

ONTARIO ELECTION 2014

Thursday, June 5, 2014

Eighteen months ago Labour Council starting preparing for the provincial election. The passage of so-called "Right to Work" legislation in Michigan sparked a realization that Conservative leader Tim Hudak's plans to enact the same laws in Ontario was not just idle talk. We quickly assembled at team to create material and start intense training of hundreds of activists to go back to their workplaces to engage members in discussion about the Hudak threat.

At the Canadian Labour Congress 2013 Political Action conference union leaders from the U.S. and Australia emphasized the need to invest time and money to stop the anti-union attack. Every union in this country agreed to fund the Fairness Works TV ads that would show how the labour movement has helped improve workers' lives. And most unions developed their own material that put the threat in context for their members.

Fortunately there was no election called in 2013, so we gained time to continue the work. The OFL convention mandated an ambitious plan of holding all-union meetings in every Ontario city to expose Hudak's plans. They were a great success, re-building a sense of urgency across the labour movement. As this work developed, a new theme emerged in the messaging – Hudak can't be trusted to run Ontario.

With the election called, that theme has proven to be absolutely correct. From the bogus claim about creating a million jobs, to the campaign launch at a workplace which enjoys government funding that he pledges to end, Hudak has stumbled from the start. The proposal to kill 100,000 public sector jobs defies belief, and has been a stark reminder of the vicious cuts imposed by the Harris government in which Hudak was a minister.

While many unions have concerns about the need for an election at this time, nearly every affiliate is fully engaged, with staff and booked-off members plugged into campaigns across the GTA. TV ads and social media are being used more than ever to go after the Conservatives and their plans for a low-wage economy. Innovative tactics such as house visits to members are paying off, as more and more union families commit to voting against Hudak.

In the closing week of the election, we cannot let up. Our goal is to dramatically reduce the number of union members who vote Conservative, and permanently discredit any political program designed to weaken unions in the future. After the election we will continue the long-term task of building stronger relationships with our own members and community allies, in order to advance labour's fight for a decent quality of life for all.