



Manitoba Federation of Labour

Annual Brief to Cabinet

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Introduction

The Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) is pleased to present the Government of Manitoba with its 2008 Annual Brief to Cabinet. This continues a tradition that stretches back for more than four decades. This document touches on a few of the current issues that are regarded as highly important by our affiliates and their members. The absence of any particular issue in this paper should not be construed as a lack of interest by the labour movement. It simply means there are other opportunities for those discussions.

Economic Challenges

We are living in a time that is fraught with uncertainty and trepidation that has been brought on, in large part, by the excesses of the major players in the financial markets and the widespread unwillingness of conservative governments to regulate them in the interests of their citizens.

Many Manitobans are deeply concerned about the possibility of losing their jobs, their pensions and their savings. They look to all three senior levels of government to take immediate action to do whatever is possible to address the issues that make up this crisis.

Recently, the Canadian Labour Congress issued an analysis of the economic crisis and proposed some short and long term strategies to deal with it. We'd like to share a summary of that analysis:

Global capitalism: on the edge of the abyss

Dramatic recent events have thrown into sharp relief some chronic and long-standing problems of our global and national economic system: an over-developed financial sector which has fuelled rampant speculation rather than productive, job-creating investments in the real economy; huge returns for senior executives and corporate insiders while the wages and the incomes of working families have stagnated; rising household debt instead of a fair sharing of productivity gains with workers; over-reliance on the export of raw resources; a deep crisis in our manufacturing and forest industries; and massive global financial imbalances driven by unbalanced and unfair trade.

Even heads of government of the largest advanced industrial countries are now saying that the age of deregulated “neo-liberal” global capitalism is over. Financial collapse has led not just to the discrediting of an ideology, but also to a major reassertion of the role of governments in maintaining systemic financial stability. What remains to be seen as we await emergency international meetings is how far the re-regulation of finance will go, and how much more profound will be the needed reassertion of the role of governments.

Toward solutions: A co-ordinated international response

Future financial crises will be avoided only by strengthening government regulation of the banks and other financial institutions, and by extending the scope of government regulation to include hedge funds and private equity groups. Leverage (the use of borrowed funds) must be both limited and closely monitored by regulators to reduce excessive risk-taking and to forestall future asset bubbles. Calls for self-regulation must be rejected. There must be regulation of credit rating agencies to prevent conflicts of interest.

An international framework is needed since re-regulation at the national level would soon be undermined by capital moving to the least onerous locations.

Governments should be encouraged to restrict or ban capital flight to locations which do not agree to abide by a new set of rules.

Governments must follow up with further concerted cuts to interest rates.

A small transactions tax should be levied on all securities trading, including the trading of commodity futures, to discourage short-term speculation in financial assets and to raise government revenues.

We also need a co-ordinated fiscal stimulus. Those countries, including Canada, which have no or very low deficits and paid down government debt should do the most.

China and other countries running large trade surpluses must expand demand at home by increasing public investment and by allowing free trade unions to grow

and function, while helping shore up the global financial system so that the U.S. can grow its way out of a recession through higher exports.

Financial Re-Regulation and Action at Home

More government assistance to the Canadian banks should be given only in return for an equity position, with a view to increasing the power of the federal government to regulate and supervise the banks on an ongoing basis through an internal, ownership-based window on the industry.

While it is claimed that the large Canadian banks are strong and well capitalized, this should be confirmed through a thorough audit.

As needed, the federal government must be prepared to guarantee operating lines of credit to viable companies which cannot obtain credit from the banks. Consideration should be given to creating a public investment fund which would take equity positions in companies seeking funds for long term investments.

Moving forward, the Bank of Canada should be given the power to impose asset-backed reserve requirements on the banks and near bank lending institutions so as to slow the growth of asset bubbles in areas such as housing, commercial real estate, and equities without raising overall interest rates.

