be sure to register delegates by Sept. 20 for early bird rates!

More information and the Convention call can be found online at www.sfl.sk.ca/events/convention.



SEIU-West launches 'Hey Moe' campaign

This summer SEIU-West formally launched its newest activism campaign: Hey Moe! #RespectUsProtectUsPayUs.

"As Premier Scott Moe continues to push Saskatchewan to 'the way it should be,' he and his government need to remember who bore the brunt of this pandemic and helped get the province to this point – front line essential workers," says SEIU-West President Barb Cape. "There has been extensive damage done to our public service workforce in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that needs to be repaired."

Accompanied by a digital and mass email campaign, billboards across Saskatchewan and other multi-media outlets, SEIU-West's HeyMoe.ca campaign is about telling Scott Moe and his Cabinet that there

is an urgent need to repair and invest in public services. Billboards across Saskatchewan are running these messages... except for Directwest billboards, owned by Scott Moe's government, which refused to run the message, declaring it "divisive".

"There is some controversy from one advertiser about our campaign," explains Cape. "How, exactly, does a simple request for respect, protection and fair wages for the thousands of essential workers serving Saskatchewan's front line today offend this government-owned company's guidelines?"

SEIU-West members, like all essential front line workers across Saskatchewan, have been providing hands-on care and in-person services since the very start of the pandemic, enduring extraordinary per-

sonal, mental, physical and financial hurdles including the absence of and/or insufficient personal protective equipment; inconsistent application of protocols; isolation and lack of mental health supports; insufficient staffing levels; and unfair, arbitrary distribution of the Government of Canada's temporary wage supplement.

COVID-19 has gravely injured a public service that was broken prior to the pandemic's arrival – now it needs time, money and leadership to heal.

Cape adds "We are asking everyone in Saskatchewan who supported and applauded essential workers as heroes, to please sign onto the letter at HeyMoe.ca and send a

message to Premier Moe that we need to act now by investing significant funding into our public services."

More information about the campaign can be found online at www.hey-moe.ca

Frontline workers at risk as COVID variant spreads

While the Saskatchewan government lifted all public health restrictions in July, many frontline workers are still at risk as the Delta variant, a much more contagious strain of COVID-19 that can be spread even among those who have been vaccinated, has become the common strain of COVID-19 in the province. Like always, the health and safety of working people needs to be taken seriously, especially now that all public health restrictions have been dropped.

While many in Saskatchewan have worked hard to stop the spread of the virus by getting vaccinated, a large portion of residents still have yet to get the vaccine, and are at risk contracting and spreading the virus. Workers on the front lines, especially in grocery stores, restaurants, and retail workers, will

be at high risk of exposure of being in contact with the virus, especially without public health restrictions

"Even as vaccination rates rise, frontline workers will be dealing with people who are unvaccinated"

in place. Children under 12 are also at risk, as they are not able to receive the vaccine, putting workers with young families in the difficult position of having to go to work and risk bringing the virus home. Workers in schools are also concerned about the potential spread of the virus when students return in the fall.

When restrictions were removed in July, SGEU called on the Govern-

ment to provide employers with clear direction on how to keep people safe at work until we achieve herd immunity and COVID-19 cases drop to zero, to legislate paid sick days so workers never have to choose between putting their co-workers and the public at risk by going to work sick or staying home without pay, and to recognize the strain that getting back to normal puts on frontline workers by investing in mental health supports.

"Even as vaccination rates rise, frontline workers will be dealing with people who are unvaccinated or only partly vaccinated, putting them at higher risk," said SGEU President Tracey Sauer. "If we truly want to get 'back to normal,' this government needs to bring in structural changes that will support working people through the rest of this pandemic, and afterwards."



SFL staff Deena Kapacila and Jessica Boyer at a demonstration in support of Regina's bylaw banning conversion therapy in July.

Conversion Therapy: Sask. Party must take a stand

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour's Solidarity and Pride Committee is calling on the Sask. Party government to be clear about where they stand on the federal bill to ban the dangerous practice of conversion therapy, after half of their federal counterparts, including 13 Saskatchewan MPs, voted against the bill in June.

"The passing of a federal bill to ban the harmful practice of conversion therapy in Canada was a huge victory for LGBTQ2S+ people," said SFL Solidarity and Pride Committee chair Krystle Wallman. "Unfortunately, almost every single Saskatchewan MP, including two former Sask. Party MLAs, voted against the bill and in favour of letting this harmful practice continue. While the provincial NDP has voiced sup-

"The Sask. Party has often been on the wrong side of history when it comes to the fight for LGBTQ2S+ rights."

port for the bill, the Sask. Party has remained silent. LGBTQ2S+ people and allies deserve to know where they stand."

Conversion therapy is an abusive, harmful practice that preys on LGBTQ2S+ children and youth, and has devastating impacts on its victims. Despite being denounced by medical and health organizations worldwide, conversion therapy still remains common across Canada, with a recent study reporting that as many

as 1 in 10 LGBTQ2S+ people have been victims of the practice.

"Conversion therapy has caused immense harm for so many in the LGBTQ2S+ community here in Saskatchewan and across the country," Wallman said. "The Sask. Party must be clear about whether or not they share the same position as their federal colleagues, including two of their former MLAs, and if they are supportive of the federal ban on conversion therapy and the efforts of local municipalities in

Saskatchewan to ban the practice in their communities."

The Sask. Party has often been on the wrong side of history when it comes to the fight for LGBTQ2S+ rights and equality. Former Premier Brad Wall spoke out against marriage equality when he was opposition leader, the Sask. Party refused to support an NDP bill that would protect a student's right to form Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA) clubs in schools, and previous petitions presented by the NDP calling

for a provincial ban on conversion therapy have gone ignored.

"Pride is political, it's more than just flying a flag or showing up to a parade," Wallman said. "It's also supporting queer people by passing legislation that makes life more fair, just and equitable for all. LGBTQ2S+ people and allies need to know whether or not their government has their back, and the Sask. Party's silence on conversion therapy is deafening."

Minimum wage change insulting to frontline heroes

This summer's embarrassing announcement from the provincial government of a change in the minimum wage from \$11.45 an hour to \$11.81 an hour- an increase of just 36 cents- is an insult to the frontline heroes who have remained on the job throughout the pandemic while earning the lowest wages in the entire country.

"It's incredibly insulting that, after what working people in Saskatchewan have been through over the past year, the provincial government would announce a raise for minimum wage workers that amounts to a small handful of

change," said Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) President Lori Johb. "These frontline heroes have been working hard over the past year in grocery stores, gas stations and many other workplaces, putting their own health and safety at risk to ensure Saskatchewan people have access to vital goods and services."

Johb noted that a significant raise to the minimum wage is needed now, especially as the province looks forward to recovering from the pandemic.

"Now is the time for us to be invest

ing in our communities and stimulating the economy" Johb said.

"Anything less than \$15 an hour is unacceptable. Saskatchewan workers deserve so much better."

Putting Workers First is

- **Paid sick days for all workers**
- **A living wage for all workers**
- **Affordable, accessible childcare for working families**
- **Safer workplaces**
- **Investments in our crowns and public services.**



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