

WINTER | 2024

LABOUR ACTION

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LABOUR LEADS THE FUTURE



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Cover photo: SEIU Healthcare workers at the February 6th Hospital Workers Bargaining Rally. Photo by Yaroslava Montenegro

Message from the President

Dear Comrades, Sisters, Brothers,

2023 was an incredible year for the labour movement. In 2024, we must be ready to build on the momentum from last year's victories and mobilizations. And what a new year it has been so far!

Just this past month, we've witnessed an important and welcome shift in Toronto with Mayor Chow. She presented the first anti-austerity budget the city has seen in over a decade, managing to secure the funding needed for quality public services—all while dealing with a \$1.5B shortfall inherited from previous administrations. Together with tireless work of our members and allies, Mayor Chow also secured federal funding for refugee shelter and housing support. She has clearly been up to the challenge. Inside this issue, we have more thoughts on the Budget, ranging from our wins—including from our allies at TTC Riders (see p. 5)—to our concerns with the Toronto Police Services budget.

But we know that this Budget is only the beginning to building a more caring city. We had the opportunity to chat with Councillor Alejandra Bravo about working at City Hall, uniting progressives, and building a new vision for Toronto. Now more than ever, we need dedicated organizers and progressive Councillors at City Hall to commit to ending austerity for the long run. It will take time to fully repair the damage caused by Mayors Ford and Tory, but Councillor Bravo shows us what that could look like.

Throughout the last few months, the Labour Council has worked hard together with our affiliates and allies to help bring equitable and progressive visions to life. From uniting with Ontario Place for All (p. 12) to save public space, to joining workers across the region on the picket lines and rent strikes (p. 22), our members have been at the forefront of mobilization across the region, uniting in solidarity. At last October's Indigenous and Workers of Colour Conference (IWOC), we didn't just talk about the Future of Work (p. 13) or call for justice for Migrant Workers (p. 16) – we mobilized committed labour activists to “build power outside of the checkbox”, both within the labour movement and beyond. Seeing the organizing taking place among Indigenous (p. 15) and education workers (p. 19) is inspiring. And just before going to print, the NDP and our communities achieved the first step in establishing a national, universal, single-payer Pharmacare program. With all this happening, we have a great year to look forward to.

Finally, February was Black History Month—a time to remember those who have carved a path for Black workers and organizers in the past, those who fight for racial and economic justice today, and those who are building towards a better, more equitable future. Our Equity Committee has some clear reflections on keeping the fight going by and for Black workers across our Region (p. 8).

From all this, it's clear that labour leads the future, so let's continue building to make it happen together.

Solidarity,

Andria Babriff
 President

Toronto & York Region Labour Council

2024-2026 Executive Board and Committees

Please welcome our new Executive Board and Committees to a new term of office. Nominations were held at our February 2024 meeting and all candidates were acclaimed.

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Andria Babbington

*President
Unite Here Local 75*

Abdi Hagi Yusuf

*Secretary
CUPW Toronto*

Jeff Irons

*Vice President
IBEW Local 353*

Jinkie David

*Treasurer
CUPE Local 4948*

Blair Gallant

*Sergeant at Arms
SMW Local 30*

Maggie Yen

*Tyler
COPE 343*

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Justin Antheunis

IATSE Local 58

Hendrik Bruyn

USW Local 8300

Carolyn Egan

USW Local 8300

Chris Graham

The Society of United Professionals 160

Miguel Lima

CUPE Local 4400

Aleem Tharani

ATU 113

Nigel Barriffe

Elementary Teachers Toronto

Karen Ebanks

OECTA York Region

Keith Fiering

CUPE Local 79

Kingsley Kwok

OPSEU Local 532

Joe Popadynetz

SMW Local 30

Rick Young

UFCW Local 1006A

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Standing Committees of the Labour Council

EQUITY

Philip Austin - CUPE Local 416
Joy Davis - CUPE Local 4400
Richardo Harvey - OSSTF District 12
Monica McKenzie - Unite Here Local 75
Shyanna Medicine - SEIU Healthcare
Keith Menezes - USW Local 9197
Cory Rutledge - CUPE Local 416
Camlin Vinayagamoorthy - CUPE Local 4948

EDUCATION

Rob Bauer - TECT
Pam Beetlestone - ETFO York Region
Frank Bruno - TSU/OECTA
Marie Coulter - CUPE 4400
Karen Ebanks - OECTA York Region
Wayne Harris - Sprinkler Fitters U.A. Local 853
Mike Platt - OSSTF D12
Helen Victoros - ETT

MUNICIPAL

Hendrik Bruyn - USW 8300
Chris Campbell - Carpenters 27
Amarjeet Chhabra - Unite Here 75
Brian Connolly - ATU 113
Anthony Fracassi - CUPE 416
Ryan Grech - IAFF 3888
Brandon Haynes - CUPE 4948
Fred Shilson - CUPE 79

WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

Coline Babin - CUPE 79
Karen Dublin - Unite Here 75
Emma Lee - CUPE 4948
Judith Logan Junop - SUP 160
Kim Mantulak - CUPE 2484
Christine Perri - CUPW Toronto
Laura Thompson - OPSEU 503
Tunika Grace Udoh - ATU 113

“
WORKERS DESERVE DIGNITY.
WE CANNOT SIT
ON THE SIDELINES.
THE TIME TO ACT
IS NOW!
”

Andria Babbington
President

BUILDING STRENGTH TOGETHER

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Toronto: Moving Beyond Austerity & the Challenges Ahead

In 2023, Toronto saw an important shift in leadership with Mayor Olivia Chow's election. This followed decades of austerity measures under all levels of governments, leading us to the current crises in housing, transit, and affordability. Despite inheriting a \$1.5B deficit, Mayor Chow's 2024 budget focused on funding essential public services working people use and need every day. To get Toronto back on track, all we needed was to pitch in 80 cents a day – less than a cup of coffee to keep essential public services running.

Thanks to the commitment of our members and allies, together with Mayor Chow's leadership and our endorsed Councillors, we were able to secure funding for crucial public services, including the Eviction Prevention Program, RentSafeTO, the Scarborough Busway, and a freeze on TTC fares. Mayor Chow secured provincial support for two highways running through Toronto. Successful negotiations with the federal government, backed by hundreds of volunteers, also helped secure shelter and housing funding for refugees.

While the funding of essential City services is a good first step, we are disappointed that scare tactics affected the City Council vote, adding more funds into the already well-funded Toronto Police Service. The money could have been better spent on community services that would have likely reduced the need for more policing.

While we are closer to building the City we want, there is still much work needed to create a Toronto where all residents have access to affordable housing, reliable transit, effective climate solutions, and good union jobs. Our City is worth every dime. Together, we can beat the austerity agenda and build a caring city for all.

budget2024

The Good:

- Increased funding for shelters, seniors, housing, transit, and more
- No cuts to city services

The Bad:

- Years of austerity has left services working people rely on still needing to recover
- State of Good Repair backlog continues to grow due to lack of Federal and Provincial funding

The Ugly:

- Funneling more city finances to Toronto Police budget means less resources for critical programming



0.80¢ a day to fund
quality public services



\$2.00 for your
cup of coffee

OUR CITY IS WORTH MORE THAN A CUP OF COFFEE

Mayor Chow's TTC Investments and Scarborough Transit Solutions – Property taxes yield big results for transit

You've heard about the increase to Toronto's property tax rate, but have you heard about the increase to TTC service? Mainstream media has focused on Toronto's proposed property tax hike, but not the vital services funded by these taxes, like public transit.

