

WORKERS SHAPE OUR FUTURE



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**CHECK OUR
SOCIALS ON
LINKTREE**



Members of UNITE HERE
Local 75 at the 2024 Labour
Day Parade. Photo by
Nadine Mackinnon

Labour Action Editorial Team:
Yaroslava Avila Montenegro (Communications & Data Coordinator)
Bria John (Events Coordinator)
Susan McMurray, Jennifer Huang (Executive Assistants)

Opinion | It's time for a different kind of common sense — one that's rooted in solidarity and focused on the common good

By Andria Babbington, Contributor

Andria Babbington is the president of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, representing 220,000 unionized workers. In 2021, Babbington became the first woman of colour to lead the council.



Workers in this country have been dealt a raw deal for decades, while the bosses rake in record profits on the backs of the very people who keep this economy running. We're told to work harder, hustle more, and yet, despite juggling multiple jobs, too many of us still can't make ends meet. We work hard, but housing, groceries, and other essentials slip further out of reach. This is the grim reality for workers across Canada today.

Decades of austerity and social service cuts, driven by Conservative politicians, have devastated working people. These same politicians — like Pierre Poilievre — then turn around to play the everyman, like wolves in sheep's clothing, telling you to blame your neighbours and progressives for the fallout — while they subsidize their rich friends, sell off public assets, and suppress your wages.

Conservatives never let a good crisis go to waste. Like former Ontario Premier Mike Harris before him, Poilievre says he stands for “common sense” policies — less bureaucracy, more trades, more homes. But let's be clear: Poilievre, a career politician, wouldn't know what common sense for workers looks like. His brand of “common sense” is a recycled playbook from the Stephen Harper and Harris days, where the rich get even richer, and the rest of us are left scrambling to survive.

When Conservative politicians get into power at all levels of government, they always go after workers' rights. Ontario Premier Doug Ford says he's “for the people,” but still tried to

strip education workers of bargaining rights in 2022. Now, Ford attacks workers by privatizing health care, “liberalizing” alcohol sales, shutting down the Ontario Science Centre, and giving a foreign spa a 99-year private lease at Ontario Place.

At the city level, Conservative-backed Toronto Councillor Brad Bradford says he's a “community builder,” but supports open tendering that sidesteps union labour and undermines the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act. This puts workers and communities at risk by enabling billionaire developers to exploit unlicensed young workers. IBEW Local 353 is currently fighting against developers hiring non-union labour because of Ford's failure to enforce worker protection regulations. Now, we face Poilievre, ready to drag us back to the worst days of austerity and anti-labour legislation on a national level.

That's what we're up against.

And let's not pretend that the federal Liberals have done enough to push back against this. The austerity agenda has lasted decades because, at every turn, our political leaders have failed to stand up for the people who make this country run. While there have been improvements to workers' rights with the

passing of national anti-scab legislation, the Liberal government needs to do better to stand on the side of workers — the recent national CN/CPKC Rail lockout is proof.

“ We're not going to go back to the days when workers were disposable, and the rich got all the breaks. We've seen what that looks like, and we won't stand for it. **”**

It's time for a different kind of common sense — one that's rooted in solidarity and focused on the

common good. It's common sense to fight for living wages, affordable housing, and strong public services. It's common sense to demand that the people who build our communities, care for our loved ones, and keep our economy going, are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

We're not going to go back to the days when workers were disposable, and the rich got all the breaks. We've seen what that looks like, and we won't stand for it. We marched this past Labour Day to remind the bosses that we are here, we shape our own future, and we are never going back. The future belongs to those of us who believe in fairness, justice, and equality for all. And together, we're going to build that future — one that works for everyone, not just the wealthy few.

This Op-Ed was published in the Toronto Star on September 25th, 2024.

OPENING THE BOOK ON CITY BARGAINING WITH CUPE 4948

Municipal workers across all sectors will be bargaining with the City of Toronto in the fall. Library workers play a vital role in our city. They are the “heart of our communities,” Brandon Haynes, President of CUPE 4948 - the union that represents library workers, said. But the background of this bargaining round is ongoing understaffing and resource shortages after over a decade of right wing rule in the City. But with a more progressive Mayor in office, there's a chance to secure better working conditions and protect essential services for Toronto residents.

Brandon Haynes
President
CUPE 4948

Yaroslava Avila Montenegro: Brandon, thank you so much for being here with Toronto & York Region Labour Council. Tell us, who are the workers in your union? What do they do? What is the role that they play in our communities?

Brandon Haynes: I represent over 2,300 library workers at the Toronto Public Library. And we have a range of different roles in serving the public.

We have librarians, people in front facing positions, and also people in the back end. We service the busiest library system in North America and, by most metrics, in the world. We generally get over 18-19 million visits a year and we have 100 different branches in the City of Toronto.

Libraries are like a cradle-to-grave service for people. It might come off a bit strong in saying this, but it's our reality. People that are very young rely on library services. Seniors rely on those services as well. And we try to serve as many people as we can, in many different corners of the city. In many respects, we are the heart of our communities. Going to the library is free for most people, so it's very equitable in that sense as well.

YAM: You've mentioned equity being a key component of the library system. What are the key issues that your members are facing right now?

