



**Manitoba Federation of Labour**

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**Annual Brief to  
Cabinet**

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**December 3, 2007  
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

## **Introduction**

The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is our provinces largest central labour body, representing the interests of more than 35 national and international trade unions which are affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). Our affiliated unions, in turn, represent more than 95 thousand working men and women in the public and private sectors; in the construction sector, in the manufacturing, service, resources, tourism, information and transportation sectors. Our mandate is to develop consensus among our affiliates and speak on their behalf on many areas of mutual interest, some of which are referenced in this presentation.

The topics addressed here are not a comprehensive summary of the issues we have concerns about at this time. Should a particular issue not be referenced here, it should not be construed as disinterest on our part – it is simply a conversation for another day in another forum.

## **Labour Legislation**

The Manitoba Federation of Labour congratulates you on the many progressive amendments to labour law made by the government since 1999. In particular, we'd reference positive amendments made to the Manitoba Labour Relations Act, Workplace Safety and Health Act, the Workers' Compensation Act, The Employment Standards Code and the Pension Benefits Act.

However, there is more work to be done to improve the condition of working people, their families and their communities here.

## **Manitoba Labour Relations Act**

The Manitoba Labour Relations Act (MLRA) is a piece of legislation that should be under constant review to make sure it evolves to keep pace with the rapidly changing labour relations environment. One aspect of the MLRA that is out or step with much of the rest of the country is the threshold for automatic certification based on signed union cards.

At one time, the Manitoba threshold was 55% of the potential bargaining unit's membership. In the early '90's, the Conservatives copied right-to-work style legislation from other jurisdictions, such as Mike Harris' Ontario Conservative government and Ralph Klein's Alberta Conservative government, and did away with automatic certifications, no matter how many workers in the potential bargaining unit indicated their wish for a union by signing union cards, among other regressive measures.

Upon election in 1999, the current government reviewed the MLRA with the aim in mind of undoing the worst of the excesses that working families suffered under their predecessors. Many measures enacted by the Filmon Conservatives were repealed, including mandatory votes attached to every union application for certification as bargaining agent. But, strangely, the automatic certification threshold was set at 65% of the potential members – not the long-standing Manitoba measure of 55%. It remains at 65% to this day, the highest threshold among jurisdictions that practice automatic certification. The most recent survey of jurisdictions on this matter (January 2006) shows that Canada, Prince Edward Island, Quebec and Saskatchewan all grant automatic certification if more than 50% of the potential members sign union cards. The New Brunswick Board may grant certification at 50% and must if more than 60% of members sign cards. Remaining jurisdictions require a certification vote be held with no regard to the number of union cards signed - in essence, forcing workers to vote twice, once when they sign a union card and again upon application. The second vote opens the door for terrific “unofficial” pressure from employers on workers to vote against the certification.

We ask that the automatic certification level in Manitoba be set at 50%, plus one vote to base the certification process on truly democratic values. There are few instances where an expression of democratic choice in Canada requires more than a simple majority to be carried. Voting to join a union should not be one of them.

Another area of long standing concern is the ability of the Manitoba Labour Board to deliver on its mandate in a timely fashion. The Board is comprised of individuals who are dedicated to making sure that labour relations in Manitoba unfold in a manner

consistent with the Act and the aims and objectives outlined in the MLRA preamble. The difficulty is a chronic lack of resources means that the Board cannot always complete its tasks in a timely manner. We ask that government provide sufficient resources to the Manitoba Labour Board, and other government funded entities, to enable them to carry out their important work.

### **Essential Services Act**

We believe that it is past time to take action on the Manitoba Essential Services Act. As we've pointed out in past meetings, we believe the Act is fundamentally unfair to public sector employees. One of the basic elements of a free and fair collective bargaining system is the ability of workers to choose to withdraw their services, or not, when the question is put to them. When the ability to take effective strike action is no longer possible, then there is no real right to strike.

