

FALL | 2023

# LABOUR ACTION

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## Worker Power Lifting Communities



# Message from the President

Dear Comrades, Sisters, Brothers,

Thank you all for joining us this past Labour Day back on the streets to celebrate our victories and moving forward in our struggles for another year! We are seeing our collective power in action this year as workers organize and join the many picket lines that have taken over our streets across the city and region. Your actions are lifting up entire communities at a critical time when unaffordability and inequality have reached their peak (Page 12), and for this, I (and everyone at the Labour Council) thank you! We are truly demonstrating what the “Year of the Union” looks like.

The striking colours of the Fall are in the air, carrying on the energy from our “Hot Labour Summer” as many of our members are striking all across the Region. As we go to print, workers at the Bradford West Gwillimbury Public Library (CUPE 905 members) and TVO (members of CMG) continue on strike. Members of ACTRA continue to push back against the Institute of Canadian Agencies (ICA) in a lockout that has lasted more than 500 days (Pages 14 to 15). Everywhere, people are standing up and fighting back.

So despite rising inflation rates and cost-of-living making daily life more difficult, we also have many victories to celebrate and build on. Earlier in the spring, health-care workers fought back attacks on their essential wages for essential work and won in arbitration (Page 10). And this past summer, the labour movement won a decisive victory in the election of Olivia Chow as Mayor of Toronto, building a progressive agenda for all working people across the city (see our municipal report on page 7). Now is the time for us to keep pushing our progressive agenda forward with the upcoming Scarborough-Southwest by-election on November 30th, 2023. Let’s show up for those who genuinely fight for working people. Make sure to make some time to volunteer so we can grow our progressive vision at City Hall! See you on the streets, and at the polling station on November 30th!

Solidarity,

President

Toronto & York Region Labour Council

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Cover photo: Sept 4th, 2023 Labour Day Parade featuring TVO workers on strike. Photo by John Maclellan.

# The Year of the Union: Worker Power, Lifting Communities in Canada and Across the World



**2023 Labour Day Parade.** From Right to Left: Cassava Band, Toronto & York Region Labour Council banner, Jeff Irons IBEW 353 Business Rep and VP of Labour Council, OFL President Patty Coates, Canadian Media Guild Workers

On the first Monday in September, workers across all industries, trades and workplaces in North America come together to celebrate the victories and struggles of the labour movement. Victories like the 8-hour work day, child labour laws, health and safety regulations were fought with the struggle of working people more than a century ago. This legacy begins in Toronto – in 1872 – when thousands of workers gathered to protest the arrest of the printers’ strike leaders and fought for the right to organize labour unions. These victories—paid for with the lives and dedication of workers who came before us—have been increasingly challenged by corporations and their friends in government.

Around the world, working people know that we are in a critical moment. Right now, we are living through the greatest affordability crisis in a generation. We are dealing with a housing crisis, a cost-of-living crisis, an equity crisis, a health care crisis, and a climate crisis that seems to get worse every passing day. All while corporate CEOs rake in billions in profit, with governments helping line their pockets at the expense of working people.

Workers are not flourishing—they are sinking while trying to survive. The solution to all of this is in the hearts and hands of workers: we need to build our power—in every workplace, across every border, in every community—to unite and fight for what’s rightfully ours.

We are at the point where we, as working people, can no longer afford the cities we live in. In Toronto alone, a worker must make more than twice the minimum wage to afford a one-bedroom apartment, while landlords cash in profits. Refugees face this reality with little support—many of them left on the streets. Frontline workers are called “heroes” by employers who make millions, while their staff can no longer afford to buy groceries. Entertainment workers in Canada have been locked out for 500 days, while American producers push their own writers to “lose their apartments” for daring to strike.

We cannot sit on the sidelines. The time to act is now! When we go onto the streets, we are here to say that workers deserve fairness. Workers deserve to know that when they retire, they will get to do it in dignity!

And we are fighting back. We fought back and won against anti-strike legislation and attacks on essential wages for essential work. We are fighting right now alongside education, health care, and private sector workers for the right to organize, decent wages and working conditions. Library and public television workers are on strike in Toronto as you read this! We are fighting back on the picket lines that have taken over our streets.

We have hope in our new Mayor, Olivia Chow, with deep ties to the labour movement. This was her first Labour Day Parade as Mayor marching with us. Her victory reflects the collective hopes of everyday people who trust this City Council to be their advocates in bargaining for political power.

We know there is still much to do to combat the many crises we are in. But the solution to these crises begins by organizing together in our workplaces and in our communities. Workers are not going to take it anymore. We have said “enough is enough!” We are saying to governments and employers across the world: we are not getting ready to fight. We are ready.

So join solidarity actions like picket lines wherever you are, to make the world built by us, finally, for us.

*Andria Babich*

President

Toronto & York Region Labour Council

# Labour Day 2023: Lifting our Communities with Workers' Power!

From Queen Street and University to the Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto felt the energy of workers' power at the 2023 Labour Day Parade. Marking the 151st year of the Parade and the Year of the Union, locals from across Toronto and York Region are demonstrating what it means to lift our communities with workers' power.

Today, we are part of a legacy that began in 1872, when thousands of workers gathered to protest the arrest of leaders of the Globe printers' strike and fought for the right to organize. This led to the passage of the first Trade Unions Act — a legacy which this region's unions are proud to continue as we fight for a more just and affordable City and region for all working people.

Unions play a vital role in improving our workplaces, our neighbourhoods, and our lives, and we are proud to hold this legacy over 150 years in the making. From workplace challenges to the cost of living crisis, it's through our collective power that we can inspire positive change, and uplift not only ourselves but also the communities we're a part of. When we stand together, we can uplift entire communities!

A big thank you to everyone who participated in this year's Labour Day Parade, and congratulations to all the unions that won awards, including:

- Most Decorated Vehicle, SEIU Healthcare
- Most Enthusiastic Union, ACTRA Toronto
- Most Original Float, ATU 113 and Carpenters Local 27

Congratulations! Together we can build a region for all working people!