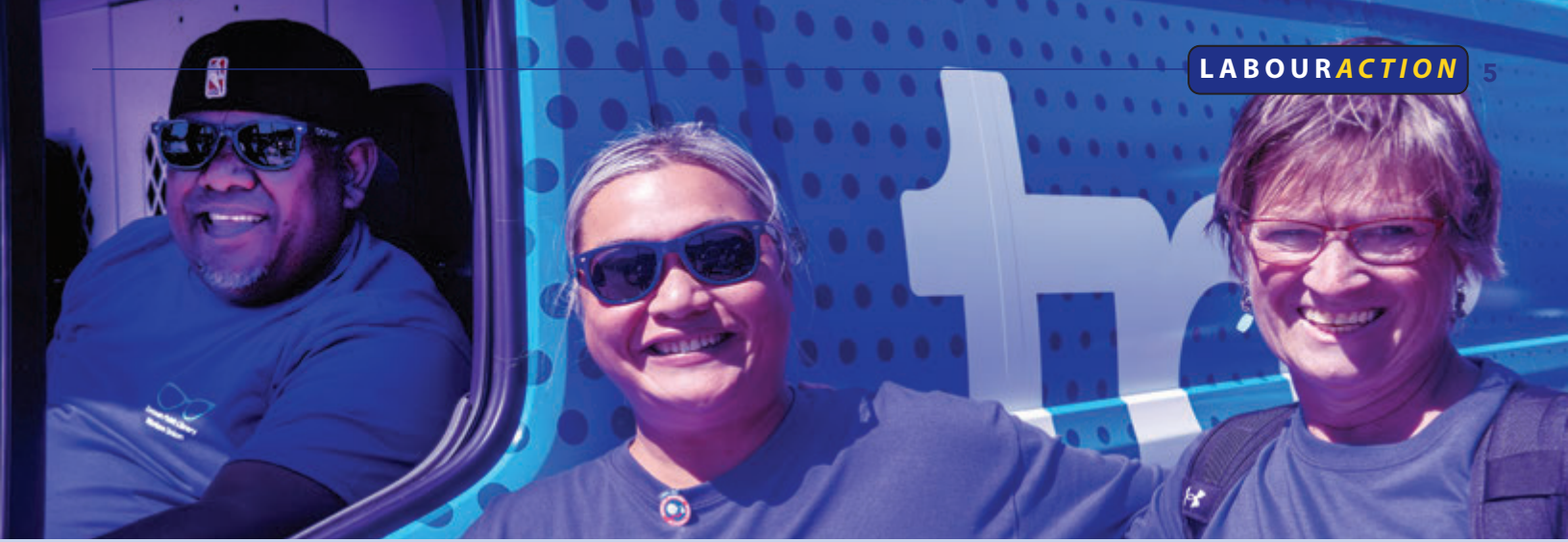
BH: Generally, people who work at the Toronto Public Library live in the city. So they are personally affected by the struggle to pay for groceries, the struggle to pay for rent, and other costs.

I also think people feel the long-term lack of investment in the library. Whether it's dealing with burnout or other issues, understaffing is a big factor our workers face. Right now, the library is expected to serve every sort of need that people have. We try our best to be able to provide the services people need. And I think that takes a toll on workers.

Understaffing and lack of resources have been a major issue over the years. We do also have a large issue in terms of violence and harassment in libraries. That's on the rise, and that's a concern. Especially when the staffing levels are low, we sometimes see people take anger out on the staff and respond in a negative way. We also don't want to militarize libraries or over-police. But we do want to address the root causes that lead to the issues that we face.

YAM: Yes, absolutely. What's at stake for the Toronto residents, the broader community?

BH: People notice when there are long lineups at the library, when they're waiting to get the services that they rely on. And we try our best to serve people and help their point of need. But if there are a lot of people that are waiting for something, we don't have much time to dedicate to each person.



And so I think what's at stake for people is having the ability to go to a library that's fully staffed — one with workers with time to speak with you, that will engage with seniors and older adults, newcomers, with children and youth. Having a staffed library to help people make investments in their own life that will benefit their careers or benefit their wellbeing — such as exploring culture and entertainment for example.

If those services are not there, it would be a big issue for the City. Libraries are essential as equitable places for people to visit, find the services they need, interact with actual human beings and not have to buy something to go there.

YAM: So then, the bigger stake for the broader community is the question of public services and the fact that the library is there, as you say, from cradle to grave.

BH: Yes! Like I said, there's a library in everyone's neighborhood. Most people have very direct experiences interacting with library workers. And not having that community connection does lead to other problems in society. Whether it's people being more isolated, people not being able to rise out of poverty and eventually increasing the risk of crime and all of those other social issues as well. So investing in the public library system is not only a social investment, but also an economic one for the city of Toronto.

YAM: Absolutely. What are some of the bigger challenges that you've faced in previous rounds of bargaining? What's changed, if anything?

BH: Well, one big advantage now is that we do have a progressive Mayor in Toronto. And in the past, we have not had very progressive Mayors, namely Rob Ford. He was not a fan of libraries. He was looking to close a lot of libraries and there were a lot of issues having libraries unstaffed.

Currently, staffless libraries exist. In the past, there was a threat of those being expanded and the public not being able to go and actually interact with a human being working at the library.

Another challenge was getting the employer to understand that we need a made in Toronto public library agreement—and that we are ultimately City workers.

The employer is hiring mostly part-time staff, with many in precarious jobs, and there's a lack of equity in career growth opportunities. Much of the lower-wage members are primarily from more racialized or marginalized backgrounds, and most of our members do live in the city of Toronto. So I think investing in the Toronto public library workers also benefits the City in general, and it helps the economy.

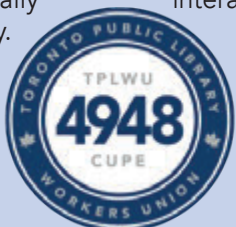
YAM: What can people in the labour movement and the wider public do to support library workers and the bargaining currently underway with the City?

BH: I will say our biggest supporters are the public. There was a study done a number of years ago that showed that Canadians were the number one readers in the world, next to Denmark. And so people love their libraries. They love their library workers.

They're willing to appreciate our struggles. And even when we went on strike last time, they were understanding of what our issues were. So I think the number one thing they can do is thank the library worker in their neighborhood. Whenever there is a conversation that comes up about investing in libraries, make sure to send a message to the Mayor, to City Council, and to the Library Board expressing your support for the services and the workers that provide those services. And we do have a supporter database of over 35,000 people in the City of Toronto and beyond.

If people want to sign up for that campaign, make sure to go to <https://ourpubliclibrary.to>. That way, whenever there's an issue that comes up, they can send a message to the Mayor, to the Library board, and to their City Counselors to show their support for their public library.

SIGN UP



Toronto Public Library Workers Union



Toronto and FIFA World Cup 2026: Ensuring Good Jobs and Economic Justice through Community Benefits



In June 2026, Toronto will stand at the center stage of global soccer (or football) as one of host cities for the FIFA World Cup, a significant event with a history of uniting nations through the love of the game. Toronto, renowned for its cultural diversity and being a world class city, will be a key player in this global spectacle, hosting six matches during the tournament amongst Vancouver and major cities in the USA and Mexico.

