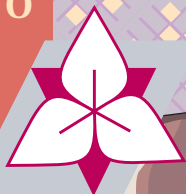




THE ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

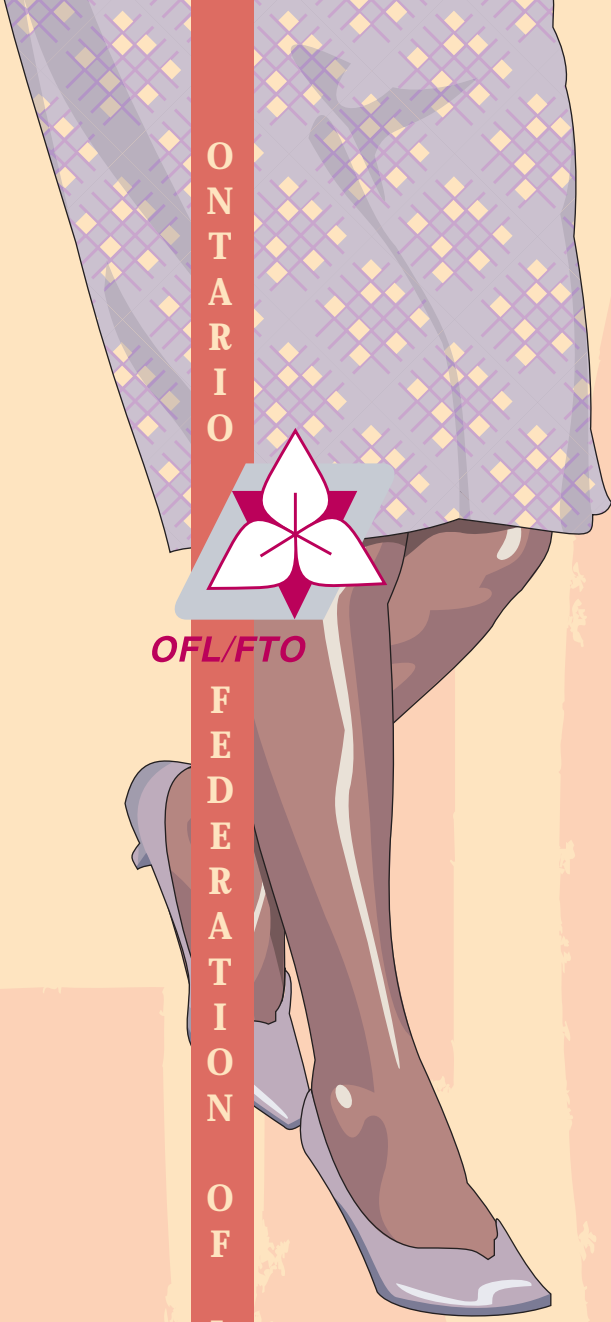
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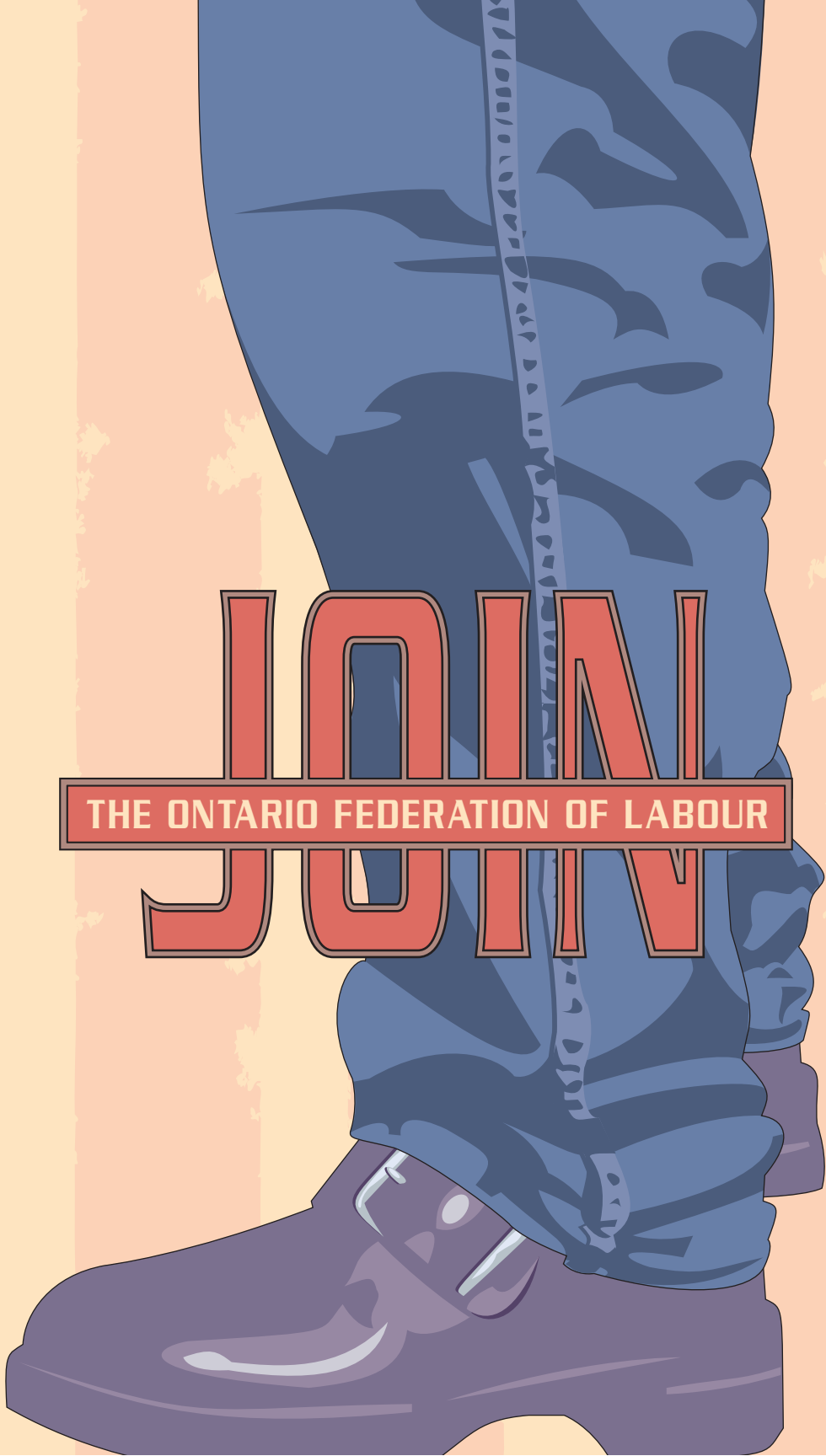
ONTARIO