Let us all tell employers and governments: we are not getting ready to fight. We are ready.

Photo credits go to Yaroslava Montenegro, Nadine Mackinnon, John MacLennan, and BM Evoy

Author: Labour Council





"We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Toronto & York Region Labour Council for their outstanding efforts in organizing the Labor Day Parade. This year's event was a resounding success, drawing a remarkable turnout. Our dedicated members from the Central Ontario Building Trades eagerly anticipate next year's parade with great excitement."

**Central Ontario Building Trades Council**

# Building on Chow's Election: Now is the Time to Mobilize for a City For Everyone!

Labour in Toronto achieved a decisive victory when Olivia Chow won the mayoral by-election on June 26. Chow's election comes after a surprise by-election drove Torontonians back to the polls again for the second time in less than a year.

Chow's victory is the culmination of over a decade-long push from labour to overturn right wing rule in the city. All told, eighty percent of the votes cast in the by-election went to candidates who actively sought endorsement from the Toronto & York Region Labour Council, and candidates across the spectrum adopted at least some of the popular policies the Labour Council advocates for.

Chow's platform is a breath of fresh air for Toronto workers who have long been sidelined by the right wing at city council, whose priorities are enriching their friends on Bay St., not looking out for working people. Among other things, Chow has pledged to reverse cuts to the TTC and restore transit service to pre-pandemic levels, reopen libraries to ensure seven-day access to their services, and ensure good local jobs by using Community Benefits Agreements. She has also said that she will address the housing crisis by building 25,000 housing units, introducing anti-renoviction bylaws, reviewing and strengthening existing policies and programs for renters, and pressing the provincial government to implement real rent control.

The challenge now for labour and progressive forces across the city is to ensure that Chow's electoral victory delivers gains for working people. The coordinated attacks on Chow pushed by the right during the by-election show just how opposed they are to a mayor who will keep workers at the top of her agenda. Now that she's elected, the attacks have begun to ramp up further, with many of them attempting to blame Chow for the poor state of affairs in the city that she inherited, with some critiques coming even before she began to govern. Further, Chow was being portrayed as "the mayor with no mandate" in a specific set of media circles - particularly those which favour Ford and his cronies.

In reality, Chow's platform is incredibly popular with working people. As the Labour Council has shown time and again across several polls conducted in 2022 and 2023, working people are tired of the austerity pushed by the right, and are looking for improvements, and, importantly, increased funding, for the services that improve their daily lives.

While Chow has serious allies in Council, Queen's Park, and on Parliament Hill from her time as a City councillor and NDP MP, the right wing still dominates these institutions. That means labour must mobilize to take advantage of the foothold we have gained with Chow's election, and not let the intense pressure put on Chow force capitulation to Bay St, as has been the case before.

During Mayor David Miller's tenure, working people scored some decisive victories at council. There was a coordinated expansion of transit projects in the city through Transit City, the city gained new funding tools with the City of

Toronto Act and the land transfer tax, and environmental issues became a major focus in the city. Miller also cleaned up corruption and introduced ethics processes.

At the same time, Miller was successfully isolated by right-wing forces, including aftereffects of the Mike Harris Conservative government, in some major battles. This forced Miller to capitulate on certain key issues including making cuts to services and pushing back-to-work legislation which helped buoy the electoral chances of his successor, Rob Ford.

Labour cannot allow Chow's victory to be a fleeting one for working people, and must mobilize broadly to support the left on council, and the popular mandate they hold. More than that, labour cannot simply act as a backstop against a rightward drift, and must push to expand our progressive agenda, and the left on Council's mandate. If we want to address the multitude of crises in Toronto, Labour simply cannot rest on its laurels. We need to get out into the streets, and show the right that a progressive political platform, and a progressive mayor who champions it, does indeed have a mandate - a massive one.

Only a strong mobilization by working people, built around a strong labour-based municipal program that is committed to real progressive change, can aid the new mayor and the progressives on Council in resisting the push from the right and in implementing reforms that put people before profit.

Labour can look to its own militant history, including campaigns like the Days of Action against the Mike Harris Conservatives in the 1990's, to prepare for the fight that is coming. Chow's election provides an important opening, but success is by no means guaranteed - labour, as always, must mobilize to set the political bar. By setting our sights on a true victory for working people, we can deal a blow to corporate power and win a city for everyone.



Newly elected Mayor Olivia Chow along with labour movement leaders and ATU 113 members. Photo credit Y Montenegro

# Where is the Federal Government's Just Transition Policy – A Primer

In the final days of the 2019 federal election Justin Trudeau stood at the foot of Burnaby Mountain in suburban Vancouver and announced his government's commitment to a Just Transition Act. He chose the tail end of the then privately owned Trans Mountain pipeline to make that announcement to bolster his claim that Canada could both continue to develop the oil and gas industry, while preparing for a low carbon economy.

The government has certainly remained committed to expanding the oil and gas sector, having approved several new gas fields. In 2018 it purchased the Trans Mountain pipeline for \$4.5 billion from Kinder Morgan through the creation of the Crown corporation Trans Mountain Corporation (TMC), in order to "keep the project alive". TMC is a Crown corporation. In May 2023 the cost estimate was at least \$30.9 billion, more than 300 per cent, from the initial \$7.4-billion estimate from former owner Kinder Morgan. The pipeline is \$23 B in debt, critics claim fees from the use of the pipeline will never pay the overall cost of the project.

On the Just Transition side of things, the outcome of government actions is not so clear cut. The Liberal government no longer uses 'Just Transition' in any of its communications, as Conservative politicians have successfully sullied that term. Instead the term sustainable jobs is used.

To the Canadian government, a 'sustainable job' is compatible with Canada's path to a net-zero emissions and climate resilient future and such jobs are decent, well-paying, high-quality jobs that can support workers and their families over time and includes such elements as fair income, job security, social protection, and social dialogue. The main goal of social dialogue itself is to promote consensus building and democratic involvement among the main stakeholders, government, employers and unions.