With significant public investments from all levels of government and planning by the City of Toronto well underway, the Toronto Community Benefits Network is one of many organizations advocating to ensure human and labour rights are protected and that economic, social, environmental and legacy benefits are central to the planning of this global competition.

Celebrating 10 years of community-labour advocacy

This spring marks the 10 year anniversary of the Toronto Community Benefits Network, a community-labour coalition whose focus is on negotiating Community Benefits Agreements that ensure good jobs, equitable economic opportunities and community benefits as part of new development projects in Toronto. Since TCBN's inception, the network has grown to over 120 member organizations, 16,000 supporters and has supported over 2,500 individuals from Black, Indigenous and equity deserving communities into good jobs, apprenticeship training and other professional, administrative and technical opportunities.

In recent years, the platform for community benefits has led to major gains for workers and communities through public policy wins and formalizing agreements as part of Toronto's largest infrastructure and urban development projects including the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, Finch West LRT, West Park Healthcare Centre and Casino Woodbine Expansion projects.

Protecting human and labour rights, and ensuring a positive impact for Toronto communities

As recently as the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, advocates have raised accusations of labour and human rights abuse during the preparations and hosting of the World Cup. This is not the first time such allegations and incidents of human and labour rights violations have occurred.

With this concern, the TCBN has been working with community, labour and environmental allies including the Toronto & York Region Labour Council, CUPE Local 79, Social Planning Toronto, the Workers Action Centre, Progress Toronto, Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, TTC Riders and Toronto Environmental Alliance amongst other organizations and groups to raise important concerns related to human rights, workers rights, community and legacy benefits, environmental sustainability and transit improvements.

Recently, in advance of the staff update on FIFA 2026 planning at the March City Council meeting, the groups worked together to send joint letters to Council and the Mayor, issued public press releases and hosted press conferences to raise concerns.

With the leadership and support of Toronto Mayor Olivia Chow, Deputy Mayor Ausma Malik and Chair of the Economic and Community Development Committee, City Councillor Alejandra Bravo, a number of motions including support for a FIFA 2026 Community Benefits Plan were passed at the City Council meeting in March.

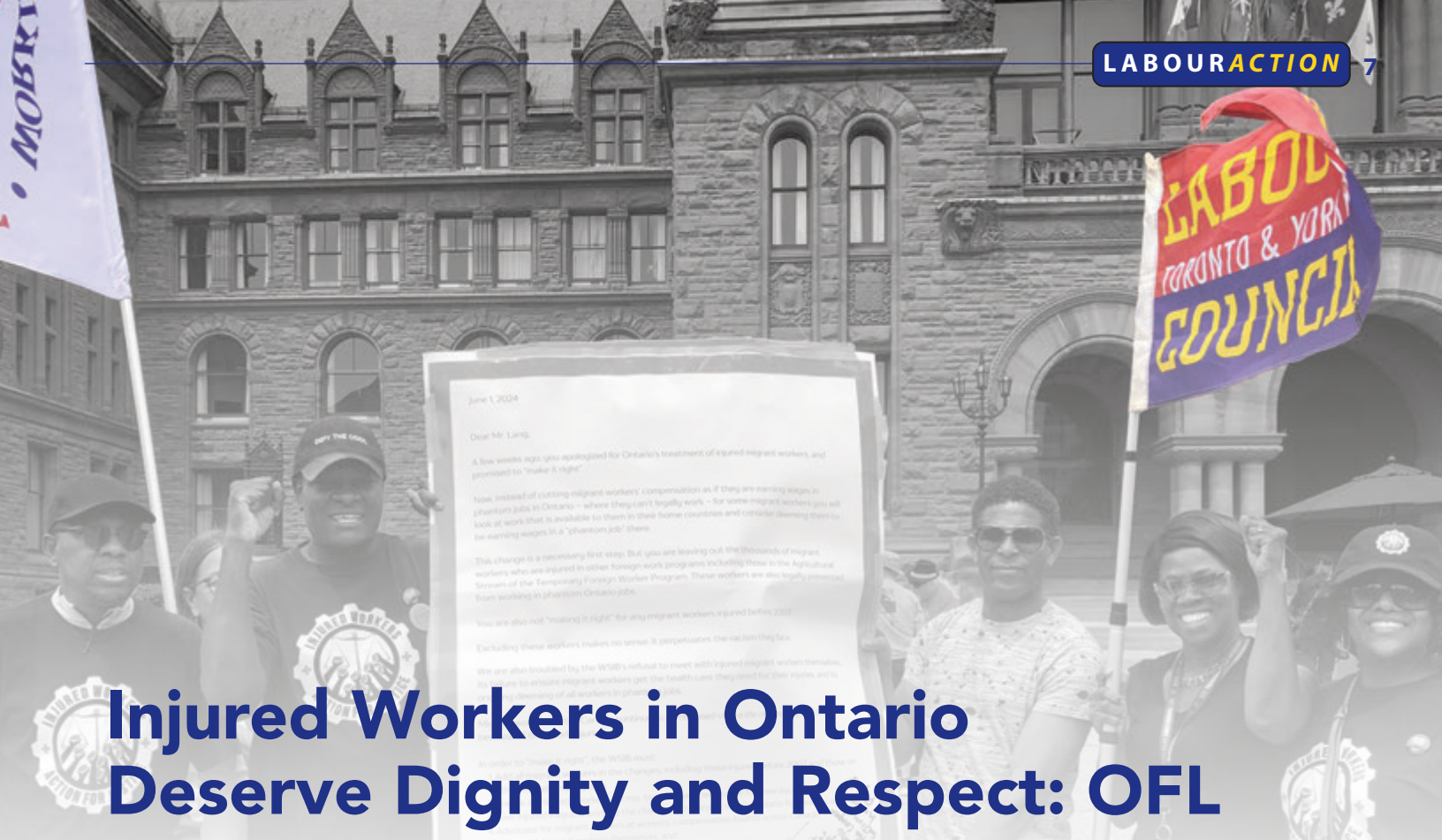
A FIFA 2026 Community Benefits Plan would ensure minimum targets for the equitable participation of Toronto residents in employment opportunities, small businesses participation through social procurement and supply chain diversity commitments with monitoring, tracking and reporting.