In its present form, the Essential Services Act denies public sector workers the ability to take effective strike action by allowing employers to declare, in some cases, all workers as "essential" during a labour dispute. The result is a denial of a genuine collective bargaining relationship in the workplace, with employers put in the position where they can dictate rather than negotiate.

The Essential Services Act was trumped up and put in place by an anti-worker government for no other reason than to weaken and render powerless public sector workers and their unions, and to further the process of weakening all unions in the province. It replaced voluntary, mutually agreed to essential services agreements negotiated in the health care sector that worked well during disputes. These agreements recognized the need for a certain level of services during a dispute, but still recognized and preserved workers rights.

We urge the province to consult with public sector workers and their unions and either repeal the Act or at the very least identify amendments that will make it respectful of workers' rights.

One possibility is to require the parties currently covered by the Essential Services Act to negotiate an essential services agreement (ESA) and file it with the Manitoba Labour Board. Failure by the parties to agree on an ESA could be resolved in a manner similar to the Alternative Dispute Resolution process, or perhaps using the First Contract model.

### **Civil Service Superannuation Board Pension Fund Joint Trusteeship**

Members of the Civil Service Superannuation Board Pension Fund (CSSB) have been waiting patiently for nearly eight years for the government to follow through on its commitment to establish true Joint Trusteeship of the Fund. In 2000, the Minister of Finance even went so far as to sign a memorandum committing his government to “develop a plan which would implement joint trusteeship arrangements at the earliest possible date.”

Joint Trusteeship would establish a Board of Trustees with equal representation from both employees and the employer. Basic fairness dictates that the individuals who contribute to the plan, the Fund members, should have greater representation than they currently enjoy. Many other public sector pension plans including the City of Winnipeg, hospital workers in Manitoba, and public employees in British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario use this model. Manitoba workers should have a similar voice and help determine improvements to the pension benefits they have worked for.

We urge the Provincial Government to follow through on their promise to enact the necessary Joint Trusteeship legislation at the earliest possible time.

### **Employment Standards Code**

The MFL is pleased that the government has given clear indication that it intends to include paid agricultural workers under the provisions of the Employment Standards Code. This is consistent with the MFL’s position that all agricultural workers should be covered by all provisions of the Employment Standards Code, including the minimum wage level.

## **Minimum Wage**

The Manitoba Federation of Labour is pleased that the government has announced an increase of fifty cents per hour to the Minimum Wage, effective in the spring of 2008. We commend your dedication to regularly improving the income of low-wage earners in the Province.

When the increase goes into effect on April 1, 2008 – Manitoba will have the second highest minimum wage in the country for one month. On May 1, 2008 Saskatchewan's minimum wage will increase to \$8.60 per hour and \$9.25 per hour a year later, if the newly elected Saskatchewan Party leaves the increase schedule intact. Ontario is on track to increase its minimum wage in stages to \$10.25 per hour by March 31, 2010.

But the fact is low income earners will still be earning too little in Manitoba, even after the increase goes into effect next April. Organized labour, anti-poverty groups and much of the progressive community across the country are all committed to promoting sixty percent of the average weekly wage as the appropriate level for a minimum wage. Were that in place today, the Manitoba minimum wage would be \$10.61 per hour, based on the August, 2007 average weekly wage.

We urge the government to adopt this strategy and maintain it through automatic annual increases to ensure that the minimum wage remains equal to 60% of the average weekly wage.

## **Construction Industry Wages Act (CIWA)**

The CIWA was enacted in its current form in 1964. It was meant to do two things. One, provide fair wages and working conditions for employees in the construction industry. Two, it was to create a level playing field for employers by ensuring that all employers can submit tenders for construction projects based on relatively uniform wages and hours of work.

The MFL is pleased to note that since our last meeting, the Construction Industry Wages Consultation Panel has presented a number of recommendations for action to government. In its report, the panel observed “the need to develop, recruit and retain skilled tradespersons for projects such as the expansion of the Floodway, the development of Manitoba Hydro’s new head office in Winnipeg, and the contemplated development of major Hydro projects in northern Manitoba, confirms the need to update and rationalize the Wages Schedules in order to establish an objective and common set of province-wide standards.

