

**12TH OFL BIENNIAL CONVENTION
NOVEMBER 25-29, 2013
TORONTO, ON**

OFL CONVENTION REPORT

HUMAN RIGHTS

**RISING
TOGETHER**



ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR



**Convention Report: Human Rights
November 25, 2013 • Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL)**

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) represents 54 unions and one million workers.
It is Canada's largest provincial labour federation.

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1.

EQUITY, HUMAN RIGHTS & THE RISING OF US ALL:

AN OVERVIEW

It is the proud tradition – and the greatest strength – of the labour movement that a partnership with community activists can transform the gains made in the workplace into universal laws of the land. Indeed, the rising of unions leads to the rising of us all.

Pressure for greater inclusive representation at the OFL Board level came from caucuses of black workers as far back as 1985. At the 1993 OFL Convention, delegates approved the creation of two vice-president seats for visible minority women, in addition to the allocation of seven vice-presidents specifically designated for women, one vice-president allocated to a First Nation's person and one allocated to a person with a disability (OFL Constitution 1993, Article V Section 1.1.)

The OFL Human Rights Department has acted on many of the recommendations and resolutions passed at the 2011 OFL Convention outlined in the policy paper titled "The Power of Diversity in the 21st Century." The resolutions and recommendations encompassed defending the next generation where the focus remains evident today: austerity, good jobs, protecting public services, (un)employment insurance for all, alleviating poverty, tax fairness and revenue generation, giving younger people a fair chance at work and in society, securing pensions and benefits for all. The clear mandate in the Rising Together Action Plan is supporting workers and their families in their communities and workplaces politically and socially.

The OFL will continue building strong and secure relationships with our community allies around common issues and struggles for equity, social justice and human rights. It is the proud tradition – and the greatest strength – of the labour movement that a partnership with community activists can transform the gains made in the workplace into universal laws of the land. Indeed, the rising of unions leads to the rising of us all.

2.

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

The OFL Human Rights Committee is made up of affiliate members or staff whose expertise is human rights. The Standing Committee reports, advises and makes recommendations on human rights and equity: labour, civil, cultural, economic, political and social issues from a thematic or province-specific perspective to the OFL Executive Board and Council. With the support of the Human Rights Department, the Committee challenges issues and concerns of a broader, structural and sometimes systemic nature through collective discussion and action. It is followed up with recommendations to the OFL Officers and Executive Board. The Committee brings alleged human rights violations or abuses to the OFL's attention. They contribute to the development of human rights standards and policy for labour. They engage in advocacy, raise public awareness, and provide advice to the other OFL departmental committees or working groups through an equity lens.

Community building has been a priority for the OFL equity and human rights committees and the Aboriginal Circle specifically around migrant workers, employment equity, youth, austerity, poverty, the minimum wage and the good jobs for all campaigns. The need for building longstanding, sustainable and respectful relationships with equity centred community organizations like the Colour of Change Network, the Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR), the African Canadian, South Asian and Asian Legal Clinics, the Canadian Arab Federation (CAF), Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), Asian Canadian Labour Alliance (ACLA) and the Latin American Trade Unionists Coalition (LATUC) have been very successful initiatives both for labour and the community.

The OFL Human Rights Committee coordinated the development of the first equity self-identification audit for this year's Convention call out. The Committee members assisted in the revision of the OFL Equity Statement.

Over the next term, the Committee will continue to work together to educate, lobby and develop training tools around austerity and other campaigns on equity and human rights specific issues that will dispel myths, build solidarity and eliminate barriers for all workers in Ontario.

The Committee will map out and initiate a focused lobby directed at the provincial government to re-enact employment equity legislation with clear guidelines, targets and enforcement policies.

3.

ABORIGINAL CIRCLE

The Ontario Federation of Labour and its affiliates recognize the urgent need to respect and promote the inherent human rights of Aboriginal peoples, particularly the right for their families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education, social and financial wellbeing of their children and families.

Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit peoples regionally, nationally and internationally have faced ongoing dispossession of their lands and resources. They are subject to repeated racism and discrimination and other human rights abuses. The OFL Vice-President representing Aboriginal peoples and the OFL Aboriginal Circle's mandate is to gather appointed Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit representatives together to address, lobby, advocate and politicize economical, social, cultural, political, civil, spiritual and environmental rights specific to the First Nations peoples here in Ontario. When necessary, the OFL Aboriginal Circle supports any national or global campaigns initiated by Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit peoples, the Canadian Labour Congress and community allies.