The significance of such a plan lies in its ability to transform temporary event-driven opportunities into good jobs and lasting benefits for the Toronto community. By embedding principles of equity and inclusivity into its World Cup preparations, Toronto not only enhances its global reputation but also reinforces its commitment to economic, social and environmental justice.

In conclusion, Toronto's hosting of the FIFA 2026 World Cup represents more than just a sporting event—it is an opportunity to showcase the city's strengths, diversity and commitment to good jobs and inclusive growth. Through meaningful community and labour involvement in the planning, Toronto aims to harness the transformative power of the World Cup to help bring communities together and support some of the deep challenges of inequality and high youth unemployment, especially amongst Black and Indigenous youth.

As the countdown to 2026 begins, Toronto stands ready to welcome the world, demonstrating that with careful planning and community-driven policies, major international events can leave a positive and enduring impact on host cities and their residents alike.

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Kumsa Baker is the Director of Community Engagement at the Toronto Community Benefits Network



Injured Workers in Ontario Deserve Dignity and Respect: OFL

On the Day of Mourning, April 30, the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) launched an Injured Workers Campaign that aims to bring dignity and respect to injured workers in Ontario.

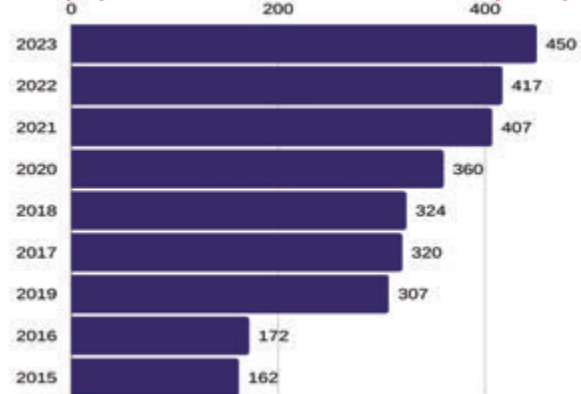
The campaign has many facets, but the cornerstone of the campaign is the Injured Workers’ Bill of Rights, which was created in conjunction with the Ontario Network of Injured Workers’ Groups (ONIWG). The Injured Workers’ Bill of Rights outlines the basic demands of injured workers that would make the process of receiving compensation from WSIB fair, just, and equitable. You can see the Bill of Rights as an online petition. Make sure to sign and support it below.

Since the launch of the campaign, injured workers have been spotlighted across the province at Labour Council meetings, sharing the campaign, and their stories over social media. We have set a wave in motion for the injured workers movement. Further, there were two integral education pieces included in the campaign to ignite the movement for the next steps and the fight ahead.

Earlier this spring, the OFL held a number of sessions to help build injured workers power. These included hosting panel discussions with local MPPs, educational sessions on the introduction of a private member's bill for urgent WSIB, as well as a day of action at Queen’s Park on Injured Workers’ Day on June 1st.

Our work is far from over. There are opportunities to engage those who have signed the Injured Worker

Critical Injury - Construction Health and Safety Program



Critical injuries have risen steadily in Ontario over the last decade. Data from the chart can be found on the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Data Catalogue under the Critical Injuries section.

Bill of Rights and to find further allies within our communities that we can connect with, to collectively build our strength to fight for change to Ontario’s workers’ compensation system. Regardless of where you work, you should be able to access equitable and just compensation if you are injured or made ill at work. The fight for a better compensation system is now. But to get it, we have to fight like hell.

SIGN HERE

Laura Walton is the President of the Ontario Federation of Labour





Labour Day Parade 2024

Workers Shape Our Future

This Labour Day, over 20,000 people marched on the streets of Toronto to mark the 152nd Labour Day Parade. We made sure to send a clear message to the boss: workers are the backbone of our communities. Without us, there is no future for anyone. The benefits our children and grandchildren enjoy today were hard-won by past generations, and we pay homage to their struggles by marching together to build a better future for all. We deserve our fair share and will keep fighting for it.

We are incredibly grateful to everyone who came out and marched with us this year! Special thanks to the dedicated staff and volunteers who worked tirelessly to make this event possible.

Let's carry the energy of Labour Day forward as we continue to fight for the rights and dignity of all workers. Together, we shape our future to build a more just and equitable society.





This year's Labour Day Parade Award Winners are:

- OPSEU Region 5 for Best Decorated Vehicle
- CUPE 79 for Most Original
- ATU 113 for Best Turnout
- ACTRA Toronto for Most Spirited

The Central Ontario Building Trades also held their own awards, including:

- Elevator Constructors Local 50 for Best Turnout
- Ironworkers Local 721 for Best Marchers
- UA Local 46 & IBEW Local 353 tied for Best Uniform
- LiUNA Local 506 for Best Solidarity
- Sheet Metal Workers' & Roofers' Local 30 for Best Band



Photos by: Yaroslava Montenegro, Nadine Mackinnon & John MacLennan

Closing the Gap in Wages & Representation

Strengthening Unions for Racial & Economic Justice

New research from the Centre for Future Work confirms that racialized workers are under-represented in unions.

The report, *The Importance of Unions in Reducing Racial Inequality*, analyzed union coverage and wages across different racialized categories of Canadian workers and also found that racialized workers were significantly less likely to be represented by a union or covered by a union contract.



This lack of collective bargaining power contributes to racial gaps in job quality, wages, and employment benefits. The report also includes a variety of recommendations for strengthening the union movement's practices.

In 2022, racialized workers earned hourly wages almost 10 percent lower than non-racialized workers – and were 8 percentage points less likely to be covered by a union contract. Only one-quarter of racialized workers are covered by a union contract, compared to one-third of non-racialized workers. The gap is even worse for racialized women, reflecting the intersectional barriers they face in accessing decent work – and achieving collective representation to fight for improvements.

The correlation between lower union coverage and lower wages confirms unions need to become more effective at organizing with racialized workers, and engaging with them in collective action for better jobs and better pay. For that to occur, however, unions need to become more visible and more consistent in fighting for racial equality in everything they do: from organizing campaigns, to collective bargaining, to union education, to leadership development, and grassroots community engagement.

This report also shares insights from interviews with fifteen experienced racialized trade unionists that shed important light on the experiences of racialized workers organizing within unions. These interviews reveal a mixture of hope and frustration: hope that unions can and must be vehicles for racial equality and overall economic justice, but frustration that negative attitudes, inertia, and systemic racism within unions hold back the labour movement's engagement with anti-racism struggles.

