



OFL/FTO

PRESIDENT'S ACTION UPDATE

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

May 15, 2012

CANADA'S LARGEST LABOUR
FEDERATION ADVOCATING FOR
ONE MILLION WORKERS

SID RYAN - PRESIDENT



Ontarians protest budget cuts and call for corporate tax fairness at mass rally in Toronto. Photo: Joel Duff

“We Are Ontario” Rally on April 21 Draws Over 15,000 Against Cuts

Over 15,000 Ontarians amassed at Queen's Park on April 21 to add their voices to the Day of Action Against Cuts. Under the banner “We Are Ontario,” nearly 90 labour unions and community groups joined the OFL in protesting McGuinty's deep cuts to jobs and services – the largest since Mike Harris' first term of office.

One hundred buses rolled in from across the province, including two buses that trekked for 10 hours to Toronto from Timmins, Ontario. The rally began at Queen's Park and marched through one of Toronto's most affluent shopping districts to expose the gross inequity in the impact of the cuts on Ontario's 99 percent.

The Day of Action provided an unmistakably expression of the widespread public opposition to budget cuts that would hit the most vulnerable people the hardest and would mean job loss and service cuts that affect every Ontario family. People from all walks of life protested cuts and underfunding that would hurt health care, education, social assistance, childcare, and nearly every other sector.

On April 21, we came together to say “no” to a budget that asked Ontarians to pay for an economic crisis they didn't create. We came together to demand a job creation strategy and an economic recovery that included everyone. We came together to demand that corporations pay their fair share after years of paying less. And most of all, we came together to remind the McGuinty government that WE are Ontario.

The mobilization galvanized public outrage and give voice to a new alliance of community groups and labour unions that will be a significant political force in challenging federal and provincial cuts in the weeks and months ahead.

Now we must take our fight to every community in Ontario.

Sid Ryan
Sid Ryan, OFL President



Ontario Health Coalition's Natalie Mehra addresses community groups and labour unions at a packed Common Front meeting. Photos: Joel Duff

Labour and Community Forge Common Front Against Cuts

Since late last summer, the OFL has been outreaching with community groups throughout the province to coordinate a collective fight-back against damaging government cuts. On April 20, labour and community activists from across the province packed Toronto's Church of the Holy Trinity for an evening strategy session in advance of the April 21 Day of Action Against Cuts.

From the incredibly productive meeting, a true Common Front is being forged and "We Are Ontario" is its central campaign. Bringing together province-wide groups with community branches, the Common Front is less a coalition than a vehicle for coordinating action. An

interim steering committee has been struck and a mandate has been given to transition to a representative structure that will reflect the province's diversity and regionality.

The nearly 100 community groups that have endorsed the Common Front to date are evidence of a growing appetite for collective action to challenge cuts.

The emphasis of this new movement will be on developing deep roots in every region of the province so that labour unions and community groups can coordinate actions to push back against economic inequality and cut backs that will hurt Ontario families.

OFL Raises Concerns About Wage Cuts for Temporary Foreign Workers During South Asian Heritage Month

The OFL helped recognize May as South Asian Heritage Month by co-hosting a labour celebration in Brampton on May 8 that drew together over 300 participants to celebrate South Asian cultures and honour labour and community activism.

All three OFL officers joined NDP MPP Jagmeet Singh (Bramalea-Gore-Malton) at Baisakhi Day (or Vaisakhi Day) Celebration in Etobicoke, Ontario on Sunday, May 6, 2012. As a featured speaker at the event, OFL President Sid Ryan called for social justice for the Sikh community before a rally of one hundred thousand people.

In his remarks at both events, Ryan took aim at the Harper government's changes to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program that would cut foreign worker wages by



OFL Officers & Jagmeet Singh join Sikh community celebration to call for justice. Photo: Bhargav Trivedi

15 percent and force E.I. recipients to accept lower wage jobs. He called for Canadians to challenge politicians to oppose this legislation and defend all workers:

"We must ask our Members of Parliament: Have you lived up to the principles of social justice? Will you treat all workers in this equally when it comes to wages and benefits? Undermining the rights and protections of any worker is just plain wrong," said Ryan.



NDP MPPs join an OFL and UNITE HERE Local 75 press event to call for labour law reform. Photos: Joel Duff

NDP Bill on Labour Law Reform Passes Second Reading and Gets Sent for Committee Review

On May 3, the labour movement celebrated an important accomplishment with the passing of Bill 77, *Fairness for Employees Act*, to Second Reading. Proposed by NDP Labour Critic Taras Natyshak (MPP for Essex), Bill 77 proposes measures to make it easier for workers to join unions and establish successor rights in the contract services sector. Natyshak has also served Bill 79, *Equal Rights for Employees in Ontario Act*, which is slated to come back for Second Reading sometime in the fall.

Taken together, these two bills would provide invaluable protection to some of Ontario's most vulnerable workers and they mark the first time in more than 15 years that the legislature will debate this type of labour law reform.

