

THE SUMMIT ON GOOD JOBS FOR ALL
Thursday, December 4, 2008

The Good Jobs for All Summit on November 22nd was an amazing event. An article in Now Toronto magazine best captured the spirit of the day:

“The Convention Centre meeting hall was abuzz with a standing- room-only crowd of more than 1,000 participants of every race and nationality in the city. They came in answer to the coalition’s call to begin laying the turf for a new-style movement aiming to bridge community, environmental and labour issues.

The day-long event, months in the planning, was the product of a collaboration between the Toronto & York Region Labour Council and a host of neighbourhood, ethnic, labour and enviro organizations across the GTA, all the way from the Toronto office of the Chinese Canadian National Council to the Toronto Environmental Alliance.

There was an almost electric quality to a gathering that offered so many constituencies the chance for face time with each other.”

The preparation for the day saw thousands of activists engage in an extensive dialogue about good jobs - and what policies are needed to ensure there are good jobs for both today and the next generation. Some of the best progressive researchers in Canada created background papers ranging from precarious employment to industrial strategies. Hugh Mackenzie and Jim Stanford produced a report on a Living Wage for Toronto – identifying \$16.60/hour as the pay rate needed for a two income family to enjoy some basic level of inclusion in society.

The Declaration on Good Jobs for All, endorsed by the Summit participants is meant to be a touchstone for future struggles for economic justice in Canada’s largest urban centre. The Declaration, like the Summit itself, was the product of months of planning and consultation

The Declaration first puts our current reality in context – the dream of generations of immigrants, the fact that prosperity was never fully shared, and those investments and achievements that helped set the standards for our quality of life.

The Declaration defines the factors that are critical in providing good jobs, and states unequivocally that we reject policies which undermine or erode our right to decent work. Finally, it calls on people from all walks of life to demand an economy with good jobs for all. More importantly, it demands that we build social solidarity in our communities, workplaces, organizations and public institutions.

The three keynote speakers – Deena Ladd of Workers Action Centre, Dave Foster of the Blue-Green Alliance, and Maria Elena Durazo of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, touched on crucial issues facing working people in the global economy. But it was in the workshops where the exchange of ideas by participants provided the real wisdom needed to address the challenges of this century. Their recommendations will form the basis of an action plan for the Good Jobs Coalition in coming months.

The event owes its success in no small measure to the superhuman effort of staff and volunteers who worked day and night to accommodate the extraordinary turnout. They deserve our gratitude for a job well done.

We are living in a special moment in history. As the economic model built on deregulation and profiteering flounders, the people of Toronto and Canada will face many challenges. The spirit of the Summit and the Declaration can act as a beacon for working people as we defend the good jobs we have, work to create new ones, and strive to ensure that none of our sisters and brothers are isolated or left behind in this changing economy.