It is a myth that Canada has not experienced a housing bubble. CMHC must be given access to government guaranteed funds to be drawn upon as needed to refinance distressed mortgages at lower rates in return for a partial equity stake so as to forestall any wave of foreclosures.

In addition to reviews by the Competition Bureau, all major corporate mergers and acquisitions, including leveraged buyouts and private equity purchases, should require government approval, preceded by an open public interest review of the impacts on real investment and employment.

Fair Solutions to the Crisis

Executive compensation in the form of stock options must be restricted to reasonable amounts and limited to long-term gains in share values. A maximum

limit should be placed on senior executive compensation which can be deducted for corporate tax purposes. Capital gains should be fully included in taxable income, and there should be a surtax on very high incomes to help pay for the costs of bail-outs.

Fighting recession

The question today is not whether we will see large job losses and rising unemployment in Canada, but rather how deep and prolonged the crisis will be.

The federal and provincial governments must maintain current public programs, services and employment. It would be folly to take the discredited 1930's strategy of slashing spending as we fall into a Depression. That led to horses towing cars (the infamous Bennett Buggies) and the tragedy of the "On to Ottawa" march. Increases to public investment are far more potent job creators than tax cuts, since most forms of public investment are labour-intensive, and draw heavily on Canadian as opposed to imported inputs.

Governments should provide an immediate emergency fiscal stimulus to the economy of at least \$10 billion over each of the next two years. Such a program mainly directed to energy efficiency and renewable energy projects including building retrofits and public transit would create at least 200,000 jobs.

Immediate priority should be given to public infrastructure and affordable housing projects which would offset the growing construction slowdown and could be rapidly implemented. Control of public infrastructure must remain within the public sector.

Funds which have already been allocated to basic municipal infrastructure and to energy efficiency, renewable energy and green investments should be fast-tracked and increased, and planning for major public transit projects and passenger rail and similar projects should begin immediately.

We need sectoral economic strategies to rebuild our industries, particularly the hard-hit manufacturing and forestry sectors. Further corporate tax cuts should be

cancelled and replaced by direct government support for new private sector investment in machinery and equipment, research and development and training.

Taking advantage of the opportunities likely to be opened up by President Obama, NAFTA and other unbalanced one-sided trade deals must be renegotiated to promote labour rights and higher environmental standards and to remove investor rights provisions. Measures must be taken to reverse our large and growing manufacturing trade deficit with countries running large trade surpluses.

The federal and provincial governments should launch significant improvements to public services which people need, and which will also save and create new jobs. We need major investments in child care and early learning, home care and long-term care and high quality public education. Post-secondary education and training programs must be expanded to help upgrade the skills of laid off workers.

PROTECTING WORKERS AND WORKING FAMILIES IN A CRISIS

Employment Insurance (EI)

EI is a critically important program for Canadian workers, especially in tough times like we face today. Laid off workers obviously need adequate benefits to support themselves and their families while they search for a new job.

Compared to when we hit previous recessions, our EI program will leave many Canadians out in the cold, unable to qualify for benefits. And it stands on much shakier financial ground.

With an accumulated surplus of more than \$50 billion in the EI Account, the federal government must maintain and increase benefits, and also expand spending from the EI Fund to pay for labour adjustment and training programs.

Building the labour movement

The roots of this crisis lie not just in the excesses of finance, but also in the fundamental imbalance of power between workers and employers here in Canada and around the world which has been fostered through restrictive laws.

We must ensure that growth is driven by the flow through of gains from greater real investment and higher productivity into higher working class living standards. When people earn decent wages, all parts of the economy do well. As was shown in the 1930s, this will be achieved not just through more government intervention in the economy, but also by building strong unions and increasing the bargaining power of labour. Governments must facilitate new union organizing through card check certification, first contract arbitration and anti-scab legislation.

