

■ ■ The Saskatchewan Federation of Labour

LABOUR REPORTER

THE VOICE OF SASKATCHEWAN'S WORKING FAMILIES SINCE 1956



SPRING
2015

• THE FEDERAL ELECTION ISSUE •

SFL president Larry Hubich addresses a rally about defending workers' rights.



RIGHT TO STRIKE PUTS CONSERVATIVES ON NOTICE

“SASKATCHEWAN’S LABOUR MOVEMENT: the folks who brought you the constitutional right to strike!” said Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) president, Larry Hubich, as the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) sided with working families on January 30, 2015.

The SCC ruled, in no uncertain terms, that the SFL was right – the Saskatchewan Party government’s Public Services Essential Services Act (Bill 5) was heavy-handed, unworkable, and violated a Charter-protected right to strike.

“The decision by the Supreme Court to grant every worker in Canada a constitutional right to strike is a profound victory for our movement,” said Hubich, “the Court also delivered a

strong message to conservative governments everywhere: your rigid ideology does not trump workers’ rights,” he added.

The Public Services Essential Services Act (Bill 5) was introduced by the newly-elected Saskatchewan Party government in 2007. As soon as it was introduced, workers, their unions, lawyers, and academics all said the Bill was overreaching, unnecessary, and probably illegal. The Saskatchewan Party, though, continued to only listen to their corporate friends instead of Saskatchewan families. As a result, a long Charter Challenge was launched by the SFL and its affiliates against Bill 5 to protect working families.

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Unions always prefer a negotiated agreement that is good for both sides. Our victory does not change any of that.

— LARRY HUBICH

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Despite the long and expensive court process, workers and their unions were gracious in their victory—extending an invitation to the Saskatchewan Party government to work together.

“We know that a work stoppage is always the last resort, and unions always prefer a negotiated agreement that is good for both sides,” said Hubich, “our victory does not change any of that, and we want to work with the provincial government to develop labour laws that are fair, balanced, and respect the rights of workers,” he added.

However, just a few days after the SCC ruling, Brad Wall floated the option of using the notwithstanding clause so that he and his government could continue violating Charter rights.

“This is a time for reconciliation and leadership, not a time for the premier to stomp his feet and threaten to deny Saskatchewan families their Charter rights,” said Hubich, “workers and their unions continue to offer our cooperation to create good public policy, and we hope the premier will come to the table in good faith,” he added.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

UNIONS ARE POLITICAL

BY KENT PETERSON

SFL STRATEGIC ADVISOR AND LABOUR
REPORTER EDITOR

THE VERY ACT of signing a union card is a political act. When we become a member of a union we signal that we believe in workplace democracy. We signal that we think people deserve fair wages, a good pension, and the right to work in a safe environment – all of which are radically political ideas.

The adversaries of working families – such as corporations and conservative governments – advance the idea that unions ought not be political at all. They say unions have no business talking about gender equity, job security, or tax fairness. It is very easy to see why corporations and conservatives try to frame being political as a bad thing – it threatens their authority and, of course, it threatens their almighty profit. Ultimately, though, the priorities of a union are set by the workers that make up that union. If workers want to take a political stance and stand up to the forces that enable domestic violence, they should do it. If workers want to take a political stance and say they believe in a robust, publically-funded and publically-delivered healthcare system, they should do it. And, more to the point, those workers should not be ashamed of doing those things. Being political is a good thing.

Saskatchewan’s labour movement has always practiced social unionism, and social movement unionism. We concern ourselves with achieving fair wages, good pensions, and job security – of course. However, we look beyond those direct workplace issues and focus on people’s lives outside of work. We build community coalitions, and take up the causes of our allies, and we work towards a better society for everyone – these, too, are fundamentally political acts.

