

CAW and CEP to begin talks on new union

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 24, 2012

(TORONTO/OTTAWA) -- The executive boards of the Canadian Auto Workers and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers unions have unanimously approved a process to explore the possibility of creating a new Canadian union as soon as mid-2013.

Leaders of the two unions have held preliminary discussions for several weeks, reviewing the current labour relations climate and the challenges facing organized labour, and considering whether the formation of a new Canadian union would help the movement to address those challenges. Now those discussions have been formally endorsed by the elected National Executive Boards of both unions. At separate meetings within the last week, the two boards unanimously approved a "Process Protocol" document. This document sets out the terms of reference and a timeline for union representatives to explore issues related to the formation of a new union.

"Events like the lockout at Caterpillar have made it increasingly obvious that Canadian workers need a stronger, more active, and more innovative labour movement to defend them," says Ken Lewenza, CAW national president. "Our movement cannot afford a 'business-as-usual' approach in light of the attacks we face from both business and government. We need to combine our resources, and use them more effectively, if we are to protect Canadian jobs and push for greater equality in this incredibly hostile economic environment."

"Our goal is to create a new, Canadian union," says Dave Coles, president of the CEP. "We are examining every aspect of our work as trade unions, from organizing to bargaining to political activism. We are working to create a stronger union movement and a better future for workers."

Under the Process Protocol, a representative committee will work over coming months to investigate specific issues related to a new union (including dues and finances, representative structures, and regional issues). It will issue a report on whether a new union is feasible and desirable in time for the upcoming conventions of both unions (August 2012 for the CAW, and October 2012 for the CEP).

Both unions pledged a high degree of transparency concerning the work of the Process Committee, including the establishment of a joint website devoted to the project.

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