Mayor Olivia Chow's first budget has made important investments in the TTC, including freezing fares at 2023 levels. The TTC budget acknowledged that the 10-cent fare increase implemented last year "had an undue hardship on those riders who depended on transit the most." This represents a change in direction. For years, a big part of Toronto's budget was paid from the pockets of transit riders. Past City Council decisions shielded homeowners from bigger property tax increases by squeezing transit service and raising fares. As a result, TTC fares have risen faster than the rate of inflation for decades. Toronto's last Mayor cut TTC service by 9% compared to pre-pandemic levels, which was felt across the city.

Mayor Chow's budget starts to fix this broken model and delivers on critical pre-election transit promises: reversing service cuts made by Toronto's last Mayor, instead investing in supportive frontline staff on the TTC, and fully funding a busway in Scarborough.

Transit riders in Scarborough have been asking for a busway for 3 years, following TTC staff's report on the early closure of the Scarborough RT that would leave riders on replacement buses for nearly a decade. A busway will provide faster and more reliable transit for tens of thousands of Scarborough riders, saving up to 20 minutes each day. With the completion date of the Scarborough Subway Extension years away and the potential for delays, the busway is critical. The busway will continue to provide transit benefits after the subway extension opens, since the subway will run 2km away along McCowan road.

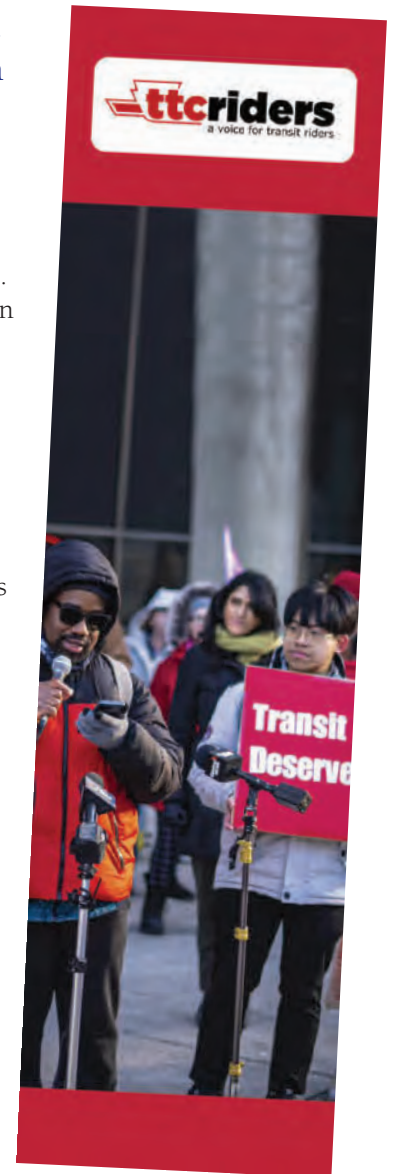
Mayor Chow was not responsible for the gap in Scarborough transit service, but she recognized how wrong it is that people are losing precious time every day and feeling stranded by elected leaders. The Scarborough busway has already been delayed once because the previous Mayor did not secure proper funding. With this secured in Mayor Chow's first budget, there won't be more delays.

Mayor Chow's budget marks a crucial step in reversing previous transit service cuts. Recognizing the need to boost TTC ridership, she prioritizes investing in improved service for today's riders. This is in sharp contrast to "matching service to demand" to describe last year's TTC service cuts, with an overall lack of transparency. Despite City Councilors' requests

for a list of affected routes before the budget vote, TTC staff claimed it wasn't available. Later, a Freedom of Information request revealed a draft list of service reductions had already been prepared.

The TTC is still far from perfect. Subway service will increase marginally, from 82% to 83% from pre-pandemic levels this Spring. Service levels still prioritizes "standing room only," impacting accessibility. Despite the Mayor's efforts to add extra service, Toronto's traffic congestion diminishes the impact. However, City Council's approval to expedite the RapidTO plan is promising. This plan aims to enhance bus efficiency by prioritizing their movement, stretching transit investments further, benefiting the climate and reducing congestion. Installation of this on Jane Street could happen later this year, and with future routes on Dufferin, Steeles West, Lawrence East, and Finch East in the design phase.

It won't be easy to undo more than a decade of austerity, but it requires honesty and action. Quality city services come with a cost, and public input from Torontonians during pre-budget consultations emphasized the need for investment in affordable housing, shelters, and transit. We will need to keep speaking up to restore services and win even more for working people in the coming years.



ENDING THE AUSTERITY AGENDA: BUILDING A PROGRESSIVE TORONTO WITH ALEJANDRA BRAVO

Last summer, Toronto elected Olivia Chow Mayor of Toronto. She became the first woman to take office post-amalgamation after more than a decade of right-wing rule – a significant moment for our city's history. Mayor Chow elevated a number of Labour Council-endorsed City Councillors to her Executive Committee and other key positions. Among them, Alejandra Bravo, elected to represent Davenport Ward 9 in 2022, stands out as a lifelong community leader, advocate and is a known friend to labour.

Yaroslava Avila Montenegro: Thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview with the Toronto & York Region Labour Council. As someone now in a leadership role on Mayor Chow's Executive, what is your vision for this city and region and what are your priorities as part of Toronto's Executive Committee?

Bravo: My vision for Toronto and for the Greater Toronto Area and for this country is that we have a fair and equitable economy so that people are able to live a good life with decent work, housing, and the services that make life livable for people. Instead of focusing on economic growth as the focus, which only grants greater profits for corporations, we should be talking about equity as a growth principle.

We are in a crisis situation. But the solution can't be to make more cuts. We can't cut our way out of a homelessness crisis. We can't cut our way to a better standard of living. If we really want a safe and healthy society, it has to mean that we change livelihoods for the better.

YAM: Why do workers and unions matter to you?

Bravo: I've always identified myself as working class. It's workers who provide the services and the goods that make society work. It's workers who are the bedrock and foundation of the economy. Unions are the democratic voice of workers. When unions are strong, the standard for all workers is lifted. So I think that we need unions to be a countervailing power to the corporations and the interests that actually have much more power. Unions are an important, essential partner and leader in making sure that we have a more equal society. They are the front lines of fighting inequality.

YAM: Of Course! I hear the importance you're giving to the labour movement. How do you plan on collaborating with the labour movement on key issues in the city?

Bravo: When I took office in November 2022 and was on Tory's budget committee, the very first thing I did when the budget documents were first introduced was to speak with civil society groups. For example, when we're talking about the crisis in transit, we're sitting down with and talking to ATU and TTCriders.

In every area of life there are going to be workers and their unions who are able to provide insight into what's happening on the front lines. We must ensure that unions and their leadership are in the room when we discuss the implications for policy and funding choices.

I'm particularly committed to making sure that community groups and unions are able to sit together to talk about their particular interests, on where they align and how they can work together. Community groups with relatively fewer resources are often



bolstered by being in relationship with the labour movement. I think that's one of my favorite things I've gotten to do throughout my life — facilitating that relationship and then making sure that we're developing campaigns where we can work together.

We need to have practices for people to show up and be able to say, look, these are the interests that I have to advance here. Where do my interests align with yours? And then, with transparency we can push the issues we agree on together. I think that's really important.

If people are really clear that there's all kinds of expertise that live in different unions and different civil society groups, we think we can really collaborate to find solutions that change the dial. And solidarity needs to be the founding principle. We can't sell each other out. We come together, stand together, and together we win. Small wins that are done in solidarity lead to bigger wins.

YAM: You answered this a little bit already, but maybe we can go into some more detail about what role you see yourself playing as a member of the Executive at the City of Toronto?

Bravo: Currently I'm a member of the Executive because I'm Chair of the Economic and Community Development Committee. Some real progress has been made under this Mayor on homelessness, shelter and housing as a single conversation. I think it's really important to not have these things disaffiliated. In terms of the Economic and Community Development Committee, we are going to be focusing and paying attention to all of the things that have to do with licensing, like rent safety, making sure that landlords aren't letting their properties decline to the point where they can justify renovation. We're concerned about what happens with tenants around the many issues that have to do with the really terrible conditions people are facing in the city of Toronto right now.