In January 2006, the panel – made up of management and worker representatives – unanimously recommended that government continue to work toward reforming the CIWA by adopting a province wide minimum wage schedule. The Report indicated that “the Panel recognizes that wage rates negotiated through free collective bargaining in the unionized sector is one of the most relevant indicators to be used when determining the ‘prevailing’ rate for a trade”.

The MFL urges the government to act quickly on the Panel’s recommendations for reforming the CIWA.

### **Apprenticeship Futures Commission**

The MFL commends the government for taking action on Apprenticeship Training by establishing a short term goal of increasing the number of apprentices in Manitoba by at least 4000 over the next half decade. Part and parcel of this objective is the need for government to devote the necessary resources to create the infrastructure - such as adequate numbers of staff, equipment and the construction of classroom space – to enable the post-secondary education system to meet this challenge.

Another important step to further skills training was to establish the Apprenticeship Futures Commission. The Commission will complete the public and targeted consultation portion of its review this week.

The MFL makes the following recommendations:

- Put in place an aggressive multi-media campaign to promote skill trades as a way to make a valuable contribution to society and our economy. This campaign must educate parents, teachers, guidance counsellors and young people that a skilled trades career is not a “poor second choice” to a university degree track following high school graduation.
- Address the single greatest bottleneck in the apprenticeship training system – the unwillingness of many employers to become involved and to hire apprentices. Our apprenticeship and training practitioners are unanimous in the analysis that many more employers must become involved, or expand their level of commitment if they are already involved in apprenticeship training. One of the major barriers to increasing employer involvement is the reluctance to spend money on training if other employers try to circumvent similar expenditures by simply “poaching” their trained staff. Other jurisdictions have addressed this by instituting a “Levy and Grant” system. All appropriate employers pay a training levy, and those employers who undertake training programs receive this levy cost back in the form of a grant. This spreads the cost of training over all employers who hire trained workers, doing away with employer “free-loading”. It also removes a major barrier to employers taking on training programs and facilitating the government plan to increase apprenticeship training spaces.
- The Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Board and the Provincial Trade Advisory Committees (PTAC) should be made up primarily of journeyed ticket holders from the skilled Trades, with representation from the ranks of apprentices. These representatives should be appointed by their democratically structured organizations. The Board and PTAC’s should be dominated by worker representatives to keep the system focused on the needs and welfare of working people – the apprentices and journeyed ticket holders.
- It is important that the Apprenticeship and Training Board and Branch be recognized as key stakeholders when other government departments collaborate in the development of an industrial or larger economic strategy. It is essential that

workforce needs are part of the outset of the planning process to avoid, as much as possible, future skilled labour shortages.

- The numbers and types of designated apprenticeable trades need to be increased to reflect today's economy and workplaces. Work processes and areas of specialization are in a continuous state of evolution, more so now than at any time in the past. As many of these new work processes as possible should be designated as apprenticeable trades to ensure that workers skills evolve and develop in lock-step with need.
- MFL strongly urges that none of the trades qualifications regimes be watered down. Journeyed workers should have a qualification certificate that shows employers and consumers alike that these certified workers are able to meet high standards in all facets of their trade. Partial certifications are only another way to describe the de-skilling of the workforce. It harms the workers involved and serves only to decrease employer training, wage and benefit costs. It limits the ability of workers to be employed by other employers or to find work in other jurisdictions. It makes the recruitment and retention of qualified workers even more difficult.
- There is growing pressure to speed up the process of educating and certifying journeyed workers by reducing the time and standards required to complete apprenticeship levels. Our apprenticeship and training practitioners are unanimous in recommending against any reductions. The current mix of workplace and classroom training for apprentices works well – classroom training delivers the theory and workplace experience makes it stick. This is the process that results in highly skilled journeyed ticket holders and should not be short-circuited on the altar of short-term expediency. In fact, some practitioners report to us that recent evolutions in some trades may need more time and training to maintain adequate training standards.
- The Manitoba Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress are committed to the use of the public post-secondary education system, through Community Colleges and other public institutions, for the primary delivery of apprenticeship training programs. We believe this is the most long term cost-

effective way to delivery high quality training that is unencumbered by other, non-training agendas.