OFL/FTO

FEDERATION
OF
LABOUR





JOIN

THE ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

If you belong to a union you already accept the idea that there is strength in numbers. One worker asserting a claim against the united strength of a company's management has little force or persuasion. Many workers asserting the same claim with one voice will be heard.

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) exists because it is a logical development of this idea. If workers gathered in a union are a force to be reckoned with, then many unions joined in a federation is a huge gain in strength. Behind each member of every union affiliated to the OFL stands the collective strength of all of the members of all the affiliated unions. When the OFL steps out to confront an issue relevant to working people, it goes forth as the ambassador of Ontario's labour movement. Corporations, governments and political leaders know that when the OFL speaks it is with the voice of a multitude.

There can be no more important reason to affiliate with the OFL than to have its voice raised in defense of your members' rights and claims. You know that its voice represents the committed strength and resolve of all of your brothers and sisters in Ontario's other unions. All at once your union's voice has gained in volume and you can depend on the support of other unions in achieving your goals.

This is the most important reason to affiliate to the OFL because it is the foundation underlying all the advantages and benefits which membership provides. The rest of this booklet describes these advantages and benefits. They are not promotional gimmicks or advertising slogans. These advantages and benefits are facts.

To understand how affiliating to the OFL can improve the welfare of your union and of your members it helps to know something about its historical origins and the reason why it was created.

There have been trade unions in Canada since 1834 and national labour organizations since the 1880s. An early version of the Ontario Federation of Labour was established in April 1944. A little later, in 1947, another central organization was also established in the province and was called the Ontario Provincial Federation of Labour (OPFL). With the purpose of consolidating its organizations, the labour movement merged these two in March 1957. The current Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) was the product of this merger.

The Ontario Federation of Labour is the largest provincial federation operating under a charter from the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). The OFL represents 700,000 workers belonging to 1,500 affiliated local unions in Ontario.

Every two years the OFL holds a policy convention to which all affiliated local unions and labour councils can send elected delegates. These delegates are responsible for determining by their votes the future policies of the OFL. At the convention they elect the OFL's full-time officers: its president, secretary-treasurer and executive vice-president.


The president of the OFL is its chief executive officer and supervises all of its affairs, signs all official documents and presides at regular and special conventions. The secretary-treasurer is the chief administrative and financial officer of the organization. The executive vice-president provides aid to the president in the operations of the OFL.