The labour movement must be consulted and our voice must be listened to by governments as we deal with this crisis. — [CLC 10-17-08](#)

Provinces that have the good fortune of having substantial oil royalty income are a better placed than the rest of Canada to meet these challenges. However, Manitoba has the advantage of having a provincial government that formulates and follows sound economic policies to best use its available revenue streams. Manitobans were justifiably reassured to hear their Premier urge the Prime Minister to put to work infrastructure improvement budgets that are already in place, to maintain and even create jobs to help meet the economic crisis.

Minimum Wage

One measure the provincial government can take is to increase the minimum wage from its current level of \$8.50 per hour to \$12 per hour. The government of Manitoba has an enviable record for increasing the minimum wage on a regular basis, eight times since 1999. But we believe that a substantial increase now is necessary to ensure that Manitoba's lowest income earners are not overwhelmed by the fiscal challenges that are sure to be part of the unfolding economic crisis. Clearly, the only way that minimum and near minimum wage earners get a raise is through government action. As well, increasing the minimum wage will exert pressure on the employers of "near-minimum wage" earners to follow through with similar increases.

An increase to the minimum wage and near minimum wage scales will almost be immediately returned to the Manitoba economy in the form of consumer and basic needs spending, creating valuable economic activity.

To preserve the effectiveness of this increase, we further recommend that the minimum wage be automatically increased on an annual basis by an amount equal to the increase in CPI since the previous increase went into effect.

To facilitate consideration of this proposal, we recommend that it be referred to the Minister's Labour Management Review Committee for study and recommendations.

Pensions

The Canadian Labour Congress economic analysis referenced earlier in this paper had specific recommendations regarding the building crisis in pensions:

The financial crisis, combined with a major recession, threatens to produce a severe pensions crisis as companies in major difficulties face large pension fund deficits. As in other countries, notably the U.S. which guarantees pension benefits of up to about \$50,000, Canadian pensions should be backstopped by a national pension guarantee fund. Revenues from a financial transaction tax should go to this fund.

Pension funds must be more closely regulated to limit investments in hedge funds, private equity and other risky assets. Public pensions are the fundamental basis of income security in retirement. Old Age Security benefits must be raised immediately.

Pension Benefits Act Regulations

The foregoing CLC analysis deals with the federal pension jurisdiction. In Manitoba, other actions are possible. Let us say that we are encouraged to see that the Government of Manitoba places a high value on protecting public and workers' pensions to ensure that retirees have a modicum of financial security after they leave the workforce. This was stated by the Premier in

no uncertain terms when he met last month with the Prime Ministers and the other premiers when he emphasised the need to protect retirees and those nearing retirement.

That concerted and co-ordinated action is necessary is beyond doubt. The Canadian Labour Congress estimates that, as of October, Canadian working families have lost at least \$80 billion in retirement savings since April 1, 2008 - \$50 billion from trustee pension plans and \$30 billion from RRSP/RRIF investments.

In his statement, CLC President Ken Georgetti said, “When Canadians’ retirement security is threatened by malfeasance and corruption, Canadians want their government to protect them from harm and backstop their losses,” says Georgetti. “As bad as it is in the U.S., the American government at least recognizes a large portion of their citizens’ retirement savings would be lost if there was no government action. Our own (federal) government’s silence adds to Canadian working families’ worries. Action is needed now.”

The government of Manitoba made important amendments to the Pension Benefits Act in 2006 to, among other things, increase the say that pension plan members have in how their funds are administered. Among other important changes, the amendments:

- clarify provisions relating to multi-unit pension plans (plans established by employers in co-operation with unions or associations),
- require the board of trustees of a multi-unit pension plan to include a member who represents the interests of retirees and other non-active members, and
- require certain pension plans to be administered by a pension committee that includes at least two committee members selected by the members and beneficiaries.

Though the amendments were passed by the Manitoba Legislature in 2006, they have not been proclaimed, pending the drafting and approval of the accompanying regulations. The economic meltdown experienced this fall brings new urgency to the situation. We ask that efforts be redoubled to approve the regulations as soon as possible so that working people can benefit from these important amendments.

