

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2014

“What’s at Stake in October 2014”

Labour Day kicks the municipal election into high gear. The next eight weeks his promises to be a political roller-coaster ride. Polling done at the end of the summer shows it’s now a 3-way race for Mayor, with Olivia Chow no longer enjoying the commanding lead she had at the start of the year.

John Tory seems to have benefited from Ford’s resurgence, as some voters who want to stop Ford are turning to Tory as the lesser evil. At this stage he is presenting himself as the centrist candidate - many people seem unaware that Tory’s policies are actually close to Ford’s.

Our challenge is to make sure people understand this election as a referendum on the austerity agenda. The fact is there are two Conservative candidates whose politics line up with Stephen Harper and Tim Hudak. On the other side is the progressive choice of Olivia Chow.

The recent polls are a wake-up call to the Chow campaign and the labour movement. There is still time to focus the Chow campaign on the issues that are most important to working families. The campaign’s language and tone must reflect its commitment to address those issues.

The Labour Council statement *The City We Want* makes it clear, “*Politicians who want to cut to the bone, sell off public assets and turn good jobs into poverty jobs, are simply not doing their job.*” That defines Rob Ford. However City Council was able to block most of his right-wing agenda. The result is that today he can get away with sweeping statements based on half-truths, and many people don’t see evidence of the damage he WOULD HAVE INFLICTED if he could have gathered enough votes on Council to carry out his plans.

John Tory, on the other hand, would be able to cobble together the votes to pursue an agenda favoured by Bay Street – including privatization and outsourcing. His endorsers include anti-labour heavyweights such as Case Ootes, Ford’s former campaign manager Nick Kouvalis, and a smattering of Liberals among a solid core of Conservatives. If Tory were elected, it would boost the political fortunes of both the provincial and federal Conservatives, and be a real step backward for the people of Toronto.

Labour Council’s election material highlights six issues: Transit, Community Services, Fighting Poverty, Environmental Leadership, Equity, and Neighbourhoods where Families Thrive. We will also focus on privatization and tax fairness in the coming weeks, to help differentiate the real choices facing voters.

It is urgent that affiliates continue engaging members as the follow-up to the workers’ rights campaign, to establish a “new normal” of political work in our unions. That includes recruiting volunteers for key City Council and School Board elections as well as the mayoral campaign.

Our movement must focus all its efforts to mobilize members, their families and other working people around a progressive agenda for Canada’s largest city. It’s our next challenge in making 2014 a year of justice.