

# STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 2004 - 2010

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# STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR THE TORONTO LABOUR MOVEMENT 2004-2010

The political landscape in the Toronto area has shifted dramatically in the past year. The election of David Miller and new progressive Councillors and Trustees have brought a new sense of optimism that things can be done to restore the vitality of Canada's largest city. The series of crises spawned by the Harris/Eves government tarnished the allure of right-wing politics, and instead created a new appreciation of the value and integrity of public services.

The labour movement has learned many new skills through its recent campaigns. We have started to communicate with members based on where they live, creating the potential for organizing at the neighbourhood/community level. We have carefully chosen messages and alliances that increase our effectiveness – and help in winning key victories.



## LOOKING TO 2010

Against this backdrop, we need to map out our strategic vision for the future. What should the labour movement be like in 2010? In those six years, we will experience ongoing changes in the economy- including a recession. There will be a number of elections to engage in, and a continued shift in the demographics of the workforce. Across the world, wars and environmental degradation will threaten a large percentage of humankind, while workers will find new forms of solidarity in the struggle against global capitalism.

As the most multicultural city in the world, we are in a unique position to draw on the skills and experience of workers from every imaginable background. How can we engage that wisdom to not only make Toronto "A proud union city" but also a "City of Solidarity". And most importantly, how will this apply to young workers, most of whom do not have unions today.

The lessons of organizing immigrant communities is that people need victories in the immediate issues that make a difference in their lives. To be successful, efforts must be well-focussed and every achievement celebrated. Similarly, when we examine the capacity of Labour Council to engage in campaigns, we know that our goals must be carefully chosen and then resourced properly. We can realistically only undertake two or three campaigns in any year, or our affiliates will be unable to lend the support needed to win.

What should determine our priorities? While there will be pressures to respond to many different issues, the essential element must be that we are building labour power. Three tasks are central to that goal: Building Leadership; Building Power for our Communities; and Organizing Unrepresented Workers.

## Building Leadership

The labour movement in Toronto has brought forward generations of exceptional leaders. There is a richness of experience that needs to be shared and passed on to hundreds of union activists who will lead the struggles of the future. Each new decade, however, brings unique challenges that also must be understood. The process of learning leadership takes place at many different levels - from the role of steward or safety representative to elected heads of unions and senior staff reps. For our sisters and brothers to be seasoned leaders, they will need to gain real life experience that develops the following skills:

- 1) Mobilizing in the workplace around key issues such as bargaining goals, defence of jobs, or worker rights
- 2) Learning to analyse the forces at play and the challenges for workers in their sector
- 3) Recruiting activists for broader collective campaigns of the union or labour movement
- 4) Actively working for an equity agenda within their union
- 5) Generating support for their union's engagement in political action
- 6) Fulfilling the responsibility of reaching out to unrepresented workers either in their sector or their community
- 7) Contributing to building the solidarity of workers at local, national and international levels

Labour Council can take specific steps to help build the kind of leadership described above. From mentorship programs, to how we run our delegates meetings, to the style in which we undertake major campaigns - we need to consciously design our work to engage workers in a constant learning process. Our structures should draw people together to achieve specific goals, including a collective ability to analyse the opportunities and challenges in front of them.

When we undertake campaigns, we identify activists within our affiliates who can play leading roles. Their unions have to provide the time and resources for those sisters and brothers to fulfill their potential and achieve the results within their own organizations. As more union leaders see that organizing unrepresented workers is part of our collective mandate, local activists will be called on to play a greater role. And on issues like strike support, we must discover how to deliver effective pressure on employers of varying sizes in different sectors.

A key piece of what we learn from varied struggles is how to make alliances. In our broader campaigns, we need to include newer leaders in the process of analysing who our allies should be on any given issue, and what steps are needed to create and maintain strong, principled relationships.



On issues of economic development Labour Council has a wealth of experience in fighting for good jobs, and we should not hesitate to look back to well-developed policies of past years. In difficult times our principles will sometimes be tested in fighting for the goal of job creation or retention. In the face of globalization and the corporate drive to reduce both the direct wage levels and the social wage our movement has attained, the **struggle for good jobs** is central to our future.