On the shelter side, there's a crisis on a scale we haven't seen before. Now we have

“
We have to be really clear about whose side we're on.
And for me, it's very clear that I'm on the side of the working class.
 ”

the added pressure of thousands of asylum seekers arriving, and we have to figure out together how to make sure shelter is being provided. We need to ensure people are able to access care and shelter regardless of their status. And it's a big effort.

The question of shelter and access for refugees is something I've been working towards even before I was on the Economic and Community Development Committee. Under the last administration the Committee was my top pick, but I didn't get it then.

I myself am a refugee. I came to Canada from Chile. I lived in a shelter hotel briefly, and so I've had the experience first hand. More than anything, it's always been a concern to me that we meet our obligations to refugees in Canada, especially considering there are countries with much fewer resources, and which are much less wealthy, and yet do disproportionately more.

YAM: Shifting to the City's own employees, how are you supporting those essential workers who were instrumental in maintaining the city's operations in the last couple of years?

Bravo: I talk about this in every speech that I make at City Council. It's easy to forget that 60% of the jobs that are posted are under \$20 an hour. So it's not like there's a workforce or labour shortage. It's actually a good job shortage. When we talk about housing, we remind Councillors constantly that to be able to afford an apartment, you need to make \$40 an hour. And we're increasing the minimum wage to \$16.55. The only way to fix that is through the power of workers to organize. That's why I've been out on picket lines supporting everyone from

Metro grocery workers to Education workers trying to get a fair deal.

It is absolutely crucial that the public understand that everything good we have today has been won by people in struggle. The labour movement has underpinned so many of these efforts. Nothing was conceded to us: our health care system, our pension system, maternity leave, the weekend. These were all won by people who were fighting really huge odds. So we have to be really clear about whose side we're on. And for me, it's very clear that I'm on the side of the working class.

YAM: We've talked a lot about the things that you're dealing with and can connect to the labour movement. But what do you need from us?

Bravo: I think we need a focused agenda and the opportunity for leaders in the labour movement to continually sit with other leaders in civil society so that we – on the political side – are really clear on where the wins are possible and what we can fight for collectively, so that we come out stronger together at the end.

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 The full interview will be published digitally in our upcoming online version of Labour Action

Alejandra Bravo is City Councillor for Davenport, serves as Chair of the Economic and Community Development Committee, Vice-Chair of the Board of Health, Chair of the Francophone Affairs Advisory Committee, and is a member of multiple committees including the Executive Committee, Toronto & East York Community Council, Toronto Arts Council, McCormick Playground Arena Board of Management, and all local Business Improvement Areas in Ward 9.

Standing up for Ontario Place and the Ontario Science Centre



Premier Ford is back at it again, attempting to privatize more public services while at the same time stripping away our rights and good jobs. Bill 154 stripped away all protections from Ontario Place, and waived our environmental bill of rights, all in the name of building a taxpayer-funded “MegaSpa,” which will blight our waterfront for the next 95 years.

To make matters worse, in December, the Auditor General reported that Premier Ford's business case to demolish the Ontario Science Centre is incomplete and missing various costs. His plan to build a half-size replacement for the Science Centre at Ontario Place is to justify the MegaSpa's taxpayer-funded underground parking lot.

At stake in this fight to Save Ontario Place and the Ontario Science Centre are several things:

- 1. Taxpayer funds exceeding \$1 billion allocated for:** \$200 million site servicing (including 1,500 tree removal), \$450 million in underground parking space, and \$400 million relocated Science Centre. Additional costs like extending sewage and electrical services will further burden taxpayers. With Emergency Rooms closing provincewide and many other urgent needs, prioritizing the MegaSpa is unjustifiable.
- 2. Union jobs:** Over 50 OPSEU jobs will be lost at the Ontario Science Centre because of relocation—framed as a cost saving measure for the province. These jobs are vital for local communities like Flemingdon and Thorncliffe Park, and commuting to the new site poses challenges for those who manage to hold onto their jobs. On the Ontario Place side, the government has granted the MegaSpa a 95-year lease on current public parkland. Therme, which owns the MegaSpa, intends to hire foreign workers for its construction and replace well-paying park management jobs with non-union positions.
- 3. Public Private Partnership:** The Ontario Science Centre's construction at Ontario Place, along with the taxpayer-funded underground parking lot, is proposed as a P3 project (Public-Private Partnership) project. P3s often lead to lower wages, diminished bargaining power, and job insecurity for workers, with less transparency compared to traditional government projects. The government's

track record with P3s has been poor, with past projects consistently experiencing delays and budget overruns.

- 4. Diminished school access to the Science Centre:** According to the Auditor General's December report, GTA teachers reported a 50% decrease in likelihood of visiting the proposed lakeside downtown location due to heavy downtown Toronto traffic. Equity deserving schools in Flemingdon and Thorncliffe Park stand to lose access to the Science Centre, impacting science programs dependent on its proximity. Nearby schools currently benefit from free afternoon access, which would be lost if the Science Centre relocates downtown – ultimately harming students.
- 5. Ontario's cultural heritage:** Ontario Place and the Ontario Science Centre were established during Canada's centennial with great provincial pride. Notably, renowned architects such as Raymond Moriyama, Eb Zeidler, and landscape architect Michael Hough were commissioned to create enduring structures meant to stand the test of time. Moriyama used concrete designed to last over 250 years, while Hough's work on West Island, including a popular beach on the West Island that still stands today. We will be losing part of our cultural heritage by undermining or demolishing institutions like Ontario Place and the Ontario Science Centre.

Join us in preserving Ontario Place and the Ontario Science Centre. This is about safeguarding our public spaces and the jobs they provide. Contact your MPP and visit <https://ontarioplaceforall.com/takeaction> and <https://savesciencecentre.com> to learn how you and your union can support. If we lose them, we'll never get them back.

Norm Di Pasquale is the Ontario Place for All Co-Chair, former candidate for Spadina Fort-York, a community activist, school board trustee, and information technology specialist who champions equality and innovative solutions to the many challenges facing us today.

No end to the ER crisis without investments and addressing workers' concerns

The recent auditor general's report provided another sober reminder of the intensification of Ontario's hospital crisis, as this government's health care management sinks to new lows. Emergency room shutdowns were unheard of in Ontario until last year, when an alarming 145 closures caused much pain and misery for patients seeking urgent care.

That unfortunately failed to jolt the government into action, setting the stage for an ignominious record of ERs and other hospital services shuttering nearly 1,200 times in 2023. As the auditor general noted, these closures are predominantly happening due to staffing shortages.

Staffing issues are also contributing to the surgical wait-list comprising 107,000 people currently waiting beyond maximum clinical guidelines, including thousands of children suffering consequences of delayed procedures.

This tells us that without health care workers, there is no health care system. It also tells us that employers and the government cannot continue to discount their voices, and their pleas to address unsustainable workloads, workplace violence, and unconscionable wage suppression.

As representatives of more than 70,000 hospital workers in an ongoing round of central bargaining, our unions have put forward proposals that will help improve staff retention, reduce attrition costs for hospitals, and prevent the destabilization of teamwork that negatively impacts patient care.

We are calling for staff-to-patient ratios for nurses and personal support workers across units including ICUs, emergency rooms, and palliative care. Hospital staffing ratios were implemented in California over two decades ago, with evidence of better patient care and lower mortality rates. Research from California also shows improved retention, lower rates of burnout and job dissatisfaction.

Recently, the British Columbia government negotiated staffing ratios with the nurses' union and agreed to phase-in a minimum staffing standard over three years. This is an important precedent in Canada, and Ford must follow B.C.'s lead.

