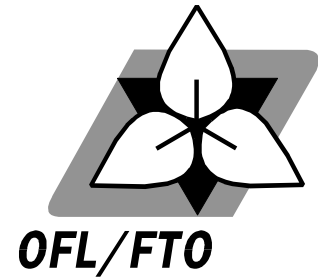


# 5<sup>th</sup> BIENNIAL CONVENTION

*Building for Tomorrow  
Together*

**November 22-26, 1999**

Document 3



---

## FIGHTING THE RIGHT AND BUILDING OUR VISION

### SECTION I THE RIGHT-WING AGENDA

In 1995, the people of Ontario elected their first provincial government openly committed to implementing an extreme right-wing agenda. While its basic features would be gruesomely familiar to those who endured 18 years of neo-conservative rule under Margaret Thatcher, or the 12 years under Reagan and Bush, the advent of Reform-style politics has been a major trauma which has divided and polarized Ontario society.

The so-called Common Sense Revolution of Mike Harris is, in fact, a counter-revolution. Backed financially and politically by a narrow elite from the business world, it seeks to turn back the clock and to destroy the impressive social, economic and political gains which Ontarians have won for themselves over fifty years of political struggle. Its purpose has been to unleash and “liberate” the forces of the private market and to recreate, as quickly as possible, a society based solely on the market principles of competition and private profit.

And despite the bewildering array of individual acts of destruction and tearing down which have confronted Ontarians since 1995, the Harris agenda is essentially very simple. The Common Sense Revolution is based on two key foundation stones – privatization and the tax cut.

The first of these, privatization (with its companion in arms – deregulation), seeks to restore ... to the maximum degree ... unregulated free market forces. By shrinking the size of the public sector, Ontario's people are forced to turn from public services provided as a right of citizenship to private services accessible only on the basis of ability to pay. And, as the spending cuts bite deeper and deeper, the network of laws and programs, put in place over the last 50 years to protect working people and their families from the consequences of the market mechanism and its monomaniacal pursuit of profit, become so many dead letters. Environmental protection is a thing of the past. Public parks are sold and privatized. Worker protection laws are not just ignored, they are repealed, as the appendix to this paper reminds us.

---

**ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR (CLC)**

15 Gervais Drive, Suite 202, Don Mills, Ontario M3C 1Y8 Telephone: (416) 441-2731 Fax: (416) 441-1893 Web: <http://www.ofl-fto.on.ca>

The second key element of the Harris agenda, the tax cut, is the engine that drives everything else. The tax cut, now valued at \$6 billion a year in lost revenue, represents a frontal assault on the financial foundation of Ontario's public sector. Implementation of the successive phases of the Harris tax cut has proceeded, lock-step, with wave after wave of massive spending cuts, huge cuts in public services and the largest mass layoffs in Ontario history. In 1999, there are 45,000 fewer public sector workers than there were in 1995! And the public services which they used to provide have been privatized, like homecare, or abolished altogether, like environmental protection.

The numbers have been crunched by the *Ontario Alternative Budget*. When Harris was elected in 1995, provincial spending on public programs and capital works represented 15.1% of the total Ontario economy, measured as gross domestic product. This year, 1999-00, Ontario's program spending as a share of the total economy will be 12.2%. In other words, in just four years, the Harris Government has reduced the size of the public sector of the Ontario economy by 20%!

### ***Our challenge***

The re-election of the Harris Government in 1999, despite the labour movement's massive investment of financial and human resources, represents a profound challenge which must be faced.

Foremost in that challenge is the recognition that tens of thousands of union members have voted to elect, and then re-elect, this extreme right-wing government. The facts speak for themselves. In the Windsor area, the Conservative vote increased from 8.6% in 1990 to 22% in 1995 and 24% in 1999. In Hamilton, the Tory vote went from 16% in 1990 to 40% in both 1995 and 1999. On the Niagara Peninsula, the Conservative vote increased from 17% in 1990 to 42% in 1999. In Oshawa, it grew from 16% to 47%. Even in the Davenport riding in the west end of Metro Toronto, where it had virtually disappeared in the

1980s, the Conservatives climbed from 5% in 1990 to 15% in 1999.

This is not totally surprising. Our members, like everyone else, are bombarded day after day with neo-conservative propaganda from the commercial media. The emergence of extreme right-wing political parties – Reform and Ontario's Reform/Conservatives – has legitimized views which used to be confined to a lunatic fringe. Views about poverty, unemployment and minority communities, which used to be confined to the margin of politics, are now part of the mainstream climate of opinion.

Whatever else we do as a labour movement, our most important task is to find the ways and means to win back the minds and hearts of our own members to the cause of a just and compassionate society.

We have, in the past, through disciplined and focussed effort in concert with friends and allies, created a climate of public opinion in support of progressive social change. We can, and must do so, again.