In our ongoing political work, there must be a patient process that respects the vastly different traditions of our many affiliates in order to craft an approach that brings the strength of working people into the real politics of the twenty-first century. We cannot afford to have only a small layer of activists engaged in politics on behalf of millions of workers. The measure of success will be the ability to actively mobilize thousands of our members in political action.



None of these things will be possible without the leadership of workers of colour. The Equity Agenda of our Council is not an addendum in a list of things to do, but the very foundation of future success. Making the space for workers of colour to assume leadership roles is vital, and so is training. Our Labour Education Centre can play an important role in outreach and capacity building, as well as launching a **Labour Leadership Institute** that provides a thorough grounding for future leaders

## Building Power for Our Communities

The most important lessons of recent elections and the campaigns around education and water is how crucial it is to speak to union members about issues that matter in their communities. Identifying where our members live is vital for electoral success and for pressuring politicians to either keep promises or respond to our issues. The maintenance of up-to-date databases of members and volunteer activists is a basic requirement for this work.

As well as geographic, we also need to be able to reach ethnic and issue specific communities. We often find that union members are already leaders in their own communities, but don't connect that work with union business. Politicians only pay attention to those who have a real base and can organize the constituents in their own backyard. Whether we are fighting for affordable transit, quality daycare, or police accountability, our ability to show that we represent many residents in a given ward or riding will determine how seriously we are taken.



Too often, groups that are working for social justice do not have the political weight to force those in power to respond. The challenge is how to build power for our communities, particularly those with many newcomers and low-income residents. Social service agencies are now calling attention to the new pockets of poverty found in the inner suburbs of Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke. Lack of recreation facilities and other social infrastructure is identified as a key problem. But the reality of poverty is that tens of thousands of well-paying jobs have disappeared through trade deals and public sector cutbacks in the last decade, while enforcement of employment standards has virtually disappeared.



It is essential that we prove to newcomers that the route to improving their quality of life is through strong unions. Unions are the only way to lift income standards in any sector of the economy. But they must also be at the core of civic engagement to win better arrangements for individual communities - from the quality of their schools to decent housing. We need to dedicate more of our resources to supporting the creation and maintenance of progressive community groups.



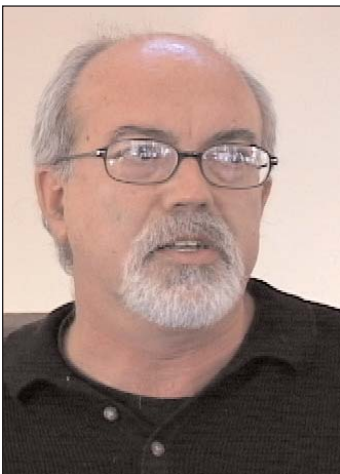
The work of our Labour Community Services should result in building capacity of working families to help shape their own future. We need a **Community Leadership Institute** to help people learn how to actually build power within these communities, so that they can command the respect of decision makers at City Hall, Queen's Park and the school boards.

What labour brings to the discussion on cities is our rock-solid understanding that strong public services are the foundation of strong communities. The experience of the Mike Harris years has removed any doubt on the question, so that the rebuilding of public services is now the basis of unity for many broad campaigns. However, powerful financial forces will continue their drive to commercialize every social transaction, and vigilance is required to stop the incursion of public-private partnerships into the public realm.

The growing interest in a new deal for Canada's cities provides labour with an opportunity to lay out our vision for healthy, sustainable communities; based on strong public services and principles of social justice; where working families of all backgrounds can live in harmony. The "new urban agenda" provides space for development of left politics that reflects the real interests of the majority of Canadians. For Labour Council, this must be translated into our work in York Region as well as the city of Toronto.



## Organizing Unrepresented Workers



*Stewart Acuff,  
Director of Organizing,  
AFL-CIO, addressing Labour  
Council Organizing  
Conference*

Labour Council's 2004 Organizing Conference outlined the key goal of raising union density in the Toronto region. Organizers and activists from every sector of the economy agreed that we must transform our organizing efforts if we are to sign up thousands of new members each year.