MPPs Jagmeet Singh (Bramalea–Gore–Malton) and France G  linas (Nickel Belt) both spoke passionately in support of the bill and NDP House Leader Gilles Bisson (Timmins–James Bay) worked hard to garner multi-party support for Bill 77.

However, the OFL and affiliates played an instrumental role in helping to get past the initial hurdle. The quick response from affiliates to the OFL's call for letters to be sent to Premier Dalton McGuinty and local Members of Parliament helped to underscore the importance of the issue and put pressure on politicians of all stripes to engage in this important debate.

This victory shows the strength and potential of collaboration between the NDP and the OFL on campaigns inside and outside of the legislature. As a result of our collective efforts, we have created a genuine opportunity to extend some fairness to workers who, more than ever, need a collective voice in their workplaces.

However, to realize this goal, we will have to redouble our efforts in the days ahead to persuade Liberal MPPs to support Bill 77 in Committee and at Third Reading.

OFL Campaign for Tax Fairness Helps NDP Secure Progressive Budget Changes

The timing of the OFL-led "We Are Ontario" campaign couldn't have been better. The April 21 Day of Action landed mere days before the final budget vote and weeks of campaigning helped to buoy the NDP budget demands and shape the public debate around tax fairness.

The OFL worked with affiliates to develop a common campaign strategy and messaging in advance of the release of the Drummond Commission Report and the Ontario Budget. Affiliates across sectors responded to McGuinty's "austerity agenda" by focusing on the unfair impact of cuts on the most vulnerable while the most affluent celebrated tax cuts and loopholes.

The OFL responded to Andrea Horwath's invitation for public feedback on the Ontario Budget but conducting a public opinion poll that demonstrated overwhelming voter opposition to McGuinty's cuts and support for tax fairness. The poll showed that 68 percent of the public would like to see corporations pay their fair share to help reduce the provincial deficit and 74 percent supported

an additional ten percent tax on individual income above two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The poll spurred a series of media surveys that echoed the OFL's results and helped to shift the bargaining climate for the NDP.

The OFL carried its principled rejection of McGuinty's budget into the Ontario NDP Convention in April. In doing so, Labour increased the political currency of the NDP's more modest budget demands and helped to make it impossible for the Liberals to refuse progressive concessions to avoid an election.

Reinforced by membership outrage against the Liberal budget, Horwath and her team were able to dig in behind several key demands and successfully wrestle back funding increases for childcare and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) while also extracting a new two percent surtax on Ontarians earning over \$500,000/year.

The gains made through the budget negotiations are a testament to what can be accomplished when the OFL and the NDP work together.



Sister Nancy Hutchison recognizes fallen workers at Hamilton and Oakville Day of Mourning Ceremonies. Photos: Federico Carvajal

April 28 Day of Mourning for Workers Killed or Injured on the Job Marks 20th Anniversary of the Westray Mine Disaster

Thousands of workers, friends and families of those killed and injured on the job gathered at ceremonies across Ontario on April 28 to commemorate the labour movement's most solemn occasion, the annual Day of Mourning for Workers Killed or Injured on the Job. This year, remembrances also served as a call for justice and the vigorous pursuit of Criminal Code convictions of corporate executives, directors and managers whose reckless or negligently actions compromise the safety of workers.

OFL executive officers joined ceremonies in various communities to remember the 11 workers (including 10 migrant workers) who were killed near Hampstead, Ontario this year, three workers killed in February's horrific train accident and too many other lost lives.

"The OFL's 'Kill a Worker, Go to Jail' campaign will not stop until bosses and CEOs learn that if they endanger the lives of workers, they will be escorted from their boardrooms in handcuffs to serve prison time," said OFL President Sid Ryan.

This year also marked the 20th anniversary of the Nova Scotia Westray mine disaster in which an underground methane explosion claimed the lives of 26 workers prompted years of relentless lobbying by the United Steelworkers that finally resulted in Bill C-45 changes

to the criminal code that allowed for the prosecution of negligent employers.

OFL Secretary-Treasurer Nancy Hutchison, herself the survivor of a work-related illness, appeared with retired Steelworker Health and Safety Director Andy King on the CBC's "Sunday Edition" to discuss the legacy of the Westray disaster. Hutchison flew out to Nova Scotia the following week to attend the Westray Memorial.

"In the eight years since Bill C-45 was passed it was unused in Ontario, yet more than 500 workers have been killed on the job and more than two million are injured," said Hutchison. "Mothers, fathers, children, friends and neighbours have endured the worst tragedies imaginable as the relentless drive for profits has been allowed to take precedence over the health and safety of workers. We cannot permit one more company to ignore its obligation to put people ahead of profits."

In Ontario, in the first three months of 2012, there have been 107 deaths and 59,296 claims for work-related injuries and diseases reported to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board; in 2011, there were 436 fatality claims and 240,342 injuries and disease claims.

The OFL's "Kill a Worker, Go to Jail" campaign calls for the vigorous use of C-45.