Through recommendations, actions and activism, the OFL Aboriginal Circle encourages the labour movement and the governments of Ontario and Canada to follow the guidelines outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples where cooperation with the First Nations people on the principles of justice, non discrimination, equality, democracy and respect for human rights is critical and necessary. The OFL Aboriginal Circle will continue to work closely with the Assembly of First Nations, Chiefs of Ontario, Defenders of the Land and other Aboriginal groups and allies to champion the following causes:

- Respect for treaty rights;
- Shannen's Dream campaign;
- Idle No More movement;
- Solidarity with Grassy Narrows;
- Sisters in Spirit campaign against violence against women;
- End the clean water crisis in Aboriginal communities; and
- Other issues that relate to the rights and dignity of Canada's Aboriginal people.

The Circle will also be preparing an action toolkit of resources to assist affiliates in setting up an effective Aboriginal Circle. The Circle will also be hosting a first ever meeting with affiliate and community Aboriginal Circles and committees to talk about a collective community/union action plan for the next term.

4.

PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY COMMITTEE

What is accessibility? It simply means giving people of all abilities the opportunity to participate fully in their unions and in everyday life. A disability can happen to anyone at any time; it can be visible or invisible, physical or mental, but none should limit the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in their communities, their workplaces and in society. More than 1.85 million Ontarians – one in seven – are currently living with a disability, and by 2036 that ratio will become one in five as the population ages.

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* was passed in 2005. Its goal is to make Ontario fully accessible for people with disabilities by 2025. Ontario now has accessibility standards in five areas:

- Customer service,
- Employment,
- Information and communications,
- Transportation,
- Design of public spaces.

Full accessibility means eliminating or fixing invisible and visible barriers, whether they be attitudinal, informational, technological, organizational, architectural or physical.

The OFL Persons with a Disability Committee's mandate is to work with affiliates and community allies, such as the AODA Alliance, to educate the broader labour movement on current disability issues and lobby the provincial government on behalf of the disabilities community.

The Committee has been involved in the development of regulations under the provisions of the *AODA* where Committee members have assisted in the development of the accessibility regulations applicable to different sectors.

In January 2012, the OFL Persons with a Disability Committee worked with the OFL's Occupational Disability Response Team (ODRT) to develop the OFL Member & Community Service Policy which was in compliance with the Customer Service Standard developed under the *AODA*. The document was circulated to all affiliates and they were encouraged to develop similar policies for their organizations. Similar documents will have to be developed in response to the *Employment Standards Act* and other legislation.

The Committee undertakes to ensure that all OFL events and campaigns are accessible to all members. Early in 2013, the Committee met with representatives from the Sheraton Centre in Toronto and WE Travel to ensure that the 2013 OFL Convention is the most accessible to date.

The OFL took part in the first review of the *AODA* but the second review has yet to be implemented.

The Committee members are kept informed about the activities of the OFL, such as the People's Budget, the Rising of Us All and the Ontario Common Front, to ensure that the voices and concerns of injured workers and persons with disabilities are heard, acknowledged and addressed.

At the 2012 OFL Equity not Austerity conference held in Niagara Falls, the Committee worked with the Ontario Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) to present their Action on Workplace Stress: Mental Injury Tools for Ontario Workers. This gave trade union and community activists the essential tools needed to address mental health issues in the workplace.

The Committee worked with labour and community activists to ensure that the concerns of Ontarians with disabilities were heard and addressed during the Social Assistance Review process and later in the Ministry of Community and Social Services Employment Focused Discussions.

At the national level, the Committee members are made aware of the CLC Disability Working Group's action plan.

The OFL Persons with a Disability Committee will engage other affiliates to follow the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation's (OSSTF) endorsement and support for the AODA Alliance's call for the development and enactment of an *Education Accessibility Standard under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*. This supplements the much-welcomed endorsements that we have received from the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO). So many front line workers in Ontario's education system agree that an Education Accessibility Standard is needed to ensure that our education system becomes barrier-free by 2025. It is required by the AODA. It is time for the Ontario Government to heed our collective call.

The OFL Persons with a Disability Committee will continue to work with the AODA Alliance to get a full update on how many organizations have filed mandatory Accessibility Reports under the AODA, how many have been audited or inspected.

