

# OFL President's Action Update

OFL women's retreat sets top priorities for remainder of 2010



Forty-three representatives from the OFL's Women's Committee, Women's Council and Equity Committee met last week to hammer out key campaigns and priorities. The five priorities call for strong links with the OFL's *Communities That Work* campaign as well as a concentrated focus on pay equity, child care, work-place violence, and work-family-union life balance.

In my remarks, I congratulated the sisters on their Ontario budget victory that retained the \$63.5 million for child care and noted their on-going efforts to achieve equality for all women over the years have produced substantive changes. I also emphasized the importance of integrating employment equity structures into the labour movement to ensure strong and vibrant representation of workers of colour. The future of the labour movement rests on pro-active employment equity initiatives and the strong leadership that inevitably develops.

**Pay Equity:** The Liberal government's two-year wage freeze makes maintenance an urgent item. Women workers must receive the increases they are entitled to under the *Pay Equity Act*. Expert Mary Cornish has been booked for a July 8<sup>th</sup> seminar for union reps. Formal notice will be sent out shortly.

**Child Care:** As the government works through its plans for Early Learning and Care, we'll be working closely with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care to ensure that no subsidized spaces are lost in the municipal or community sectors. On the federal front, we continue our joint work with Canadian Labour Congress to press the Harper government for a national program.

Women's Retreat Continued

**Violence against women:** The OFL's success in winning amendments to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to address workplace and domestic violence and harassment were an important achievement. We begin our education initiative next month to ensure that women understand and make use of these new rights. Also joining the retreat were OFL Secretary-Treasurer Marie Kelly and Executive Vice-President Terry Downey. I want to commend Carrol Anne Sceviour, OFL staff, for her lead role in organizing this retreat and the wealth of expertise she brings to all women's equality initiatives. Her hard work produced a three-day event that resulted in rich discussion and concrete plans for the remainder of 2010.

**17 days left -- Battle escalates with Shoppers Drug Mart  
and the generic drug industry**

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Go to [www.ofl.ca](http://www.ofl.ca) and click on the link**

**Also see: SEIU Canada ([www.seiu.ca](http://www.seiu.ca)) and click on the JOIN THE FIGHT button**

On March 7<sup>th</sup>, I joined Health Minister Deb Matthews at the media conference calling for a 50% cut in the price of generic drugs. I was one of three speakers that included Susan Eng, Canadian Association of Retired Persons, and Rick Perciante of the Canadian Cancer Society.

The generic drug industry and Shoppers Drug Mart (the ringleaders) continue to use their deep pockets to block long-overdue reforms to lower the price of generic drugs.

I told the media the money gobbled up in profits by drug companies and big pharmacies has always been at the expense of the workers and the public and that it is one of the worst cost-drivers in Ontario's health system – not hospitals, nurses or other staff. Ontario pays up to 75% more for generic drugs than many other countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom.


In a subsequent "Open Letter," the OFL condemned Shoppers as one of Ontario's worst corporate citizens, using its \$585 million profits to target the most vulnerable people - including cancer patients, elderly people, shut-ins, mothers with sick children and its own workforce – when it announced delivery charges in London, shortened hours and potential store closures.

I have done scores of media interviews on this issue and have called for the government to follow Ireland's example when it was embroiled in the same fight last year; there, pharmacies warned of mass closures, layoffs of 5,000 workers and worse outcomes for customers; yet nine months later, 130 new stores opened, more jobs were created and profits were high.

London and District Labour Council, representing approximately 30,000 members, has called for a boycott of Shoppers in its community.

Unions and community organizations have worked for decades to win this kind of reform. We're urging all affiliates to carry the fight across the province.

## G8 & G20 Summits, June 25 – June 27 – A MAJOR OPPORTUNITY



**People First!**  
**We Deserve Better!**

**G8 & G20**  
**PUBLIC RALLY and MARCH**




Saturday, June 26 @ 1:00 p.m.  
**QUEEN'S PARK - TORONTO**  
March ends at **Trinity Bellwoods Park**  
(Queen Street West @ Trinity Drive)

**WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?**

The G8 & G20 Summits taking place in Ontario from June 25-27 offer Canadians a rare opportunity to speak out on priorities that the world's most wealthy and powerful nations should adopt on economic recovery, environment, human rights, decent jobs, and social justice. Decisions taken by the G8 & G20 governments impact on millions of lives in Canada and around the world.

Join us on June 26. Show the world that Canadians still share the dream of a better world for everyone.