From supporting women’s suffrage to organizing waitresses at the Baltimore Café in Regina in 1918, this Saskatchewan’s labour movement has taken on political issues from the founding of this province in order to build better lives. Sas-



SFL Strategic Advisor Kent Peterson launching Project: Community.

katchewan’s unions have never hesitated to withdraw labour if the result meant better working conditions for all people. One such example occurred in 1920 when the Plumbers, Gas and Steam Fitters union (current-day UA Local 179) went on strike, because they believed people shouldn’t die as a result of going to work. Furthermore, our unions recognized early on the need to force a workers’ agenda in elections. Indeed it was Saskatchewan’s Labour Movement that rallied behind J. S. Woodsworth’s Independent Labour Party in 1929, and partnered with M. J. Coldwell and the farmer-backed Progressive Party to ultimately form the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF).

It was the political activity of workers and their unions that won all of Saskatchewan’s residents many of the rights we enjoy today, as well as a strong social safety net.

These are but a few examples of how unions are inherently political, and how being political is the only path to real change – change that is good for all people. Throughout all of those examples, workers and women and all marginalized groups of people were opposed – and sometimes even murdered – by the forces of the right-wing. The right wing, such as corporate bosses and conservatives, said back then as they say now: unions have no right to talk about issues that affect people outside of workplaces.

Well, unions not only have a right to engage in political activities that build a better province – indeed they have a responsibility to do so.



BUILDING MOMENTUM TO HELP DEFEAT THE HARPER GOVERNMENT

“WE CANNOT GROW as a movement until we defeat Stephen Harper,” said Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) president, Hassan Yussuff, as he kicked-off the first of 17 election preparation conferences to be held across Canada.

The conference, which took place in Saskatoon Jan. 9-10, brought together over 160 participants from all over Saskatchewan. Conference goers ranged in age and experience, but all were compelled to attend the gathering because they want to get to work electing a caring and competent federal government.

“What we’ve seen happen since Stephen Harper was elected as the prime minister is an erosion of accountability, slashing of public services, mismanagement of the economy, and overall a complete lack of respect for working families,” said the CLC’s Prairies Region Director, Alex Furlong.

Workshops at the conference included how to engage young workers, how to build allies locally, how to build diverse campaigns, and several other workshops on communication skills and effective outreach. The skills learned, and the networks built, will be put to good use as the country approaches a federal election. Opportunities for engagement, as well as an overview about why the upcoming federal election is so important, was provided by professors Charles Smith and David McGrane during a panel discussion on the second day of the conference.

“The Harper Government has attacked working families, passed anti-worker laws, ripped funding away from vulnerable groups of people, and generally made a mockery of everything Canada has traditionally stood for,” said Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) president, Larry Hubich, “the SFL was proud to have co-hosted the conference because we need people to not only educate each other on the issues we’re facing, but to actually go out into their federal ridings and work to elect a government that actually cares about people,” he added.



What we’ve seen happen since Stephen Harper was elected as the prime minister is an erosion of accountability, slashing of public services, mismanagement of the economy, and overall a complete lack of respect for working families.

ALEX FURLONG | CLC PRAIRIES REGION DIRECTOR

HEALTHCARE MUST BE

Nurses, like all Canadians, need to recognize how politics and elections impact the care we provide.



LINDA SILAS

BY LINDA SILAS

PRESIDENT,
CANADIAN FEDERATION OF NURSES UNIONS

THE COMING FEDERAL ELECTION will be a close contest having a major impact on the direction our country takes. As a nurse labour leader and president of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, I represent almost 200,000 frontline nurses across Canada.

Nurses, like other Canadians, will be paying special attention to the upcoming federal election. Nursing is a highly demanding job, and we are constantly trying to give our patients the best possible care. Unfortunately, we are finding this increasingly difficult because of federal, provincial and local health care cuts. Nurses, like all Canadians, need to recognize how politics and elections impact the care we provide.

There is a lot at stake, but the CFNU will not presume to tell nurses how they should vote – rather it is our responsibility to inform members that political parties differ in their approach to health care delivery in Canada and how these differences impact our members and their patients.

