

Labour Reporter

The voice of Saskatchewan's working class since 1956



Fall 2022

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66TH ANNUAL SFL CONVENTION 2022



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OCTOBER 26-28, 2022

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OCTOBER. SEE WWW.SFL.SK.CA FOR MORE
INFORMATION.

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 speaks at a rally for reproductive rights in Regina in June.

Solidarity after a tough summer for workers

This summer marked one of the toughest for workers across the province in recent memory. While for the first time since the start of the pandemic, many of us were able to reconnect with friends and family and (cautiously) resume in-person events and travel, workers have been finding it tough to make ends meet as the province faces the worst affordability crisis in a generation. Record high fuel prices, tax and utility hikes, interest rate hikes, and the highest inflation rates since the 1980s has left working people in the province making difficult choices about how to pay their bills and put food on the table, and a survey taken this summer showed that 7 in 10 people in Saskatchewan were having difficulty making ends meet.

Your federation of labour spent the summer pressuring the Sask. Party government to address the affordability crisis. We called on the Sask. Party to immediately address inflation by providing temporary

“A survey this summer revealed that 7 in 10 Saskatchewan people were having difficulty making ends meet.”

tax relief at the gas pumps like in other provinces, immediately increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour instead of waiting until 2024, scrap PST and power rate hikes, and implement a windfall tax on companies experiencing record profits from high resource prices and providing a rebate to Saskatchewan workers.

In July, we launched a petition calling on the government to take these measures and it was signed by hundreds of workers from across the province. I was surprised at the many comments workers signing the petition left us about the ways that the skyrock-

eting cost of living was affecting their lives. "I've worked the same job for 20 years and this is the first time my paycheque isn't making ends meet," wrote one worker. "I'm already working long hours with a heavy workload, but now my wages don't meet my family's basic needs," wrote another.

Instead of addressing the issue immediately, the Sask. Party government decided to sit on a giant surplus all summer, hoarding record revenues at the expense of working people. It wasn't until the fall - and on the eve of a byelection being called in Saskatoon - that they finally announced their plans to give a \$500 cheque to everyone in the province, which workers won't be seeing in their bank accounts until at least November. While the money will help many in the short-term, we still need additional measures to address affordability. The Sask. Party has moved forward with an 8 per cent hike in utility bills, and is still leaving the majority of their PST hikes introduced in the spring budget intact. The minimum wage still won't be \$15 an hour until 2024, and gas prices still remain high. Your federation of labour will keep calling on the government to take measures to address affordability for workers in the province. Solidarity with ev-

eryone after a difficult summer, we will keep fighting for you.

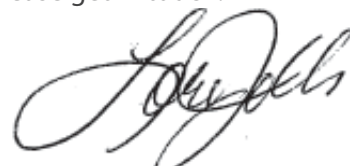
The crisis in healthcare has also been top of mind for many Saskatchewan workers over the summer. Although the government has stopped reporting COVID-19 cases, we know that the virus is still spreading across the province and pushing the healthcare system to its limit. Long emergency room waits, surgery backlogs, hallway medicine and hospital closures due to understaffing tell the story and have sadly become the norm. Worst of all, the Sask. Party is denying the crisis and choosing to ignore once again what our healthcare sector affiliates, and public health experts are telling them. Instead of investing our surplus (and it is our surplus - it belongs to the people of the province, not the Sask. Party) in fixing our public healthcare system, they are moving forward with plans to privatize more of it - taking resources out of the public system and making things even worse.

While the 2024 election can't come soon enough, there is the chance to send the Sask. Party a message in the upcoming byelection in Saskatoon Meewasin. CUPE member Nathaniel Teed is running for the NDP, and I encourage all workers to support his campaign and elect

an MLA who will put workers first and actually listen to the concerns of working people.

