

# **Atlantic Regional Director's Recommendations**

**Atlantic Regional Council  
2024**



# Recommendation # 1

## Mobilizing Workers for Change New Brunswick and Nova Scotia Elections

The governments of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have not done enough for workers, despite having the comfort of majority government power.

In New Brunswick the Progressive Conservative government of Premier Blaine Higgs has spent it's time in power attacking workers' rights with Bill 23, antagonizing vulnerable youth with Policy 713 and scaling back access to French language education. All this at the expense of investments in public health care, strategies to protect well-paying forestry jobs — and the communities those jobs support — and initiatives to combat the cost-of-living crisis.

In Nova Scotia, the Progressive Conservatives could be doing so much more for workers, including fighting harder for affordable housing, increasing health care funding to fix staffing shortages, and improving job security for forestry workers. And Premier Houston is nowhere on anti-scab legislation, despite the high-profile strike by Local 100 members and the use of scabs at CN Autoport

The Atlantic Regional Council is already hard at work preparing for the upcoming provincial elections in the region. We trained a full class of member organizers in New Brunswick to assist with our campaign to ensure our members vote for a government that promises to help workers.

With anti-scab legislation on the books in both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, it's vital that we elect governments that will usher this legislation into law and further the fight to support workers in every aspect of their lives.

The Atlantic Regional Council must urgently continue preparations for a campaign to mobilize members and defeat Blaine Higgs in their next provincial elections.

We are ready to conduct a member-to-member campaign with activists from locals talking to other members about key issues for working people.

We will work other allies to oppose these governments at every opportunity because we know that forming a new government is the faster route to success for all workers in the province.

### **Therefore, I recommend:**

1. That the Atlantic Regional Council and its locals engage in a significant member-to-member organizing campaign, using member organizers and others, as needed, to assist in work related to upcoming provincial elections.
2. That all New Brunswick and Nova Scotia locals work urgently with our Unifor member organizers to coordinate events and activities during this critical period to make sure all members are informed about the critical issues at stake in these elections.
3. That the Atlantic Regional Council and its locals partner with their respective Federations of Labour and other progressive organizations to educate and inform voters about the importance of voting for candidates who will fight for workers' rights and help build sustainable communities for future generations.

## Recommendation # 2

### Growing Unifor in the Atlantic

Unifor was founded on principles that included making union organizing a priority at all levels. A decade later, this commitment remains steadfast.

While we strive to make gains at the bargaining table and fight tirelessly for our membership, the economic conditions for workers in Atlantic Canada have worsened. Employment terms and conditions in non-union workplaces have deteriorated drastically, and coupled with record-setting inflation, this has had a devastating impact on the working class.

In the face of these challenges, Unifor understands that ongoing organizing efforts in the Atlantic Region are vital for improving conditions for non-unionized workers, our members, and all Atlantic Canadians.

Since the end of 2022, Unifor's Organizing Department has conducted training and organizing drives in all four Atlantic provinces, collaborating with our regional leadership, local union leadership, and staff to support these campaigns. We recognize that expanding our organizing capacity is essential to increasing union density, which will not only enhance the economic conditions of the working class but also raise their aspirations and expectations.

We must collectively champion organizing efforts across Atlantic Canada, and it should be integrated into all Unifor meetings. Elected regional and local leaders, staff members, and union activists need to recognize that effective organizing is vital to our future success.

#### **I therefore recommend:**

1. That Atlantic Regional Council reaffirm its dedication to the organizing goals set out at Unifor's founding convention in 2013, prioritizing new union organizing.
2. That Atlantic Regional Council and its locals support organizing efforts and expand on the recent training and outreach initiatives to increase organizing capacity at both regional and local levels. We will work towards a collaborative approach that is inclusive and enhances our ability to provide workers with the representation and collective agreements they deserve.
3. That Atlantic Regional Council strive to ensure organizing discussions are integrated into meetings at every level, from National to Local.
4. That Atlantic Regional Council and its locals embrace new tools and strategies for workplace and digital organizing. By modernizing tactics and extending reach, we will become the most dynamic organizing force, making Unifor the preferred choice for workers in the Atlantic Provinces.

## Recommendation # 3

### Anti-Scab Legislation Everywhere

The use of scabs undermines our collective power, unnecessarily prolongs labour disputes, removes workers' ability to apply economic pressure through the withdrawal of labour, contributes to higher-conflict picket lines, jeopardizes workplace safety, destabilizes normalized labour relations between workers and their employers and removes the employer incentive to negotiate and settle fair contracts.