The OFL also has an executive board, which consists of 33 vice-presidents chosen from the OFL's affiliates. To ensure equality in representation the executive board also includes vice-president positions for aboriginal persons; gay, lesbian and bisexual persons; persons with disabilities; persons from visible minorities and young persons. The executive board is an important feature of the OFL's structure, as its members contribute the advice and opinions of different provincial regions and social perspectives. The executive board meets to review policy and sanction courses of action.

Another duty of the executive board's members is to chair the OFL's numerous standing committees which discuss issues and develop policy







responses which are then approved by convention delegates. The standing committees, whose membership is composed of representatives from the OFL's affiliates, deal with just about any issue which affects the welfare of working people. Here is a sample of issues investigated by the committees: strike co-ordination and support, education, energy and the environment, health, human rights, labour relations, occupational health and safety, persons with disabilities, political education, social services, solidarity and pride, women's issues, workers' compensation and youth issues. If an unexpected issue or problem arises between conventions, special committees are organized to research them and recommend a course of action to the OFL's elected officers.

After a committee and the executive board has completed its policy discussion and submitted its recommendation on an issue, the officers and the board of the OFL delegate it to one or more of the ten departments within the organization for further action. It is at this point in the process when policy is translated into an actual campaign, press releases, media reports, submissions to the provincial government, demonstrations, rallies, town hall meetings and educational forums. It is also at this point when activists and other interested parties from the OFL's affiliates get involved, supplying their resources and skills to help publicize the issue and carry through a course of action to deal with it.

The ten departments of the OFL are essential in performing this task of taking policy off the page and converting it into specific actions which can produce real results. Very often the departments directors have already been engaged with an issue through their participation in the standing committee which investigated it. As a consequence, the directors have acquired considerable knowledge on an issue before they are called to act on it.

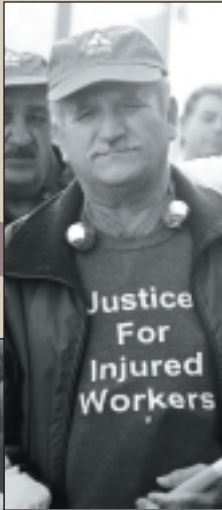
The OFL's ten departments administer and direct issues and campaigns selected for action by convention delegates and the executive board. These issues and campaigns affect almost every aspect of society in Ontario, as the list below reveals.

- arts and heritage
- disability rights
- communications
- child care
- violence against women

- pay equity
- political education
- industrial relations
- education, apprenticeship and training
- environment
- health care
- human rights
- labour law and employment standards
- legislative and political action
- occupational disability response team
(return-to-work and workplace accommodation)
- occupational health and safety
- pensions
- research
- social services (housing, the homeless and income security)
- solidarity and pride
- unemployment insurance
- women's rights
- workers' compensation
- young workers (30 years of age and younger)

The close collaboration between affiliates, labour councils, convention delegates, executive board members, the OFL's elected officers and its departments insure that issues and campaigns are meticulously researched and carefully planned; and, when they are presented to the public, express the commitment and wisdom of a united labour movement. This is the voice of labour in Ontario. This is what you and your union gain by affiliating to the Ontario Federation of Labour.





So far in this booklet you have learned about the history, structure and operation of the OFL and it all sounds very impressive. But you may be wondering how really effective all of it is in the real world. Does the OFL produce real change for working people? Are the OFL's affiliates really involved in deciding on its courses of action and are they given the opportunity to be practically engaged in its campaigns?

In this section two campaigns engineered by the OFL are presented as examples to answer these questions. These two campaigns were chosen because they demonstrate the flexibility of the OFL in pursuing the interests of its affiliates.

They are by no means the only campaigns the OFL has been involved in. Over the years the OFL has developed numerous campaigns which dealt with issues of concern to its members.

THE FIGHT FOR JOBS

Well-paying, hazard-free and permanent jobs in Ontario has been an enduring goal of the OFL and its affiliates. The very long and varied campaign to achieve this goal incorporated over decades many smaller campaigns, all of which were inspired by the same purpose.

The fight for jobs was initiated in 1957, the very year of the OFL's creation, to oppose the relocation and closing of factories during a protracted recession. Soon after it was established, the OFL mounted campaigns to restrain the reckless opportunism of companies.

With the advice of its affiliates, the OFL produced in 1971 a special

report on the bullying tactics of transnational corporations and on corporate responsibility towards workers and society. While it was dealing with these issues, the OFL had to also contend with a sudden increase in unemployment resulting from the OPEC oil crisis in the mid-seventies. “Forums for Full Employment” were held by the OFL in communities across the province to allow affiliates’ members to present their views on the crisis. The outcome of the forums was a brief submitted to the provincial government, advising it to curb price increases to protect the buying power of working people.