Staffing ratios will offer hope to a workforce chronically deprived of it, reflected in an attrition rate exceeding 10 per cent. But they need to be supplemented with fair compensation increases, to offset inflationary pressures compounded by over a decade of subpar wage improvements.

In a recent workforce survey, more than half of CUPE hospital workers said they were dissatisfied with compensation. Considering the heroic sacrifices of staff over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the additional workloads in dealing with higher demand over the past few years, a significant boost in compensation is essential to maintain morale.

These measures require considerable government investment, which necessitates a reversal of fiscal restraint borne of ideology rather than prudence.

However, some may wish to impose the austerity ideology even as inflation, aging, and population growth necessitate at least a 5% annual funding increase.

We recently estimated that dealing with those pressures and bringing back the quality of care in our hospitals to an acceptable standard would require a \$1.25 billion annual investment after offsetting costs of inflation. But so far, the Ford government is letting the hospitals deteriorate while it sits on \$5.4 billion in contingency funding.

If this government is serious about addressing the hospital crisis, it must commit to historic investments immediately. The auditor general's report makes it clear that we don't have time to waste, as hundreds of thousands of lives are at stake with people languishing on surgical wait-lists and unable to rely on emergency rooms.

But if we continue to see inaction from Ford, the Tories must get ready for a battle as the festering anger within our members will only lead to escalating actions, and a protracted fight for public health care that will be supported by Ontarians of every stripe.

Michael Hurley is president of CUPE's Ontario Council of Hospital Unions, Sharleen Stewart is president of SEIU Healthcare and Kelly-Anne Orr is assistant to the national officers at Unifor.

A version of this article was published by the Toronto Star.



HARVESTING FREEDOM



Plantation Canada: Migrant Workers and the Struggle Against Exploitation

I came into organizing migrant workers by accident. In 2001, I witnessed a wildcat strike in Leamington, where Mexican migrant farm workers were protesting poor accommodations, kitchen facilities, and overall working conditions. Instead of addressing the issues, the employer terminated the workers, forcing them to return to their home country.

After the strike, we teamed up with United Farm Workers to inspect farms near Windsor. I will never forget my first visit to Leamington. Workers crowded around us in a church parking lot, each voicing concerns about living conditions—ranging from proximity to raw sewage to long work hours and overcrowded housing. It was surreal to confront the harsh realities behind the people we celebrate as “feeding our nation.”

Afterward, I delved deeper into the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP), which annually brings tens of thousands of laborers to Canada from the Caribbean and Mexico. SAWP is an employer-driven program with an inherent power imbalance built into its structure. Migrant workers are bound to a single employer for up to eight months annually and must return home after their contract ends. They are ineligible to apply for permanent residency or citizenship and cannot seek alternative employment. Moreover, as work permits are tied to employers, workers fear not only deportation but also unemployment.

SAWP claims to address agricultural labor shortages, but I don't believe a shortage exists. Rather, the government has made a program where workers are employed under conditions that are eerily familiar to me. Following the abolition of slavery, my mother's family immigrated from India to the Caribbean as indentured laborers. They were part of a broader movement of workers exploited by plantation owners to avoid fair wages and improved conditions for freed Africans. Labeled as “coolies,” indentured workers were viewed as easily exploitable. Yet, narratives of resistance, survival, and community also emerge from this history.

What I see in Canada is the same exploitative plantation labour system that ravaged the Caribbean. Here, employers have the liberty to select workers from any country participating in the SAWP. Employers often resort to threats of replacing entire worker groups if productivity declines.

Workers constantly report instances where entire groups were replaced for advocating their rights at work.

Further, racist stereotypes influence the allocation of workers to specific crops. Canadian growers and officials often stereotype Mexicans as more suitable for greenhouse labor because of their shorter stature, while Caribbean workers are perceived as better suited for crops like tobacco, apples, and peaches. When Canada reduced tobacco production, predominantly Caribbean workers lost employment.

Racism underlies the program's structure and the exclusion of migrant farm workers from their communities. Black and brown individuals are reduced to mere bodies, overlooking their significant contributions to society as they support their families back home. Meanwhile, our celebration of “local food” at grocery stores and markets perpetuates false narratives about our farming industry.

Migrant workers and their families are telling the government, their employers, and the public that they will not be ignored. Their voices matter and their acts of collective resistance are essential to the health of farming in Canada.

As we celebrate Black life, we must honour Black resistance across the food chain, especially among generations of Caribbean farm workers. As legal scholar Adrian Smith wrote on the commodification of racialized labour: “The trajectory of these racialized class dynamics extends back at least to the commencement of New World enslavement, and yet it also invites the possibilities of collective resistance struggles of which the Haitian Revolution provides the paradigmatic example.”

Chris Ramsaroop is an Assistant Professor at New College, University of Toronto and the Coordinator for the Community-Engaged Learning program. Chris is also an organizer with Justicia for Migrant Workers.

An extended version of this article was published by the CBC.

The Labour Advantage: To Fix the Racial Wage Gap, We Must Fix the Racial Unionization Gap



Statistics Canada recently began collecting regular labour market data (on employment, unemployment, wages, and more) broken down by racial categories. This is a welcome step: Canada has been slower than many other countries to publish official data on the extent of racial economic inequality.

We have started analyzing data on average wages and unionization among racialized workers, as part of the 'PowerShare' research project hosted by the Centre for Future Work and will publish a final report soon.

This new data confirms what racialized union members and anti-racist activists have long known: there is a stark and persistent gap in incomes between racialized and non-racialized workers. Moreover, that racial wage gap intersects with a gender wage gap, which makes the situation all the worse for women workers of colour.

In 2022, racialized workers earned an average hourly employment income of \$29.64 per hour. This includes hourly income for salaried workers, like professionals and managers — almost 10% less than the average hourly income for non-racialized workers: \$32.85 per hour.

But this racial wage gap was worse for racialized women, who earned about 11% less than non-racialized women, and 15% less than racialized men. That said, combining racial and gender wage gaps shows a much greater difference – what we call an “intersectional wage gap” – with racialized women earning 22% less than non-racialized men."

Wage gaps among racialized workers vary due to factors like employment concentration in specific sectors or occupations, and the unique nature of racism experienced within each group. Racial wage gaps are biggest for Filipino and Black workers, and less extreme for other communities of racialized workers. Note that this Statistics Canada data does not provide a breakdown for Indigenous workers, as they're measured using a separate methodology based on Indigenous status. We're working on acquiring this data for our final report.

A key factor in these significant racial wage gaps is the gap in union representation. While union membership boosts wages, benefits, and job security for all racialized workers, they are notably underrepresented in Canada's trade union movement.

In 2022, union coverage for racialized workers stood at around one-quarter, while for non-racialized workers, it was about one-third. This 8-percentage-point gap in union coverage blocks the efforts of racialized workers to win better wages and overall economic equality.

	Non-Racialized		Racialized	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Average Wage (\$/hour)	\$34.98	\$30.61	\$32.04	27.26
Racial Wage Gap (vs. same gender)			-8.4%	-10.9%
Gender Wage Gap (vs. same racial category)		-12.5%		-14.9%
Intersectional Wage Gap (vs. non-racialized men)				-22.1%
Union Coverage (% employed)	30.5%	34.8%	22.7%	26.2%

Source: Authors' calculations from unpublished Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey data.

Again, this unionization gap varies across genders and racialized groups. Women, both racialized and non-racialized, are more likely to have union representation. Black workers have the highest union coverage at 34%, slightly exceeding non-racialized workers. In contrast, only 19% of South Asian workers are covered by a union contract.

The struggle for racial equality requires unions to overcome this racial representation gap. This means unions must have increasing presence, support, and credibility in racialized communities, while prioritizing anti-racism initiatives in union-building, advocacy, and education to fully engage racialized members.