Effective anti-scab legislation is critical to success in bargaining, and we know that fair deals happen at the bargaining table.

When striking or locked out workers can't be replaced by scabs, bargaining will be more respectful and productive, picket lines will be safer, and labour disputes will be shorter and less frequent.

As a result of Unifor's ongoing campaign to secure anti-scab legislation everywhere, we have now finally seen the tabling of Bill C-58, an act to amend the Canada Labour Code and the Canada Industrial Relations Board Regulations, and the result of this legislation will be a banning of scabs in the federally regulated sector along with significant fines if scabs are used.

Strong and fair anti-scab legislation - at both the federal and provincial level - will help lead to shorter labour disputes, safer workplaces, and less acrimonious and conflict-ridden picket lines.

Bill C-58 passed third reading on May 27, 2024, however even with Royal Assent Bill C-58 will not protect all workers. Provincial legislation is also needed.

While two provinces have taken important first steps towards protecting provincially regulated workers - the

Nova Scotia NDP introduced provincial anti-scab legislation on March 19, 2024, and the New Brunswick Green Party followed suit on May 31, 2024 - Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador still have no anti-scab legislation on the books.

#### **Therefore, I recommend:**

1. That Unifor Atlantic Regional Council locals write to their provincial Ministers of Labour and Members of Legislative Assembly or Member of the House of Assembly urging them to extend anti-scab protections to provincially regulated workplaces.
2. That Unifor continues to campaign for the introduction and passage of anti-scab legislation at the federal and provincial level across Canada.
3. That Unifor Atlantic Regional Council locals work with other labour organisations in the region to lobby government for effective anti-scab legislation.
4. That Unifor Atlantic Regional Council locals will ask their members and supporters to stay up-to-date by visiting the campaign page: [www.unifor.org/anti-scab](http://www.unifor.org/anti-scab)

## Recommendation # 4

### Prioritizing Health and Safety Through Education

On May 9, 1992, in Plymouth, Nova Scotia 26 miners were killed in an explosion at the Westray Mine. All of these deaths were preventable but the company and its executives faced no repercussions for their actions.

For over a decade, Unions fought tirelessly to change the Criminal Code of Canada to include a provision known as the Westray Law. This law established criminal liability of corporations and decision-makers in the event of a workplace injury or death.

This year marks the 20th Anniversary of the Westray Law. There have only been ten convictions despite an average of 1,000 Canadians who die every year as a result of a workplace incident or illness. It is clear, there must be greater accountability for corporations and bosses that neglect their duties and responsibilities.

Workplace injury, disease and fatality incident rates are unacceptably high in the Atlantic Region. Since the start of the year, we have had three local Unifor members that did not return home from work to their families. This is more than any other region in Canada.

But, there is hope.

Research shows that educated, engaged and functioning health and safety committees have a direct, and positive impact on the safety of workplaces and our members with a reduction of illnesses and injuries.

The Unifor Bargaining Workers' Power Summit, held in Halifax in 2023, set a goal to negotiate a minimum of 40 hours of paid health and safety training into collective agreements, with provisions for all union health and safety representatives and/or Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) members to access the training.

The Education and Health, Safety and Environment Departments of the national union provide excellent resources for training and consultation with committee members, which create conditions for positive functioning and engagement with the employer.

#### **Therefore, I recommend:**

1. That Atlantic Regional Council establishes a mandate that commits to health and safety training for locals and their committees in the region, while continuing to work with the Education department to ensure locals are fully aware of health and safety training opportunities available through area schools and through the PEL program, as well as to ensure local access to these programs.
2. That Atlantic Regional Council with the help of the local leadership will engage with the Regional Health & Safety Committee, Unifor National representatives and the National Health, Safety and Environment Department and other resources in matters related to specific issues regarding work refusals, critical injuries and fatalities, government inspections and workplace committee related issues.
3. That Atlantic Regional Council and the Regional Health & Safety Standing Committee will work the National Health, Safety and Environment Department to keep up-to-date lists of workplace health and safety committee members and their training credentials, as well as of the types of health and safety training offered in workplaces across the region and the frequency with which it is given.

4. Make bargaining health and safety language a priority in all contracts including a minimum position of 40 hours of training for union members of workplace safety committees,
5. Encourage locals to provide health and safety information during onboarding sessions for new members. As well as ensuring all members are aware of their rights and protections regarding health and safety, such as right to refuse unsafe work.