

**EXECUTIVE BOARD STATEMENT TO THE  
TORONTO AND YORK REGION LABOUR COUNCIL  
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING  
APRIL 6, 2006**

**WORKERS RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS**

The issue of human rights has been interwoven with workers struggles for centuries.

From slave revolts led by Spartacus against the Roman Empire, to the popular rebellions in medieval Europe, through the horrific legacy of slavery that underpinned the development of both South and North America, working people have been denied their full expression of human dignity for most of recorded history.

Upholding human rights was established as the legal responsibility of governments only in the past few decades. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (1948) grew out of the world's revulsion over the Holocaust and the brutal realities of fascism and colonialism. It was an amazing document, given that much of what it outlined was far from reality in most of the signatory countries. Even today Section 31, which says "Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests", is routinely ignored by our own governments.

The long, wearisome campaign to transform that Declaration into law here in Canada was the result of the relentless effort of many unsung heroes. The establishment of Human Rights Commissions to allow individual women and men to gain redress for discrimination suffered in employment and other spheres of life was an important milestone in our collective history.

It comes as no surprise that conservative politicians have sought to limit the enforcement of human rights. It is, however, both surprising and disturbing that the McGuinty Liberal government is doing that as well.

On Feb. 20<sup>th</sup> of this year, it announced plans to dismantle Ontario's Human Rights Commission and move to a different model for handling complaints. They call it "direct access", but others call it a "no access model".

Under their proposal, people would no longer have access to free investigation, mediation and legal representation through the Human Rights Commission. Instead, they will have to do their own investigation and hire a lawyer to prepare and argue the case. Direct access will not speed up the process – it will just lead to a longer backlog like we now experience in the court system.

The Executive recommends:

1. Labour Council join with the OFL, OPSEU and community groups in telling the McGuinty government to stop dismantling the Commission and work with the public for real improvement to human rights protection.
2. Labour Council work with its affiliates to create a deeper understanding of the importance of Human Rights legislation in the achievement of social justice in our society.