Government inaction on the issue compelled the OFL to launch its “Ontario Can Work” campaign, which included a huge demonstration at Queen’s Park and the ingenious tactic of having workers sign protest cards in their workplaces. The day before the OFL was to present 120,000 protest cards to the government, it agreed to investigate the plant shutdown crisis in Ontario.

To aid the large number of unemployed workers in the province the OFL worked in concert with labour councils to develop help centres for them and in 1983 offered them representation through the creation of the Ontario Union of Unemployed Workers.

In the same year the OFL produced another significant achievement: the “Ontario Needs a New ERA (Economic Recovery Agenda)” campaign. All of the staff of the OFL and numerous members of affiliated unions ranged across the province to deliver the campaign’s message to every city, town and outpost. Very soon the message was on open-line radio shows. Not only workers but also students, clergymen and police chiefs offered their opinions at panel discussions held by the OFL in communities across the province. The OFL achieved its purpose of turning the unemployment crisis into an issue of concern to everyone.

Still proceeding with its fight for jobs, the OFL in 1990 collaborated with the provincial government in designing the “Technology Adjustment Research Project (TARP)” to help workers integrate with the new high-tech industries which were on the rise. Unfortunately, when Mike Harris and the Tories took power in Ontario in 1995 they terminated the project.

In 1991 the OFL held a conference which drew from its affiliates over 1,200 delegates to devise a plan to oppose plant closures, privatization and contracting-out of jobs. With its “Stake Your Claim” campaign in the same year the OFL identified the number of jobs lost to free trade, thereby refuting the claims of the federal Tories that the treaty they had signed with the US was progressive and beneficial.

1995 saw the beginning of enormous demonstrations organized by the OFL, its

affiliates and social activist partners against the policies of Tory Premier Mike Harris. These demonstrations in the cities and towns of Ontario were known collectively as the “Days of Action”.

At its convention in 1997 the OFL submitted a paper called *Organizing In A Cold Climate* to advise its affiliates on how to continue organizing new members under the legislative restrictions imposed by the Tory government in Ontario. Also at this convention another paper called *The Public Sector And The Social Economy* described the government’s attack on its own employees and its ambition to privatize several of its operations.

In 1999 the OFL circulated among its affiliates a paper on *The Future Of Work* which recommended changes to the *Employment Standards Act* to protect workers in the new restructured and downsizing economy. Again in 1999 the OFL alerted its affiliates to the dangers of the Tory government’s policies in *Privatization: Private Gain At Public Expense*. This paper was reinforced by another, called *Decent Work In A Decent Society*, which challenged the Tories’ program of Workfare and its enthusiasm for the creation of low paying, unprotected jobs.

Along with its “Job To Die For” campaign against occupational disease, the OFL in 2001 and 2002 returned to its criticism of the Tories changes to the *Employment Standards Act*. It opposed the government’s new 60-hours work week, the division of a worker’s vacation time into single day allotments and changes to overtime rules which resulted in more work for less money. Also in 2002 the OFL made two submissions to the provincial government on behalf of its affiliates in the trucking and garment industries, whose workers were threatened by these changes.

In 2004 the OFL made yet another submission on the *Employment Standards Act* to the new Liberal government in Ontario, advocating stronger enforcement of labour standards, protection for workers vulnerable to the *Act’s* more cruel restrictions and an end to the Tories’ 60-hours work week.

The fight for jobs is not over. It has been and will continue to be a complex campaign, demanding constant vigilance of the decisions of governments and businesses and the untiring ingenuity of the entire labour movement in Ontario to find time and again new tactics to meet new threats to working people. For all its past victories, the Ontario Federation of Labour is not satisfied and is not prepared to abandon the fight for jobs.





WOMEN'S RIGHTS

A growing commitment to the equality of women in the workplace and in society led the OFL to establish its first women's committee in 1962 to identify relevant issues and recommend action. The committee's first conference was held during the 1965 OFL convention. The conference examined how automation in the workplace affected working women.

In 1971 the federal government released its Royal Commission report on the *Status of Women*, which was followed shortly by the Ontario government's *Women's Equal Opportunity Act*. Finally, women's issues were on the political agenda. Taking the lead, the OFL held a conference on "Sex Discrimination in Ontario", throwing a spotlight on this unacknowledged issue. The outcome of the conference was the development and establishment of numerous women's programs within the OFL and affiliated unions.