When Canadians last voted federally, there was still an agreement between federal and provincial governments called the Health Accord. This ten-year deal laid out the levels of financial transfers the federal government would provide the provinces for health care and outlined key priorities. In 2014 that agreement expired, and the Conservative government refused to negotiate a new accord. Instead, they told provinces there would be no future agreement and the federal government would unilaterally de-



cide how much was to be transferred for health care. The provinces have been disturbed by these developments and have stated that the current transfers represent a 36-billion-dollar decrease for provinces over the next 10 years. Already, provincial budgets are over-stretched because of rising health care costs, and the impacts of decreased levels of funding from the

AN ELECTION ISSUE



The federal government clearly has an important role to play in areas like prescription drug access, but in recent years has not made health care a priority. Rather than viewing it as a partnership between the provinces and Ottawa, the Conservative government claims it is solely a provincial responsibility. The CFNU rejects this and believes that without strong federal partnering in health care, Canada will have 13 different health care systems, all of them weaker.

federal government adds to the burden.

Still there is hope and many areas for improvement. Over the last two years, support has been steadily growing for a universal prescription drug program. Already provincial collaboration on purchasing and negotiation for only a handful of drugs is saving about \$315 million per year. The evidence is clear, CFNU research

commissioned by Dr. Marc-Andre Gagnon shows there is over \$11 billion in annual savings that could be reinvested in health care, if federal and provincial governments would commit to universal drug coverage for Canadians. While these vast amounts of savings are being left as profit for the pharmaceutical industry, Canadians are losing out. Federal leadership



for pharmacare would free resources to deal with the impact cutbacks have had on patient safety and access to health care. Improving access for those who need prescription drugs and saving billions in costs represents a win-win for Canadians and a stronger health care system for Canada.

While health care in Canada is a shared federal-provincial responsibility, every day provincial nurses' unions work with provincial governments, sometimes praising and sometimes criticizing. The federal government clearly has an important role to play in areas like prescription drug access, but in recent years has not made health care a priority. Rather than viewing it as a partnership between the provinces and Ottawa, the Conservative government claims it is solely a provincial responsibility. The CFNU rejects this and believes that without strong federal partnering in health care, Canada will have 13 different health care systems, all of them weaker.

During this next federal election it will be important to let all candidates and all parties know that if they ignore health care, Canada's nurses will ignore them when it comes time to mark our ballots.



WHY STEPHEN HARPER IS GOOD FOR THE RICH, **BAD FOR THE REST**



SIMON ENOCH

BY SIMON ENOCH
CCPA SASKATCHEWAN

FOR ALL HIS TALK of “ordinary” Canadians and “average” working families, one must wonder if Stephen Harper knows what an average Canadian even looks like. Because, despite his populist rhetoric, his policies seem to have one unique feature – they almost always disproportionately benefit the wealthiest in our country while simultaneously undermining the economic security of the rest of us.

For instance, the median individual income in Canada during the last census was just shy of \$30,000, while the median family income was \$76,000. Given these numbers and Harper’s penchant for appealing to the Tim Horton’s coffee crowd, you would think his economic policies would be squarely directed at these folks in the middle. But while Harper might talk a good game on serving the interests of average Canadians, his policies leave a lot to be desired.

Take income splitting, which the Conservatives have pitched it as a middle-class “family” tax cut. A C.D. Howe Institute report con-

