



**ONE MILLION EARN LESS THAN \$29,800 IN TORONTO REGION.
LABOUR COUNCIL CALLS FOR JOINT ACTION FROM GOVERNMENTS, EMPLOYERS**

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From health care to food service, manufacturing, childcare, social work and a host of other key sectors, a million workers in the Toronto region are earning less than \$29,800 per year and many are struggling to stay afloat, according to the Toronto and York Region Labour Council. Today, the Council launched a new campaign 'A Million Reasons to Take Action' which calls for specific actions by governments and employers to ensure these workers, many of whom are people of colour, are not left behind.

“Profits are now at the highest level in Canadian history but we have a million GTA workers in key sectors of the economy whose work is undervalued and underpaid,” says Labour Council President John Cartwright, noting that 85 per cent of these workers are full-time. “These people are contributing to society, yet their work is not rewarding them with the wages and benefits they need for a decent quality of life. It’s up to all of us—governments, employers and unions—to ensure that working families can keep their head above water.”

Along with addressing wages, Cartwright points to the need for Employment Insurance reform, the anticipated new deal for cities and the benefits provided in the recent federal Liberal-NDP budget—including assistance for students and new immigrants—as necessary social supports. “Working families rely on public transit and other city-provided services, public education and health care that are paid for by our taxes to contribute to a decent quality of life,” he says.

The state of these one million workers concerns Ryerson Professor Grace-Edward Galabuzi, who is also a research associate with the Centre for Social Justice. “A disproportionate number of those workers who earn less than a living wage are women and men of colour, who make up about 40% of Toronto’s workforce. It is no wonder there are twice as many people of colour as other Torontonians living below the poverty line,” says Galabuzi.

Food service worker Sam Graziano is proud of the work he does but is dismayed at the erosion in his pay. “I was well below the \$29,500 median for full time work, and then last year my employer reduced my hours which dropped me a further \$5,000,” says Graziano. “I have colleagues who are single mothers. There is no way they can pay the rent, feed and clothe their children on this kind of income.”

Labour Council has identified key measures that governments and employers must take if conditions are to improve for low wage earners:

- Funds promised in the recent federal budget must be received by cities now to strengthen their ability to provide public transit, social services, low or no user-fee recreation facilities and other supports for working families;
- The federal government needs to restore Employment Insurance coverage. Only 26 per cent of the jobless in Toronto are currently eligible for benefits.
- The provincial government must restore fair labour laws and the rights of working people to attain decent wages and benefits, which were taken away by the Harris government.
- Employers need to reward work with decent wages and benefits, rather than relegating people to McJobs and moving other jobs offshore.
- Federal, provincial and municipal governments must stop the practice of outsourcing work to low-wage contractors. While money may be saved in the short-term, the costs of having to assist those who become under- or unemployed are sure to increase.

For its part, the Labour Council cites unionization as an essential tool for ensuring decent wages and benefits. Unionized workers across Canada receive an average of \$5 an hour more than those doing the equivalent job without a union.

“It was unions that put a stop to the ‘sweatshops’ of the past. Now in the Toronto region today, we have upwards to a million workers earning well below the low-income cut-off for a family of four, says Cartwright. “Building strong unions has always been the key to raising the standard of living for their families and their communities, but we can’t do that under current labour laws.”

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