### ***MYTHS AND REALITY***

One way to begin is to recapitulate the known truths about the Common Sense Revolution and to communicate these truths effectively to our members. After an initial early phase of relative honesty about their plans and intentions, the Harris Revolutionaries have buried their true purposes beneath a mountain of lies, distortions and tax-financed propaganda. Each affiliate will develop its own political education campaign tailored to the needs of its own membership. But it is useful to set out again in summary form, what we know about the true face of the Harris agenda. What follows are some of the prevalent myths about the Common Sense Revolution and the truth that lies behind the fabrications of right-wing propaganda.

**Myth #1**

*The Common Sense Revolution (CSR) was necessary to fix Ontario's deficit crisis.*

**The Reality**

The last thing the CSR is about is deficit reduction. Every penny spent to pay for the tax cut so far has been borrowed money: the total borrowed to date to pay the cost of the tax cut has been \$25 billion. The annual carrying cost of the interest on this debt is \$1.4 billion per year. The truth, as the *Ontario Alternative Budget* has demonstrated, is that growth in the Ontario economy since 1994 has generated sufficient new revenue to balance the budget ... without a penny of spending cuts. If Mike Harris and Ernie Eves had been locked in a closet in 1995 and prevented from doing a single thing, the Ontario budget would have been balanced in 1998-99.

**Myth #2**

*The Harris Government is already spending more money than ever on health care and has promised a 20% increase on top of that.*

**The Reality**

The 1999 budget for health care fails to keep pace with population growth and inflation. The truth is that Ontario's real per capita spending on health is lower than it was before Harris was elected. In 1994-95, real per capita spending was \$1,609. By the fiscal year 2003-04, it will be \$1,558 per person. And in real dollar terms, the Ontario health budget has already been cut by nearly \$2 billion a year. The health care and hospital crisis is guaranteed to last another five years.

**FIGURE 1**  
**How the tax cut debt builds**  
(millions)

	1995-6	1996-7	1997-8	1998-9	1999-0	2000-1	2001-2
Annual Cost of Tax Cut	-	1,140	3,305	5,391	6,194	6,595	6,987
Interest Costs During Year	-	41	141	326	618	998	1,434
Previous Year's Tax Cut Debt	-	-	1,181	4,627	10,344	17,156	24,749
Carrying Cost of End-Year Debt	-	85	289	595	986	1,423	1,907

The Harris tax cut was phased in over three years. Since Ontario still has a deficit, every cent used to pay for the tax cut has to be borrowed. And every year the cost of the tax cut, plus the interest on the loan to pay for the tax cut, is added to the total provincial debt. The interest is, of course, compound interest. So, from a modest increase in the debt of \$1.181 billion in 1996-97, the total debt owing because of the tax cut will reach \$25 billion, just four years later in 2001-02.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Provincial Government Spending on Health Care**

	Expenditures Current \$  (millions)	Per Person Expenditures Current \$  (dollars)	Health Care Price Index, Ontario (1992=100)	Real Expenditures 1992 \$  (millions)	Population	Real Per Person Expenditures  (1992 \$)	Cumulative Per Person Deficit  (1992 \$)	Cumulative Total Deficit 1992 \$  (millions)
<b>1995</b>	18,572.4	1,673.50	104.2	17,823.8	11,098,137	1,606.02	0.00	0.0
<b>1996</b>	18,704.0	1,661.50	105.0	17,813.3	11,257,501	1,582.35	23.66	266.4
<b>1997</b>	18,842.8	1,651.80	106.5	17,692.8	11,407,641	1,550.96	78.72	894.5
<b>1998</b>	19,044.0	1,647.20	108.9	17,487.6	11,561,162	1,512.61	172.13	1,974.4
<b>Change fr.1995</b>	471.6	(26.20)	4.5%	(336.2)	463,025	(93.40)	172.13	1974.4

Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information, National Health Expenditure Trends, 1975-1998

**Myth #3**

*The Conservative education reforms have restored quality education to Ontario schools.*

**The Reality**

Along with Medicare and welfare, education has been slashed to pay for the tax cut. The new education funding formula reduces real school funding by \$987 million a year, and that is on top of the \$525 million slashed from the schools' budget between 1995 and 1997. The grand total: a \$1.5 billion reduction in real spending on classroom education.

As for post-secondary education, a \$400 million budget cut, combined with deregulated tuition fees, are turning our universities into bastions for the well-to-do. Annual tuition fees for some professional schools have now hit double digit thousands, putting university education where it once was for working families – out of reach.