So far, so good.

Part of the 2022 Supply and Confidence motion between the federal Liberals and the NDP that essentially forms a coalition government was the creation of a Clean Jobs Training Centre, renamed a Sustainable Jobs Training Centre. Both the November 2022 Fall economic and the 2023 budget mention the Sustainable Jobs Training Centre with monies to be allocated starting this fiscal year 2023-24.

On February 17 2023 the government released its Sustainable Jobs Training Plan (see box for details) and followed up June 15 with the First Reading of the Canada Sustainable Jobs Act (CSJA-Bill C-50).

Unfortunately the plan and its enabling legislation (see Box for details) is still pretty vague. The Sustainable Jobs Secretariat is about coordinating at least 6 federal departments to get to the job of creating sustainable jobs. The Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council will be made up of employers, industry



and communities, including indigenous reps, 15 in total. Through a process of social dialogue the Council is to provide the Minister and specified Ministers with independent advice to create sustainable jobs, measures needed measures to support workers, communities and regions in the shift to a net-zero economy, including through skills development, training and retraining. Note that they are to provide advice, not create actual programs. The Sustainable Jobs Training Centre, was not mentioned in the Plan or the Act.

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and Unifor were in attendance as validators at the news conference June 15 in Ottawa when Natural Resources Minister Jonathan Wilkenson announced the legislation. They are among the many labour environmental and social justice organizations who have been pushing the government for action. The CLC is calling for a third of the members of the Council to be union reps.

An interesting part of the legislation is ministerial accountability, the minister has to respond to annual reports from the Council, first by making them public within 30 days, and responding to them publicly within 120 days.

Canada's Sustainable Jobs Act will go to committee hearings after Second Reading sometime in the Fall, giving workers and their unions an opportunity to have their voices heard. One place to start would be to fund Just Transition at the same level as the Trans Mountain pipeline, in other words, whatever it takes.

The Toronto & York Region Labour Council and the Labour Education Centre have been advocating for a Just Transition strategy for over 5 years. In 2020 the Labour Education Centre published 4 case studies of Just Transition programs put in place in Ontario, Alberta and 2 Australian coal plant closures. For these studies and other resources go to [www.laboureducation.org/working\\_green](http://www.laboureducation.org/working_green)

# LABOUR & UNITED WAY 2023 PRESIDENTS'

# Breakfast

**JOIN US ON OCTOBER 11, 2023**

**IN-PERSON & ONLINE | 8:30 AM - 10:30 AM**

Inviting all Labour leaders to come united in lifting everyone up to end poverty and launch the 2023 United Way Greater Toronto fundraising campaign. Visit the RSVP link below to reserve your seat and for full details.

# RSVP

**BY SEPT. 29: [HTTPS://2023PB.EVENTBRITE.CA](https://2023PB.EVENTBRITE.CA)**

**CONTACT: [INFO@LABOURCOMMUNITYSERVICES.CA](mailto:INFO@LABOURCOMMUNITYSERVICES.CA)**

# UNITED IN LIFTING EVERYONE UP TO END POVERTY



**United Way  
Greater Toronto**



# Hospital Nurses Win the Fight for Fair Wages After Bill 124



In November 2022, the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) and other provincial public-sector unions celebrated a huge victory for fairness and the rights of workers when the Ontario Superior Court ruled Bill 124, Doug Ford's wage-suppression law, violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The ruling was a vindication of the rights of ONA members, who had launched a legal challenge alongside other public-sector unions, arguing the bill interfered with their right to freely negotiate a collective agreement.

The Ford government had passed the bill in 2019, imposing a limit to increases in total compensation to a maximum of one percent annually for a three-year period for nurses and other public sector workers. Over 90 per cent of ONA's 68,000 members were affected by this regressive law.

While unions were successful in their legal challenges, the road to achieve justice and fair wages for workers who were impacted by Bill 124 was only beginning. ONA acted quickly following its defeat to initiate reopener clauses in our collective agreements, which allowed us to seek retroactive wage increases.

As a result, ONA members working in the charitable homes sector received additional cumulative wage increases of 2.25 per cent over three years, while hospital-sector members received 3.75 per cent for the same period.

ONA hospital members did receive a noteworthy victory when they were awarded badly needed access to unlimited mental health coverage, a vital achievement for a workforce experiencing high rates of burnout and trauma.

Despite this well-deserved benefit, the marginal wage increases assigned in these reopener decisions failed to deliver justice for nurses and health-care professionals, particularly amidst rising inflation and living expenses.

For this reason, expectations were high as ONA awaited the arbitration decision for the current round of central hospital bargaining in the spring of 2023.

Ultimately, in his June decision, Arbitrator Kaplan included the most significant wage increases in decades for ONA's more than 60,000 hospital-sector registered nurses and health-care professionals. Kaplan provided wage increases of 11 per cent over two years. When added to the reopener decisions, this amounts to an average hourly wage increase of approximately \$5 to \$7 by April 1, 2024.

In what we believe to be a first for health-care contracts in Ontario, the arbitrator also provided dedicated isolation pay. This ensures salary continuation in the event of



exposure to communicable diseases, such as COVID-19, recognizing health-care workers are at heightened risk.

In his decision, Kaplan accepted many of the arguments put forward by ONA's negotiating team. He called the wage increases "long overdue and meaningful," explicitly recognizing that improving wages is among the best ways to recruit and retain desperately needed nurses and begin to fix the nursing shortage.

ONA's message that better pay would result in better staffing and better care was clearly heard. After months of escalating actions designed to call attention to the importance of retaining and recruiting nurses and health-care professionals, Kaplan's decision was a win for all ONA members.

This decision was a first step to righting past wrongs, and bringing hospital nurses' compensation up to where it should be. However, nurses know this new contract will not fix staffing shortages overnight, especially with the Ford government's disastrous privatization agenda.