As we look towards the fall, your federation of labour is busy with the return of in-person events and reconnecting with our affiliates. We've been able to hold an in-person/online hybrid of our Prairie School for Union Women in June, held our first SFL Summer Camp since 2019, and had our annual Occupational Health and Safety Conference in Regina this past month, where we were able to celebrate the 50th anniversary of OH&S legislation in Saskatchewan. I am looking forward to our convention being held in-person in Regina next month, and gathering together in solidarity.

SFL Secretary-Treasurer Kent Peterson and I have also been meeting with affiliates and affiliated locals and listening to your thoughts and ideas of how we can all work together. The meetings have been very encouraging, and the feedback we've received has been very helpful as we plan for the years ahead. If you want us to attend your executive or local meeting, please get in touch!



Lori Johb, SFL President



WORKERS NEED RELIEF FROM INFLATION

Rebates for workers a short-term solution to a long-term affordability crisis

While the announcement of a government rebate is welcome news to the working people of Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour continues to demand that the government take immediate measures that will address the affordability crisis. Workers across the province are struggling to make ends meet due to the rising cost of living thanks to Sask. Party tax and utility rate hikes and high fuel prices.

"The province's latest financial update proves what we've known for months - that the government has been hoarding record resource revenues, while at the same time, raising taxes and utility rates at the expense of working people," said SFL President Lori Johb. "The SFL has been calling on the government

"Many workers have already spent well over \$500 due to tax hikes and inflation"

to provide relief to working people for months, and while the announcement of a \$500 rebate for Saskatchewan workers will help provide relief in the short term, it's too little and too late. Many workers have already spent well over \$500 due to tax hikes and inflation, and they need the government to come up with a plan that will lower the cost of living for the long term well after their rebate cheques have been spent."

Johb continued to call on the government to take additional measures to help workers address the inflation

and affordability crisis, including:

- Immediately increasing the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, and come up with a plan to introduce a living wage
- Scrapping planned PST hikes passed in the 2022 provincial budget and cancel proposed power rate hikes
- Providing relief from high fuel prices
- Taxing profits from companies experiencing record revenues from

high resource prices.

Johb also called on the government to use the record revenues generated by an unprecedented increase in resource royalties to invest in public healthcare and education, and scrap their plans to privatize healthcare. "It's unconscionable that, in a time when the province is facing record revenues and a balanced budget, the Sask. Party government is continuing to underfund public education, and are moving forward with plans to privatize healthcare - including

sending patients out of province for private surgeries while hospitals across the province are being shut down due to lack of staff. The government must use this unprecedented cash windfall to invest in our public healthcare and education systems - the government's fiscal update showing a large surplus makes it clear there is no excuse for privatization and cuts."

"Can't make ends meet:" What workers are saying about the affordability crisis

In July, the SFL launched a petition calling on the Sask. Party government to take immediate action to address the affordability crisis being faced by workers across the province. The petition was widely circulated by SFL affiliates and was signed by hundreds of workers. The following is some of the feedback we received from workers who signed the petition on how they are dealing with the skyrocketing cost of living:

"With the cost of food and rent, \$15 for a minimum wage is still not enough." -Rene

"I am really struggling to meet my

needs due to the high cost of inflation." -Prasanna

"With inflation, gas prices, and the past two years of COVID, people need a government that stands behind them. It's time for a government that stands up for working people." -Tanya

"Politicians don't feel this crisis like us regular folks. They don't know the struggle." -Warren

"My take home pay is below the poverty line. Everything is going up except our wages." -Debbie

"I'm very concerned about the cost of living in this province. The Sask.

Party isn't doing anything to address this issue. They're creating a mess." -Cindy

"It costs me over \$30 a day just for my drive to work. We need relief to help with these costs." -Rachelle

"We need help now, and the government should be doing everything in its power to ensure people have stability as we face these challenges." -Stepan

"The government doesn't understand that not everyone has a huge bank account or a high-paying job. The Sask. Party isn't doing anything to help workers through this tough time." -Lana

Photos: SFL Joins Rally for Reproductive Rights



Following the United States Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe vs. Wade and 50 years of settled law, many in Canada felt the same feelings of hurt, frustration and rage that women in the United States were also feeling. The SFL was proud to join a rally in Regina in support of reproductive rights for all women, and the expansion of access to reproductive healthcare in Saskatchewan.