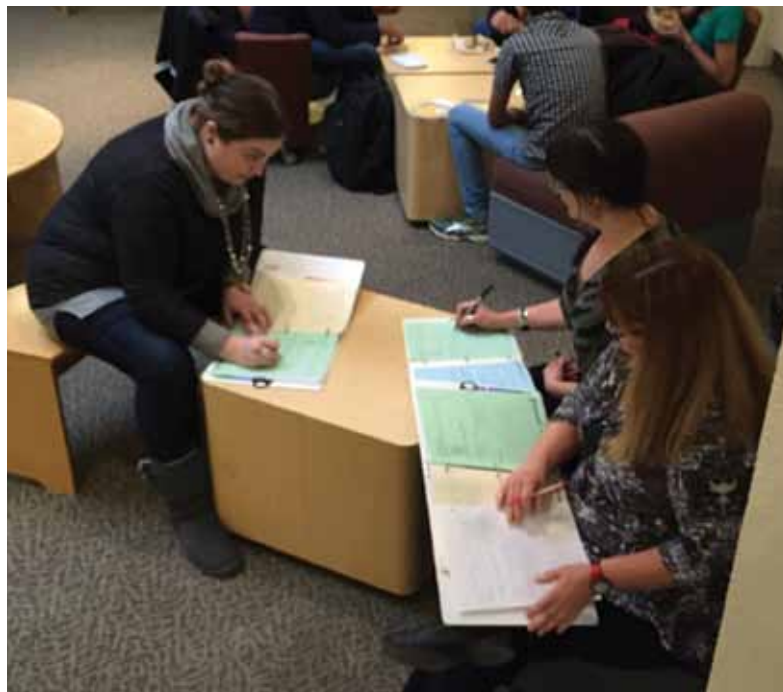
cluded that the benefits of income splitting would go overwhelmingly to upper-income earners. Three-quarters of the benefits would go to families earning more than \$125,000 a year, with the greatest payoff to those making over \$200,000. Virtually nothing would go to the other 85 percent of taxpayers.

What about all those “boutique” tax cuts Harper loves so much? Like the Children’s Fitness Tax Credit? The Caledon Institute concludes that the tax credit “is an unnecessary windfall for the affluent, while still leaving most poor families out in the cold.” Or how about Public Transit tax credit? Surely that must benefit the average Canadian? Well, while the credit is claimed predominantly by average-income Canadians, the size of the tax claim is actually greater for higher-income earners.

Lastly, not only do these tax policies disproportionately benefit the rich, but they also reduce public revenues available for the social programs that actually do benefit ordinary Canadians. To paraphrase U.S. president Obama, Harper’s economic policy really is “Robin Hood in Reverse.”

PROJECT: COMMUNITY CREATES A NETWORK OF ORGANIZERS

TOP: Some Project: Community School participants doing group work to build a thriving social movement. **BOTTOM:** To see a video about Project: Community, visit sfl.sk.ca.



WITH A FEDERAL ELECTION SET for the Fall of 2015, and a provincial election in the Spring of 2016, and then a municipal election after that – there is no shortage of organizing to do. Responding to the need to reach out further and build even more relationships, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) has hired a new community organizer.

Paige Kezima is no stranger to movement-based organizing, and coalition-building. Kezima has been active in Saskatchewan’s and Canada’s student movement, she has been involved in immigration justice issues, and is a vocal advocate for mental health rights and services. She is, no doubt, a powerful and effective organizer.

“My family has always been active with unions and workers’ rights issues, and I am excited to do my part in building a stronger labour movement and a better province, said Kezima, “I hope to use my activist background, my organizing experience, and my education as a social worker to accomplish the goals of Project:

Community,” she added.

The first initiative Kezima was involved with since becoming the SFL’s community organizer was co-facilitating Project: Community Schools across the province. The schools were one-day, hands-on training courses on how to be effective community organizers as well as how to develop leadership and communication skills. Kezima and the SFL’s Strategic Advisor, Kent Peterson, conducted schools in Regina, Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, and Saskatoon. The courses were engaging, well-attended, and an important initial step towards building a Saskatchewan-wide network of trained organizers.

“The courses were a mix of strategic planning, outreach development, and practical training on petitioning and canvassing,” said Kezima, “the participants worked on case studies in small groups and you could really see how the tools we were providing in this classroom setting could easily be used in their communities and in their unions,” she added.

The Project: Community Schools were free to attend, and open to anyone – whether they were from a union or not. As such it allowed for a dynamic and diverse group of people to come together, work on the issues presented, and apply it in the real world. Many of the newly-trained community organizers are now planning their own issue-based petitioning events throughout the province, and coming together as Project: Community’s ‘community teams’.

