

ONE TORONTO - Build it Up, Don't Tear it Down! September 2010

Labour Day marks the time when the municipal election moves into high gear. With summer holidays behind us, people start to pay attention to candidates and issues. In recent weeks, the headlines have been dominated by rise in support for Rob Ford's bid for mayor, based on a disturbing right-wing populism. Bay Street powerbrokers and news columns have been full of disparaging remarks about the Miller government, feeding the anti city hall sentiment in recent months. And now the uncertainty in people's lives due to the economic crisis creates fertile ground for scape-goating and demagoguery. There is more than a whiff of "Common Sense Revolution" in the air.

There is an urgent need in the next eight weeks to change the nature of the debate. Toronto's labour movement and many community allies have spent years working to build the kind of city we can be proud of – one that serves all its residents regardless of income, which celebrates its diversity and plays a leadership role in the crucial areas like climate change and social equality. We have rejected the politics of division and crafted a common vision of a city that is built on a foundation of strong public services and equity for all.

Progressives from all walks of life need to rally around these values, and bring forth the urgency for collective actions to counter the right wing agenda. We need to craft a powerful message that talks about the city we want instead of privatization, outsourcing and tax cuts. Our goal has always been one Toronto that offers everyone both respect and a decent quality of life. Past generations had the wisdom to invest in mass transit and schools, parks and libraries, childcare and community centres. Today's investment includes culture and arts, social services and old age homes, solar energy and organic waste diversion.

Yes there is the over-riding reality of an economic system that is ruthlessly increasing social disparity. But we have to ensure our city acts a balance against those forces, rather than a vehicle for further disparity and inequality. We need our elected politicians to be builders not bullies.

A "One Toronto" campaign aims to change the nature of the public debate around the 2010 election. In doing so it will create a groundswell of public opinion that re-asserts the progressive values that most Torontonians share. It can motivate those who feel disengaged up to now. In the next eight weeks we have a choice to make. Labour and community activists need to do whatever we can to safeguard the values of this proud city.

The Executive Board recommends that the Labour Council:

1. Work with student, environmental and community organizations to launch a campaign themed "One Toronto: Build it up, Don't tear it down!" and create a mass outreach for this message using every available means, from traditional print material and cultural events to electronic and social media.
2. Urge every affiliate to engage the full creativity of their membership to take this message into every workplace and community between now and October 25th.