

Resisting Ford's Attacks on Workers, Tenants, Students and Communities: An Omnibus Statement About Ford's Omnibus Approach



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Anyone who has seen the movie "Everything, Everywhere, All At Once" should recognize the driving force that Ontarians are contending with: The Conservative government's "omnibus" approach to governing Ontario is "to, for, by, with or from everything." Doug Ford has been busy since he was re-elected earlier this year, busy distracting Ontarians while he pretends to fight Trump's trade war but actually helps corporate buddies amass more profits.

New Bills at Queen's Park are called "omnibus" when they include changes to a number of statutes and policies all together, sometimes with a logical common theme, and other times just pushing an internal goal of a government. Packaging new legislation this way makes it difficult to analyze and debate effectively.

Sometimes Ford's legislation contains multiple anti-community elements, other times it includes good and bad but obscures the bad, and sometimes it seems designed purely to distract us from other things such as handouts to corporate buddies or corruption, from trying to sell off the Greenbelt to friends to entering into a contract to build a huge parking lot for untested business buddies to replace Ontario Place with Therme Spa. Wait until we see which of Ford's friends gets to develop the valuable lands freed-up by closing the Ontario Science Centre!

Ford's "omnibus" legislation is matched by his overall approach to governing which tries to ram policy changes through Queen's Park rather than have more legislative days, more democratic debate, more community consultation, and more truthfulness.

Is Ford trying to make us feel that the only outcome of life is "everything, everywhere, all at once" so that we stop resisting and just go along with his exploitive and cronyistic approach? When nothing else works to distract us, he makes it easier to buy alcohol. It's not even circuses over bread, it's simply drunk over well-fed.

Let's start with Bill 60. Ford touts Bill 60 as the "Fighting Delays, Building Faster Act." Labour allies such as the York South Weston Tenants Union more accurately call Bill 60 the "Faster Evictions Act."

Bill 60 is a clear attack by making it easier and faster to evict tenants, so that landlords can evade rent control and increase rents for new tenants. One quarter of unionized workers are tenants, and many of the gains made in collective bargaining are being outpaced by the high cost of rent. Homelessness is at an all time high, and Bill 60 will increase evictions, creating a direct pipeline from the Landlord and Tenant Board straight to encampments. More on that later.

But attacking tenants isn't the only objective of Bill 60, which has 18 different schedules, affecting 15 statutes. In addition to helping corporate landlords evict faster, Bill 60 also lets the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing unilaterally override provincial policy statements in local planning decisions. It speeds up the already-controversial MZO process, allowing for Ford favourites to receive benefits. It again undermines municipal authority by banning new bike lanes that would reduce motor vehicle lanes, putting kids and adults at risk. It loosens sewage-works regulations for larger lots, which is never good.

In shades of Naomi Klein's "The Shock Doctrine," other bills and actions individually and collectively create chaos and diversion. Bill 56, the so-called "Building a More Effective Economy Act" has 11 different schedules. This is the legislation that removes the ability of municipalities to use speed cameras to make school zones safer. Vehicles registered to Ford Cabinet Ministers have been caught by speed cameras more than 20 times,

one blowing past a 40kmh sign at 70 kmh. So they decided to eliminate that threat, while also allowing forests to be cut down without annual approvals, and continuing to dismantle the Endangered Species Act. Bill 33 attacks school boards and schools – and goes after their valuable real estate, while sidelining democratically-elected trustees, and distracting parents' concerns about adequate funding to educate their kids.

Now they are talking about raising political contribution levels yet again, and ending predictable fixed-date elections. The contributions will undoubtedly increase the serious cash-for-access fundraising game played by governments with deep corporate ties. Ford's Conservatives are also spending huge amounts on advertising the so-called "Ring of Fire" to allow northern mining when they don't currently have rights over the land. Who knows, they will probably use the hugely controversial Bill 5 which was passed this spring to allow Ford's government to run rampant in exploiting and extracting minerals with no need to respect environment, human rights, labour or other regulations. And, quietly, they have cut labour law enforcement.

Back to Bill 60. There are lots of technical procedures that may be difficult to explain but here are a few things to pay attention to:

- Why kick tenants out? Rent control only exists while a tenant remains in their specific unit. Landlords want to kick existing tenants out so they can drastically raise rents for new tenants.
- The Bill makes it much easier and quicker for landlords (especially corporate landlords) to evict if there are rent arrears, even if the tenant is only believed to be in arrears.
- It makes it difficult for tenants in temporary financial difficulties to work out a rent repayment plan with their landlord
- When someone with a disability or children is evicted, Bill 60 takes away the adjudicator's discretion to add an extra month for the tenant to find a new place.
- Tenants would lose the ability to explain why they have been withholding rent (e.g., landlord's refusal to provide heat, clean up mould, repair elevators, fix windows, etc.) unless they pay 50% of arrears up front, and unless they have brought issues previously to the Tenant Landlord Board in writing.
- This stops the ability to call rent strikes. Why? Because rent strikes have been successful.
- Bill 60 also smashes tenant organizing, with a future Ford goal of moving again to implement fixed-term leases. Although the Conservatives agreed to remove consultations from Bill 60 on establishing fixed-term leases (at the end of your year lease, you can get kicked out of your home) they refuse to promise they won't bring them in next year.

Remember, many of these issues are linked by Ford's government trying to confuse, distract, and disengage us. On some issues, such as disapproval of the Conservatives for dismissing school board Trustees and knowing Conservatives are responsible for inadequate school funding, Ontarians know better. See an Abacus survey on this issue for the results. Let's help everyone see clearly what's going on across the board and how they can fight back. With enough of us fighting these laws, we can change their policies. And the policies that we can't change, we'll do so much damage that their future will be in jeopardy.

The Labour Council resolves to:

- Ask their OFL Convention Delegates to support an emergency resolution re Bill 60 that includes the following actions:
 - o The OFL endorse the Stop Doug Ford's War on Tenants campaign and find ways to resource the campaign led by tenant groups across Ontario.
 - o The OFL work with the CLC and local Labour Councils to help grow the campaign across the Province.
 - o The OFL recognize November 22nd as National Housing Day (NHD) and organize contingents to support rallies and actions across the province in support of NHD.
- Support and have members join the YSWTU Stop Doug Ford's War on Tenants campaign www.tenantunion.ca/action
- Support and have members join the TYR Labour Council's Fund Our Schools campaign <https://www.fundourschools.ca/>

- Read and share information about Ford’s track record from the OFL’s Ford Tracker and take action

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