Full accessibility means eliminating or fixing invisible and visible barriers like attitudinal barriers, information or communications barriers, technological barriers, organizational barriers and architectural or physical barriers.

Creating a fully accessible province in which everyone who lives or visits can fully participate in the community, economy and society without barriers is a goal that can be attained in our lifetimes. The OFL Persons with a Disability Committee will continue to challenge systems that oppress while confronting systemic forms of discrimination.

5.

SOLIDARITY & PRIDE COMMITTEE

The OFL Solidarity & Pride Committee has had an active two years. Members serve as a resource to both union and community members on combating homophobia and transphobia in the workplace and in our communities.

Coming out or being out at work can be challenging and, for some workers, dangerous. The OFL Solidarity and Pride Committee continues to build awareness of workers' rights on anti-harassment and violence under the *Occupational Health & Safety Act*. We have produced a fact sheet and held a workshop at the 2012 OFL Equity Conference. The Committee raises the issues of bullying and violence in our promotion of Pink Shirt Day held in April of each year. We also highlight the issue of violence experienced by members of the trans community throughout the year and mark November 25th National Day of Trans Remembrance.

On May 17, the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia, we stand in solidarity with our lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and Queer members and with LGBTQ communities around the world. The Committee has developed a poster and statement which is available to our affiliates and community partners.

There are LGBTQ workers in every equity-seeking community. In May 2012, a diverse group of 100 union and community LGBTQ activists and allies attended the OFL's Out@Work Conference. Participants shared strategies on how to support, empower and mobilize LGBTQ members in their workplaces. Committee members were particularly proud on the opening day of the OFL's Out@Work Conference. Delegates were joined by NDP MPP Cheri DiNovo (Parkdale-High Park) who announced the second reading passing of Bill 33, *Toby's Act (Right to be Free from Discrimination and Harassment Because of Gender Identity or Gender Expression)*. The bill became law the following month.

Another key legislative victory was passage of Bill 13 *Accepting Schools Act*. Anti-bullying legislation became law in 2012 and now makes clear that sexual assault, gender-based violence, homophobia and transphobia will not be tolerated in the province's publicly-funded schools.

The Committee continues to work with the CLC, Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (EGALE), NDP and other national groups for federal legislation for trans rights.

In 2014, Toronto will have the honour of hosting World Pride. Through our membership in the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), the Committee will continue to oppose the criminalisation of sexual minorities in more than 70 UN member states. In 2014, we will focus on mobilizing Ontario unions for both the International Human Rights Conference and the building of labour participation and visibility in both the conference and Pride week activities.

Convention resolutions will reflect the concerns, priorities and actions required as identified by activists in addressing LGBTQ equality. The Committee will review its 2013 mandate in early 2014 and establish a plan of action to strengthen this essential work.

6.

WORKERS OF COLOUR COMMITTEE

Racism – whether it is in society, in our workplaces or in our unions – must never be tolerated.

The OFL Workers of Colour Committee was formed to address the effects of racism, oppression, social injustice, and other human rights violations. The space at the Committee allows representatives from affiliates to share and continuously acknowledge, recognize, confront, and address pervasive racism at individual, workplace, systemic and institutional levels.

The OFL Workers of Colour Committee has been successful in holding the first ever OFL Equity Committee Retreat where a workshop discussing “White Privilege” was presented. The Workers of Colour Symposium in 2012 was attended by over 160 delegates and a second Symposium is planned for November 2013.

The Committee was also responsible for acknowledging Black History Month by co-sponsoring events in 2012 and 2013. Two successful South Asian Celebrations were hosted in 2012 and 2013 in which South Asian community and union activists were acknowledged and celebrated. Details of all events can be found in the President’s Reports from June 19, 2012 and June 17, 2013.

The two issues demanding most of the Committees’ attention will be the community union partnerships around the Roots of Violence Report by Alvin Curling and Roy McMurtry. The OFL must engage labour, governments, public institutions and the academe as resources for the African Canadian Community and other racialized communities to address the intricacies of austerity specific to their communities. This action would also include positive opportunities for education and training for youth followed by decent full-time non-precarious employment with benefits. This action is one of the most important platforms on which the battle for dignity, fairness and access to good jobs is needed by advocating for fair wages and income equality.