The SFL will always stand in support of women's healthcare and a woman's right to choose to access an abortion. But the sad reality is that there are Conservative politicians in Canada, and right here in Saskatchewan, who applauded the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, and who are hoping that one day they will be able to take away a woman's right to choose in Canada.

There are Federal Members of Parliament from Saskatchewan who support putting barriers in place for

women's healthcare and banning abortion altogether. Saskatchewan's Justice Minister and Sask. Party MLA Bronwyn Eyre are on the record saying that "serious hurdles" should be put in place for women trying to access reproductive healthcare, and Sask. Party MLAs, including Premier Scott Moe, have been endorsed by anti-choice groups.

We must send a message loud and clear to these politicians: We are never going to go back to the way things were. Remember to ask politicians and political candidates where they stand on women's healthcare and access to abortion, and expanding access to women's reproductive healthcare services.

All women deserve equal access to abortion and reproductive healthcare, and Saskatchewan's labour movement will continue the fight for better women's healthcare and a woman's right to choose.





“Enough is Enough:” Workers send Moe, Sask. Party a message at Saskatoon cabinet office

Workers gathered in front of the government cabinet office in Saskatoon last month to send Scott Moe and the Sask. Party a message that workers have had enough of their government’s inaction.

“It’s been a hard summer for workers all across the province,” said SFL President Lori Johb. “Inflation has driven up the cost of living and working people and their families are struggling to make ends meet. The Sask. Party’s solution has been to do nothing, in fact, they made the situation even worse by raising taxes and hiking power rates. Workers have seen just how little the Sask. Party cares about making their lives more affordable, and they are fed up.”

Johb pointed to the healthcare crisis as another area where the Sask. Party is failing.

“Workers have seen just how little the Sask. Party cares about making their lives more affordable.”

“We’re facing a critical staffing crisis in healthcare - workers are burnt out and hospitals are overwhelmed and being shut down across the province due to short staffing. The Sask. Party’s solution has been to ignore the problem, and make the situation even worse by taking resources away from the health system by looking at privatization as a way out of the mess they created in healthcare over the course of the pandemic.”

Johb also noted the cuts made to education and the fact that school boards are struggling to balance their budgets while the government continues to fund

private schools, including Legacy Christian Academy, which is facing shocking allegations of abuse.

"The Sask. Party is making cuts in our schools and taking resources away from the public system and into private schools while our public schools are understaffed. The fact that Legacy Christian Academy is set to receive hundreds of thousands of tax dollars in funding this year despite investigations into their abuse of students while pub-

lic school boards make cuts to balance their budgets is shameful."

Johb said that the SFL and provincial labour movement will be working in the upcoming byelection to elect an MLA who will hold the Sask. Party to account in the upcoming byelection.

"Workers are demanding better from our government, and today's message from workers is that they are tired of Moe and the Sask. Par-

ty's inaction on so many issues and their ignoring of the problems working people in this province are facing," said Johb.

"Saskatchewan's labour movement will do everything we can to send Scott Moe and the Sask. Party a message by electing a progressive voice who will put workers first in the upcoming byelection, and work to elect a new government in two years who will actually listen to the concerns of working people."

Finance Minister's \$8K flight an insult to workers

Sask. Party Finance Minister Donna Harpauer's \$8,000 private flight to travel 400 kilometres is an insult to workers who are struggling to make ends meet due to record high inflation and tax and utility rate hikes, says the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour.

"It's unbelievable that at a time when workers are finding themselves unable to put food on the table, or to fill their cars with gas just to be able to get to work, the Sask. Party has no issue booking private jets and sending Saskatchewan people the bill," said SFL President Lori Johb. "The Finance Minister should pay back the cost of the flight and apologize to working people for being so arrogant and out of touch with reality."

