

December 20, 2011

**CAW LOCAL UNIONS, NATIONAL EXECUTIVE BOARD, NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUPPORT STAFF, COORDINATORS**

Dear Brothers and Sisters;

The Labour Movement and the Year Ahead

As 2011 draws to a close, we can only shake our heads at the dramatic events of the past year.

Who would have thought that Stephen Harper would win a majority government, based on raising his party's popular vote by just 2 percentage points (2 out of every 100 voters)? And while our union warned for years of the dangers of a Conservative majority, even we were taken aback at the speed and arrogance with which he has now moved to implement his destructive agenda to the fullest. Who would have thought that the NDP would surge to become official opposition -- but then that its charismatic leader would shockingly and tragically pass away? Who would have predicted that the global financial system would continue to lurch from crisis to crisis, now threatened by the spectre of financial panic in Europe? Meanwhile, closer to home, workers face an enormous struggle every single day of the week to protect our jobs, protect our incomes, and pay the bills.

The labour movement is one of the only bulwarks standing in the way of outright domination by Conservatives and the wealthy interests who have backed their drive from the beginning. The challenges we face are obviously greater than ever. But the moral authority of our cause is also as powerful and legitimate as ever.

If there is one development in 2011 that filled us with hope, it was the sudden emergence of the Occupy movement as a strong, youthful voice against injustice. While the actual camps have come down in most cities, the call of the Occupiers to put the interests of the 99% at the top of the agenda still rings out. We will continue working with and supporting this movement as we move forward.

There is no doubt that our labour movement in Canada, and around the world, is at a turning point. Our enemies will not hold back, if they sense an opportunity to destroy the organizational base of unions. Stephen Harper's actions in the last 6 months prove that they will settle for nothing less than the destruction of collective bargaining rights. In that context, we need to step up our resistance, and work continuously to find new and better ways of carrying on the fight.

We have been urging other labour leaders in Canada to recognize the seriousness of the challenge before us, and to begin thinking about how we can effectively step up our efforts it. That means thinking outside of the box to revitalize and unify our labour centrals, find new ways of representing workers (including precarious workers) in the modern economy, find new ways of communicating our message to a skeptical public, and build new sources of organizational power. In that context, we've also had many discussions about how to reorganize labour, consolidating the number of affiliates in the CLC, improving the effectiveness of our representation and other work, and giving us more capacity to stand up to our enemies. The leadership of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union -- a large, strong, and proud Canadian industrial union -- have expressed similar views, and we are continuing to explore with them ways in which our movement can evolve. The ultimate goal is not just a "merger," but something more profound: a positive change in how we organize, communicate, bargain, and mobilize, that recognizes and rises to the challenges we confront. Other unions will be participating in those continuing discussions, too.

Media reports recently exaggerated those very preliminary discussions about the future shape of the Canadian labour movement. We will keep exploring, with CEP and others, how to strengthen our movement, when we need it more than ever. We will keep our locals and staff informed as we move forward. And, of course, any change in our structure will require the approval of our National Executive Board and ultimately our Constitutional Convention.

We would like to thank each and every member of the CAW family -- every member, every local activist and leader, every one of our staff -- for putting your heart and soul into the fight for workers' rights over the past year. Our efforts have made, and continue to make, a difference. And we look forward to working with all of you in 2012 to do an even better job on behalf of workers, communities, and our planet.

So, let us conclude by wishing each of you a safe, enjoyable, and festive holiday season.

In solidarity



Ken Lewenza  
National President



Peter Kennedy  
National Secretary-Treasurer



Jean-Pierre Fortin  
Quebec Director