The simple math of Canada's labour force cannot be

Photo Below: Winnie Ng, and Salmaan Khan presenting their preliminary findings at the 2023 IWOC Conference.

denied: if unions cannot become more representative of the growing racialized segment of Canadian workers, their power will inevitably shrink in future years. But to succeed in organizing among racialized workers, and lifting their wages, job quality, and living standards, unions must act as vehicles of racial justice at the same time as they fight for better jobs and wages. From the interviews, and a survey of research/documentation on previous anti-racist union initiatives, the report identifies several best practices which can strengthen unions' racial justice work – and enhance their visibility and credibility among racialized workers. These include:

- Make Anti-racism an Overarching Priority in Building Union Power
- Launch an Intensive and Massive Intersectional Union Organizing Strategy
- Support Organizing with Intersectional Anti-racism Union Education, among other recommendations

The report concludes with several recommendations for specific initiatives and reforms so that Canadian unions can rise to the challenge of organizing and mobilizing with racialized workers in the struggle for both better jobs and a racially inclusive and equitable society. The fundamental conclusion of this report is that those two struggles are inseparable.

Authors: Centre for Future Work, Jim Stanford, Winnie Ng, and Salmaan Khan

READ FULL REPORT



Making a Difference

- Despite the challenges, our key informant interviews identified racialized union activists and leaders have made a clear difference in several key areas:
 - o Building Authentic and Deeper Labour Community Relations
 - o Internal Organizing and Constitutional Change
 - o Collective Bargaining
 - o New Organizing Fronts
 - o Leadership Development and Mentoring



Ontario's Core Education Funding has dropped by \$1,500 per student per year



Government spending on public services is on the decline in Ontario. And so is transparency. I'm not referring to the murky Greenbelt land deals that turned housing policy into a police matter. I'm talking about the now-common practice of stashing money away in "contingency funds," which allows the government to manipulate spending, revenues, and deficit figures, turning some financial statements into accounting fiction.

This is happening to education funding, too.

The 2019-20 Grants for Student Needs (GSN) included, for the first time, "Unallocated amounts" to the tune of \$82 million, a relatively small amount. The same line item appeared in the three subsequent years, always with amounts below \$50 million. Then, suddenly, the line was no longer there in the 2023-2024 GSN projections.

Instead, the document included a "Planning Provision"—money that is not allocated to a specific purpose and not truly available to school boards, as it can only be spent at the discretion of the Ministry of Education. Last year, in 2023-2024, that amount was \$317 million. Over the course of the year, the amount increased to \$1.281 billion. In the projections for 2024-25, the school year ahead, it goes up further to \$1.390 billion.

This dramatic shift in budgeting matters. Here's why:

First, the Planning Provision makes up 4.85 per cent of the 2024-2025 GSN allocation, now called Core Education Funding (Core Ed). Boards can't spend this money at their discretion, so they can't count on receiving it as they plan (and hire) for the next school year.

Second, the Planning Provision amount helps the government disguise the systematic underfunding of public schools that has been taking place since 2018.

Last year, I estimated that since the Ford government came to power, inflation-adjusted school funding had dropped by \$1,200 per student. I excluded the Planning Provision from last year's calculation, and I did the same this year, because core funding is not really core funding if it isn't available to schools.

The inflation-adjusted funding shortfall between the 2018-19 and 2024-25 school years is now \$1,500 per student.

If the Ministry of Education were to make the entire amount in the Planning Provision available to boards by the end of the school year, the funding

shortfall per student would narrow to \$900, but only for the current year. This would most likely be one-time spending; there is no reason to think it would be built into base funding for future years. The funding gap would widen again the following year.

The bottom line is that for the 2018-19 school year, school boards counted on an average of \$14,700 per student in inflation-adjusted terms; for the next school year, they will have to make do with \$13,200. And children will pay the price.

This article appears in The Monitor Magazine, a project of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Ricardo Tranjan (he/him) is a political economist and senior researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' Ontario office. He is the author of The Tenant Class.

IT'S BACK TO SCHOOL AND BACK TO THE FIGHT FOR FAIR SCHOOL FUNDING!

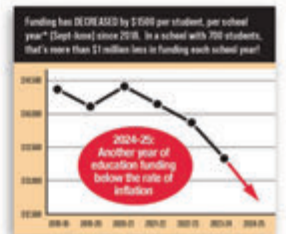
Students thrive when they're back at school with their peers learning the skills that they need to succeed. Our schools offer so much to our learners, but there are serious problems that can only be solved through adequate funding:

- Bigger class sizes year-over-year.
- The increase in violent incidents in our hallways and classrooms.
- Real stress, which impacts both learning and working.
- Crumbling classrooms—some with leaking roofs, mold and questionable air quality.
- Support for students with special education needs is decreasing, even as they are integrated into "inclusive" classrooms.
- Fewer frontline staff means less resource support for ALL our students.

Staff within our schools are doing their best to keep our schools functioning and engaging—even with \$1,500 less per student each year! The dedication and commitment of our teachers, administrators, education workers in keeping our schools safe and functioning is commendable.

Can you imagine what increased funding would change at your school? What could be improved with more resources and support for our learners?

Together, we need to **advocate for increased education funding** in order to provide what ALL students need to thrive in our schools.



JOIN THE FIGHT FOR ADEQUATE SCHOOL FUNDING!

Funding for education comes from the provincial government, and politicians need to know that voters like you care about what happens inside our beloved schools!

Visit www.fundourschools.ca (or scan the QR code) for more information on this campaign and to **sign the email petition** to your Member of Provincial Parliament.

If you love our schools, share this with your friends and neighbours!



FundOurSchools.ca



INDIGENOUS and WORKERS of COLOUR conference



In June, the Toronto & York Region Labour Council hosted two events that highlight our labour movement's equity and diversity - the Indigenous & Workers of Colour Conference (IWOC) and the Bromley Armstrong Awards Gala.



Over 200 people packed into IBEW Local 353 on June 8th to show the crucial role racialized workers played in recent labour movement victories. Just last year, we saw huge wins for our movement: ATU 113 workers at the TTC won back their right to strike, public sector workers defeated Bill 124 in the courts, hotel workers won huge raises in the private sector by mobilizing on the ground to name a few.