The SFL has been calling on the Sask. Party government all summer to provide workers with relief from inflation at a time when the province is experiencing record resource revenues while at the same time raising taxes and utility rates.

"Workers across the province are in desperate need of some financial relief, but the Sask. Party instead seems to be more focused on how they can use our money to benefit themselves," said Johb.

Harpauer isn't the only Sask. Party Cabinet Minister to travel on the taxpayer's dime. It seems the Sask. Party has caught the travel bug recently. Minister Jeremy Harrison took several luxury trips to Dubai, London and India this year, labelled as "trade missions." The trip to Lon-

don alone cost \$32,491, while the cost of the other trips have not yet been disclosed. Premier Scott Moe also travelled to London at a cost of \$60,838. Minister Gene Makowsky recently soaked up the sun in Mexico, and MLA Terry Denis went on a trip to Germany. Why would a back bench MLA be travelling to Europe? Honestly, we have no idea.

The taxpayer-funded travel doesn't seem to bother the Sask. Party though. Premier Moe says he makes "no apologies." Meanwhile, a recent survey showed 70 per cent of Saskatchewan people are worried about being able to make ends meet. Clearly, this is a government that is very out of touch with the realities faced by working people in the province.



Make September 30 A Provincial Holiday



SFL launches petition to recognize Sept. 30 as a provincial holiday

The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour is launching a petition and renewing its call on the provincial government to honour the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and recognize the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30 a provincial statutory holiday.

"The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is an opportunity for all of us to reflect upon the tragedy of the residential school system, to honour the victims and survivors of residential schools, and recognize the trauma it continues to inflict upon families and communities, as well as to commit to true and meaningful reconciliation," said SFL president Lori Johb. We encourage all workers and community members to sign onto our petition and call on the government

"The government must recognize the role they play in reconciliation and legislate September 30 as a provincial holiday."

to honour the TRC and make September 30 a provincial statutory holiday."

Passed by the Federal Government in 2020 after being outlined as a call to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report, September 30 is recognized as a statutory holiday for all federally regulated employees. Several provinces and many provincial organizations including provincial crown corporations are recognizing the holiday, but the Sask.

Party government has again said that they have no plans to legislate September 30th as a provincial statutory holiday for all workers.

“The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is an important day for workers to be able to take the opportunity to learn, quietly reflect, or participate in reconciliation events in their communities,”

Johb said. “The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour is committed to reconciliation and justice for Indigenous peoples. The provincial government must recognize the role they play in reconciliation and the importance of this day, and legislate September 30th as a provincial holiday.”

The petition can be signed online

at <https://sfl.sk.ca/take-action/petitions/sept30>.

New research reveals living wages in Regina and Saskatoon

New research from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has calculated the living wage for workers in Regina and Saskatoon.

Using cost-of-living data unique to both cities, such as rental prices, childcare costs, and transportation fees, the CCPA calculated that a family of four would require a living wage of \$16.23 per hour for Regina and \$16.89 per hour for Saskatoon in order to maintain a decent standard of living in each respective city. The living wage reflects what people need to support their families based on the actual costs of living in a specific community.

The recent announcement by the Saskatchewan government to

“Saskatchewan’s minimum wage will continue to fall short of meeting many of the basic needs of families.”

raise what is currently the country’s lowest minimum wage (\$11.81) to \$15 over the next 2 years is welcome news for minimum wage earners in the province. However, as this report demonstrates, Saskatchewan’s minimum wage will continue to fall short of meeting many of the basic needs of families in Saskatchewan until it approaches relative parity with the living wage.

This year’s living wage calculation

also demonstrates the positive impact that government investments can have on low-income families. Due to the increase in federal transfers primarily due to the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), the living wage required to meet the basic needs of families in Regina and Saskatoon is less than it otherwise would have been. This is a powerful reminder to employers that a key way they can reduce the payroll costs of the living wage is to advocate for progressive policy changes to increase government benefits to low income earners and enhance public services that improve quality of life for all families.