The historic engagement of hospital nurses and ONA members across the province in recent months represents a new era for the union. The fight for better patient care is only beginning.

Author: Erin Ariss – Ontario Nurses Association

Erin Ariss is a Registered Nurse and Provincial President of the Ontario Nurses' Association. ONA is the union representing more than 68,000 nurses and health-care professionals, as well as 18,000 nursing student affiliates, providing care in hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health, the community, industry and clinics.

# The Struggle Against Hate: A Bridge Between Labour and Youth

Hate crimes have been on a sharp rise in Canada in recent years, particularly fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic and the right-wing culture war against “wokeness,” that is, concern for women, racialized groups, queer people, and marginalized groups generally. From the years 2018 to 2022, total police-reported hate crimes rose every year, nearly doubling from 1,817 to 3,576 (96.9%). In particular, race or ethnicity based hate crimes rose 145.8%, from 793 to 1,950, and sexual orientation based hate crimes rose 164% from 186 to 491. Of course, the true numbers of these incidents are likely far higher, as most hate crimes go unreported; as the Canadian Department of Justice states, “it is likely that hate crimes are among the most under-reported forms of criminality.”

This information will come as no surprise to many, but the rapid increase in the numbers of these crimes is a stark reminder of the need for more organized opposition to such hate in our workplaces, campuses, and cities. In this struggle, one natural alliance is that between labour and youth. Unfortunately, young people in Canada are especially unlikely to be members of a union, and are often disengaged from the labour movement, even if they are involved in other movements. However, this alliance is natural in that both groups share common interests in the struggles for the protection and expansion of public services, for higher wages, and for increased affordability, all of which will benefit both them and their communities.

Overall, it is not the working class who benefit from hate and division, which only serve to divide and distract us while the bosses continue to exploit working people. This does not mean we should not fight against hate at a personal level, but as mass movements, our most effective opportunities for solidarity will always lie in collective organizing. Individual freedom can only be achieved through collective action.

The question is: how can labour and youth work more closely and effectively in the fight against hate? Internally, labour and youth organizations must first get their membership engaged and involved, ensuring organizations are putting their broad knowledge to use on the ground. As young workers contribute their experience and perspectives to the struggle, labour should reciprocate, with the union

activists educating those who are less experienced in the labour movement with the tools of labour action. While both student and labour unions need to first be proactive among their memberships, they also must engage with the community at large. More specifically, this means running active and robust campaigns through which youth and labour engage with each other in everyday settings.

Two excellent recent examples within the labour and student movements are CUPE 3261’s Good Jobs U of T campaign, and the Naujawan Support Network (NSN). The Good Jobs U of T campaign, through posters, petitions, rallies, and collaboration with a wide variety of local partners, has helped preserve quality services and fair-pay for caretakers on campus. NSN, a Brampton-based group of international students and allies, successfully used rallies, petitions, and local community support to stage a weeks-long parking lot sit-in to prevent the deportation of hundreds of defrauded international students. NSN have also recovered hundreds of thousands of dollars stolen through wage theft for international students.

We cannot wait for hate to continue to rise unchecked, or hope only for solutions in the legal system. In this renewed collaboration, labour and youth can reinforce their message against hate, showing that it has no place in our movements, and it is not an ally to the working class.

Author: Samir Mechel, VP Finance & Operations, University of Toronto Students’ Union



# New Brunswick's Teacher's Struggle Shows Solidarity is the Only Way to Fight Hate

New Brunswick's Conservative Government has drawn international attention in the past few months over their weakening of the rights of LGBTQ+ youth through a series of revisions to Policy 713, which established minimum standards for schools to ensure a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ students. Policy 713 was implemented in 2020 after a lengthy consultation process. Teachers believe that this isn't just an attack on the LGBTQ+ youth, but also on labour rights, and public education itself.

On May 5 the New Brunswick Teachers Association (NBTA) held their annual Council Day – a PD day with provincial funding. Since 2012, Council Day has included workshops by Pride in Education (PIE), which helps train teachers on issues faced by LGBTQ+ students. PIE has always received support from both Liberal and Conservative governments in the past. This year however, just nine days before Council Day, PIE received written notice from the Department of Education that their request for funding had been denied.

Additionally, a small group of protestors picketed the Council Day event holding signs reading “Perverts In Education” and “Shame on Teachers”. Instead of standing with teachers, the provincial government issued a press release distancing itself from them, denying its involvement in Council Day, and telling the public to direct their anger toward the NBTA.

It was at this point the Tories doubled down, announcing within days that they planned to open up Policy 713 for review, citing “hundreds” of complaints from concerned parents allegedly inundating their office, despite New Brunswick's Youth and Child Advocate saying they had only received three such complaints.

This coordination shows this isn't just an attack on the rights of LGBTQ+ students, but is part of a broader assault on organized labour and the very institution of public education, and are part of a concerted effort to turn public opinion against teachers and their unions, and ultimately to weaken the public education system with an eye to privatization. With a strike on the horizon in New Brunswick, teachers such as Denis Boulet, member of the Francophone Cercle 33 AEFNB are clear-eyed:

“After negotiations with the government broke down in the spring, the NBTA began preparing a strike vote at the end of August. It's no coincidence the Higgs government has engaged a section of parents that are aligned with him,



Elementary Teachers of Toronto march for Trans Rights, Toronto 2023 Labour Day Parade. Photo credits BM Evoy

and on board with his changes to Policy 713. Parents have always been an important factor in teachers' strikes, and it wouldn't surprise me if Higgs was trying to drive a wedge between teachers and parents. He's trying to undermine the credibility of our bargaining.”

The solidarity shown by the labour movement with New Brunswick's LGBTQ+ community is crucial, as it is clear that the fate of labour is tied up with the fate of all oppressed peoples in Canada. Our struggles are intrinsically linked, both historically and in the present day. We know that we are in a pivotal moment with the rise of hate both locally and globally. Labour leadership have a unique opportunity to point the way forward and are showing in practice what solidarity looks like. As CUPE-SCFP NB President Steve Drost declared at the May 13 rally in defence of Policy 713: “Your fight is our fight!”