Superannuation Fund

To meet the challenges facing pensions today, the Manitoba Government must take immediate action to fulfill a commitment to employees who are members of the Superannuation Fund and fulfill its promise to enshrine joint trusteeship in legislation. The Fund covers Manitoba civil servants and employees of Manitoba Hydro, Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation, Manitoba Liquor Control Commission and other government agencies.

This legislation would codify equal representation from both employees and employers on the Superannuation Fund's governing board and enable trustees to ensure retirement security for plan members through the efficacy of joint decision-making.

Joint trusteeship is the model used in many other public sector pension plans including that of the City of Winnipeg, hospital workers in Manitoba, public employees in British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario.

In August, 2000, the MGEU and Finance Minister Greg Selinger signed a memorandum committing the parties "to develop a plan which would create a jointly trusted superannuation plan and to implement joint trusteeship arrangements at the earliest possible date." The memorandum was renewed January 12, 2004. Since then, all the work on a plan text has been completed.

As recently as the February 5, 2005 meeting of the Manitoba Government and the Employee Superannuation and Insurance Liaison Committee the government made a commitment to introduce the Legislation during the spring 2005.

Under a joint trusteeship model, the Fund members would have direct representation on the investment committee and participate in the Chairperson selection process.

Right now, cabinet approval is required before any changes can be made to the Fund through legislative action. In fact, Fund trustees (with equal employer and employee representation) should be empowered to make those decisions and changes.

It is high time to settle this issue and make it possible for employers and employees to work in partnership to solve the many issues facing pension plans today.

Public, Private Partnership (P3's) Disclosure Legislation

As the economic heat turns up on governments across the country, there will no doubt be a resurgence of interest in establishing public, private partnerships (P3's) in order to carry out what should be publicly funded, publicly owned and publicly administered capital and service projects. While we have no concerns that this government can be fooled into accepting or promoting the false economies of P3's, the same cannot be said of many municipal governments in Manitoba.

To remind non-government readers of this document, P3's are arrangements where government enters into a partnership with a private sector company or consortium in order to build capital projects such as bridges, buildings or highways. Usually, upfront construction and ongoing maintenance costs are covered by the private sector or through a sharing formula with the government in question. At the end of a definite period, say twenty years, the sponsoring government buys the bridge or building from its private sector partner.

Many buy into the false promise of cheaper construction costs and cheaper operating costs.

What's wrong with that? Everything.

The most important issue is control. Under the classic P3 model, citizens have no decision making powers or control (through their democratically elected government), they have no access to information about the project or service, because, after all, it's a privately owned company and it's "none of your business". This is no way to deliver public services at any level – it is exactly the opposite of the democratic process that we fought so hard to develop and nurture.

The other high profile issue is cost. Proponents of P3s claim the private sector does a better job on these projects, for less money and lower operating costs. Again, wrong.

The private sector has no access to the interest rates for financing its projects that government does. That higher borrowing cost is an important factor in the overall cost of the project – money that sooner or later is recovered from the taxpayer, either in user fees (such as highway tolls) or in the payment from the public treasury when ownership finally reverts to government.

Ongoing operating costs for a private project include a substantial profit margin because that is why private companies exist – to make money for owners or shareholders. This is money that is not used for the public good or for fair wages and benefits.

There are plenty of experiences with P3's to draw on to justify these statements.

The first is the construction of the Brampton General Hospital in Brampton Ontario. The project was hatched by the provincial Conservative Government nearly 8 years ago and renegotiated in 2004 by the successor Liberal government. The initial construction deadline was 2005, but the hospital was not completed until July 2007 and didn't open until October 2007.

The project was reviewed by the Ontario Health Coalition by using access to information legislation and publicly outlined in January 2008. The coalition's director Natalie Mehra: "What we found is a deeply disturbing picture that irrefutably shows that the costs of the hospital increased from \$350 million ... to \$650 million by the time the hospital was constructed," said Mehra. (With equipment, the total bill stands at \$790 million.)