This is vital not only for improving living standards for racialized workers but also for the survival of unions. Canada's labor force is increasingly diverse, with racialized communities projected to comprise 43% of the population by 2041. Without strong ties to these communities, we will risk the decline of union membership and workers' collective power.

Fully integrating trade unions as leaders in ending systemic racism, organizing racialized workers, and leveraging collective power for justice benefits us all. It's a win-win solution in building a more equitable future for all.

Authors: Jim Stanford, Winnie Ng, and Salmaan Khan

The full report, *The Importance of Unions in Reducing Racial Wage Inequality: New Data and Best Practices*, will be published this spring by the Centre for Future Work. This commentary is based on results presented to the TYRLC's 2023 Indigenous and Workers of Colour Conference.

LABOUR STRUGGLE & BLACK RESISTANCE

A Story of Resilience

As we celebrate Black History Month each February, we also must hold space and recognize the importance of Black workers' resistance as part of the struggle for equality, justice, and fairness within our workplaces and communities year-round. Black workers have been at the forefront of the labour movement for decades, many who have and continue leading the struggle for racial, social, economic and climate justice locally and around the world. Yet, there is much work to be done to make meaningful and lasting change, in the workplace, in our unions, and in broader society, amidst widespread inequality and ongoing discrimination.

Central to the Labour Council's commitment to equality and dignity for all is our Equity Committee, whose Black-majority leadership spearheads a number of initiatives throughout the year to push this mandate forward. This year, the Equity Committee was proud to reflect on inspiring leaders of Black Resistance, and the deeply impacting role they have played for the whole of the labour movement both locally and beyond. Learn more below about the leaders who inspired us both yesterday and today to act and build a better society.



Bromley Lloyd Armstrong

A Black trade unionist, community organizer and activist, Bromley Armstrong fought countless battles against racist, discriminatory practices and actions enforced by Canada's white ruling class. Born in Jamaica, Bromley's long history as a labour activist includes sit-ins in Dresden, Ontario against racial discrimination, organizing auto workers, founding the

Urban Alliance on Race Relations, and serving on the Ontario Human Rights Commission. For over six decades Bromley won many significant battles including helping establish the Fair Employment Practices Act, later adopted across the country. The Labour Council continues to honour his legacy through Bromley Armstrong Awards, beginning in 2002 to recognize those who have taken up the struggle for racial and social justice within the labour movement.



Andria Babbington

In 2021, Andria Babbington made history as the first woman of colour elected President of the Toronto & York Region Labour Council. Born in Jamaica, and arriving in Canada in the 1980's, Andria first became involved in the labour

movement in her teens, elected as shop steward of UNITE HERE Local 75 at the Sheraton Hotel in 1986. She held the position for 16 years until leaving the hotel in 2002 to work as a union organizer. Throughout her tenure, Babbington has been a tireless advocate for workers' rights, amplifying the voices of immigrant racialized workers, inspiring hope and empowerment among workers across the region. She is an inspiration to all in the labour movement and beyond. We know she will continue to build her legacy for many years to come.



Zanana Akande

Zanana Akande was an active trade unionist with the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, the first Black female MPP in Ontario, and first Black woman to serve as a Cabinet Minister in Canada. Her landmark

work on employment equity legislation and social assistance rates stands as a testament to her lasting impact. Zanana's legacy is an uncompromising fight for justice for Black communities, women, and all working people.



Viola Desmond

In 1946, civil-rights activist Viola Desmond challenged racial discrimination by refusing to leave the segregated Whites-only section of the Roseland Theatre in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. Viola Desmond was arrested

and convicted without legal representation. Despite the efforts to assist her appeal the charges, she went unpardoned in her lifetime. Her courageous stand against racism inspired generations of Black Canadians and her legacy lives on today. In 2018 Viola Desmond became the first Canadian woman to be featured by herself on the face of a bill—the \$10 banknote—and was named a National Historic Person by the Canadian government.



Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr., Baptist minister and social activist, led the civil rights movement in the United States from the mid-1950s until his death by assassination in 1968. His leadership was fundamental to that movement's

success in ending the legal segregation of African Americans in the South and other parts of the United States. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. On April 4th, while standing on the second-story balcony of the Lorraine Motel, King was killed by a sniper's bullet.



Angela Davis

American Black activist, scholar, and author, Angela Davis, is known for her advocacy of civil rights, feminism, and prison abolition. She became involved in the civil rights movement to fight for racial and economic justice.

Davis gained international attention in the early 1970s during her imprisonment, implicated in a high-profile trial for her alleged involvement in a courtroom shootout. In 1972, she was acquitted of all charges by an all-white jury. She became an iconic figure in the struggle against racial oppression and systemic injustice, celebrated for her scholarly contributions on topics such as feminism, Marxism, and the prison-industrial complex.



Franz Fanon

Frantz Fanon was a Black revolutionary, psychiatrist, and philosopher whose work profoundly influenced postcolonial studies, critical theory, and liberation movements worldwide. Born in Martinique under French colonial

rule, Fanon experienced firsthand the complexities of colonialism and racism. After studying psychiatry in France, he became actively involved in the Algerian struggle for independence from French colonial rule. Fanon's legacy endures through his profound insights into the dynamics of power, identity, and liberation, making him a foundational figure in anti-colonial thought and global struggles for justice.

Black History Month is a time to remember those who have won the struggles of the past, but also to celebrate those who carve a path for Black workers and organizers in the present to build for a better future. This Black History Month, let us celebrate Black resistance that leads to liberated futures for Black women, 2SLGBTQIA+, disabled people, and working class people across our Region.

Empowering Indigenous Workers: Our Unionization Journey at Aboriginal Legal Services

Since 2010, I've worked at Aboriginal Legal Services (ALS) in various roles—initially as a Gladue Writer in Sarnia, then transitioning to become the Gladue Caseworker for Waterloo-Wellington after seven years. ALS staff across Ontario provide Gladue reports, letters, and aftercare for Indigenous individuals involved in the justice system.

Despite being repeatedly informed that ALS funders wouldn't provide more funding for wage increases and that working for a non-profit prioritizes community over money, workers saw no wage increases beyond an initial \$1,000 raise after the first year of service. After many years of back-and-forth, we contacted the Society of United Professionals (the Society) to start organizing efforts. When we first started, some workers initially didn't think we could secure higher wages, leading to mistrust and skepticism within the group. However, through patient engagement with organizers and addressing doubts among workers, workers voted to join the union in 2019.

In Indigenous communities, we have a sense of taking care of each other—on and off reserve. Shared bonds of traditions, experience, and family—bigger than those you're related to—bring us together. In Ojibway culture, our teachings encompass the morals, values, structures, ceremonial practices, and spiritual beliefs we hold. Many nations refer to them as the Seven Grandfather Teachings. With this in mind, it was clear that these Teachings needed to be incorporated into both the bargaining process and our first Collective Agreement.

What are some things we gained? We ensured workers could have an Elder present in any dealings with the employer. We included recognition for Ceremonial Days—where workers can use time to participate in traditional ceremonies—in the collective agreement. We even worked to bargain in a way that respected our nations' teachings: When bargaining got intense, both sides came together in a circle with an elder to ensure all sides were heard with respect. This didn't mean bargaining was easy, but we worked to keep the Seven Sacred Teachings at the forefront.