**Myth #4**

*Workfare is getting people off welfare and back to work.*

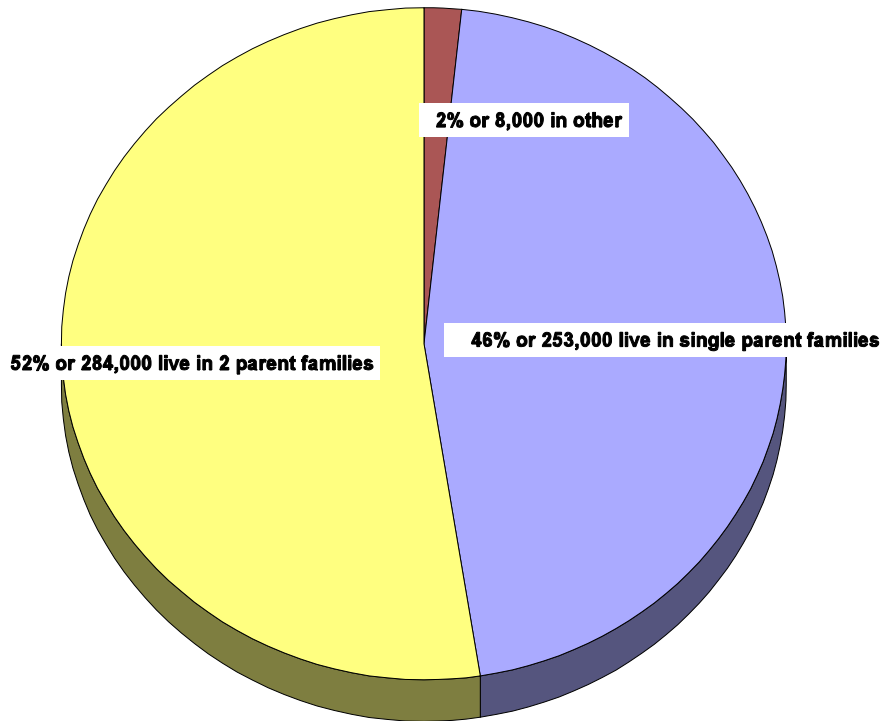
**The Reality**

The Conservatives slashed social assistance by 21% in 1995 to get a first installment of \$1 billion towards the cost of the tax cut. The effect is visible on any downtown street corner, and is measured in an eight-fold increase in child poverty in Ontario.

But cutting people off welfare is hardly the same thing as getting them a decent job. And Workfare itself has been a total failure. There are, in fact, no statistics at all on the program. Many municipalities have refused to cooperate out of a simple regard for human decency. The ugly truth is that Workfare does not pay a decent wage – in fact it does not pay any wage at all. Workfare forces unemployed men and women to work for a welfare cheque, doing jobs that used to be done by unionized workers.

**FIGURE 3**

**More Poor Children in Ontario Live in 2 Parent Families**



Workfare workers are, in fact, slave labour, forced to work without a fair wage, denied the right to join a union and denied the protection of the *Employment Standards Act*.

In his second term, Mike Harris will extend Workfare to the private sector. Who among us can compete for our own job when a union wage is set against a welfare allowance cheque?

**Myth #5**

*The Harris tax cut has created hundreds of thousands of new jobs in Ontario.*

**The Reality**

In fact, Mike Harris failed to keep his jobs promise – to deliver 750,000 jobs in his first term. Between 1995 and 1999, Ontario created a total of 549,000 jobs. What Harris doesn't mention is that fully half of these new jobs are either part-time

jobs or “full-time self-employment”. And contrary to the tax cut boast, the good jobs that have been created in the private sector are entirely the result of growth in the export sector.

Between July 1995 and July 1998, Ontario's real domestic product grew by \$32.2 billion. During the same period, Ontario exports grew by \$51.4 billion – more, in other words, than the Ontario economy as a whole. Unless the right-wingers can explain how the Ontario tax cut helps American consumers to buy our exports, they need a better story than this one.

Meanwhile, the spending cutbacks have eliminated a total of 45,000 public sector jobs in Ontario since 1995.

**Myth #6**

*Low and middle income working families have benefited from the Harris tax cut.*

**The Reality**

The *Ontario Alternative Budget 1999* calculated that the average Ontario family will save \$738 as a result of the Harris tax cut in 1999.

But that saving will be totally eaten up by at least \$766 in increased user fees, for a net loss of \$28.<sup>00</sup>.

As Figure 4 shows, most of the tax cut goes to upper income Ontarians. In fact, 57% of the total tax cut goes to the top 10% of income earners.