Bed totals were to be 720, split between 608 at the new hospital and 112 beds at the redeveloped Peel Memorial Hospital, which Brampton Civic replaced. Brampton Civic opened with 479 beds, to rise to 608 by 2012. The original plan to have 20 operating rooms was scaled back to 12; six more are to open by 2012.

What was delivered was far less than what was promised at a substantially greater cost that will ultimately be up to the public to cover.

Or how about the Hamilton Water and Waste experience. In the early '90's, the City of Hamilton and citizens fell for the P3 fantasy and turned over the operation of the city's water and

waste services to a series of private companies for 10 years. This was a decade marked by raw sewage spills, malfunctioning equipment and operator after operator who couldn't figure out how to get things done.

By 2004, the citizens of Hamilton had had enough and city council resumed responsibility for delivering water and waste services - a responsibility it should never have given up. The local newspaper bragged, *"A year after taking back public control of water and wastewater operations and maintenance in the City of Hamilton, management reported improved performance and cost effectiveness, thanks to dedicated public workers."*

Worker representatives stated, "Not only did public workers deliver almost \$1.4 million in savings for the city, our members also achieved better treatment performance compared to previous years. Public workers deliver results and are accountable to the public, not to profit seeking companies."

Even the World Bank knows a shell game when it sees one. One of its studies of P3's observes, *"The driving force behind PPPs may not only be a quest to increase economic and social efficiency, but also the ability to bypass expenditure controls, and to move public investment off budget and debt off the government balance sheet, by exploiting loopholes in current fiscal and reporting conventions."* – The World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, March 12, 2004.

In spite of these stories and dozens of others like them, city councils across the province seem willing to consider entering into P3's.

That is why the MFL urges this government to speak out strongly against P3's as a developmental–operating model and to enact legislation requiring full financial disclosure by all parties to a proposed public, private partnership. This disclosure must include all costs associated with the proposal's construction and operation, service delivery objectives and human resources plans.

Quite simply, investments of public money should be publicly accountable and not protected by privacy laws. The public has a right to see how public money is spent and what the long term costs are.

It is our belief that if citizens have the full, transparent picture before them and all implications reviewable, they will avoid these arrangements like the plague.

Essential Services Act (prepared by the Manitoba Council of Health Care Unions)

In 2007, the Supreme Court of Canada handed down a judgment in the case of *Health Services & Support*. This was a challenge of legislation passed in B.C. which substantially interfered with the union's ability to bargain on behalf of its members in the public sector.

In striking down the impugned law, for the first time in Canadian history, the Supreme Court established that unionization, including collective bargaining, is protected by The Charter of Rights & Freedoms, specifically the right to Freedom of Association.

The Court said very clearly that workers have the right to bargain collectively and that no law can "substantially interfere" with that right.

In Manitoba, The Manitoba Labour Relations Act provides the foundation for collective bargaining. In accordance with the Act, disputes are resolved by strike or lockout. The process of collective bargaining is one in which the parties continually assess both their own strength as well as the strength of the party they are negotiating with. What is achieved at the bargaining table is premised upon the strengths and weaknesses of the parties.

In 1996, the Manitoba Conservative government passed The Essential Services Act. It applies to both the health care sector as well as to the Civil Service. The Essential Services Act provides the unfettered right to health care facilities to designate the classifications, numbers of employees and names of the employees who are essential and, as a result, must work during a strike. The employer is further permitted to increase that number during a strike at its will. The role of the Labour Board is limited to altering the number of employees required to perform the functions that the employer has unilaterally deemed essential. In the Civil Service, positions have been

designated as “essential” by legislation with no negotiation with the unions nor recourse in the event of disagreement.

The Manitoba Labour Relations Act establishes a level playing field between union and employer. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms prohibits substantial interference in collective bargaining. Yet, The Essential Services Act makes it clear that should push come to shove, particularly in the health care sector, employers will have their way. Anyone would be crazy to enter a fight they knew they couldn't win. This permeates the entire process of collective bargaining. This law constitutes substantial interference in the process of collective bargaining.

