

“FIX LABOUR LAW AND EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS”

Thursday, March 5, 2015

It's time to turn things around for Ontario workers. For many years, unions raised the standards for almost all Canadians. We bargained better wages, good benefits, and pensions so workers could retire with dignity. Following the tough strikes immediately after WWII, corporate Canada agreed to a form of social contract that saw living standards rise along with industrial expansion and profitability. Even non-union employers often matched our wage rates in order to retain skilled workers, or to avoid unionization.

But in recent times, employers have abandoned any balance in labour relations and, with pro-business politicians, have driven down the living standards of Canadian workers. Whether in the public or private sector, CEO's have done that by:

- Forcing two-tier wages on new hires
- Outsourcing jobs to poverty wage contractors
- Refusing to pay a living wage in most service sector jobs
- Using temp agencies to staff a large portion of their workforce
- Increasing part-time work with lower wages and few benefits
- Fiercely opposing workers trying to unionize

This has resulted in huge growth of income inequality, and loss of union density in many sectors of the economy. More employers are locking out workers, and almost all are determined to reduce labour costs on the backs of the next generation. It's time to turn this around.

While we wage defensive battles in response to relentless attacks, we must devote far more resources to organizing and to *raising* the living standards of workers. The battle for legislated workers' rights has been at the centre of our movement's efforts throughout its history.

The Ontario government is holding a consultation to update labour law and employment standards, and we need to mobilize to ensure that real change is made that will improve conditions for workers in this province. For the Labour Relations Act our demands are simple:

- Change the rules to make it easier for workers to unionize
- Strengthen the rules to ensure workers can get a fair first contract
- Strengthen successor rights so workers can maintain their conditions when new tenders are awarded for cleaning, security, home care and food services
- Stop companies from using labour disputes or restructuring to take away workers' jobs

For Employment Standards we want:

- All work by temp agencies paid at the same rate and benefits as permanent work
- Make client companies responsible for wage theft by agencies or sub-contractors
- Employers to favour full-time permanent work over precarious jobs
- An end to misclassification of workers as “independent contractors”
- Action on the demands by the community coalition for other ESA changes

To achieve these goals, we will have to mobilize the entire labour movement. Every leader, every activist needs to support these changes, and let the government and their own MPP know how important it is to turn things around. It is vital that we build a collective determination to improve the work and working conditions of the next generation of Canadians.