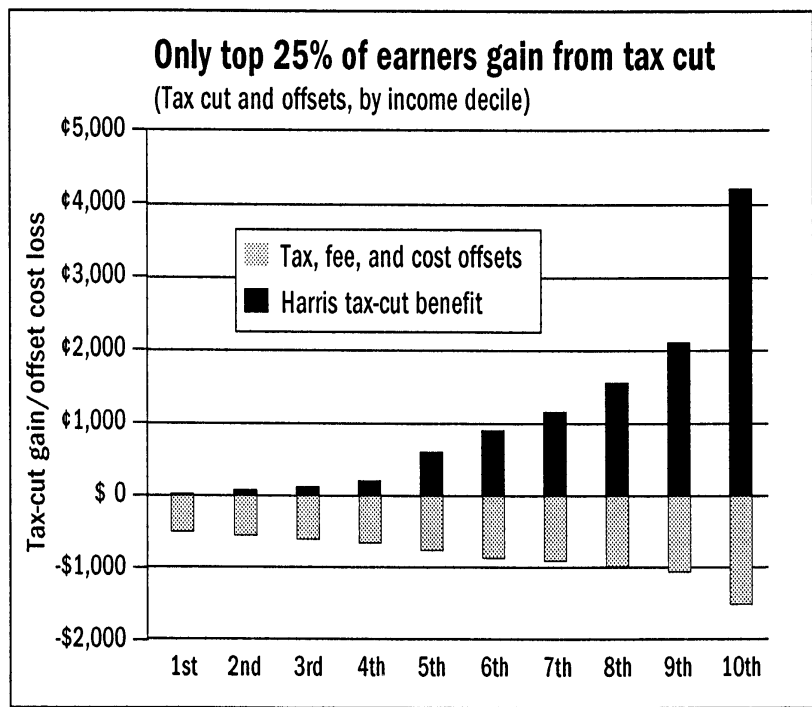
But even the families in the top 20% income bracket get hit so hard by user fees that their average net benefit, after paying user fees, amounts to less than a dollar a day.

Figure 5, from this year's *Ontario Alternative Budget*, takes the examples used in this year's Tory budget, and shows how the Tory boast of tax savings is really a net loss for low and middle income working families.

These out-of-pocket losses represent a real cut in what we call the 'social wage'. For example, as Medicare spending is cut, private spending on health care services has increased to cover services that used to be part of the social wage.

Another example: tuition fees. The sorry truth is that tuition fee increases alone have already been so huge that an average income family with only one child going to university, has already lost a lifetime of Harris tax cut benefits to cover tuition fee increases.

**FIGURE 4**



**FIGURE 5****The Incredible Vanishing Tax Cut****Examples used in the 1998-9 Ontario Budget**

Family Type	# in hhold	Net Income	Taxable Income	Earners	Children	Tax savings	Offset	Net benefit
single senior	1	\$ 14,940	14940	1	0	80	346	-266
single, no children	1	16500	16500	1	0	175	358	-183
couple, seniors	2	29000	29000	2	0	325	564	-239
couple, children	3	29000	29000	1	1	450	679	-229
single parent, children	3	46000	32500	1	2	845	802	43
couple, children	4	37000	34500	1	2	720	852	-132
couple, children	4	39000	37000	2	2	705	866	-161
single, no children	1	28500	28000	1	0	595	445	150
couple, children	5	71000	44335	2	3	1010	1214	-204
couple, no children	2	44000	44000	2	0	850	672	178
couple, seniors	2	47700	47700	2	0	950	699	250
couple, children	4	60000	60000	2	2	1385	1019	366
couple, no children	2	133000	123450	2	0	4065	1318	2747
couple, children	4	209000	181500	2	2	6835	2100	4735
single, no children	1	140000	126500	1	0	5125	1254	3871
couple, children	5	175000	186500	2	3	4020	1969	2051

Figure 5 shows that the Harris tax cut (“Tax Savings”) is eaten up by indirect taxes and new user fees (“offset”) to such a degree that most families experience a net loss. Details of the offset calculation can be found in the *1999 Ontario Alternative Budget*, pp 6 - 11.

**Myth #7**

*Getting rid of rent controls and cancelling cooperative and non-profit housing programs will allow the private sector to get back into the affordable rental housing business and solve Ontario's housing problems the free enterprise way.*

**The Reality**

The housing myth has turned out to be one of the very cruelest fabrications of the Ontario Reform/Conservatives. The crisis of homelessness that has resulted from the termination of Ontario's social housing programs is a national disgrace. The evidence of the homelessness catastrophe is all around us. What is not so well known is that the private development industry has failed spectacularly to build any rental housing at all since the housing market was liberated. Figure 6 shows the disappearance of rental housing starts since 1995.