### **Aboriginal Work Force**

A major component of Manitoba's workforce growth in the future will be drawn from the ranks of Aboriginal workers. That is why it is essential that a strategy be developed to ensure that adequate employment and training needs among Aboriginal workers will be met. The government has begun this process by building in aboriginal worker hiring targets and training opportunities when letting and awarding major capital construction contracts. But the challenge needs more effort. Programs focusing on Aboriginal students, their families, communities and educators that will lead to a smooth transition from education and training to the workplace need to be put in place.

### **Workers' Compensation Act**

The reform momentum that we enjoyed following the review of the Manitoba's Workers' Compensation Act, and the subsequent amendments to the Act, seems to have slowed down.

Expansion of coverage was to have occurred in three phases. Phase one, the least contentious expansion, was accomplished with little controversy. But to be honest, we had anticipated that the Phase Two expansion would have occurred by now and preparations for the Phase Three expansion would be in place.

Here's what the MFL had to say on Phases Two and Three of the expansion of WCB coverage three years ago:

**Workers in farming and other farm related activities, including family farms, that have employment relationships with full or part time workers.**

This industry has become a source of high worker injury and illness. This is due in large part to the nature of the work and the high level of hazard in such a complex operation which involves the use of chemicals, machinery and physical exertion that rivals any industrial workplace in Canada.

Many efforts have been made by the Department of Labour and Immigration to reduce the death toll and injury rates in the agricultural industry which have accounted for one half of all injuries and fatalities in Manitoba. Further efforts will need to be made once they have become part of the Workers Compensation Prevention mandate and resources.

Many employers in agribusiness and farming operations face liabilities that may well cost them their entire operation and livelihood after litigation by an injured employee. The yardstick we envision for identifying who should be under mandatory coverage on the family farm or employed in agribusiness is those who have income that is reported to Customs and Revenue Canada. Efforts will have to be made through Employer Services to streamline the process of participation so that the individual farmer/owner will not have additional administrative workloads.

**Employers in low risk industries that have limited or no protection for their workers through some other insurance scheme.** Many workplaces that are characterized as “low risk” have been known to cause illness through exposure to cleaning chemicals, poor ventilation and mould. Many have had minor injuries from equipment malfunction or maintenance that resulted in medical and health related costs paid from the Manitoba health care budget. Some have experienced problems and injuries related to exposure to members of the public who are ill and contagious, such as the staff of doctors, dentists and other professionals’ offices. No workplace is secure from an unforeseen catastrophic event that may result in multiple injuries and deaths.

The most notorious group of uncovered workers in Manitoba is, by far, School Division staff. This group is a mixture of covered and uncovered workers, as some School Divisions have voluntarily purchased Workers Compensation coverage for their non-teaching staff such as custodial workers, mechanics, secretaries and paraprofessionals to take advantage of the litigation protection afforded by Compensation. What is most galling for workers is that teachers have been forced to purchase their own coverage, a situation not envisioned by the crafters of Workers Compensation, to ensure that their number one job hazard, stress, would be compensated.

This last group of workers must be covered and employers should not be allowed to beg off inclusion unless they can show that they have equivalent protection for the well being and income of their employees. No worker should be required to pay for their own protection while working in Manitoba. Employers should be and must be accountable for all costs associated with an unsafe workplace that causes injury or illness to a worker.

The MFL urges the government to proceed with Phase Two and Three of the expansion of WCB coverage without further delay.

### **Government Policy**

#### **Election Financing**

In 2000, the government enacted legislation to govern political fundraising in Manitoba – it had four major elements:

- Limiting political contributions to individuals resident in Manitoba only,
- Establishing a ceiling on the amount individuals can contribute,
- Limits on third party spending, and
- Tightly regulating expenditures both between and during election campaigns.