Labour is not opposed to ensuring essential services are provided during a labour disruption. However, to be meaningful and in accordance with employees Freedom of Association as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the process of determining what and who is essential must be fairly negotiated.

Labour is asking this government to repeal or amend the existing Essential Services Act to ensure it is balanced. Should this not occur, the nine unions comprising the Manitoba Council of Health Care Unions are prepared to initiate legal action to have this law struck down.

Automatic Certification

We are concerned that the Manitoba Labour Relations Act continues to impose a “super majority” requirement before automatic certification is granted to workers seeking membership in a union that acts as their bargaining agent.

In the vast majority of cases, the democratic test of the will of people is a “simple majority”. When only two options are being tested, the appropriate threshold is 50% plus one of the voting body.

But today, unions in Manitoba applying for certification as bargaining agent must reach a threshold of 65% of the potential bargaining unit before certification is granted without further voting.

This offends basic fairness and democracy. Why are workers forced to meet a higher standard than a majority vote? It's a test politicians don't have to meet. It's a test that very few people outside of the labour relations world will ever be confronted with. It is simply a manifestation of employers' dislike and mistrust of workers exercising their Charter of Rights guarantees and government's willingness to pander to them.

Of all the jurisdictions in Canada that make provision for automatic certification based on signed union cards, 65% is the highest threshold. Most are at 55%. Some are at 50% plus one vote, including the federal jurisdiction.

The MFL renews its call for fairness for working people and demands that the Labour Relations Act be amended to lower the automatic certification threshold to 50% plus one.

Sectoral Councils

When the government passed Bill 21, The Advisory Council on Workforce Development Act this year, we were struck by its preamble: *"The purpose of this Act is to facilitate and encourage the cooperative participation of employers, employees and labour organizations in the development of government policies and strategies for developing Manitoba's workforce."*

We very quickly began referring to the structure as a "super sectoral council" amongst ourselves – an opportunity to use a cooperative model to help build government policy as it relates to a very important topic. That is, the development of our workforce to meet the needs of industry, workers and the community at large.

Section four of the Bill is more explicit in defining the roll of the Council: that it is to "consult with sector councils and provide information and advice to the minister about workforce trends, and about initiatives, policies and strategies for developing Manitoba's workforce."

To our chagrin, it must be stated that the "Super Sectoral Council", complete with worker and Labour representation, will be consulting sector councils that, by and large, do their work and make their recommendations without the benefit of participation and input from workers or their unions.

This is regrettable since the result is a great deal of relevant knowledge and expertise goes overlooked.

In the 1980's, the Canadian Steel Industry and the United Steelworkers established one of the first, if not the first, sector councils in Canada to present a common front to deal with US protectionism in the steel sector. But the Canadian Steel Trade and Employment Congress (CSTEC) soon became much more than that. It took on worker adjustment to deal with the large number of layoffs that the US actions resulted in. As many as 80% of the hundreds of laid off workers successfully found new jobs, both in the Steel sector and outside of it after taking CSTAC training.

This unanticipated development shows that serendipitous positives can result when cooperative strategies are adopted.

The MFL recommends that all sector councils in Manitoba be expanded to include union representatives to take advantage of this possibility. If a sector is not unionized to the point that makes this possible, then workers in that sector should be appointed as community representatives. We need this level of representation to have knowledgeable worker input into the work of sector council. If it is not there, it puts an impossible onus on the labour representatives on The Advisory Council on Workforce Development to be experts in all aspects of the Manitoba economy in order to properly evaluate the recommendation being made by sector councils.

Flin Flon Inquiry

The MFL has reviewed the inquest report and recommendations related to the 2000 Hudson's Bay Mining and Smelter Company (HBM&S) furnace explosion which killed Steve Ewing and injured more than a dozen more workers. While we are disappointed with the limited findings and narrow focus of the report, we fully understand the confines of the Fatality Inquires Act and the limitations it places on a Provincial Court Judge who conducts an Inquest.