We need to move our unions into an organizing mode, where members and activists see organizing as a key goal to be integrated into their everyday activities. It's obvious who our new members must be – youth, women and workers of colour.

Labour law reform is urgently needed to end the climate of intimidation in non-union workplaces that denies workers the freedom to exercise their right to join a union. That must become a key demand of our movement, but it will only happen if we can share the reality of organizing with a much larger percentage of union leaders. While this is not the traditional responsibility of Labour Council, we cannot be true to our mandate if the downward spiral of union density goes unchecked. Not only do

workers have to be able to organize without fear, but successor rights of all employees need to be restored if workers are to truly have the right to bargain collectively.

A comprehensive plan of action has come out of the conference. It includes creating an **Organizing Institute** in Toronto to train rank and file organizers, particularly workers of colour and those with different language skills. A regular **organizers roundtable** would be hosted to start opening up more communications around different efforts being undertaken by affiliates, and to identify common tools that are needed.



Labour Council would be asked to do systematic outreach to **immigrant communities** in order to build relationships with community and faith leaders who could support organizing as a key means of improving people's lives. And Labour Council would co-ordinate the labour movement approaching **MPP's and City politicians** around an agenda of organizing, where they are asked to use their elected position to support labour law reform and specific organizing drives.



This is an ambitious agenda. We do not know whether affiliates are actually ready to commit themselves to such a plan, especially if their tradition has been to leave organizing up to national or regional staff. Both the CLC and OFL have argued for more dedicated resources and co-ordination of organizing, but rivalries and traditional habits still prevail. The only way to find out if our unions are ready to do it in Canada's largest urban center is to start moving, and see where it take us.



## Building the Capacity of Labour Council

As the largest labour council in Canada, we have affiliates that represent workers in every sector of the economy. We are called upon to provide strike support, co-ordinate political campaigns, handle government relations, develop coalition work and be the overall "Voice of Labour" in Toronto. We cannot solve every issue, or respond to every problem a union faces. But we can be a key element in bringing together the skills and resources of thousands of working women and men to build real power in our society. The process will be an arduous one, full of pitfalls and detours. But if we keep our eyes on the prize - building power - we can surely make a real difference in the future of our country's largest urban centre.



## STRONG, ACTIVE, ESSENTIAL

Over a century ago working men and women came together in Toronto to win the right to have a union. In 1872 thousands marched to demand freedom for printers who were jailed for the crime of striking for the 8-hour day. They were released, laws were changed, and from that time we have built a city - and a labour movement - to be proud of.

Today hundreds of thousands of women and men are union members in Toronto. We work in every kind of occupation. Union members deliver clean water and healthy food, build houses and airplanes, care for the sick, teach children and welcome tourists. From production industries to running our transit, to staffing the CN tower, **we make this city work.**

Since the very beginning, our unions have fought for social justice, so that the wealth we create can be enjoyed by everyone. The key social programs that working families depend on - from public education to healthcare - are a product of our efforts. So too are decent wages, safety standards, and employment security. Together with community activists, we have struggled relentlessly against poverty and discrimination. **We are proud of our achievements.**

There are still many challenges ahead. We need to protect our medicare system from those who would put profit before public health. Our schools need fair funding so that every student can have the opportunity to succeed. Public services need to be guarded against the forces of privatization. Affordable housing needs to be built, and our air and water made clean again. The task of building a just society is never completed. A strong labour movement will always be needed to ensure that **the interests of working people are respected.**

The Toronto & York Region Labour Council is the central body speaking on behalf of working people in Canada's largest urban centre. With 175 affiliated local unions, Labour Council has a rich history of leadership in a wide variety of issues. We have created partnerships for services delivered through Labour Community Services and the Labour Education Centre. We have created alliances with others who value social justice. And we organize the strength of people from all walks of life to build better communities. Labour Council – **a strong, active and essential voice for working people.**



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