

# STAND UP FOR A STRONG TORONTO!

Once again, the people of Toronto are facing stark choices about the kind of city they want in the future. On one side, the Mayor and progressive Councillors are calling for new revenue tools to invest in a city with strong public services, healthy neighbourhoods, and a clear commitment to environmental action and social justice.

On the other side are right-wing politicians engaged in relentless union-bashing and demands for privatization and contracting out. They are bolstered by business interests angling to introduce public/private partnerships into city operations, and tax-revolt conservatives who dream of reviving the Common Sense Revolution. At the front are real estate agents and speculators who have no problem with a market that has raised house prices by 20-30% in recent years, but are determined to stop the proposed land transfer tax.

## *We've been here before...*

We have been in this kind of fight before. When Harris forced amalgamation of the mega-city ten years ago, he deliberately downloaded huge costs onto municipalities in order to squeeze them into slashing social programs and contracting out services. Mel Lastman was his chosen candidate for mayor, elected with an irresponsible promise of a three year tax freeze that ended up crippling Toronto's ability to serve its residents. We soon became a scruffy-looking city with transit under stress and poorly served neighbourhoods.

Lastman aimed to privatize Toronto's water and enter into a flawed contract to ship our garbage up to Adam's mine, but the people of Toronto stopped both. In his last term, he declared war on his own employees and caused bitter strikes. And now his right-wing supporters at city hall are at it again.

Minan-Wong and Stintz (the ones who wanted our subway cars built in China) are proposing wholesale contracting out. Ootes wants construction unions decertified. Del Grande wants to sink the Climate Change Initiative. Holiday and the National Post complain about bus drivers wages. The Sun's Sue Ann Levy demands the Fair Wage policy be gutted and community grants cut.

## *Investment or tax revolt*

The longer the budget crisis continues, the more this hard-right agenda will be played out. What we are witnessing is a relentless attempt to whip up the anti-tax sentiment in order to win ground for privatization and erosion of workers rights.

On the other hand, the people of Toronto gave David Miller a strong mandate for a city based on progressive values. The programs and services that are slowly being rebuilt, the Transit City plans, and the commitment to becoming one of the greenest cities in the world – all this takes money.

Labour, youth, community and environmental groups came together to launch the “Fair Deal for Our City” campaign aimed at forcing provincial politicians to deal with the devastating effects of downloading. All three parties ended up committing to address the issue. But the fact is, Toronto also needs revenue that grows with the economy. We cannot rely on user fees and property taxes alone.

The proposed Land Transfer Tax is much fairer than increasing residential property taxes, providing it exempts first-time buyers of modest homes. Vehicle registration fees are preferable to hikes in TTC fares. Let’s be clear about the choices - large increases on property taxes hit tenants, low-income families and fixed-income seniors the hardest.

### ***What it takes to have a great city***

Ultimately, this battle is about two competing visions. Ours is one of a city that serves all of its residents, that recognizes the value of its social infrastructure, its cultural life, its front-line workers, and its need to build for the future. Whatever mistakes have been made at City Hall in taking on this fight, the fact is that we need to invest in our city for it to be the kind of place provides a decent quality of life for working families. We need to defeat the tax-cutting demagogues, and exercise our basic right to build a strong city together.