The judicial recommendations must be based solely on the evidence presented. Some of the reports findings would have greater impact on safety if they were applied to comparable industries, but that was not possible without the presentation of detailed supporting evidence. This is disappointing since the lessons learned from the HBM&S event could be used to prevent other injuries and deaths.

From the outset, one of the MFL's main concerns relates to the amendments of the Workplace Safety and Health Act that were made in 2002. *Does the current Act and body of regulations have the capability of preventing deaths similar to Steve Ewing's from occurring in the future?* The Judge noted it was his opinion that the Act has that capability, but adjustments are needed for some regulations to make them more effective.

The report includes evidence presented by witnesses who were involved in the events leading up to the explosion on August 7 and 8, 2000. It examines the shutdowns' planning, supervision, worker activity, expert reports, furnace and furnace materials to determine what had occurred and what circumstances could be addressed.

This testimony showed the explosion was caused by the collection of the water on top of the very hot material in the furnace. When the rapidly cooled crust of the material cracked, the water was able to contact the molten materials underneath and this mixture exploded, severely burning Steve Ewing and his co-workers. Steve eventually died as a result of those burns. If the water had not been used to wash down the dust, no bomb would have been built, no explosion would have occurred and Steve Ewing would be alive today.

The primary recommendation of the Unions representing HBM&S employees was to never allow water to come in contact with molten metal – a measure agreed to and supported by the Judge.

HBM&S planners used job procedures to deal with risks associated with the washdown; the so-called risk management approach to safety. In his report, the Judge provided a detailed analysis of the benefits of a more systematic approach to safety through the use of engineering controls first and foremost, the “hazard management” approach.

In fact, the Judge supports the Unions' recommendation to include the precise order of controlling hazards in law. This dovetails with the MFL's longstanding recommendation that a hazard based approach to prevention be used instead of risk management to improve safety in any workplace.

The MFL is disappointed that the Judge did not comment on or support our recommendation that inquests be mandatory following a workplace fatality.

In spite of these reservations, the MFL feels that the recommendations that did come out of Steve Ewing's death will make workplaces safer where employers cooperate in the internal responsibility system.

It is clear that the Labour movement needs to redouble its efforts to improve safety in Manitoba's workplaces and reduce as much as possible injuries and deaths within the ranks of working people.

We will still participate in the joint committee structures. We will still educate our members on better, healthier and safer ways to do their work. We will continue to call for more effective enforcement in those workplaces where employers are less cooperative and do not take the safety of their workers seriously. But more than these things, Unions and the workers they represent will increase their efforts to develop new ways to improve the safety system; ways that include mandatory inquests following a workplace fatality, and certified committee members that have the power to issue stop work orders once a hazard is identified.

These things are needed because, in spite of our best efforts, we still have a safety system that fails at least 30 workers each year who die in Manitoba and another 40,000 who report injuries.

Workers of Tomorrow Safety Centre Inc

Workers of Tomorrow Safety Centre Inc. was established in 1997 as the Safe Workers of Tomorrow Project (SWOT) to provide information to young people through education and training to create awareness for safe and healthy workplaces in Manitoba.

Today, it reaches thousands of young people during the school with its expert training about workplace safety – in the 2007/2008 school year alone, it provided 789 presentations to 19,130 students, and spoke with countless more students at career fairs, symposiums and displays.

Currently, the program is funded through an annual grant from the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB), year by year funding from the government of Manitoba, and in-kind support from the MFL.

The success of SWOT is indisputable. It addresses an unmet need and as awareness of the program grows, the demand for it does too.

The MFL urges the government to establish a long-term program strategy with secure funding for this critical project by including it as an on-going line item in the Department of Labour portion of the provincial budget. This will enable the SWOT to survive on an on-going basis. It will also allow the program to reach the people who need it badly. Finally, it will further reduce the number of young people who are getting injured in Manitoba's workplaces.

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