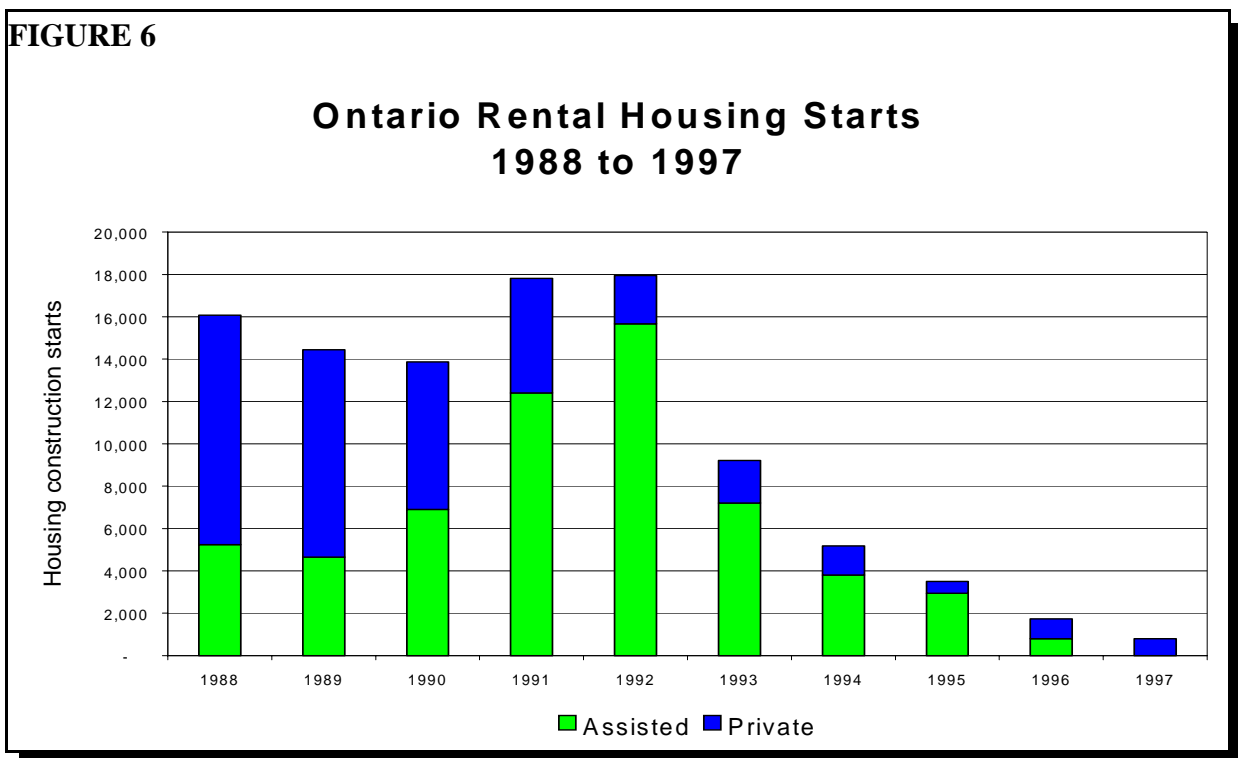
In its first days in office, the Harris Government killed more than 17,000 non-profit and co-op housing units that were under development. They alone would have given a home to 45,000 men,

women and children. In the last three years, the private sector has failed to build even a fraction of the rental homes that the Tories destroyed in 1995.



At the end of the day, the right-wing agenda can only be sustained by lies. History teaches us that the big lie campaigns, waged by governments against their own people, are often successful. The multi-million dollar Conservative television ad campaign, paid for with our own tax dollars, had an obvious impact on many of our own union members across the province.

Any campaign to win back the minds and hearts of our members must begin with a massive dissemination of the truth about the Conservative record, using all the communications, education and organizational resources at our disposal. Timing will be crucial – we cannot afford to wait.





## THE SECOND TERM

With the re-election of the Conservative Government, we can expect another four years of destruction.

### Tax Cut II

The key plank in the Tory platform was a promise to cut the provincial income tax rate by a further 20%. That will add another \$4 billion in foregone tax revenue to the total cost of the tax cuts, for a new yearly total of \$10 billion. This expense will drive a second round of spending cuts, public sector layoffs and privatization.

### Privatization

Privatization is the second key promise in the Tory platform. All government operations will be reviewed:

*“We’ll use the private sector to provide equal or better services wherever it’s safe, practical and cost-efficient,” says the 1999 election Blueprint.*

A new “business impact test” will act as a litmus test for all government activity. Everything that is done in Term II must benefit private business. Privatization, downsizing and deregulation will continue to be the watchwords of the next four years.

### Workfare

Workfare will be expanded. The Tory Blueprint could not be more clear:

*“We’ll open our parks and roads maintenance programs to Workfare participation by making sure union agreements aren’t interpreted as barriers to work-for-welfare.”*

Recall that Workfare forces the unemployed to work for their welfare cheque, not a pay cheque.

In Term II, Workfare will be extended to the private sector. It will literally steal jobs from our members and replace paid work with slave labour.

### Labour Law

As part of the drive to deregulate the labour market, new assaults on worker protection laws have been promised by the Harris Government. Specifically, the threat is made to amend the *Labour Relations Act* to make decertification even easier than it is now. Behind the rhetoric about “more flexibility in designing work arrangements” lies the clear threat of further watering down of the *Employment Standards Act*.

And, as the section on Workfare shows, the government is considering amendments to the *Labour Relations Act* that would allow Workfare placements to do bargaining unit work in violation of our collective agreements. This must be considered a major threat to the economic security of all workers in the province.