[ontario@clc-ctc.ca](mailto:ontario@clc-ctc.ca) or 416-441-3710  
[canadianlabour.ca](http://canadianlabour.ca)

Co-sponsored by the OFL and CLC the public rally and march is set for **Saturday, June 26 at 1:00 p.m.** at Queen's Park, with a march to Trinity Bellwoods Park that will head towards the action. We'll get as close as possible to it and the leaders inside the Convention Centre who are representatives of the world's most wealthy and powerful nations. This is a rare opportunity to promote labours' priorities: economic recovery, the environment, human rights, decent jobs and social justice. Detailed planning is underway, including affiliate and labour councils' sponsorship of buses for communities that are within a 200 km radius of Toronto for starters, and farther away if there is interest.

### Kill a worker, go to jail: April 28<sup>th</sup> Day of Mourning

Ontario events are now posted on the Workers Health & Safety Centre site at: [www.whsc.on.ca](http://www.whsc.on.ca). I will be speaking at the Toronto event, set for 12 noon at Nathan Phillips Square. In a short few months, we've witnessed the first prosecution under Westray Bill C-45 which took place in Sault Ste. Marie and an ongoing police investigation into last December 24<sup>th</sup> tragedy; the start-up of the Expert Advisory Panel on Occupational Health and Safety which held its first meeting last month; and in mid-June, violence and harassment legislation will come into effect. As a result of the deaths of the four workers who were killed in the Christmas Eve scaffolding tragedy, this will be one of the largest Day of Mourning events in history. Oksana Afanasenko, the widow of Aleksey Bloomberg, will be a speaker and sole survivor Dilshod Marupov will be in attendance.

## CANADA-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

I was one of the panel speakers at last week's event, adding the OFL's voice to those trying to stop this legislation from becoming reality. The Harper government, with the help of the Liberals, and in particular, Trade Critic Scott Brison, are pushing through an agreement to confer legitimacy on this dangerous regime that will create even more misery for the people of Colombia.

The Colombian labour movement operates under constant surveillance by security forces in collusion with paramilitary groups. The number of murdered trade unionists increased to 46 in 2008, from 39 in 2007; an increase of over 25%. By mid-September of 2009, a further 27 trade unionists had been murdered. Since January 2007, 115 have been killed.

The OFL supports the June 2008 recommendation of the Standing Committee on International Trade, notably that: "an impartial human rights impact assessment be carried out by a competent body, which is subject to independent levels of scrutiny and validation... before Canada considers ratifying and implementing an agreement with Colombia. A Human Rights Impact Assessment would determine the impact of the trade provisions on human rights to ensure that the trade deal does not make a bad situation worse."

## GOVERNMENT RELATIONS: MINISTER OF ENERGY & INFRASTRUCTURE

April 19<sup>th</sup>, I met with the Minister of Energy and Infrastructure Brad Duguid, and his Deputy Minister, to discuss northern Ontario energy pricing and the government's pledge to provide reduced electricity rates for hard-hit northern businesses. Included in the OFL meeting were the CAW, CEP, CUPE, and the Society of Energy Professionals. The four areas of discussion emerged from a prior conference call with OFL affiliates, specifically: how the government envisions the roll-out; whether companies will have to submit plans to show energy efficiencies; eligibility, and information on what happens after the three-year period is over. The minister stated the planning and complexities had to be worked out between four ministries: Economic Development, Finance, Municipal Affairs and Housing, and Energy. At the conclusion, the minister agreed to a working group at the staff level to enable labour's input.

## OFL YOUTH CONFERENCE

On April 10<sup>th</sup> I spoke to the first-ever aggregate meeting of the affiliates' young workers committees describing important structures within the labour movement. The youth representatives identified stumbling blocks, key issues and actions to measurably increase the draw of unions for workers under 30 .

Some of those barriers include: high committee turnover as members "age out"; lack of succession planning to enable younger workers to move into leadership positions; lack of education on union structures and politics; a generational divide that is often reflected in a too-low priority for youth issues such as low wage rates and precarious work. The next meeting is planned for November. In the meantime, the representatives are looking at attracting new union members through the "Union Rocks" tent at upcoming concerts.



Ontario Federation of Labour

15 Gervais Drive, Suite 202, Toronto, Ontario M3C 1Y8

Telephone (416) 441-2731 — Toll Free: 1-800-668-9138 — Fax: (416)441-1893 — Web: <http://www.ofl.ca>

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