The conference featured impor-

tant discussions and workshops on dismantling Anti-Black and Anti-Indigenous Racism, the ongoing Black Class Action lawsuit, hotel workers winning historic wage increases, workers winning against AI, rapid transit as a vehicle for economic and social justice, among many other issues.

From these important discussions, the Labour Council's Equity Committee is developing an Equity Toolkit to be released in 2025.

Photos by: Nadine Mackinnon



the
BROMLEY
 LLOYD ARMSTRONG
Award



On June 21st, Labour Community Services and the Labour Council celebrated the inspiring work done in labour equity and human rights at the 19th Annual Bromley Lloyd Armstrong Awards Gala. The awards, named after the Black trade unionist organizer, and activist who led Ontario's early anti-discrimination campaigns, celebrates his legacy by honouring those who follow in his footsteps.

Much like Armstrong, whose efforts paved the way for Canada's first Human Rights laws, the impactful work of the night's 12 honourees will be felt for generations. During the evening, we gave special honour to Nuredin Bulle, the first Black President of UNITE HERE 75, who has worked tirelessly leading 8,000 members across the GTA.

This year featured the historic unveiling of the first ever Indigenous Rights Awards for individual as well as collective/union activism on June 21st, National Indigenous Peoples Day. To celebrate this achievement, we were joined by Red Sky performance and keynote addresses by Krista Maracle of the OPSEU Indigenous Circle, and Ginelle Skerritt, CEO of the York Region Children's Aid Society.

With more than 400 people in attendance, a total of 12 recipients received the awards overall and have been added to the prestigious alumni.

See the profile of each winner and this year's booklet in the QR code below.

READ PROGRAM



Photos by: Felipe Noriega and Yaroslava Montenegro

Oil & Gas Sector Continues to Undermine Canada's Climate Targets

Environment

Canadians, wanting to do their part to reduce our country's greenhouse gas emissions, are increasingly adopting low carbon technologies into their lives — electric vehicles and heat pumps, for example. And their efforts are paying off, according to a slew of reports released in September.

Overall, the Canadian Climate Institute estimates that Canadian emissions actually fell slightly in 2023, and we had lower emissions than 2019, the last year of full economic activity before the Covid-19 economic slowdown. 2023 is widely considered both in Canada and around the world as the first year of full economic post-Covid recovery. Had it not been for a significant increase in domestic air travel, the CCI's 440 Institute reports that Canada's emissions would have dropped over 5.6 megatonnes, with an overall 0.8% decrease to 702 megatonnes. This would further decrease our 2005 emission levels by 7.8%, while our 2030 target is reduced by 40-45%. While there's still a long way to go, we're moving in the right direction.

What is really holding us back is the continued rise in emissions from Canada's oil and gas sector, which now accounts for almost a third (31%) of national emissions, or more than 12% higher than 2005 levels. The emissions increase was driven by higher production, with natural gas up 3%, conventional oil up 3%, and bitumen up 2%. Higher levels of production tend to cancel out any modest progress in emissions reduction.

While the rest of Canada is making progress reducing GHGs, oil and gas profits are rising even faster than their emissions. The Pembina Institute estimates the highest ever estimated profits (free cash flow) in 2022 reaching a staggering \$152 billion, with 2023 not far behind with the second highest profit, a trend continuing into 2024. Yet Environmental Defence reports that the annual subsidy to the sector in 2023 was around \$18 billion. Those hand-outs got a lot higher in June with the Carbon Capture Utilization and Storage Investment Tax Credit, which covers 50% of eligible expenses for carbon capture equipment and 37.5% for transportation and storage. The industry had sought a 67% subsidy.

The oil and gas industry and its enabling politicians tout carbon capture as the panacea that will allow the industry to become carbon neutral. In reality, it's a delaying tactic — as shown by SaskPower's Estevan plant which continuously fails to meet its tar-

gets and the cancellation of two more plants. This is the typical fate of carbon capture projects around the world: poor performance, high costs and/or canceled projects, such as Chevron's Gorgon facility in north-west Australia.

But the most insidious projects involve Shell and others attempting to combine carbon capture with climate-damaging natural gas to produce "blue" hydrogen, falsely branding it as a clean fuel. Hydrogen can be created by jolting water with electricity, and in Canada we have plenty of both. "Green" hydrogen, on the other hand, can be made using increasingly affordable renewable energy, yet the oil and gas industry continually undermines this zero-carbon fuel with taxpayer funding.

The industry knows it needs new justifications to keep selling natural gas, which is 97% methane and 80 times more damaging to the climate than carbon. Germany's Special Representative for International Climate Policy, Jennifer Morgan, dashed Canada's hope of replacing Putin's Russian gas sales to Germany, citing better German energy efficiency and greater reliance on renewables, *danke schoen*.

The Trudeau government should recognize that no amount of subsidies—such as the \$30 billion CAD publicly funded TMX pipeline to transport tar sands bitumen from Alberta to Vancouver—will ever be enough to satisfy the industry.

Instead of subsidies, Canada should invest in Just Transition programs such as early retirement for oil and gas workers.

Finally, Canadians must do more than buy climate-friendly cars and furnaces—they need to stop voting for politicians who give billions in subsidies to wealthy corporations that fuel climate change for profit.

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Steve Shallhorn is the Managing Director of Working Green 2050 at the Labour Education Centre.

The Urgent Need to Raise Social Assistance Rates in Ontario

In the midst of an ongoing cost of living crisis, a growing coalition of organizations, unions, and advocates is sounding the alarm on the inadequacy of social assistance in Ontario. The Raise The Rates Coalition, a grassroots movement gaining momentum across the province, is leading the charge to address this critical concern that affects not just recipients of social assistance, but all working people in Ontario.

At the heart of the coalition's work is a stark reality: Ontario's social assistance rates have remained stagnant for years, failing to keep pace with the rising cost of living. Currently a single person on Ontario Works (OW) receives a maximum of \$733 per month - an amount that falls far below the poverty line and is woefully insufficient to cover necessities such as housing, food and transportation across Ontario.

The Coalition seeks immediate and substantial increases to both OW and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). But why should working people who are not on social assistance care?