### Balanced Budget Law

Finally, the Blueprint has promised a balanced budget bill and a law requiring a referendum before taxes can be raised. This will be the icing on the Reform/Conservative cake. It enshrines into law the permanent reduction of the provincial government. It makes counter cyclical measures impossible during economic downturn. And it sets up yet another smokescreen to hide the profligacy of a government which has borrowed \$25 billion to finance a tax cut for the rich.

## SECTION II BUILDING OUR VISION

At its 22<sup>nd</sup> Convention in May 1999, the Canadian Labour Congress adopted an Action Plan which clearly restated the goals of the Canadian labour movement at the close of the twentieth century. It is worth summarizing.

- We seek to build a society based on human values, not market values.
- A truly democratic society requires social and economic justice and aspires to equality. In our democratic society of equal men and women, democracy is incompatible with

poverty. It is intolerable for poverty to coexist with the unimaginable wealth of a privileged elite.

- Genuine democracy must extend to the economy, by taking social and political control of economic activity: achieving environmentally sustainable development, full employment and an end to poverty. Private markets must be civilized and humanized through public regulation. Essential human needs must be met through the provision of public services. A strong and reconstructed public sector will provide essential goods and services, create jobs and develop institutions to distribute society's wealth fairly to all Ontario's people.
- Democracy must extend to every workplace, with fundamental respect for trade unions and collective bargaining rights. Working people claim the right of control over all aspects of their working lives through their free and democratic unions.
- In a genuine democracy, working people claim entitlement to strong and comprehensive worker protection laws which prevent and redress exploitation and abuse, safeguard occupational health and safety, guarantee income protection in times of need and facilitate and foster the exercise of the rights of freedom of association and free collective bargaining.
- And a genuine democracy will be truly open to all its members, under the protection of human rights laws and equity measures to ensure equality for all our people.

### **SECTION III**

#### **A RENEWED CALL TO ACTION**

Labour's mobilization in support of our goal of building a just and compassionate society must begin at home with our own members. We

recognize that an electoral majority against the right-wing agenda does not yet exist in Ontario. The Ontario Conservatives are not alone in promoting the extreme right-wing.

In 1995 and again in 1999, the Ontario Liberal Party ran on a hard-right platform that included Workfare, tax cuts for the rich, restricted labour rights and mandatory balanced budget laws. This hard-right agenda has prevailed in Ontario yet again. And the Federal Liberals in Ottawa have exceeded the worst ambitions of Brian Mulroney in destroying the financial base of Canada's social safety net.

A clear majority of voters in Ontario, including our members, are supporting at least key elements of a hard-right agenda.

We must rise to the challenge of winning the minds and hearts of all Ontario trade unionists to the progressive cause.

The 1999 CLC Action Plan remains a solid framework for mobilization over the next four years. To it, we add our own Plan of Action for Ontario. The elements of the plan are:

1. A renewed commitment to political education within our membership. This means a more intensive program of political action and policy schools to develop a new generation of local-based political action activists. It means a renewed emphasis on developing political action committees in union locals and providing them with the resources to succeed in their work.
2. We reiterate our opposition to tax cuts. The demand for tax cuts has become the chief program of corporate Canada and its right-wing political allies. Tax cuts are the engine of privatization, benefiting only the wealthy while draining the life out of public services and programs. The issue of tax cuts, the importance of public services and the need for genuine tax reform, which transfers the burden of fair taxation to the real sources of wealth,

will be a real focus of both internal and public education campaigns.

3. New emphasis must be placed on issue based political action campaigns. Issue based campaigns, focussed on matters of direct and immediate concern to our own members, can and will build public support against the exploitation, degradation and inequality that have always accompanied liberated free market forces. The issues will emerge from the reality of workplace and community life, and could include, by way of example:

S Demands for better occupational health and safety and the links between workplace safety and environmental protection.

S Workfare is an attack on the jobs and standard of living of all Ontarians which must be opposed with all of our strength. And we need to fight to replace Workfare with a Fair Work program to create real jobs for the unemployed.

S Privatization of health care, especially home health care, is rapidly proceeding across the province. Health privatization means turning medical services over to huge American multinational corporations. Quality of service is threatened, and health care workers are turned into contract service workers.

S A campaign against homelessness, focussed on the need for affordable housing programs to house the homeless and create new jobs, and to restore rent control.

S A major campaign to secure effective control over our public sector pension plan funds.

4. Resistance, with all the resources at our disposal, against any and all attempts by this Reform/Conservative Government to strip

working people of our fundamental rights and freedoms. In particular, any attempt by the Harris Government to pass labour laws which overturn collective agreements and replace pay cheques with welfare cheques will meet a massive mobilization of our members.

During the past four years, Ontario's labour movement and its community partners carried out twelve successful Days of Action in protest against the anti-people policies of the Harris Government.

Ontario's record for person-days lost from strikes has already soared under Harris: from an average of 446,000 person days between 1993 and 1995, to an average of \$1.6 million lost person-days between 1996 and 1998.