Since then, the MFL has lobbied hard for legislation creating a public financing model for political parties as a companion piece to the legislation referenced above. This is certainly not groundbreaking legislation in Canada, as is evidenced by the federal legislation dealing with this matter.

We urge the government to proceed with this legislation to ensure that the political and electoral process in Manitoba is healthy and functional.

#### **Public Private Partnerships**

The MFL is deeply concerned about the increasing frequency that Public Private Partnerships are being promoted as a way to reduce public costs for capital projects. So called P3's are bad public policy and are opposed by organized labour and a growing

segment of the general population across the country. There is no shortage of analysis produced by organized labour in Canada that details the pitfalls related to P3's and how the work against the public good.

It is interesting to note that similar analysis and warnings were made public by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in September of this year. Their report is based in part on a research paper called *Public-Private Partnerships and Municipalities: Beyond Principles, a Brief Overview of Practices*, by Université de Montréal professor Pierre J. Hamel. Some of his conclusions include:

- There is no evidence to suggest that P3s consistently cost less or provide better services than traditional public projects.
- P3s do not offer municipalities a magic solution to the problem of securing additional funds for infrastructure. Only significant, sustained public investment will meet our infrastructure needs.
- P3s give the responsibility for financing projects to the private sector, even though traditional municipal financing is simple, relatively easy, and less costly than private-sector financing.
- P3s are normally used for the construction of new projects, which tend to be more attractive to potential private-sector investors. As a result, they do little to solve the more pressing problem of funding repairs and maintenance of existing infrastructure.

Hamel's report also notes that municipalities that rely on P3s can lose the ability to ever go back, and that use of P3s can render a municipal government less flexible, less transparent and less accountable.

A year ago, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba Bureau outlined some of the experiences we've had with P3's. The City of Winnipeg has been relentless in its program to drive down the business share of investments in our communities through taxes. At the same time, fees such as water and sewer rates are on the increase to cover legitimate costs. Winnipeg is simply shifting the responsibility for paying needed taxes

from business to individuals. The upshot is, it is easier to sell the idea of P3's to municipal rate payers. Business has added the contracting out of municipal services, selling off city assets and P3's to its shopping list, right after even more business tax cuts.

CCPA Manitoba details how this has worked out so far:

Residential garbage collection in Winnipeg has been contracted out to large US-based corporations, Waste Management Inc. and BFI Canada. Starting with about half of the city's home collection in 1998, by 2005 collection for the whole city was contracted out. The Mayor justified this on the grounds that it would generate \$3 million annual savings for the same level and quality of services. The promised savings are now less than \$700,000 a year and falling, and there is growing dissatisfaction with the quality of the collection service...

...The Charleswood Bridge, a public-private partnership approved in 1995, also shows how much this approach can increase costs. Built and owned by DBF Ltd., the bridge is leased to the City of Winnipeg for about \$1 million a year. In 30 years, when the city gets ownership of the bridge, it will have paid out about \$32 million. That cost is much more (almost 30 percent) than if the city had built the bridge and financed it itself - \$10 million to build and \$15 million to finance.

The ill-considered trade policies entered into by successive federal governments turn this form of privatization into a one way street. That is why it is key that the provincial government do what it can to stem the tide of bad public policies such as P3's. We recommend that this government explore measures that can be effective in discouraging municipalities from entering into these agreements with the private sector. Part of this strategy should include a public education campaign to point out to Manitobans why privatization and P3's should be avoided.

### **Referendum Legislation**

The MFL believes the government did the right thing by enacting referendum legislation that requires a province wide vote before any move can be made to sell off Manitoba Hydro or the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation. Such a law would have undoubtedly prevented the Conservatives from offering up the Manitoba Telephone System at fire-sale prices, and a valuable crown corporation would still be owned by the people of Manitoba.

This measure should be expanded to cover all crown corporations, crown agencies and Special Operating Agencies, including those under municipal control.