First, low rates create a "working poverty trap." Many find themselves stuck between the inadequacy of social assistance and low wage, precarious employment. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty and puts downward pressure on wages and working conditions for everyone. By raising the rates we create a higher floor that can help lift wages across the board.

Second, robust social assistance acts as a crucial safety net for everyone. In an era of increasing economic uncertainty, automation, and market disruptions, any worker could find themselves in need of temporary support. A stronger social security system provides peace of mind for everyone, regardless of if they're employed.

Moreover, poverty and income inequality have far reaching societal impacts that affect us all. They contribute to higher healthcare costs, crime rates, and reduced social cohesion. By addressing poverty at its roots through adequate social assistance, we create healthier, safer, and more stable communities for everyone.

The Coalition is employing a multi-faceted approach to achieve our goals. We are organizing demonstrations, engaging in targeted lobbying efforts, and launching public education campaigns to build awareness and support. The coalition is also working to build bridges between social assistance recipients and organized labour, recognizing that our struggles are interconnected in

the broader struggle for social and economic justice.

Critics may argue that increasing social assistance rates is too costly or could disincentivize work. However, we counter these claims with evidence from jurisdictions that have implemented similar policies. We know that adequate social assistance can actually facilitate transitions to employment by providing people with the stability and resources needed to seek and maintain work.

As we navigate the complexities of a changing economy and persistent inequality, the work of our coalition serves as a reminder that the strength of a society is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable members. Our campaign is not just about a number on a cheque - it is about dignity, fairness, and the kind of society that we all deserve to live in.

For working people in Ontario, supporting this work is an investment in our collective well being. It is a recognition that a rising tide should lift all of the boats, not just those at the top. By standing in solidarity with those who advocate for adequate social assistance, we strengthen the social fabric that supports us all and take a crucial step forward building a more just and equitable Ontario.

The time for action is now. As the cost of living continues to soar and more families find themselves on the brink of financial crisis, we cannot afford to ignore the critical issue of social assistance. The Coalition is leading the way, but our success depends on broad based support. For the good of all working people and the future of Ontario, the time is now to join the call to raise the rates.

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 Ron Anicich is the Co-Chair ODSP Action Coalition. CUPE Ontario is a proud member of the Raise the Rates Coalition

**RAISE
THE
RATES
COALITION**

**JOIN THE
CAMPAIGN**



IBEW Local 353 Day of Action – Ontario: Enforce the BOSTA Act!

On July 31st, 2024, Local 353 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) organized a day of action to raise awareness of the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021 (BOSTA) amongst the building and land development community.

The day began at 5 AM with an information picket at the Crosstown Condos development by Aspen Ridge Homes at the intersection of Don Mills & Eglinton. Joining IBEW were dozens of activists from affiliates, including the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), and Toronto & York Region Labour Council in a great show of solidarity that was greatly appreciated. IBEW locals from across Ontario sent 24 organizers to join the information picket and launched a day-long blitz of 40 targeted construction sites and over 30 developers' head offices.

We want to make sure this is not understood as a union vs. non-union issue. The law applies to all employers, unionized or not. It's astonishing how many developers and site superintendents know little about the BOSTA Act governing skilled trades. Equally surprising, BOSTA is often missing from bid documents and project tenders, while OHHA and WSIB compliance language is commonplace.

Competing with non-union firms is tough enough because of the wage package disparity. It's a whole other matter when employers are not in compliance with BOSTA, giving them an even greater competitive advantage. The fact of the matter is that construction unions, through hiring halls and collective agreements, uphold and enforce the legislation.

The same cannot be said for non-union employers, where it's often about skirting rules and "whatever they can get away with," like in the case of Journey-person-to-Apprentice ratios. Worse still, many don't legally register apprentices with a signed Registered Training Agreement. Without registration, workers don't exist in the eyes of the Ministry of Skills & Training—no hours are credited, and no trade school is scheduled or completed. It's disheartening to see mostly young workers exploited by the practices of their employers.

And if you think this is just a worker issue, it's also a consumer protection issue. No one wants to discover that someone unqualified performed electrical work on a new home or condo they just paid for in top dollar.

We will continue to call out builders and developers all over Ontario to stop what is, in essence, illegal activity on their projects. The Ministry of Labour lacks the capacity to fully enforce the Act—which has been the case for decades—but that is no excuse for billionaire developers to forego their responsibility to ensure compliance.

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The Organizing Department of IBEW Local 353

LEARN
MORE ON
BOSTA



JOHN CARTWRIGHT Leadership Institute



This spring, the Labour Council hosted our annual four-day Leadership Institute — an intensive learning experience for emerging labour leaders and activists in our movement. We were proud to feature facilitators from across labour and social justice movements, including City Councillor Alejandra Bravo, Michelle Johnston, President of the Society of United Professionals (IFPTE local 160), and former President John Cartwright after which the Institute is named, among others.

Participants were also invited to travel to Mono Cliffs Outdoor Education Centre for the second part of the training course to further develop skills on organizing and mobilization of the labour movement. Congratulations to all the participants!

Building Equality: LGBTQ2S+ Organizing in Toronto's Skilled Trades



We won't have equality until we have it across all industries. For queers in skilled construction trades, the worksite can sometimes feel like it hasn't progressed since the 1970s. Many still remain closeted at work, but that isn't an option for everyone. In 2024, more and more people feel like they should be able to be themselves at work, especially in a cosmopolitan city like Toronto.

Construction trades unions have been making some progress, with IBEW Local 353 and Carpenters Local 27 now both marching in the Pride parade for the last three years. Most construction unions now acknowledge they need to recruit beyond their traditional white male demographics to be competitive and gain market share, as well as for equity and social justice reasons.

There is a lot of ground to make up for, however, especially on the shop floor. LGBTQ2S+ workers have literally faced death threats and criminal harassment at work, and hostile work environments make it difficult to get into a trade and to learn through the apprenticeship model where not everyone is given a fair shake and workers who are different in any way tend to face layoffs. So even though people might get equal pay by the hour, the overall experience and yearly income of queer and trans trades workers is much lower than their straight counterparts.