The OFL partnered with the Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR), the Black Action Defense Committee (BADC), the Never Again Coalition, and various other community groups to respond to the July 27 police shooting of Toronto teenager, Sammy Yatim. Together, with these community groups, the OFL supported the families of victims of police shootings in calling for a total overhaul of the police response to crisis incidents and demanded the immediate implementation of the recommendations contained in the 2000 report of the UARR, called “Saving Lives: Alternatives to the Use of Lethal Force by Police.” The OFL-led response generated national news and resulted in investigations into the handling of the incident and province-wide protocols for police. Arrangements are being made for separate meetings with the Premier of Ontario, the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Service, the Attorney General and the Director of Special Investigations Unit (SIU).

With the approval of OFL Executive Board, the Aboriginal Circle, Workers of Colour Committee and Women’s Committee will host an Aboriginal and Workers of Colour Women’s Symposium in 2014 to support women, women of colour and Aboriginal women in their ongoing fight against austerity, unequal treatment, bullying in the workplace, racism and sexism.

7.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Mehdi Kouhestaninejad (CLC)
- Ana Fonseca (COPE)
- Jackie Taylor (COPE)
- Megan Whitfield (CUPW)
- Jane Ste. Marie (OSSTF)
- John O’Dell (Unifor)
- Vinay Sharma (Unifor)
- Tricia Watt (TWU)
- Naveen Mehta (UFCW)

OFL Officer & Executive Board Members:

- Irwin Nanda, OFL Executive Vice-President
- Joanne Webb (CUPE), OFL VP–Aboriginal People
- Pablo Godoy (UFCW), OFL VP–Workers of Colour
- Heather Kelley, OFL VP–IAMAW

OFL Staff:

- Janice Gairey, OFL Human Rights Director

ABORIGINAL CIRCLE MEMBERS

- Eddie Ste. Marie (CLC)
- Sharon Paris (CUPW)
- Michelle Riley (CUPW)
- Michelle Byck-Johnston (IFPTE)
- Cynthia Lilly (IUEC)
- Sandra Miller (OSSTF)
- Wanda Power (USW)
- Elaine White (Unifor)

OFL Officer & Executive Board Members:

- Irwin Nanda, OFL Executive Vice-President
- Joanne Webb (CUPE), OFL VP–Aboriginal People

OFL Staff:

- Janice Gairey, OFL Human Rights Director

PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Terry Hall (COPE)
- Gina Gignac (CUPE)
- Claudette Guibord (PSAC)
- Souad Soubra (PSAC)
- Marc Prail (UFCW)

OFL Officer & Executive Board Members:

- Nancy Hutchison, OFL Secretary-Treasurer
- Teresa Colangelo (CUPE), OFL VP–
Persons with a Disability

OFL Staff:

- Janice Gairey, OFL Human Rights Director

SOLIDARITY & PRIDE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Rashida Collins (CLC)
- Casey Oraa (COPE)
- Mark Rogers (COPE)
- Marlon Picken (CUPE)
- Gina Gignac (CUPE)
- Karen Urchak (CUPW)
- Sheri Birch (ETFO)
- Cheryl Fullerton (OECTA)
- Lyla Miklos (OSSTF)
- Karen Church (PSAC)
- Thulasi Srikanthan (UFCW)
- Laura Davis (Unifor)
- Stephanie Johnstone (Unifor)
- Sue Slean (Unifor)
- Jay Yerex (UNITE HERE)
- Carolyn Egan (USW)

OFL Officer & Executive Board Members:

- Nancy Hutchison, OFL Secretary-Treasurer
- Stephen Seaborn (CUPE), OFL VP–
Solidarity & Pride
- Larry Rosseau, OFL VP–PSAC

OFL Staff:

- Carrol Anne Sceviour, OFL Director
Solidarity and Pride

WORKERS OF COLOUR COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Gogi Bhandal (CLC)
- Ana Fonseca (COPE)
- Jackie Taylor (COPE)
- Veriline Howe (CUPE)
- Mark Brown (CUPW)
- Megan Whitfield (CUPW)
- Sonia Ellis-Sequin (ETF0)
- Frank Saptel (IAMAW)
- Sandra Griffith-Bonaparte (PSAC)
- Tricia Watt (TWU)
- Naveen Mehta (UFCW)
- John O'Dell (Unifor)
- Ruth Pryce (Unifor)

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- Pablo Godoy (UFCW), OFL VP–Workers of Colour

OFL Staff:

- Janice Gairey, OFL Human Rights Director

The Committees would like to thank all those who participated since the last convention.