## **Social Policy**

### **Violence Against Women**

The ongoing crisis of violence against women continues to plague society. It is particularly cruel among Aboriginal women. In September, the MFL endorsed growing demands that government take immediate action by establishing an investigative body, a Task Force, to investigate the crisis and to outline specific action with clearly defined expectations and timelines. We recommend that action be taken on this issue as soon as possible.

### **Child Care System**

It is obvious that even the Conservatives believe that their ham-handed approach to a National Child Care strategy is a complete failure. The MFL commends the provincial government for committing financial resources in Manitoba to do what it can to provide child care and early childhood education services to our communities and families and help fill the public policy void left by the Conservatives. We recommend that more be done to ensure that there are an adequate number of quality and affordable childcare spaces in order to provide safe havens for the children of working families and to facilitate the delivery of effective early childhood education by qualified and fairly paid workers.

We also want to flag for you the appearance of a major private for-profit child care company in Canada. An Australian-based company called ABC Learning Centres has appeared in a number of provinces and child care advocates across Canada fear the company presence will result in higher fees and lower quality.

Child care in Australia underwent a transformation after ABC began to acquire centres there, including higher fees for parents, rising public subsidies, questionable quality and a switch to more for-profit daycare at the expense of community-based centres.

Companies controlled by ABC are setting up in Ontario, Alberta and B.C. The company fronting the Canadian expansion is 123 Busy Beavers.

In Australia, before ABC Learning Centres appeared in 1988, a little more than one-quarter of that country's 4,500 daycares were for-profit. That ratio has flipped with almost three quarters of the daycares now private, for-profit centres. ABC is the largest chain.

Parent fees at daycares have risen 123 per cent while household income has only increased by 62 per cent, according to an Australian task force report.

To help compensate for those rising fees, government spending on child care subsidies have skyrocketed.

Australian news reports say about 40 per cent of ABC's revenue comes from government subsidies.

At the same time, some observers say quality child care has fallen.

Recent purchases in the U.S. and U.K. have made the ABC empire the largest in the world, controlling about 2,400 daycares with a value of more than \$2.5 billion.

This style of exploitation has no place in Manitoba, and we urge that measures be taken to discourage companies like ABC from attempting to set up here and drain our scant child care resources.

### **Safe Workers of Tomorrow**

The Safe Workers of Tomorrow (SWOT) project has proven to be a valuable asset for Manitoba by creating awareness among young people about workplace safety hazards. It educates young people before or during their initial entry into the workplace about their Health and Safety Rights and how to keep personal safety front and centre. When a young worker is injured, the repercussions can be substantial. The cost to society related to an injury to a young worker could include loss of potential lifetime earnings, loss of potential societal contribution (i.e. a young worker whose arm is severed in a construction injury may have gone on to be a great surgeon), medical expenses (including rehabilitation and counselling), tangible and intangible cost to family and community.

By the end of the last school year, SWOT volunteer speakers had reached nearly 100,000 Manitoba high school students, since 1997. The students are exposed to information that helps them with hazard recognition and prevention, in working with chemicals, using personal protective equipment and giving them an overview of worker rights and responsibilities.

But funding for the group remains unstable creating a year to year state of crisis. The MFL is firm in its conviction that secure funding must be put in place to sustain its activities and to provide for future growth to meet the demonstrable needs for its services. In our view, dedicated annual funding for Safe Workers of Tomorrow should come from the Workplace Safety and Health Division and from the Workers' Compensation Board. In addition to employers, both of these entities directly benefit from the work done by the Safe Workers of Tomorrow and the reduced young person accident rate that surely results and it is only fair that they fund the Project's operation.

### **Economic Policy**

#### **Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement**

Organized labour in Canada is united against the spread and implementation of the Trade Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement. TILMA reduces restrictions on businesses, such as calling for the recognition of one set of labour standards in both provinces and not requiring a company registered in one province to reregister in the other. The deal follows the Agreement on Internal Trade, signed by Canada's provincial premiers in 1994.

