



THE NEXT FOUR YEARS IN ONTARIO

It was the wildest election in living memory. The Liberal Party collapsed, the NDP elected the most MPP's in a generation, and Doug Ford is the new Premier. His message of tax cuts, lower gas prices, and challenging the privilege of elites hit home, including with many working families. The Ford campaign cynically refused to provide any concrete indication of how a Conservative government would pay for its many promises.

There will be four years of turmoil across Ontario, but many people don't see that yet – they believe they voted to end hallway medicine, lower gas prices and turf overpaid executives, all while front line jobs will be protected. What they don't realize is how much public services and public sector workers will be under attack to pay for promised tax giveaways of the Ford campaign. Or the reality that private sector employers will be given a free hand to exploit workers, wages will stagnate and precarious work will expand.

We saw how Mike Harris and Rob Ford moved with lightning speed to privatize assets and gut workers' rights. There is no question that this Conservative regime will operate the same way, and that labour and community activists must be prepared for an immediate fight to defend public services and frontline workers. But some of the first acts of the government may be popular, so our messaging must be accurate. It will be essential to safeguard democracy in our public institutions, because a key tactic of the Conservatives and U.S. Republicans is to strip accountability from government decision-making process.

History shows that each time the Conservatives take power they drive down the standards that working people have secured. Their rhetoric criticizes the "elites", but their actions inevitably align with the interests of big business. And no matter how much some moderate corporate leaders decry the behaviour of politicians like Ford or Trump, business wants lower corporate taxes and most will accommodate themselves to an agenda that weakens workers' rights and economic equality.

But there were some victories - we can celebrate the election of many dynamic New Democrats to Queen's Park. The NDP ran on a bold platform of social justice, and the ten new NDP MPP's in Toronto will join Peter Tabuns as champions in confronting the direction of the new government. It will be essential that they help give voice to resistance and assist in building powerful movements for social justice across the province.

A difficult battleground will be the issue of climate change and just transition to a low-carbon future. His abrupt reversal of cap-and-trade will throw important energy conservation investments into turmoil, and eliminate funding for vital mitigation measures such as energy retrofits of schools and social housing, as well as industrial transition. A Ford government will mimic the same approach to the environment as the Harper regime, setting us back years in our efforts to take on this crucial challenge.

For cities and school boards, the relationship with the provincial government is fraught with difficulty. A central demand of parents and education workers is to fix the broken funding formula and invest in classroom resources. Municipalities are still recovering from the disastrous downloading of costs and services by the Harris government decades ago. Transit workers are concerned about a takeover and privatization of subway service. There is no plan to address crumbling social housing stock, and no mention of support for social services. The wild card for Ontario is the impact of Trump's moves on tariffs. With a potential trade war looming, industrial workers need a plan to defend their jobs.

The labour movement has learned from experience that we must resist every attack on working people, on the poor or marginalized, on civil society and on democracy. It is never easy to maintain solidarity in the face of powerful forces that will attempt to divide and conquer. Our leadership will be tested many times. Now is the time to defend the hard-won progress we made in recent years – including the minimum wage, Bill 148, partial pharmacare, expanded childcare, and more, and show that Ford will hurt the living standards of most Ontarians if he tries to reverse those gains.

We must join with all others to reject the politics of greed and division, building broad coalitions and working in both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary forms of struggle. And we must continuously talk to the working families that voted for Ford about the real impact of the decisions his government makes. Through all this, we have to take time to deepen the political understanding of activists in every union, including a new generation of leaders. It won't be an easy four years, but through our efforts we continue to strive for a better future, fighting for a society that provides fairness, good jobs and dignity for all.

The Executive recommends that Labour Council:

- Undertake a comprehensive outreach to all affiliates and activists to prepare for the tough struggles ahead
- Expand our ability to communicate with union members, diverse communities and the general public about the values of social, economic, racial, gender and climate justice that anchor our labour movement
- Build broad coalitions to challenge regressive policies of the Ford government
- Defend workers' rights and the gains in Bill 148 including the \$15 Minimum Wage, and urge unions to undertake mass organizing drives among precarious workers
- Work to overcome the divisions within the house of labour so that we can build a strong, united union movement as the foundation for the important work we must carry out over the next four years
- Continue to call for electoral reform in favour of proportional representation so that the true wishes of the voters are reflected in the legislature.

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