Only united can we defend our rights, and only united can we hope to win a better, more just future for all.

Author: June Patterson

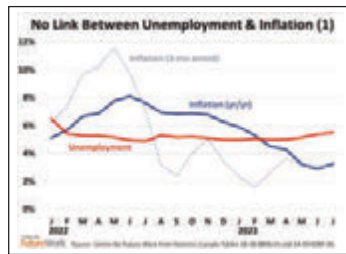
A version of this article originally appeared in Vol. 31 Issue 13 of People's Voice. Edited for length and clarity by Labour Action Staff



# Inflation Accelerates in July Despite Higher Unemployment

The uptick in July inflation reconfirms the absence of a predictable relation between inflation and unemployment, and should cast more doubt on the Bank of Canada’s current strategy to cool off prices by deliberately raising unemployment.

Unemployment in Canada has increased significantly since the Bank of Canada began raising rates in spring 2022. In the last 12 months, total unemployment increased by 155,000 persons, and the unemployment rate has risen by 0.6 percentage points (to 5.5% in July).



Consecutive three-month inflation has hovered at or below 3% since last August, despite the gradual but significant increase in unemployment over that time.

According to conventional doctrine, inflation should be inversely related to unemployment. This is the traditional ‘Phillips Curve’ theory, which sees most inflationary pressure arising from an ‘overheated’ labour market.

But while unemployment has been steadily creeping up, concurrent inflation has not significantly slowed.

Concurrent three-month inflation has hovered at or below 3% since last August, despite the gradual but significant increase in unemployment over that time. Indeed, the concurrent three-month inflation rate is presently higher than it was in late autumn 2022 and early 2023.

The engineered increase in unemployment (driven both by high interest rates to slow job-creation and labour demand, and by unprecedented increases in immigration aimed at quickly boosting labour supply) has had no visible impact on ongoing inflation.

Because post-pandemic inflation was clearly caused by factors outside of the labour market (namely, supply chain disruptions, shortages of key commodities, the energy price shock following the Ukraine invasion, and aggressive profit-taking by corporations in strategic sectors of the economy), it is not surprising that the engineered increase in unemployment over the past year has had no visible impact on price increases.

In essence, the 155,000 additional Canadians pushed into unemployment in the past year, and hundreds of thousands more whose jobs are jeopardized by continuing monetary austerity, are macroeconomic hostages - and worst of all, their sacrifice is to no avail. They did not cause current inflation. But they are being punished in an effort to reduce inflation faster and further, in line with the Bank of Canada’s one-dimensional mission.

There is no doubt that by punishing workers, stalling the economy, and elevating unemployment more dramatically, the Bank of Canada could eventually wring inflation out of the economy – regardless of the fact that inflation did not arise from excess employment or spending power among Canadian workers. By causing a slowdown big and painful enough to forcibly suppress spending, the impact of other inflationary pressures (even record corporate profit-taking) can be offset, and inflation correspondingly reduced.

But this strategy is as inefficient as it is unfair. We’d be better off to target the true causes of inflation: by regulating prices of essential commodities (like energy, rents, and key foodstuffs), capping and taxing back excess corporate profits, and stimulating more supply of housing (rather than suppressing construction with high interest rates, driving housing costs higher).

Inflation has abated significantly since the price surge a year ago. That progress had little to do with higher interest rates. And the next yards of the inflation battle are going to be much harder to traverse. Misplaced finger-pointing at workers’ wages is going to get louder. And workers and unions will need to fight harder than ever for an anti-inflation strategy that addresses the true causes of inflation, rather than scapegoating its victims.

Author: Jim Stanford and The Centre for Future Work

This article is adapted from an analysis presented by Jim Stanford and The Centre for Future Work. It has been edited for length by Labour Action staff.

# Education Funding: The Elephant in the Room

Let's talk about the elephant in the room when it comes to publicly funded education in Ontario. As the mother of an 11 year-old autistic student and as a taxpayer, I have seen governments come and go making grandiose claims on how they were going to make sweeping changes to the Ontario education system to ensure all student needs were being addressed. Too often, the opposite happens. To get elected in 2018, Doug Ford thought his party would appeal to social conservatives if it promised to roll back the sexual education curriculum to 1998 and rewrite it. The result was pretty much the same curriculum. He brought in mandatory online learning, cut school board budgets and increased class sizes. The list of problems brought on during the Conservatives' first government is lengthy.

But when it comes to delivering on the basics of what schools should offer, that's another matter. The Ford government, after a global pandemic, pretends that students and their teachers were not affected by the poor decisions to close schools and then reopen them without addressing real concerns surrounding COVID-19 in schools: lack of proper ventilation, large class sizes, and complete disorganization. The result was that some school boards attempted to create Hybrid learning, where teachers taught kids in the classroom while others watched from home.

Schools were crumbling **before** the pandemic and some were even deemed officially "sick" due to poor ventilation and air circulation where illnesses would circulate within communities like wildfire. Governments over the years have racked up nearly \$17 billion in repair backlogs for their buildings: buildings where bathrooms are uninviting at best and hygienically questionable at worst.

In Ontario we are seeing week after week, month after month, announcements from the Ministry of Education trying to suggest that they are taking measures to improve schools and funding by offering parents \$200 here and there, suggesting that they are creating better curriculum and adding educators all while schools are in serious crisis dealing with violence and lack of supports for student learning.

But, the province is not helping boards replenish the school board reserve funds they had to use to pay some of the costs of

COVID and boards are left in an economically unsustainable, financial position. It is clear in the last budget that the **Grants for Student Needs (GSN)** has decreased significantly since Ford's government took office. A recent article by Ricardo Tranjan of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) notes that, taking into account an inflation rate of 16.9 percent since 2018, these grants have actually dropped by **\$1,200 per student** for the **2023-24** school year.

