

A Million Reasons

To Take Action



A MILLION WORKERS IN THE TORONTO REGION ARE UNDERVALUED AND UNDERPAID — LABOUR COUNCIL CHAMPIONS A STRATEGY TO IMPROVE THEIR INCOMES

More than a million workers in the Toronto region earn less than \$29,800 per year¹. In key sectors of the economy — healthcare, manufacturing, retail, hospitality, clerical and service work — there are hard-working women and men who deserve much better. Many of them are new Canadians, but many have been here for generations. Many are workers of colour or women. They all share one thing in common — the work they do is undervalued and underpaid.

During the last decade of the twentieth century, working families in Toronto suffered serious setbacks. The real pay of two-income families dropped 13 per cent in real dollars; those with only one earner dropped 18 per cent. Thousands of well-paid manufacturing jobs disappeared due to free trade, while cuts to the public sector took away many more jobs that used to offer decent wages and benefits.

1 A fight for good jobs

From economic strategies to protect well-paid jobs in manufacturing and other key sectors, to stopping privatization and outsourcing in the public sector, we have a right to stand up for the jobs that provide good incomes for ourselves and our neighbours. And we have the right to demand that valuable work such as home care, childcare and social services are paid according to the skills required.

2 Bargaining to raise standards

Jobs that are underpaid will only be improved through aggressive bargaining strategies. Sectoral agreements or pattern bargaining will require tremendous solidarity from those involved and others in the community. Some unions have broken ground by bargaining employer recognition or neutrality around future organizing. Our best-paid members need to share their strength with those among us who are earning the least.

3 Mass union organizing

Setting our sights on increasing union density in greater Toronto by even 1 per cent means organizing 23,000 new members immediately. To achieve that goal, we need to devote far more resources and engage our members to reach out to those who lack representation. Restoring rights for all workers starts with fixing labour laws and enforcing employment standards.

4 Restoring the “social wage”

Universal social programs — from healthcare to unemployment insurance to pensions — are the product of years of struggle. Past generations fought to ensure that working people didn't have to rely on charity. They forged a comprehensive system of social services that provided the basis for justice and equality. In the face of corporate pressure to downsize and “re-invent” government, we need to assert that the social wage is key to Canadian values of a just society³.

In contrast, corporate profits have exploded — a 20 per cent increase last year brought them to the highest percentage of GDP in Canadian history².

For the labour movement, the challenge is to find ways to help workers upgrade their incomes in the face of globalization and constant restructuring. Young people and new Canadians — the workforce of the twenty-first century — need to see the essential role of unions in bettering standards for working families and their communities.

There are key elements that will be part of reaching these goals.

CORPORATE PROFITS HAVE EXPLODED — A 20 PER CENT INCREASE LAST YEAR BROUGHT THEM TO THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF GDP IN CANADIAN HISTORY

1. Out of a workforce of 2.4 million, 85% are full-time; the low income cut-off for a family of four in Toronto is \$36,500. 2. Profits in 2004 represented 14% of the Gross Domestic Product. 3. Social wage refers to social benefits that come from a wide range of programs: healthcare, WCB, EI, housing assistance, welfare, subsidized childcare, Canada pension, etc. In most cases these benefits were first negotiated in collective agreements. Labour and popular movements then bargained politically to have them implemented as public programs.