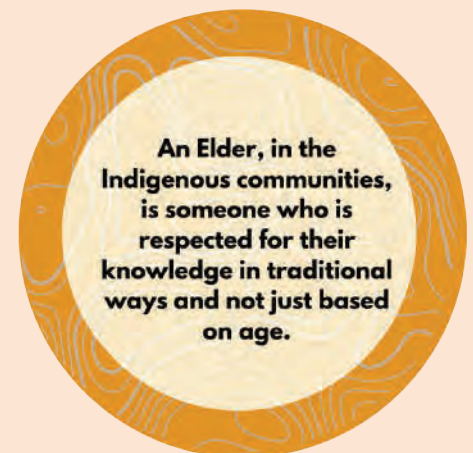
Once we were bargaining, we were told we needed to have separate negotiations between both parts of the organization: the Legal Clinic and the rest of the organization, including programs like Gladue, Community Council, Giiwedini Anang, Indigenous Court Worker, trainees, and office staff. This is important to note as staff outside the Legal Clinic, like our Gladue staff, were hit specifically with Bill 124 and limited to 1% wage increases for three years.

As we dealt with Bill 124's impact, we also realized that the health benefits provided by the employer were not equal for all employees. If a worker had "Indian Status," they were only entitled to 10% coverage for some health benefits, while the rest of the staff had the benefit of 100% coverage. Since health benefits are part of compensation, this meant that "Status" employees were being paid less. While we couldn't agree on the issue in negotiations, we did win our benefits under mediation. As of July 2024, all employees will have 100% coverage for health benefits. This represents a huge win since we were told that 129 other agencies in Ontario provide this minimal coverage for their "Status" employees.

While some of us wondered if a union would be beneficial, we now see the benefits of being a part of the Society with wage increases, full health benefits, and delegates to support members. Our lawyers and paralegals were also able to unionize and see substantial wage increases. All of us now track overtime, making sure we don't work extra hours for free. We are now starting the job evaluation process to be sure our wages are on par with other non-profit agencies, so we can make sure we're getting a fair deal. By coming together and holding our teachings strong, we now have a voice and an expanded community so we can grow together.

Miigwetch

Sharon Archer is an Anishnaabe woman from Aamjiwnaang First Nation in Sarnia, Ontario. Sharon is a Gladue Caseworker in the Waterloo/Wellington Region at Aboriginal Legal Services (ALS). After ALS workers unionized with the Society of United Professionals, she was elected as the Unit Director in 2023.



Medicine wheel with the Seven Sacred Teachings.

LABOUR
TORONTO & YORK REGION
COUNCIL



19TH BROMLEY LLOYD ARMSTRONG AWARDS GALA

Celebrating the legacy of Bromley L. Armstrong's contributions to the Labour and Human Rights Movements in Canada, the Equity Committee of Toronto & York Region Labour Council, and Labour Community Services, look forward to hosting the 19th annual Awards Gala to recognize the continued work being done within the Labour Movement. Submissions for award nominations (for individuals and unions) begin online in February 2024. Stay tuned for full award nomination/event details by visiting the Labour Community Services' website below. For any questions, email: info@labourcommunityservices.ca.

SAVE THE DATE
JUNE 21, 2024

HOLIDAY INN TORONTO
INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT



WWW.LABOURCOMMUNITYSERVICES.CA/BROMLEYGALA2024

WHY LABOUR CALLS FOR A #CEASEFIRE NOW



Workers in Ontario have a long history of supporting workers in other parts of the world. This solidarity is based on the idea that whatever happens to workers in one part of the world—for better or for worse—has an impact on workers in other parts, including here in Ontario.

That's why international solidarity is such a big part of our labour movement. In November 2001, just a month after US President George W. Bush launched the "war on terror" on Afghanistan, the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) was among the first labour bodies in the world to take a stance against the war and to call for a peaceful resolution.

That was an important moment in the emerging anti-war movement over 20 years ago: it showed how labour could be an important voice for peace and built the confidence of rank-and-file workers to join the movement.

It was also an early sign of what would become a mass anti-war movement against the US-led war in Iraq. That movement—which included trade union activists across Canada—successfully stopped the Canadian government from formally supporting the attack on Iraq.

We are facing a similar moment today.

In the last four months, Israel's war in Gaza has killed over 25,000 Palestinians, most of them women and children. That's more than one per cent of Gaza's population. Imagine losing the same percentage of Ontario's population to war—roughly 150,000 people or the entire population of a city the size of Barrie or Guelph.

On top of the devastating death toll, people in Gaza are on the brink of famine. More could die of hunger or disease in the coming months than have been killed so far by bombs or bullets. Not enough humanitarian aid is getting to the region. To make matters worse, Israel's ongoing blockade of Gaza means there's not enough fuel or electricity to cook food, desalinate water, or keep the hospitals running.

In response to this unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe, hundreds of delegates at the OFL Convention in November 2023 discussed the issue of the war. After a series of important debates, they overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling on the Canadian government to support an immediate ceasefire and to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

One month earlier, the OFL issued a public statement calling for a ceasefire. This call was informed by resolutions by past conventions, discussions within the OFL Executive Board, and the international solidarity efforts of affiliates.

A critical part of labour's anti-war stance has been to express our strong opposition to all forms of racism and hatred on the rise since the war began—anti-Palestinian racism, Islamophobia, and antisemitism.

These ideas harm people facing oppression, create divisions among workers, and weaken our movement. When one group is under attack, it affects all of us, and so we all must play a role in resisting it.

Similarly, the labour movement has taken a clear stand on civil liberties, which often come under threat during times of war. Our basic rights to peaceful protest—freedom of speech, assembly, and association—must always be guarded and defended.

Whenever our civil liberties are weakened, no matter what the issue, it becomes harder for workers to form unions, take strike action, or organize collectively to defend or improve their working conditions.

Over the last few months, mass protests calling for a ceasefire have taken place all across the country. Growing pressure from the public has pushed the federal government to back the ceasefire call, as it did at the United Nations General Assembly in early December.

But despite that vote, the war continues—which means labour and its allies must continue to raise their call for a ceasefire, and any other demands—such as a comprehensive arms embargo, for example—that could help bring the war to an end.

Beyond a ceasefire, our long-term goal is to help create the conditions in which a just and lasting peace can be achieved for all people of the region—Israelis and Palestinians alike—and for workers everywhere, from Ontario to Gaza, to be able to live their lives with dignity, security, and respect.

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) represents 54 unions and one million workers in Ontario. It is the largest provincial labour federation in Canada. Laura Walton is the President of the OFL; Ahmad Gaied is the Secretary-Treasurer; and Jackie Taylor is the Executive Vice-President.



Solidarity in Action: York South-Weston Rent Strike Back

In 2023, residents from four buildings in York South-Weston started two rent strikes against landlords Dream Unlimited (Dream) and Barney River Investments. These rent strikes were the culmination of years of poor living conditions, rapidly increasing rental costs, and grassroots organizing.

As founding members of the York South-Weston Tenant Union (YSW), residents of 33 King and 22 John Street have seen it all—neglected maintenance, loss of amenities and higher than inflation rent increases year after year.

Residents at 1440 and 1442 Lawrence Ave West, also founding members of YSW, went on rent strike after years of trying to get their landlord Barney River to do basic repairs. For more than three years, our siblings at CUPW deemed their building unsafe to deliver mail to because of the extent of pest infestation in the building.

The labour movement has been standing side-by-side with the tenants on rent strike, recognizing the common enemies and shared realities of workers and tenants. In July, Labour Council and dozens of unions joined a rally through Weston Road in support of the rent strike. In November, thousands attending the Ontario Federation of Labour convention marched with the York South Weston Tenant Union and other tenant organizations to the landlords' offices in downtown Toronto.

As of this article, Dream and Barney River have refused to come to the table to address tenants' concerns. Unnerved by the strength of tenants standing together, both landlords have resorted to the underhanded tactics of intimidation, lying, and eviction attempts to try and fracture collective organizing. But tenants in York South-Weston know that we're stronger together.

In December, tenants on rent strike showed our strength when we successfully prevented an illegal eviction at 1442 Lawrence Ave West, where tenants occupied the property management office for 74 hours, until finally our neighbour was safe at home again. Tenants on rent strike understand: we stand a chance of winning by standing together.

