



"MAKING THE CONNECTION"

MAKE E.I. WORK FOR WORKERS

The Canadian Labour Congress and their affiliates are currently involved in an *Economic Crisis Campaign*. CUPE, being one of those affiliates, is strong supporting this. The campaign is being kicked off with two rallies focused on E.I. Reform – one in Hamilton and one in Belleville on Saturday, March 21, 2009. The **Belleville rally** will be from **noon to 1 pm** at **Conservative MP Daryl Kramp's constituency office** at 1 Millenium Parkway (north of 401 & Home Depot).

Canada, and the rest of the world, is now in a serious economic downturn and recession. This recession is expected to last at least a year. Along with layoffs and job losses in southern Ontario such as GM in Oshawa, Chrysler in Windsor, the Quinte area has had many of their own losses, for example Autosystems, Hall, Food Basics in Belleville, Quaker Oats in Trenton, etc. I'm sure you know someone who is being affected by long term or permanent layoffs.

Ontario unemployment rates have been steadily increasing over the last year from 6.3% in January '08 to 8% in Jan '09. This is a 27% in 12 months or the same as one in every 12 workers. Currently there are more than 570,000 unemployed workers in Ontario right now.

The Harper conservatives January 2009 budget tweaked E.I., providing an addition of five weeks of benefits but did nothing to solve the structural E.I. issues that would help workers and their families. It falls drastically short of any real need, as the governments own figures don't anticipate the unemployment rate going down until 2011.

In the Quinte region, a **first time applicant to E.I. will need 910 hours to qualify**. For many workers, particularly women, who are part-time and temporary, this will be difficult to achieve, even more so if companies have been reducing their hours over the past 52 weeks. Today, only about 38% of unemployed workers receive EI benefits compared to 75% who qualified prior to the cutbacks of the '90s.

The length of the benefit period is roughly half what it was 15 years ago. The **maximum benefit period is currently 38 weeks**. How is that going to help families get through the theoretical max of 50 weeks that is being predicted for the recession?

The **existing level of benefits paid is inadequate** to support families and children. In 1996, the max benefit, according to the CLC, was \$604 of today's dollars. Today's maximum is only \$447, and the average benefit is just \$335 per week.

CUPE members at Air Canada who were laid off November 1, 2008 still have not received EI benefits due to the lag time in the program. These members are fighting EI on a case by case basis, and the process is very slow; some members are being denied outright and will not receive any benefit at all.

The impacts of all of these layoffs will hurt everyone, both public and private sector, by reducing our ability to pay mortgages or provide food and quality education for our families and by reducing taxable earnings placing increased pressure our hospitals, schools and municipalities to provide essential services.

Locally, the impact is already having a strong affect on our area. Workers at the local food banks, and other emergency service agencies are struggling to deal with clients who are making their frustrations and anger known.

How long it takes to recover from this recession will depend very much on what federal and provincial governments do in terms of their economic policies. The federal government needs to make changes. They need to protect the interests of Canadian families. The EI system needs major investment of dollars and energy to help unemployed workers, their families, and their communities weather this recession.

As CUPE members, it is important we participate, and the best way to do that is to bring out our members in support at the rallies. **We need your participation to make this a success.** If you have any *flags or noisemakers* bring them with you.

We are also circulating a **petition** on these E.I. issues. Please get members to sign and fax back as many completed sheets as possible to 613-962-4618 by Friday, March 20th so we can let the press know on Saturday approximately how many signatures we have. We will be continuing to collect the petitions until Friday, March 27th after which we will be making a follow up visit to MP Kramp to voice our concerns.

For more information contact:

Donna Howes, CUPE Local 1022 at 613-966-0108 or email at sister.donna@cupe1022.ca or contact Bob Cottrell, Quinte Labour Council, at 613-967-3666.

