

## THE CITY WE WANT

The summer of 2010 has already served up more than the usual share of drama and excitement. Most people haven't focused yet on the upcoming municipal elections, but the jockeying for position is already taking place. Is there a surprise in the level of support for Rob Ford's simplistic tax cuts message? We know it goes beyond hard-core conservatives to include some union members and residents who feel alienated from City Hall. But we also know what happens when that kind of right-wing populism prevails - the devastation and turmoil of the Mike Harris years were ample proof.

If it is clear what we *don't* want, why aren't more people raising their voices about the kind of city we do want? Has the relentless griping from pundits and wannabe mayors left us with selective amnesia about our past efforts to build a livable city? The Labour Council has been a very strong advocate for the kinds of policies needed for an incredibly complex city. There are no shortcuts or simple answers. This is, after all, Canada's largest urban centre, an economic powerhouse with the most diverse population in the world.

We need to remind ourselves and our neighbours of some key elements of a strong Toronto:

- A **foundation** of strong public services, publicly delivered and fully accountable to the residents of each community.
- A **reliable source** of revenues for the city government, transit authorities and local school boards.
- A **practice** of planning and decision-making that results in environmental sustainability in all aspects of both public sector and private sector activity.
- A **commitment** to the integrity of decent jobs with fair wages in every sector of the economy.
- A **goal** of social and economic equity that ensures the prosperity of our cities is shared by all.
- A **framework** of democratic governance that enhances accountability and engagement of all residents of each community.

The fact is that it will take women and men of courage to work for these principles in the face of huge political and financial pressures. The wealthiest citizens may pay lip service to these ideals, but today they are focusing their efforts on an agenda of privatization and outsourcing. Let's be clear - most employers don't want City Hall to play a role around fair wages; most landlords don't want anybody helping tenants; and none of the polluters want restrictions on how they do business. A slash and burn Council would no doubt deliver what they want, while turning its back on the most pressing needs of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Toronto.

This summer we can't rest while the political forces of the right gain momentum. Union activists, community leaders, social justice organizers - all of us need to be speaking out about the city we want. We've got to network and build connections in our workplaces and our neighbourhoods. Once Labour Day arrives, there will only be a few short weeks when the election outcome will be decided. We all need to be well prepared for that historic challenge.