

## **21. Youth**

Young workers, between the ages of 15 and 24, are among the most vulnerable in the job market. They are more likely to be engaged in precarious employment in non-union occupations, and in the sales and service sectors. Across Canada, 94 percent of them work in the private sector. Seven out of 10 work in service industry jobs. Half of all young workers are employed in wholesale or retail trade, food services, and hospitality. These service sector jobs are the least unionized, with low pay, no benefits, arbitrary scheduling and lack of security. They are also among the fastest growing areas of employment.

Young workers earn less than adults. In 1995, those working full-time, all year earned between \$11,900 and \$32,000. Low earnings and ineligibility for E.I. and Social Assistance puts many youth at risk of poverty. In 1997, 51 percent of young workers who lived on their own had incomes below the poverty line. Increasing tuition fees make it more difficult to access the post-secondary education that might enable them to increase their earnings.

Young workers have higher rates of part-time work than do older workers, and young women are more likely to work part-time than young men. Nearly half of all young workers have part-time employment. In 1999, 20 percent said this is because full-time work was not available. Young workers in part-time jobs are covered by a collective agreement in just 11 percent of their workplaces. Those with full-time jobs are covered by a union in 15 percent of their workplaces. Young workers are more likely to be juggling classes and work, or holding multiple jobs. Many depend on self-employment and contract work to make a living. In 1996, approximately 5 percent of young workers were self-employed.

At a time of globalization and economic re-structuring, downsizing and lay-offs put young workers at a particular disadvantage when competing with more mature workers with more experience and seniority. Youth unemployment in Ontario is about 2\_ times that of adults, and young workers have over double the level of underemployment and marginal employment than older workers.

Employers tend to exploit younger workers' inexperience and lack of knowledge about their rights. Many are given the dirty jobs that no one else wants to do, and are not properly trained by employers in safe procedures. Most injuries among new workers occur within their first year of work. Each year more than 18,000 young workers are injured on the job in Ontario. In 1999, 11 were killed on the job. Their injury rate is more than double the general average.

**Recommendations for A People's Charter:**

- **Targeted accident prevention.**
  - *Legislation must be introduced to provide at least five hours of mandatory paid training in:*
    - *Hazard recognition, assessment and control*
    - *Rights and obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act.*
- **Increase the minimum wage to at least \$8.35 an hour to bring it above the poverty line.**
  - *Eliminate the student wage.*
  - *Eliminate unpaid training hours for new workers*
  - *Employers must cover the costs of uniforms and tools for workers, when required for the job.*
  - *Legislate equal pay and benefits for part-time workers.*
- **Support and expand youth employment and training programs.**
  - *Specific programs for youth facing multiple barriers to finding decent jobs, such as those with disabilities, aboriginals, visible minorities, women, and gay, lesbian, transgendered or transsexual youth.*
- **Cap the maximum hours that can be worked in a week at 37.**
  - *Legislate an end to forced overtime.*
    - *Overtime has been spiraling upwards over the past ten years, with one million workers across the country averaging over 8 hours of paid overtime every week. This is the equivalent of 225,000 full-time jobs.*

- ***Lower, and eventually eliminate, post-secondary tuition fees.***
  - *Fees for undergraduate arts programs rose by 134 per cent in the decade between 1990 and 2000.*
  - *Many students acquire debts over \$20,000 to obtain a four-year university degree, and \$15,000 for a college diploma.*
  - *Adequate funding of colleges and universities is necessary to take the burden of financing post-secondary education away from students.*