School boards face deficits for the coming year. Ottawa-Carleton District School Board is looking at cutting staff to deal with a \$15-20 million shortfall. Toronto DSB is short \$61 million even after it went into its reserve funds to the tune of \$70 million to pay for COVID costs because the Ford government wasn't going to put up the money. Currently the board is looking at cuts of 522 staff now that the province has ended its one-time COVID funding of \$31.5 million.

## What does this all mean for parents and families?

As COVID-19 protocols began to lift in 2022, we saw Lecce make several announcements about supporting families doling out over \$600 per student in a short period of time. It is no wonder that the GSN has gone down significantly since a portion was given to families in lieu of providing support in schools at a time when students and educators need support.

Often parents have no understanding of the political, socioeconomic and historical bag of missteps by previous and, certainly, the current government that has affected the state of publicly funded education. NEEDS SOMETHING TO TRANSITION HERE... maybe something like.... But they can tell that something is wrong/stinks. The time is now for parents to speak up about the inequities caused by an underfunded education system and its effects on student's mental, emotional and academic success.

Author: Sandra Huh, York Communities for Public Education

Sandra Huh is the Parent Co-Chair of York Communities for Public Education and the parent of a child with special needs attending a publicly-funded school in Ontario.



# Strikes and Struggles

## Public Service Alliance of Canada

In April, PSAC members, who deliver services at the federal level, went on strike for a fair contract to keep up with the cost of living and provide safer workplaces. With nearly 200,000 members across Canada, they rallied thousands of supporters across the country to their cause, including in Toronto and York Region. In the early hours of May Day – after two years of bargaining – the union announced a tentative agreement had finally been reached. PSAC members at the Canada Revenue Agency workers remained on strike, but reached a new collective agreement shortly after. The countrywide PSAC strike is the largest single-employer strike in Canadian history.



## SNAPSHOT: Inflation in Toronto & York Region

In Toronto and York Region, inflation is hitting workers hard, as everyday life becomes more and more unaffordable.

The Bank of Canada's interest rate hikes have driven up the price of housing, with average mortgage payments surging by almost 30%, and rent increasing by over 6% - this means the average one bedroom apartment in Toronto is now over \$2500 a month, in the York Region city of Newmarket it's up to \$2300 a month!

On top of housing prices, price-gouging grocery monopolies like Metro, Loblaws, and others are still driving prices up to pad their massive profits. While headline inflation may be closer to 3%, food prices are still surging near 9% - with the price of essentials like cooking oil rising at double-digit levels!

With their cost of living going through the roof, it's no wonder workers are fed-up and fighting back.

## CUPE Local 233

CUPE Local 233 members at Toronto Metropolitan University also went on strike in April 2023. Local 233 represents custodians, groundskeepers and maintenance workers at TMU. They sought fair wages and pensions in line with other workers at the University - a struggle supported by faculty and thousands of students over the course of the strike who walked the line in solidarity with 233. The bargaining unit, numbering in the hundreds, held strong with the support of the labour movement in Toronto, and reached a collective agreement in the first week of May.



## Unifor Local 414

Unifor members at Metro Stores went on strike in late July for fairer wages, after having pandemic pay bonuses cut by their employer, similar to workers at other grocery stores. At the end of August, they reached an agreement after a month on the picket lines.



## Canadian Media Guild

Canadian Media Guild workers at TV Ontario endured real wage cuts due to Bill 124, and now face the Ontario government's push for temporary contracts, replacing permanent positions with gig work - tactics Education Minister Stephen Lecce (whose portfolio includes TVO) loves to employ to hurt workers, and the students and viewers they educate. The strike is ongoing as CMG members demand equitable wage increases and the preservation of full-time positions and benefits. At the time of publication, CMG was back at the bargaining table with the employer.



## ACTRA-Toronto

ACTRA-Canada members who make commercials through the National Commercial Agreement (NCA) with the Institute of Canadian Agencies (ICA) have been locked out for over 500 days. The employer wants to reduce rates by 60%, end retirement contributions, and the multi-employer benefit plan. Further, in a move akin to a sci-fi indentured servitude, the company wants to own the rights to an actors likeness for life and use AI to put them into features forever. This is just another attack on gig workers who bring in billions in profits for the companies they work for. Join ACTRA's boycott of union busting brands at <https://www.actra.ca/nca/boycott/>

## CUPE Local 905

CUPE 905 members at Bradford West Gwillimbury Public Library went on strike in July to reach a first contract. They joined local 905 in September 2021 in order to achieve equity with the male-dominated sectors in the town, a group of workers the mayor has been much happier to settle with. At the time of writing, the municipality is denying a fair wage increase, but public and labour support remains overwhelmingly strong.



# Our Solidarity is Unbreakable: ACTRA Members Continue to Fight ICA Lockout

Unions have a name for unity of purpose. We call it “solidarity” and it is our only weapon.



David Gale is the President of ACTRA Toronto

Without solidarity, we have no power. With it, we are an unstoppable and united force.

By informing, engaging and empowering all members to act in solidarity, we secure a future of fairness, dignity and prosperity for each and every one of us.

Solidarity is more important than ever this Labour Day as we see union workers fighting for fair pay and working conditions around the world.

Skyrocketing inflation, the growing threat of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on our jobs and attacks on unionized workers’ contracts are making it more difficult for hard-working Canadians to not just succeed but survive.

And if you’re a precarious or gig worker – like professional performers – it can add an extra layer of uncertainty when you’re constantly vying for your next job.

The world took notice when our friends to the south – first members of the Writers Guild of America (WGA) then SAG-AFTRA – called a strike and Hollywood productions being shot around the world went from booming to nil in just a few months.

The WGA and SAG-AFTRA’s asks are not unique or unreasonable. They are seeking living wages, decent working conditions and fair benefits for their respective memberships. What worker does not deserve that?

Most performers and writers are not earning multi-million dollars from each job. We work in a competitive industry with very few artists having the luxury of supporting themselves solely from their writing or acting work.

