

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 2009-12

The first decade of the 21st century witnessed an extended financial boom in which corporate profits in Canada soared to new heights, followed by the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression.

Income inequality has reflected the worst extremes in decades, as over a hundred thousand manufacturing jobs were lost in greater Toronto and unemployment soared in nearly every sector of the economy. While the crisis has raised questions about the legitimacy of the corporate agenda described as “neo-liberalism”, it has also set the stage for serious erosion of workers wages, working conditions and pensions. And it will strain all aspects of social solidarity that are crucial to a just society.

Nobody is able to predict how long this recession will last, nor how deep it will be. There is no doubt that there will be significant structural adjustment in the economy of greater Toronto by the time it is over.

Through the work of the Labour Council, its affiliates and community allies, labour has been able to establish a reputation as a strong, active and essential force in Toronto and York Region. The annual Aboriginal/Workers of Colour Conferences have helped deepen our equity agenda, as have the Leadership Institutes and the work of the Labour Education Centre and Labour Community Services. The release of “*A Million Reasons to Take Action*” clearly identified the mandate of raising the standards of all workers in the GTA,

Labour Council initiated a community-labour alliance of thirty-five key organizations to host the Summit on *Good Jobs for All for a Greater Toronto* in November 2008. More than a thousand people came together in a profoundly multi-racial gathering of progressive activists to shape a progressive vision of Toronto’s future. Ongoing struggles to Fix Employment Insurance, invest in social infrastructure, and develop an equitable green economy continue to unfold through the Good Jobs for All coalition.

In May 2009, Labour Council convened its first ever Stewards Assembly. The overwhelming turnout of one thousand six hundred stewards, staff and leaders, showed that union activists want a collective response to the challenges of the economic crisis.

There is increasing recognition of the need for the kind of labour power needed to counter a corporate agenda that impacts so ruthlessly on many in our society. Over the next three years, Labour Council will concentrate its efforts on building deeper labour power within Toronto and York Region. An essential part of that involves strengthening solidarity with Toronto’s diverse communities, and workers voices within their communities

A collective response to the new economic reality

Labour Council will mobilize the strength of the labour movement and our community allies in greater Toronto, to:

- Fight for a living wage and good jobs for all
- Work for sustainable economic development strategies
- Develop new capacity to organize around strikes and lockouts
- Campaign to restore the social safety net, starting with EI
- Defend and expand the social wage, including retirement income
- Support investment in both physical and social infrastructure,
- Secure procurement policies from all levels of government
- Reform labour laws, employment standards, and regulations
- Explore new strategies for organizing unrepresented workers
- Develop a labour “greenprint” for a sustainable and equitable economy
- Develop a new generation of seasoned leaders and campaigners, reflecting the full diversity of the Toronto region

This plan will be informed by a critical analysis of the impact of global capitalism on workers in the GTA, Canada, and also the Global South. We will learn from labour experience in other North American cities with large immigrant workforces and from labour and popular movements in the global south. As well, we will draw on the work of progressive researchers in critiquing the current economic model and advocating alternative solutions.

Strengthening Our Capacity to Organize

To carry out effective political bargaining, we must engage affiliates in both issues campaigns and extensive election work. Comprehensive membership mapping on riding and ward levels, and involving activists in lobbying and direct campaign work will strengthen the accountability of labour-endorsed politicians and improve our ability to respond to key opportunities as they arise.

Over the next three years, Labour Council will undertake to strengthen its relationship with leaders and activists of every affiliate, including the new affiliates from the student unions. It will also challenge its affiliates to engage more profoundly in collective initiatives and campaigns, and to help transform our entire movement into a real force to be reckoned with.

Only by forging deeply rooted labour power will we be able to truly speak for working people in Canada’s largest urban centre. We will build on the achievements of those who have come before us, while continuing the arduous process of shaping a more just society for future generations.