For as long as Ontario's Reform/Conservatives and their business backers perpetuate this climate of extreme hostility to working men and women, Ontario will continue to lead the nation in strikes. That's not a threat, it's a simple fact. What is taken away in the social wage will be fought for again at the bargaining table.

And if the government attempts further assaults on Ontario's *Labour Relations Act*, it can expect nothing else than a major battle with this labour movement.

5. The OFL will continue its active participation in the work of our coalition partners in the social movements. In co-operation with the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice, the Ontario Health Coalition, the Aboriginal communities, the churches, disability, visible minority and gay/lesbian communities, we will expand our efforts to build support for labour's vision.

In alliance with our coalition partners, we continue to stand ready to mobilize our members in direct action to defend our rights.

6. Unity and solidarity remain labour's greatest strength – in political action as well as at the bargaining table. Now, more than ever, we need a renewed commitment to labour's own political party – the NDP. Only the New Democrats have shared labour's vision of a truly democratic society based on social and economic justice. Labour's support for the New Democrats should never be regarded as unconditional. It is based upon shared ideals, a shared vision and a common program.

We realize that our social and economic objectives can only be achieved in partnership with our social democratic political party, with whom we remain allied and united.

But this relationship can never be taken for granted.

Our concerted participation in the life of the NDP remains essential: to ensure that we maintain our commitment to the broader vision of social unionism; to achieve the goals which cannot be achieved through collective bargaining alone; and to keep the goals and ideals of the labour movement front and centre in the Party's program.

# SUMMARY

The so-called Common Sense Revolution of the Mike Harris Government is really a counter-revolution. Its purpose is to roll back the social, economic and political gains which Ontarians have won since the Second World War. It intends to reinstate the old status quo by restoring the old forces of the private market and to recreate, as quickly as possible, a society based solely on the market principles of competition, private profit and ability to pay.

The Common Sense Revolution has accomplished its goal of shrinking the public sector through a simple combination of privatization and the tax cuts. In just four years, the size of Ontario's public sector of services and programs has been reduced by a full 20%.

We recognize that this destructive and reactionary program does have considerable support from within the ranks of our own membership. This is reflected in poll results and, sadly, in the results of the 1999 election.

Our challenge is centred on the need to win back the minds and hearts of our own members to the cause of a just and compassionate society, where human values outweigh market values and essential services and programs are provided as a basic right.

One way to start is by systematically exposing the lies, fabrications and myths that sit at the heart of the right-wing neo-conservative agenda – whether it is promoted by Conservatives or Liberals.

Document 3 sets out seven central myths of the Common Sense Revolution and counters each of them with the real story. It also reminds us that, in their second term, the Harris Government plans to unleash a second wave of destruction, including:

- a second income tax cut costing \$4 billion a year, raising the total cost of the tax cuts to \$10 billion a year;
- major privatization and deregulation;
- extension of Workfare to the private sector;
- new roll backs in labour law; and
- a balanced budget law to hide the fact that the Harris Government will borrow \$25 billion, just to pay for the tax cut.

Building on the Action Plan adopted by the Canadian Labour Congress at its 1999 Convention, we re-affirm labour's vision of a society founded on principles of justice, equality and real democracy.

The 1999 CLC Action Plan remains a solid framework for mobilization over the next four years. To it, we add our own Plan of Action for Ontario.

## ACTION PLAN

Labour's mobilization in support of our goal of building a just and compassionate society must begin at home with our own members. We recognize that an electoral majority against the right-wing agenda does not yet exist in Ontario. The Ontario Conservatives are not alone in promoting the extreme right-wing.

In 1995 and again in 1999, the Ontario Liberal Party ran on a hard-right platform that included Workfare, tax cuts for the rich, restricted labour rights and mandatory balanced budget laws. This hard-right agenda has prevailed in Ontario yet again. And the Federal Liberals in Ottawa have exceeded the worst ambitions of Brian Mulroney in destroying the financial base of Canada's social safety net.

A clear majority of voters in Ontario, including our members, are supporting at least key elements of a hard-right agenda.

We must rise to the challenge of winning the minds and hearts of all Ontario trade unionists to the progressive cause.

The 1999 CLC Action Plan remains a solid framework for mobilization over the next four years. To it, we add our own Plan of Action for Ontario. The elements of the plan are:

1. A renewed commitment to political education within our membership. This means a more intensive program of political action and policy schools to develop a new generation of local-based political action activists. It means a renewed emphasis on developing political action committees in union locals and providing them with the resources to succeed in their work.
2. We reiterate our opposition to tax cuts. The demand for tax cuts has become the chief program of corporate Canada and its right-wing political allies. Tax cuts are the engine of privatization, benefiting only the wealthy while draining the life out of public services and programs. The issue of tax cuts, the importance of public services and the need for genuine tax reform, which transfers the burden of fair taxation to the real sources of wealth, will be a real focus of both internal and public education campaigns.
3. New emphasis must be placed on issue based political action campaigns. Issue based campaigns, focussed on matters of direct and immediate concern to our own members, can and will build public support against the exploitation, degradation and inequality that have always accompanied liberated free market forces. The issues will emerge from the reality of workplace and community life, and could include, by way of example:

S Demands for better occupational health and safety and the links between

workplace safety and environmental protection.