Next, in 1976, the OFL created a position for a Human Rights Director with the responsibility for women's issues. The new director got involved in the Equal Pay Coalition, in the founding of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and in the production of educational materials on women's issues for distribution to secondary schools. Near the end of the 70s the Human Rights department actively defended women workers who were subject to retaliation and reprisals by employers in the notorious Fleck, Radio Shack, Irwin Toys and Blue Cross strikes.

In 1978 a women's standing committee was established. For the first time in 1979 the OFL provided child care for delegates to its convention. At the next convention the OFL released the report, *Our Fair Share: Affirmative Action and Women*, which initiated a major campaign to press for affirmative action.

Public hearings across the province collected testimony of discriminatory practices and the lack of workplace equality. The testimony was compiled into the 1984 report, *Making Up the Difference*, which was presented to the provincial government.

The OFL not only exerted pressure on the government to recognize the importance of affirmative action but also acted on its own recommendations and created an internal action plan that led to the creation of five affirmative action vice-presidents for women.

After working with the Equal Pay Coalition for years, the OFL finally saw the issue of pay equity break into the open and become a major political debate in 1985. To keep the issue at the forefront, the OFL drafted model legislation for the government to consider and organized women's and community groups in a broad campaign to lobby MPPs across the province.

The Liberal government of the day reacted to the pressure and announced *Bill 105*, which turned out to be a huge disappointment because it implemented pay equity in the public service sector only. The OFL and the Equal Pay Coalition challenged the *Bill* with their “One Million Denied” campaign that succeeded in having the legislation withdrawn. Its replacement, *Bill 154*, covered women in all sectors of the economy. Although the new *Bill* did not satisfy all of the labour movement’s demands on pay equity, it was a significant move in the right direction.

But with the election of Mike Harris as premier in 1995 labour legislation in the province was revised to the benefit of employers and the *Pay Equity Act* was one of the first items to receive a cut in funding and a general weakening of its enforcement.

As part of the drive for pay equity, the OFL’s women’s committee participated in the year 2000 in the “Women’s March Against Poverty”, holding events in 43 communities and a rally in Ottawa. Partners in the March were the Canadian Labour Congress, National Action Committee on the Status of Women and the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice. In the evolving campaign, the OFL co-sponsored lobbies, media events and also two challenges to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to press for pay equity.

The 1990s saw the OFL women’s committee assume responsibility for two other issues: violence against women and child care. To deal with these issues the committee broadened its contacts and joined forces with a variety of coalition partners.

“No Longer Silent”, a comprehensive information package on violence against women, was produced and used in workshops, along with other educational materials on the issue. At the same time, the committee worked with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care in provincial campaigns to establish universal, affordable, accessible, not-for-profit child care.

Workshops were organized for the leadership and staff of unions on the issue of “Human Rights and Collective Agreements: Union Obligations and Liabilities”. The workshops encouraged women to engage in community actions to protect their rights and to get the vote out in provincial elections in support of candidates who promoted their issues. The success of the workshops was evident in the “Women Vote ’99” and “Women Vote ’03” campaigns, which involved thousands of women in political action, many for the first time.

As part of the OFL’s comprehensive “Didn’t Vote For That” campaign against the policies of the Harris government, the women’s committee built support for the campaign through its large network of community activists. Part of the campaign was

to continue opposition to the Harris government's destructive changes to pay equity legislation, child care funding and a worker's right to join a union.

In 2002 the OFL embarked on the most comprehensive consultation in its history, soliciting opinion and advice from within and without the labour movement. The result of all of this work was *A People's Charter*. The *Charter* identified the condition of the province and its people after years of Tory rule and proposed new policies for the benefit of all the people in Ontario. Clearly the Tory regime had betrayed women in the province in major ways and particularly those women who lived and worked in an atmosphere of violence. The *Charter* identified that this violence is the consequence of inequality between the sexes and that eradicating it did not only involve prosecuting the offending men but also instituting social and political reforms.

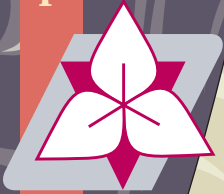
In 2003 the OFL's women's committee joined the Cross Sectoral Violence Against Women Sectoral Group in lobbying federal and provincial governments for better legislation and more secure funding for the community groups who dealt with this issue on the ground.

At present all of the issues described in this long and difficult campaign are still being pursued. Gains have been made in improved legislation, better working conditions, child care, rights for contingent workers, less prejudice and improvements to women's safety. But the OFL and the labour movement in general is not satisfied that enough has been accomplished. To say the glass is half full is to acknowledge that it can hold more. When it comes to women and particularly their safety in our society, the OFL would like to see the glass filled to the brim.





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