It's been more than 9 months on rent strike and not a single neighbour has been evicted, but we still need to get Barney River and Dream Unlimited to the table. To join our collective tenant movement sign up to volunteer or donate at tenantunion.ca/join.

Chiara Padovani is a founder of York South-Weston Tenants Union, a social worker, Weston resident, and former city councillor candidate for York South-Weston.

Empowering Futures, Transforming Communities: The Legacy of the Labour Education Centre

Established as a project of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, 1988, the Labour Education Centre (LEC) has become a dynamic force, leaving a lasting imprint on labor education and community development. Initially conceived as a labour union resource center, LEC's journey began delivering vital programs, including labour education, adjustment initiatives, and leadership training rooted in a working-class worldview.

Responding to evolving societal needs, LEC shifted from traditional labour education to service delivery in employment, digital literacy, and construction trades. The heart of LEC's impact lies in its multifaceted approach to societal betterment. Basic Skills Programs provide essential digital skills, while pre-apprenticeship initiatives offer theoretical and hands-on training, mentorship and networking. LEC's employment services foster personal growth, connecting individuals to opportunities that enhance their lives.

LEC's forward thinking has been key to its success. The Working Green Program addresses environmental sustainability, training individuals as green building operators, while the Women in Construction training program empowers women with skills, mentorship,

and connections needed to thrive in traditionally male-dominated careers.

A pivotal chapter in LEC's history is its role in community development, exemplified by involvement in the Toronto Community Benefits Network. Through strategic negotiations around major projects like the Eglinton Crosstown Light Rail Transit, LEC has been instrumental in shaping communities, creating employment opportunities, and fostering professional growth.

In essence, LEC transcends traditional labour education. We actively benefit society through empowerment initiatives, community development, commitment to environmental sustainability, and promotion of equity, diversity and inclusion.

**Labour
Education
Centre**



Workers Unite: Public and Private Sectors Join Forces in the Fight for Fair Wages



Over the past year, we have seen workers on the move. There was the Public Service Alliance (PSAC) strike where 155,000 workers fought the federal government for better wages and working conditions. This movement saw workers, including many new to union activism, taking bold actions such as shutting down the lift bridge in Hamilton and rallying at the port of Montreal. Meanwhile, in Ontario, CUPE education workers defied the provincial government's attempts to impose a collective agreement, persisting in labor action despite legal injunctions and hefty fines. Their steadfastness eventually compelled the government to yield.

Recently, a Common Front of 500,000 public sector workers walked off the job in Quebec. Teachers were on an unlimited strike for over a month and other components joined them for 11 days. There was strong community support from both students and parents. The government faced strong criticism for attacking services and not paying wages that dealt with workers' real needs. Metallos (United Steelworkers) gave \$100,000 to the Front Commun and other unions gave support as well.

It has not only been public sector workers who are angry because of the affordability crisis. Private sector workers have also been demanding more and making it clear that they are no longer willing to accept crumbs from the tables of the corporate elites.

In the United States, 2023 was called the year of the strike. The United Auto Workers under a new, more militant leadership took on the Big Three automakers with 46 days of rotating work stoppages. Although it stopped short of an all-out strike, they made significant gains for workers who have borne the brunt of a two-tiered wages and other major concessions. Unifor bargained with the Big Three in Canada and although analysts said that they were some of the best contracts they have negotiated in recent years there were very strong “no” votes from members.

National Steel Car workers in Hamilton held a six week strike, entirely shutting down the operation. NSC had three deaths over the previous twenty-one months, so workers were demanding increased health & safety protection and increased wages. Workers rejected the first tentative agreement, demanded more, and won significant gains.

International Longshore and Warehouse Union stuck for thirteen days shutting down thirty terminals in BC. 7,400

workers held strong picket lines and also rejected a tentative agreement. It cost the economy \$500 million a day before a settlement was reached. St Lawrence Seaway Workers, organized by Unifor, struck for the first time since 1968 and won a 13% increase after turning down a tentative agreement.

Windsor Salt workers also rejected a tentative deal, and in the end won a \$4.60 an hour increase. Meanwhile, Metro grocery workers in Ontario struck and fought a militant battle with the employer. The majority of these workers are racialized women—who stood together for working class families trying to put food on the table against their bosses' soaring profits.

It hasn't only been strikes. Strong deals have been negotiated with plenty of worker power behind them. AcelorMittal in St Patrick-Montreal just signed a collective agreement with Metallos 9399 for a 37.5% increase in wages over six years—a 150% increase to the shift premium for the evening shift and 300% increase for the night shift.

United Steelworkers members at the Iron Ore Company of Canada in Labrador City won wages of 18.25% over 5 years plus a cost of living allowance with significant benefits and pension improvements. While at Crown Metal Packaging in the GTA, United Steelworkers got a significant wage increase.

Workers are angry and are taking on management wherever they can. We know the cost of living crisis is not going away. Unions are the strongest defense that working people have to fight for a better life for everyone. “An injury to one is an injury to all”—when workers in any sector take on the employer, we have to be there with strong solidarity.

Carolyn Egan is the President of the Steelworkers Toronto Area Council. She is also president of USW Local 8300 where she earlier held the position of recording secretary, unit chair and steward in her workplace. She is the vice president of the Steelworkers Humanity Fund.

Strikes and Struggles

2023: Labour Strikes Back

2023 marked a return to mass strikes and mobilization for organized labour in Canada and across the globe. This should come as no surprise, as workers across the country have borne the brunt of a cost-of-living crisis thanks to skyrocketing interest rates by the Bank of Canada and decades of austerity that put the interest of finance bosses first.

While wages have increased over the last few years, they have yet to catch up with inflation. Debt in Canada is at an all time high and nowhere is the situation as bad as it is – right here — in the GTA. People are struggling to put food on the table and make ends meet. But workers are fighting back. A whole new wave of labour mobilization points to one thing: Enough is Enough. Workers won't back down until we all get the dignity, fairness and justice we deserve. Watch for the next issue of Labour Action for details.

Bargaining Successes

USW 1998: University members give employer lesson on work-life balance

Some 5,800 administrative and technical staff members at the University of Toronto reached a three-year agreement to recover lost ground from Ontario's unconstitutional Bill 124 which previously restricted collective bargaining. The deal provides total wage increases of 12.8% with 9% in the first year. Members addressed work-life balance issues with improved language alternative work arrangements, overtime and workloads and secured a fifth personal leave day each year.

As a part of the bargaining process, a strike vote took place and garnered a 95.4% vote in favour of a strike. This strong backing from the membership sent a powerful message to the employer, leading to major victories in the new contract.

UNITE HERE Local 75 Park Hyatt wins historic wage increase

In November 2023, Park Hyatt workers represented by UNITE HERE Local 75 voted in favour of a contract that brings them an average of more than 15 %wage increases over one year. This historic agreement includes not only the largest ever wage increase in the union's history, but the largest wage increase won by any unionized hotel across the province.

At a time when affordability in the city is challenging, UNITE HERE Local 75 is pleased with its continued success in leading the GTA's hospitality and food service sector in the fight for good wages.

Labour Struggles

ACTRA Lockout Sees Mediated Proposal - Lockout Reaches 650+ Days

28,000 Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA) members have been in a commercial lockout imposed by the Institute of Canadian Agencies (ICA) for over 650 days, as of February 2024. ICA ad agencies proposed reducing unionized actors'



compensation for commercial work by as much as 89 %for some productions when negotiations broke down over a year ago.