For the last year, a new community group called Hi-Viz has been organizing queer and trans trades workers in Toronto, starting with a monthly social meetup. Just meeting and making connections with other people who understand the trades world and the difficulties faced by gender non-conforming workers can be a weight off of people, but there is also a hope that the socials will make space to allow people to meet to organize various related projects. The deep dive investigative journalism project and event with the Green Line for example, came out of connections made at Hi-Viz meetups, and small contractors have found other queer trades workers in complimentary trades. Queer workers in construction and related trades are encouraged to sign up to the mailing list and come to the monthly meetups.

Megan Kinch is a labour journalist and union electrician with IBEW Local 353 based in Toronto. Most recently published in Briarpatch Magazine, West End Phoenix, Spacing and the Green Line.

JOIN MAILING LIST



Chinese Workers Network LUNAR NEW YEAR

On February 25th, the Chinese Workers Network (CWN) together with the Labour Council was proud to host Chinese Lunar New Year, celebrating the year of the dragon.

CWN and the Labour Council hosts the annual dinner to celebrate the hard work of Chinese Canadian workers from across all sectors—education workers, postal workers, fire fighters, health care workers, grocery store workers, electricians, and more.

This year, rising costs of living has continued to erode the affordability and the living standard of many Chinese Canadian workers. Despite the hardship, they continue to work tirelessly to provide services to our communities. Many members of CWN have emerged as leaders in their respective fields.

The Ontario NDP Caucus has also made it a tradition to join the CWN to celebrate the hard work of Chinese Canadian workers and Lunar New Year. We were happy to be joined by Mayor Olivia Chow, provincial Leader of the Official Opposition NDP, Marit Stiles (MPP Davenport), MPP Peter Tabuns (Toronto – Danforth), and MPP Kristyn Wong-Tam (Toronto Centre) to celebrate this year's Lunar New Year.



Strikes and Struggles

Bargaining Successes

CUPE 3902, 3261 & 1230 — University of Toronto

Beginning in 2023, CUPE locals 3902, 3261, and 1230 began a unified bargaining campaign for contract negotiations with the University. Together, over 8,000 workers were able to secure historic wins across three CUPE locals, including wage increases of up to 12.8% in some units. When teaching assistants, caretakers, postdoctoral researchers, and food service workers stand together, they win together.

York University Faculty Association (YUFA)

York University's aggressive labour tactics nearly pushed YUFA into a lockout/strike position, with the administration crying poor while university executives had their salaries go up by 41%. YUFA resisted York University's top-down restructuring, which recently has pushed some class sizes ten-fold, and was able to secure overall wage increases of 8.8%, with 3.1% in the first year, and continues to fight back against University restructuring efforts.

OPSEU Local 5119 & 298 at LifeLab

Over 150 LifeLabs couriers and mail room clerks were ready to walk off the job in September after weeks of negotiations with the employer. The union has been standing up to the billion-dollar company, pushing for fair wages, consistent schedules, and increased outsourcing among other issues. The union reached a tentative agreement before the strike deadline.

Labour Struggles

CUPE Local 3903 at York University

Contract Faculty, Teaching Assistants, and Graduate Assistants at York University went on strike on February 26th, 2024 for over 7 weeks over livable wages, contracting out, York University restructuring, and retroactive pay among other issues. Like many other workers during this affordability crisis, many members have had to rely on food banks to make ends meet, as Bill 124 capped wages at 1% for public sector workers. The strike ended on April 22nd, with wage increases of 17.8% (including the previous 3% increases of the Bill 124 period), as well as retroactive pay among other wins.

ACTRA Lockout

After a two-year lockout, ACTRA members rallied on May 13 to protest the Ontario Government's use of locked-out advertising agencies to produce non-union ads. In July information came to light, proving the government is still using these agencies. Ontario's performers need a clear government-wide policy banning the use of locking-out ad agencies during this dispute.



Upcoming Municipal Bargaining

CUPE 79, CUPE 416, CUPE 4948: This fall, municipal workers across Toronto are beginning negotiations with the City of Toronto. Key issues such as wage increases to deal with the ongoing affordability crisis, increased health and safety protocols at work, and staff retention will be on the negotiating table. Check our social media for the latest bargaining updates!



OPSEU-SEFPO Local 5115 at Regent Park Community Health Centre

After two weeks on strike, OPSEU Regent Park Community Health Centre workers reached an agreement on April 5th, 2024. Members provide a wide array of services, including overdose prevention, harm reduction, health care and support for addictions, homelessness, and support for youth and families in the community. The new two-year collective agreement includes a 4% wage increase in the first year and 3.5% in the second, improved benefits, enhanced workplace psychological safety, and a commitment to allocate any additional funding from external sources to workers.

OPSEU Local 535 Art Gallery of Ontario

On April 26th, members of OPSEU-SEFPO Local 535 voted to ratify their new collective agreement after a one-month, historic first strike at the gallery. The new two-year collective agreement includes an 11.4% wage increase, part-time conversion language, expanded worker rights for holding multiple positions, and a joint committee to reduce third-party contracting. Additional improvements include meal allowances, shift premiums, and bereavement leave for full-time employees.

OPSEU at LCBO

Following an intense round of bargaining and an incredibly strong two-week strike, OPSEU-SEFPO workers at the LCBO voted to ratify a new three-year Collective Agreement on July 21st that protects public revenue and good jobs in a workplace that has increasingly become reliant on casual labour. good jobs and public revenues. The deal includes significant improvements, including a guarantee of no store closures and a cap on the number of agency stores (akin to private liquor stores).

OPSEU Local 5115 at Anishnawbe Health Toronto Action

Anishnawbe Health Toronto (AHT) provides essential, culturally affirming care to Toronto's Indigenous community. However, AHT workers, represented by OPSEU/SEFPO Local 5115, have been fighting for over a year for a fair first contract that includes fair pay, a pension, and improved wellbeing. It's time for leadership to negotiate and reach an agreement—Community Health Workers deserve a fair deal!



november 2024

- 7: Delegates Meeting (IN-PERSON ONLY)
- 15: Health & Safety Banquet
- 18: Racial Justice Toronto Summit

december 2024

- 5: Delegates Meeting (IN-PERSON ONLY)
- 24: Office Closed (Holiday Season)

january 2025

- 2: Office Opens
- 9: Delegates Meeting (ONLINE ONLY)
- 21-22: Toronto Budget - Committee Deputations

february 2025

- 6: Delegates Meeting (ONLINE ONLY)



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