- S Workfare is an attack on the jobs and standard of living of all Ontarians which must be opposed with all of our strength. And we need to fight to replace Workfare with a Fair Work program to create real jobs for the unemployed.
  - S Privatization of health care, especially home health care, is rapidly proceeding across the province. Health privatization means turning medical services over to huge American multinational corporations. Quality of service is threatened, and health care workers are turned into contract service workers.
  - S A campaign against homelessness, focussed on the need for affordable housing programs to house the homeless and create new jobs, and to restore rent control.
  - S A major campaign to secure effective control over our public sector pension plan funds.
4. Resistance, with all the resources at our disposal, against any and all attempts by this Reform/Conservative Government to strip working people of our fundamental rights and freedoms. In particular, any attempt by the Harris Government to pass labour laws which overturn collective agreements and replace pay cheques with welfare cheques will meet a massive mobilization of our members.

During the past four years, Ontario's labour movement and its community partners carried out twelve successful Days of Action in protest against the anti-people policies of the Harris Government.

Ontario's record for person-days lost from strikes has already soared under Harris: from an average of 446,000 person days between

1993 and 1995, to an average of \$1.6 million lost person-days between 1996 and 1998.

For as long as Ontario's Reform/Conservatives and their business backers perpetuate this climate of extreme hostility to working men and women, Ontario will continue to lead the nation in strikes. That's not a threat, it's a simple fact. What is taken away in the social wage will be fought for again at the bargaining table.

And if the government attempts further assaults on Ontario's *Labour Relations Act*, it can expect nothing else than a major battle with this labour movement.

5. The OFL will continue its active participation in the work of our coalition partners in the social movements. In co-operation with the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice, the Ontario Health Coalition, the Aboriginal communities, the churches, disability, visible minority and gay/lesbian communities, we will expand our efforts to build support for labour's vision.

In alliance with our coalition partners, we continue to stand ready to mobilize our members in direct action to defend our rights.

6. Unity and solidarity remain labour's greatest strength – in political action as well as at the bargaining table. Now, more than ever, we need a renewed commitment to labour's own political party – the NDP. Only the New Democrats have shared labour's vision of a truly democratic society based on social and economic justice. Labour's support for the New Democrats should never be regarded as unconditional. It is based upon shared ideals, a shared vision and a common program.

We realize that our social and economic objectives can only be achieved in partnership with our social democratic political party, with whom we remain allied and united.

But this relationship can never be taken for granted.

Our concerted participation in the life of the NDP remains essential: to ensure that we maintain our commitment to the broader vision of social unionism; to achieve the goals which cannot be achieved through collective bargaining alone; and to keep the goals and ideals of the labour movement front and centre in the Party's program.

## APPENDIX A

### THE ATTACK ON WORKER PROTECTION LAWS

- Bill 7 1995**  
Repealed all the NDP law reforms, legalized scabs, scrapped the card-majority system of union certification, allows employer petitions for decertification.  
  
August 1995 - Workplace Health and Safety Agency disbanded.
- Bill 15 1995**  
Attacked workplace safety by removing all labour representatives from the Board of the WCB.
- Bill 22 1998**  
Prevented Workfare workers from joining a union.
- Bill 26 1996**  
Restricted the independence of public sector arbitrators with legal fetters, limited pay equity by abolishing the proxy method in the broader public sector.
- Bill 31 1998**  
The Wal-Mart law removed effective penalties against employers found guilty of misconduct, abolished interim orders and allowed employer to dispute unit size, exempted “non-construction employers” from union contracts.
- Bill 49 1996**  
Deprived unionized workers of enforcement of the *Employment Standards Act* by the Ministry of Labour, set a \$10,000 ceiling on all claims against an employer, regardless of the real amount.
- Bill 55 1998**  
Lowered standards and wages for apprentices.
- Bill 84 1996**  
Striped Ontario’s firefighters of collective bargaining rights.
- Bill 99 1996**  
Striped \$15 billion worth of benefits from injured workers, restored the bias of WCB procedures to employers, denied unionized workers access to services of the Office of the Worker Adviser.
- Bill 136 1997**  
Public sector restructuring, attempted the destruction of independent public sector arbitration. The labour movement forced the government to back down. Bill 136 killed the Ontario Wage Protection Program and restricted the independence of WCAT.
- Bill 142 1997**  
Set up Workfare, required forced labour for welfare allowance, not wages, excluded Workfare workers from employment protection laws, and made social assistance a repayable loan for many unemployed people.
- Bill 160 1997**  
Restructured Ontario’s education system, striped teachers of the right to bargain working conditions.

opeiu343