Promoted as the way to reduce barriers to inter-provincial trade, TILMA does far more than that. It severely constrains the capacity of provincial governments, municipalities and school boards to act in the public interest.

These so called barriers are, in fact, nothing more than regulatory differences between the provinces – differences that address realities specific to the enacting province. There is

no substantial evidence that these differences constrain trade to any great degree. In fact, the 1985 Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada found that inter-provincial trade barriers, to the degree that they exist, cost no more than .05% of the Gross Domestic product, less than a billion dollars in today's economy. Even that figure was greatly reduced by the 1994 Agreement on Internal Trade – if not to zero, then nearly so. Why treat low-cost regulatory differences as “trade barriers” with an onerous dispute resolution system?

TILMA's dispute-settlement process opens the door to allow private interests to sue provincial governments, municipalities and school boards for up to \$5 million over alleged violations. How will the dispute-settlement panels, which meet behind closed doors, interpret the agreement's extremely broad language? It is not hard to imagine how TILMA will have a chilling effect on provincial regulators who will fear being sued. In fact, almost everything government does faces the threat of being challenged under the agreement's broad and general language.

Instead of TILMA, we support identifying the few inter-provincial frictions that still exist and work on reducing or eliminating them.

### **Security and Prosperity Partnership**

One of the worst kept secrets in North America is the fact that there are ongoing efforts to negotiate and sign the Security and Prosperity Partnership between Canada, the United States and Mexico. One of the best kept secrets is what's being agreed to on our behalf.

So far, the only people being consulted by the politicians are business leaders – not members of the public, not worker representatives, not anti-poverty activists, not social justice representatives of any sort.

Important decisions are being made, within the defence framework established by the United States.

Since the tragedy of 9-11, defence considerations have been used to clothe many aspects of our lives, including no-fly lists, arbitrary arrests with the blessing of the CSIS and the RCMP and torture. What better time for powerful economic investors than now to cloak efforts to further economic integration between the three countries with the mantle of genuine security concerns?

Organizations such as the C.D. Howe Institute and the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (the most recent incarnation of the Business Council on National Interests) have made repeated calls for a “strategic bargain” to ensure Canada’s access to the US market. The last time we were sold that particular bill of goods, it didn’t achieve that objective. The FTA and NAFTA did not head off more than a decade of trade harassments and barriers by trade interests in the US. The “strategic bargain”, would turn the US-Canada border into nothing more than a check-point and create a North American perimeter to ensure our security.

The SPP is a major policy initiative that concentrates power in the executive level of North American governments. Government leaders are seeking advice directly from corporate executives which will then be used to direct the working groups in the bureaucracy of the three countries. No law will be changed, so neither Parliament, the House of Representatives nor the Camará de Diputados will be consulted. No treaty will be signed, so the agreements that are made will not be scrutinized in a democratic manner.

While we aren’t sure of the detail of what is being agreed to, we have a pretty good idea about what SPP will not be focused on. Analysis from the Canadian Labour Congress makes that clear:

*It does not address poverty in North America. It does not address joblessness, or pay equity. It does not provide a response to deindustrialization or worsening trade deficits in manufactured goods. It does not address growing economic inequality or climate change.*

*The Security and Prosperity Partnership does not commit itself to fight institutional racism. It is not concerned with income security for retired workers or the educational needs of children across the continent.*

*The SPP does not tackle access to public health care or respect for labour rights. The SPP does not encompass electoral reform, nor does it contemplate access to quality child care. In the SPP view of the state “social provision” and “welfare” are completely absent.*

The MFL asks the government to use whatever persuasive tactics it can to convince the federal government to make SPP negotiations transparent and to consult Canadians and our elected representatives on what is discussed and what is agreed to.

## **Conclusion**

The Manitoba Federation of Labour Executive Council members present today thank you for giving us the opportunity to raise and discuss these issues with you. We are committed to acting in concert with our government to achieve these goals when asked to.