With files from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives



Healthcare provider unions concerned about new healthcare recruitment crown

The unions representing healthcare providers in Saskatchewan are questioning the creation of the Saskatchewan Healthcare Recruitment Agency.

"This is just another layer of beaurocratic smoke and mirrors. The government is under pressure to do something - but instead of implementing actual programs, they created this crown corportation," said Bashir Jalloh, President of CUPE 5430. "The Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) already has resources and a robust out-of-scope workforce, some of whom are dedicated to workforce planning and human resources. They are funded by and directed by the Ministry of Health. Why do they need another structure to do the job of recruitment and retention?"

This entity is new, but the people assigned as Chair

"It does not appear that healthcare professionals and unions are going to be part of the collaboration."

and Vice-Chair are Tracey Smith, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health, and Andrew Will, CEO of the SHA. This does not seem independent of the parties that should be charged with recruiting and retaining healthcare workers.

"Over the past number of years, our unions have consistently tried to discuss recruitment and retention strategies, but the Government of Saskatchewan didn't listen to us," said Tracey Sauer, SGEU President. "Adding more seats in education programs, increas-

ing compensation, and ensuring vacation time and work-life balance is honoured are ways to add and keep staff. A new agency isn't going to help if we don't address the issues at hand."

Further, this new Crown corporation has in its mandate to do their recruitment and retention work in "collaboration and coordination with provincial and local stakeholders such as local foundations, local health committees, and mu-

nicipal leaders." It does not appear that health care professionals and unions are going to be part of the collaboration."

"Healthcare professionals know how to solve this crisis," said Neil Colmin, SEIU-West Vice-President. "The healthcare provider unions have been calling for recruitment and retention initiatives and have provided ideas for better, more stable staffing, all of which has fallen on deaf ears. Every suggestion in

the past eight years has been rejected."

The provider unions have been calling for more full-time permanent work, education, and certification opportunities in rural communities, representative workforce initiatives, and using the provisions of the collective agreement like market supplements and market adjustments to attract workers.

Poilievre and the Conservatives can't be trusted to stand up for workers: CLC President

With his lengthy anti-worker track record and history of cutting health care, Pierre Poilievre's election as leader of the Conservative Party of Canada is a concern for working families, warned Bea Bruske, President of the Canadian Labour Congress.

"Pierre Poilievre has used populist rhetoric to hide away his real agenda. But his long track record of attacking workers' rights and siding with profitable corporations over everyday people makes clear the kind of leader he would be if he gained power," warned Bruske. "While Mr. Poilievre talks loudly about inflation, he cannot be counted on to push companies to increase workers' pay to keep up with skyrocketing inflation."

Bruske noted that while the evidence clearly shows wages are not contributing to rising inflation, 'greedflation' by large corporations – who are taking advantage of the inflation to raise prices – is helping to drive up the cost of living.

"While workers and their families see their buying power decreasing, Mr. Poilievre ignores the real problem. It is critical people see through his glib rhetoric to what his real plans are for our country," explained Bruske. "All we hear from Mr. Poilievre are vague sound bites about freedom. But he isn't talking about your freedom to make a fair wage or the freedom to make greedy corporations pay their fair share."

Bruske added that Poilievre does have a previous record in government, having served in a Conservative government that cut health care, imposed austerity on everyday people, introduced anti-labour laws and helped rich corporations pay even less in taxes.

"In government, Mr. Poilievre and his Conservative colleagues ignored the warnings of frontline health workers and voted to cut tens of billions from public health care funding. He voted to cut support for unemployed workers and repeatedly attacked workers' rights," concluded Bruske. "Pierre Poilievre cannot be trusted now to repair our broken healthcare system, help struggling families or stand up for workers."

SEPTEMBER 30 NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

***“Children are the great hope of
reconciliation.”***

-Cindy Blackstock