After 17 months in lockout, ACTRA's NCA negotiating team was finally successful in forcing the ICA to provide an on-the-record proposal. The end of mediation means the media blackout is paused so members can now download ICA's disrespectful proposal, along with ACTRA's proposal and other key bargaining documents. To learn more about the negotiations check out ACTRA's website: <https://www.actra.ca/nca/>

Support GOBOLT Drivers Against Union Busting

On June 12, 2023, GoBolt Drivers Union Teamsters Local 938 became the first union at GoBolt, a North American supply chain network. On September 28th, 2023, in the middle of contract negotiations, GoBolt's Markham site fired all 23 parcel delivery drivers.

Since then, Teamsters local 938 brought forward an Unfair Labour Practices Case (ULP) to the Ontario Labour Relations Board. In late February 2024, the OLRB issued an Interim Order to preserve the bargaining unit by hiring two Teamsters back to GoBolt while the ULP is heard. Despite the passage of time, GoBolt Drivers remain united and resolute in seeking justice for members affected by GoBolt's sudden mass termination.

TVO CMG Workers End 11-Week Long Strike

After 11 weeks on the picket lines in Fall 2023, TVO workers represented by the Canadian Media Guild (CMG) voted to accept the employer's offer. 70-plus members who produce the current affairs program The Agenda, online news, online curriculums and other TVO offers for Ontarians of all ages, stood strong on the picket lines: the in real life picket line at 2181 Yonge St. in Toronto and the digital picket line out there on social media. The creativity of TVO workers was on full display as they brought their message to Ontarians.

Unfortunately, while TVO members and the employer agreed to a voluntary severance package to be part of the deal for some members, the employer chose to discredit those leaving the station after the agreement was ratified. The CMG will continue to defend the rights of its members at TVO and is committed to supporting them as they use the newly negotiated language to have regular meetings with the employer with the goal of improving labour relations and the workplace environment for all.

Society Members at Electrical Safety Authority Reach Agreement, Ending Strike

On September 20th, Electrical Safety Authority workers represented by the Society of United Professionals went on strike after last-minute bargaining failed to produce a deal. This was only the second strike in the local's 70-year history. Negotiations with the employer began in June 2023. The strike ended on October 4th securing a new deal, and members returned to work to "support the electrification of Ontario's economy and keep the people of this province safe from electrical harm."



Poillievre's Conservatives Delay Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act

Climate Change is here and the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are top of mind for many Canadians and labour activists. In Canada, we continue to see wild variations in our own climate as we watch unprecedented rainfall in California and raging forest fires in Chile. However, for the last 3 months there has been a flurry of activity in and around Ottawa to move us closer to a low carbon economy.

One of the developments closely watched by Labour is the progress of Bill C-50, the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act, which allows for “the creation of sustainable jobs for workers and economic growth in a net-zero economy”. This Act is meant to fulfill the Trudeau government’s commitment to a Just Transition.

The legislation was also one of three topics that was the focus of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) Ottawa lobby day in November, along with pushing for a national pharmacare program, and Bill C-58 that deals with anti-scab legislation. The CLC has done considerable work on C-50, including co-authoring two reports with the Pembina Institute.

The Bill passed second reading last June and went to the natural Resources Committee of the House of Commons. This is where a concerted effort by Conservative members over several months obstructed and delayed the report back to the House until mid December. This prevented Bill C-50 from passing 3rd Reading before Christmas, which was the objective of the Conservatives, by introducing thousands of nonsense amendments. It is expected that the Bill will pass 3rd reading in February, when it will be brought to the Senate.

As reported in the Fall 2023 Labour Action, the Bill would create a Sustainable Jobs Council. Amendments to the Bill have given more detail on what that Council could look like. The number of members have been reduced from 15 to 13, including an industry and labour co-chair. Other members include: three members representing trade unions; three members representing Indigenous peoples; three members representing industry; one member representing an environmental non-governmental organization; and one member representing another unspecified key stakeholder group. The CLC

had been campaigning for 1/3 of the Council to be Labour, this configuration would have Labour 30% of total membership.

The CLC is running a strong campaign to ensure the Bill is passed. You can see their Sustainable Jobs Superheroes campaign at futurethatworks.ca for a backgrounder on the CLC campaign to pass the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act.

Relatedly, in December, the federal government released its 2023 Progress Report on the Emissions Reduction Plan.

The Progress Report shows Canada’s progress towards its emissions targets: a 40% reduction to 2005 levels by 2030 and net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Assuming this trend continues, it marks a significant achievement, considering Canada has yet to make its emissions reduction targets going back to the Chretien government over the Kyoto Protocol in the 1990s. The next Progress Report is due in 2025.

On February 2, 2024, the federal government dropped the announcement of a public consultation process with Canadians and Indigenous Peoples to determine what Canada’s national greenhouse gas emissions target should be – this time for 2035. Talking Targets: Canada’s Climate Future, is a portal open until March 28, 2024, where individuals and their unions can leave comments either anonymously, or as a named contribution. The input collected will be considered when setting the 2035 target which has to be set by Dec 1 2024.

If your union would like to leave a comment and would like some help from the Labour Education Centre, please contact Steve Shallhorn at sshallhorn@labureducation.org.

Steve Shallhorn is the Executive Director of Working Green 2050

We  our schools!

BUT THERE ARE PROBLEMS THAT NEED URGENT ATTENTION!



FUND OUR SCHOOLS!

EDUCATION CAMPAIGN LAUNCH

In the Fall of 2023, leaders of Elementary Teachers of Toronto, OSSTF Toronto, and Toronto Education Workers / Local 4400 met with progressive School Trustees and parents. They agreed to work together on a campaign to address the problems in our schools – problems that need urgent attention. The campaign is named: **FUND OUR SCHOOLS!**

The COVID pandemic intensified problems caused by many years of budget cuts. Right now, a wide range of serious day-to-day problems are impacting students, parents, education workers and entire communities.

We urgently need to organize vocal opposition to the Provincial Government's escalating budget cuts. At the very least, we must resist, expose, and undermine those responsible by challenging them and how they are viewed by working people.

Before and after government funding announcements, as well as the School Board Budget process, the FUND OUR SCHOOLS campaign will launch hard-hitting grassroots initiatives directed at individual Conservative MPPs in key ridings. The campaign will publicly point the finger at them and hold them responsible for underfunding our schools.

The next provincial election will take place in June 2026. Let's challenge the Conservatives on their budget cuts to school funding. When we build strength together, we show the provincial government what workers power looks like. NOW is the time to push back.

This campaign is for the long haul. Across the education sector, we need a long-lasting and inspiring campaign bringing members together, so we can win TOGETHER.

While research, policy papers, and lobbying are crucial, this is not just a debate. We are fighting to give students what they need to succeed, and education workers fair working conditions, putting people power first.

Where do people start building people's power? On the ground – in our schools. Right now, however, it's not an easy task. Many of our union members across the education sector are stressed and burned out. Many are barely coping and feeling alone.

The FUND OUR SCHOOLS campaign will reconnect our members with each other and their unions to rebuild hope and inspire our members to fight back. First, let's SPEAK UP and SPEAK OUT about the issues our members are witnessing and experiencing in our schools.

Our members will tell their first-hand stories and take action together.

Hearing each other's stories helps bring us closer and overcomes the isolation many members feel. We are working to build connections, empower members, and raise hope to mobilize members to take a stand.

TDSB unions are already joining the campaign with their members and telling their stories. Join us and reach out to teachers at your child or grandchild's school and give them all the support you can. Parents: keep an eye out for the next phase of the campaign.

The struggle to save public education is right now. Join us to save education for all Ontarians. Join us in the fight to FUND OUR SCHOOLS! Sign up at fundourschools.ca



march

21: International Day for the
Elimination of Racial
Discrimination

april

4: Delegates Meeting
26: Day of Mourning

may

1: International Workers Day
2: Delegates Meeting

june

6: Delegates Meeting
8: Indigenous & Workers of
Colour Conference (IWOC)
21: Bromley Armstrong
Awards Gala



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