“Our community teams are a vital aspect of our outreach work, especially as we approach the federal election,” said Kezima, “the community teams are groups of volunteers who do outreach on specific issues, engage people who are traditionally turned-off by electoral politics, and then help build with those people an even larger organizer network,” she added.

If you wish to be part of any training sessions in the future, or canvassing events, or if you wish to join your local community team – please make contact with Kezima through www.projectcommunity.ca.



IN THE 2015 FEDERAL ELECTION, OUR MEMBERS WILL:

“...work in their communities to help elect Canada’s first social democratic federal government. Steelworkers will canvass, make phone calls and engage neighbours and co-workers to make the case that Canada needs a truly progressive NDP government that will put working families first.”

– **STEPHEN HUNT**

WESTERN CANADIAN DIRECTOR, UNITED STEELWORKERS

“...be helping to elect more New Democrats, especially in Saskatchewan. UFCW Canada thinks Canadians deserve better than Stephen Harper’s tired, scandal-plagued regime, and that is why it will be crucial for progressive-minded citizens to come together in the 2015 federal election to defeat the Conservatives. We will be working with our allies to elect a forward-thinking government that is committed to evidence-based policy making and transparency. In 2015, let’s put the Harper era behind us and get the country back on track.”

– **PAUL MEINEMA**

UFCW NATIONAL PRESIDENT

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

March 4-6	CUPE Sask Convention	Regina
March 8	International Women’s Day	
March 21	Int’l Day for Elimination of Racism	
April 26-May 1	SFL/CLC Spring School	Humboldt
April 20-21	Activist Training Conference	S’toon
April 28	International Day of Mourning	
May 1	International Worker’s Day (May Day)	
May 17	Int’l Day Against Homophobia	

LEAVE IT TO HARPER: 5 CONSERVATIVE POLICIES BETTER SUITED FOR THE 1950s

EDITED FOR LENGTH FROM PRESSPROGRESS.CA

1. Child care

The Harper government opposes national child care on the grounds that it’s “a crazy scheme to raise your kids for you.” But if you can’t stay home with your kids, the Conservatives’ enhancements to the Universal Child Care Benefit, which provides \$720 more per year for families with children aged six to 17, won’t help much. In 1951, 17 percent of all mothers with dependent children were employed. Today, 63 percent of mothers with children under six participate in the workforce. Average monthly day care costs (outside of Quebec’s publicly-funded system) range from \$800 (Saskatoon) to \$1,676 (Toronto).

2. Income splitting

The Conservative income-splitting plan — or ‘Family Tax Cut’ — seems to belong in the Leave it to Beaver era. It allows parents with kids under the age of 18 with different incomes to shift up to \$50,000 from a parent in a higher tax bracket to a parent in a lower income bracket (with a \$2,000 cap). Experts argue it is “a tax policy that will encourage one parent, most likely the mother, to stay home and raise their children.” 89.9 percent of Canadian households will not benefit at all from income splitting.

3. Tough on crime

The average annual cost of putting a Canadian behind bars is \$113,000. The Harper’s government’s so-called tough-on-crime agenda has seen incarceration rates increase 17.5 per cent since 2005 even though overall crime rates have been falling for 20 years. Canada is second in the world (the U.S. is first) in the number of offences that get minimum sentences, which legal and policy experts agree “do not have a deterrent or educative effect.”

4. Environmental blinders

For the Harper government, the 1950s would have been a blissful era where the words “climate change,” along with mountains of pesky supporting data, didn’t hang over their heads. No need to spend nine years paying lip service to issues like industry regulations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. And none of those embarrassing international climate change summits for the PM to avoid!

5. I spy with my little eye

The Tories new anti-terror legislation sounds like it would have also fit right in during the 1950s. Canada’s domestic hunt for communists in the early ‘50s saw the RCMP spy on many groups suspected of having communist leanings or progressive opinions. Security checks on civil servants, scientists, university professors and trade unionists were common.



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