Yet Hollywood’s top executives are trying to threaten their livelihoods (this from people who earn an average of US\$28 million a year). With the cost of living rising exponentially, we can’t have minimum rates in 2023 or 2024 be less than what performers or writers were paid in 2019.



The two Hollywood strikes are also impacting Canada’s screen-based industries and the suppliers that support them, especially here in Ontario.

With foreign service production accounting for approximately 55 per cent of production in the province (excluding the National Capital Region), everyone from ACTRA performers to crews to studios to caterers to hotels are experiencing uncertainty and uneasiness.

But it’s not just the Hollywood strikes that are hurting ACTRA members.

Sixteen months ago, the Institute of Canadian Advertising Agencies (ICA) – and the 15 major advertising agencies it represents – walked away from the bargaining table and locked out our members.

For over a year, ACTRA had been trying to negotiate a renewed National Commercial Agreement. During this period, the ICA continued to attack our agreement with major cuts and concessions with the ultimate goal of busting our union.

When they didn’t get what they wanted, they unlawfully declared the agreement had expired. Overnight, our members had their livelihoods put in jeopardy.

ACTRA performers have had a sixty-year history helping bring brands’ commercials to life only to be tossed aside out of corporate greed and left to feel devalued as artists and contributors to our screen industries.

Major brands like Wendy’s, Home Hardware, Canadian Tire and Rogers are indirectly harming the wellbeing and livelihoods of thousands of ACTRA performers by continuing to use these 15 ICA agencies to create their ads.

We need a show of solidarity to demonstrate to these big brands that we won’t stand for it. This is why we are asking Canadian workers to support ACTRA performers by taking their business elsewhere.

Please join us. Visit [actra.ca/nca/boycott](http://actra.ca/nca/boycott) to learn more.

United we bargain, divided we beg.

In solidarity,

**David Gale**  
ACTRA Toronto President



## Planting the Seeds for Unionization in Newcomer Outreach

Every year, many newcomers settle in the GTA – many of whom are unfamiliar with Canadian labour unions. Our Labour Council is building a template for newcomer outreach that plants the seeds of unionization for newcomer workers. Approached by long-time labour activist Winnie Ng about a strategy for newcomer outreach, the TYRLC Executive Board wholeheartedly approved. The pilot project attempts to reach out to Hong Kong migrants, most of whom do not qualify for government-funded employment services and newcomer settlement services.

In June 2019, protests over the anti-extradition law physically incapacitated Hong Kong for months. In 2020, Hong Kong and China enacted the National Security Law, which made secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign entities punishable under a new strict framework. This new law is very controversial as it effectively puts an end to Hong Kong's long-established guarantees of freedom of speech for residents and media. Hundreds of activists have since been arrested, and even some media publications critical of the government have shut down.

There has been a new exodus of Hong Kongers all over the globe since 2019 with over 150,000 leaving for Canada. But Hong Kong migrants to Canada are ineligible for employment services and newcomer settlement services because they are not yet Permanent Residents or designated as a Refugee claimant. This next generation of the working class from Hong Kong is

ripe for organizing since they are politically aware, having left Hong Kong because of the political instability there.

Since June 2023, this Labour Council – in partnership with IBEW 353, Sheetmetal Workers Local 30, Labour Education Centre, and Justice for Workers – have run employment-related workshops that also include union training. These workshops help newcomer workers learn their rights at work and introduce them to unions and how to join. As these workshops continue into the Fall, this Labour Council is very much seeking to partner with other local unions in this outreach. If your local union/organization is interested in newcomer outreach, please contact Jennifer Huang at [jhuang@labourcouncil.ca](mailto:jhuang@labourcouncil.ca)

Author: Chinese Workers Network

## Indigenous Workers: Power Beyond the Checkbox and Taking Action as BIWOC

This year, the Labour Council Equity Committee is proud to mark the 17th year of our annual Indigenous and Workers of Colour Conference (IWOC), centering the voices and experiences of Indigenous and racialized workers across the region. Especially, as we approach National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (September 30th) and the Day of Indigenous Resistance (October 12th), it's crucial to recognize Indigenous Peoples as an integral and foundational part of the labour movement.

From Kaniienkhehaka (Mohawk) ironworkers building the skylines of our cities, to Salish longshore workers organizing a branch of the International Longshoremen's Association in 1913, Indigenous peoples have been at the forefront of many labour struggles throughout this territory. We need only to look at the many Health and Safety protocols that have either been inspired by struggles of Indigenous labour and their organizing—the Engineering “Iron Ring” as a result of the 1907 Quebec Bridge Disaster and the Canadian Indigenous Nurses Association (CINA) to name a few.

Yet, despite Indigenous People's significant role in these struggles, our peoples and nations are rarely recognized in labour history, many times relegated to the sidelines as checkboxes to fill the gaps of equity and inclusion policy. It's why our theme for this year's IWOC conference—*Power Beyond the Checkbox, Taking Action as BIWOC (Black, Indigenous, WORKERS of Colour)*—challenges us to break free from the

confines of token representation and step into our power as racialized workers through anti-racism and decolonization.

Taking Power as Black and Indigenous Workers of Colour isn't just a slogan—it's a call to action to bring together our collective power within the labour movement and unite our struggles across communities. No more passive checkboxes—this is about dynamic action that changes lives, workplaces, and societies.

This year, we are honoured to invite Indigenous youth drummers from 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, followed by our main panel themed *Beyond Performance: What Power and Action Looks Like for BIWOC* and a series of workshops in the afternoon. Some highlights of our program includes workshops such as *Decolonizing our Movements across Seven Generations*, *Just Transition in a Time of Climate Crisis*, among others.

Come join us on October 14th and hear those who are rewriting the rules, challenging norms, and embracing our collective power. **To register your union/local please visit <https://www.labourcouncil.ca/iwoc2023>**

# Olivia Chow is Mayor — *Now the Real Work Begins*



In June, Toronto voters made history by electing Olivia Chow as their mayor, ending over a decade of conservative rule. With Mayor Chow in power and a much more progressive City Council than we've seen in over a decade, we can begin to usher in a new progressive era for our city.

With this election, Toronto chose a different path, one that invests in people and communities. We elected the first woman and first racialized person to lead amalgamated Toronto. This work was not easy, and it didn't happen overnight—it is the result of years of organizing and groundwork done by community groups and labour to get progressives elected to council.

When Progress Toronto first launched in 2018, we knew that organizing and building progressive power across Toronto—especially outside the downtown core—was key to winning on progressive issues and changing our city. This is the work we, alongside others, have been doing across the city for the past 5 years. Together, we've organized and won on issues, built up and trained thousands of volunteers, and have run campaigns that have reached hundreds of thousands of people. In part because of this work, progressives have seen big electoral wins; now we must continue the momentum we've built to translate those wins into big changes for our city.

But this work that we've been building on for years cannot stop—with the opportunities now before us at City Hall, we must double down on our organizing efforts. The reality of Chow's mayoralty is that there is and will continue to be a lot of opposition to it: there still isn't a naturally progressive majority on City Council, Doug Ford is Premier, and the federal liberal government has refused to step up and fulfill their responsibilities. This is all on the backdrop of a rising rightwing movement, and powerful monied interests who have for a long time been all too welcome in the mayor's office.

We know that the right-wing, including conservatives on council, will be organizing to thwart any progress we can make and will fight to take back power. That's why Mayor Chow cannot deliver progressive wins on a silver platter, or on her own: to achieve the changes we want to see, we have to do our part and organize for progressive issues.

In the face of a loud conservative opposition to progress in our city, we need to organize to create a united and even louder demand for progressive solutions to our city's crises. Mayor Chow and our other progressive allies at City Council will only be successful in winning a progressive agenda if they have broad public support on key issues. Important issues like the ones mentioned above will likely be won or lost by a few votes; our task now is to create the support outside of City Hall to give Mayor Chow and city councillors the conditions they need to confidently push for progressive policies and win.

Our city is facing no shortage of crises and we know that the only way to solve our biggest problems is by taking a radically different approach. We need massive public investment in things like housing, transit, and other services. This isn't an easy task—the attack on public services has been ongoing for more than a decade in our city. If we remain steadfast in our resolve for a more progressive city and build public support for policies, then Mayor Chow and other progressives can finally deliver on the changes we so desperately need.

Author: Saman Tabasinejad, Executive Director | Progress Toronto

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# The Many Benefits of Public Transit

In recent weeks air quality in many parts of Ontario has been atrocious. Much of this has been caused by wildfire smoke, fuelled by a changing climate and record temperatures. At one point Toronto reportedly had the worst air on Earth.

The Ontario government's immediate response — if response it can be called — was to urge residents to eschew campfires. But there's something else the province, and Ottawa, could do to help us breathe better: put more money into public transit.

Fast, convenient buses and rail provide a crucial alternative to the private, gas-burning automobiles that are major sources of urban air pollution.

How much of a difference can transit make? A significant one. The Canadian Public Health Association says, "People who live in communities with high-quality public transit drive half as many kilometres as residents who live in car-oriented communities." The association adds that health benefits are even more substantial if transit services are electrified.

But transit does far more than tackle smog. It also helps to make life affordable, boosts the economy and creates jobs.

The CPHA says, "Households can save, on average, \$10,000 per year by using public transit." For a low-income family that's huge. The Canadian Urban Transit Association released a paper in 2019 that aggregated these savings across the country and found transit "reduces vehicle operating costs for Canadian households by about \$12.6 billion annually."

Transit also cuts costs — and prevents human suffering — by reducing traffic collisions. (Given that buses are operated by professional drivers, this is not surprising.) We often overlook the financial impact of car crashes, but the dollars are enormous. CUTA says, "Transit reduces the economic costs of traffic collisions by almost \$3.2 billion annually."

Manufacturing, building and operating buses, light rail and subway systems generate a great deal of employment. Earlier this year Statistics Canada released data showing over 130,000 full-time employees — including some 80,000 drivers — work in the bus sector alone. When we put money into transit, we hire our neighbours.

It's also worth noting that support for transit comes not just from environmentalists and the labour movement but from mainstream commentators as well. In a 2020 editorial, "Green, equitable and job-creating: Why Ottawa should make a big investment in public transit," the *Globe and*

*Mail* made the point that millions of Canadians, including millions of low-wage workers from food services to health care to provide the services we all rely on, public transit is necessary for them to get to work.

So, the case for transit funding from upper levels of government couldn't be stronger.

But here's the problem: In general, Ottawa and the province want to support big-ticket capital projects like light rail and subway construction. This is valuable, but what transit agencies need most right now is money for daily *operations*.

Operations funding pays for crucial but un-glamorous things such as drivers' salaries, station sanitation and vehicle maintenance. If transit systems can't cover these costs, they can't even think about ridership expansion.

The Ontario Public Transit Association estimates that the province's transit providers face an operations shortfall this year of about \$500 million. It's vital that Queen's Park intervene and provide this funding as soon as possible.

It's also critical that we see action from Ottawa.

To its credit, the federal government is committed to a permanent transit fund that will provide \$3 billion annually. But the money doesn't start flowing until 2026 and will likely cover only capital costs.

Last year, the feds supported municipal transit operations across the country with a one-time payment of \$750 million. As cities continue to deal with pandemic-related ridership loss, Ottawa should provide this money again so transit systems can cover essential day-to-day expenses.

Cleaner air, greater affordability and more good jobs would be the result.

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**Authors:** Gideon Forman and Andria Babbington

*Gideon Forman is a transportation policy analyst at the David Suzuki Foundation. Andria Babbington is the President of the Toronto & York Region Labour Council. This article appeared in the Hamilton Spectator on August 20th, 2023*

# POWER

## BEYOND THE CHECKBOX:

taking

# ACTION

as

# BIWOC



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