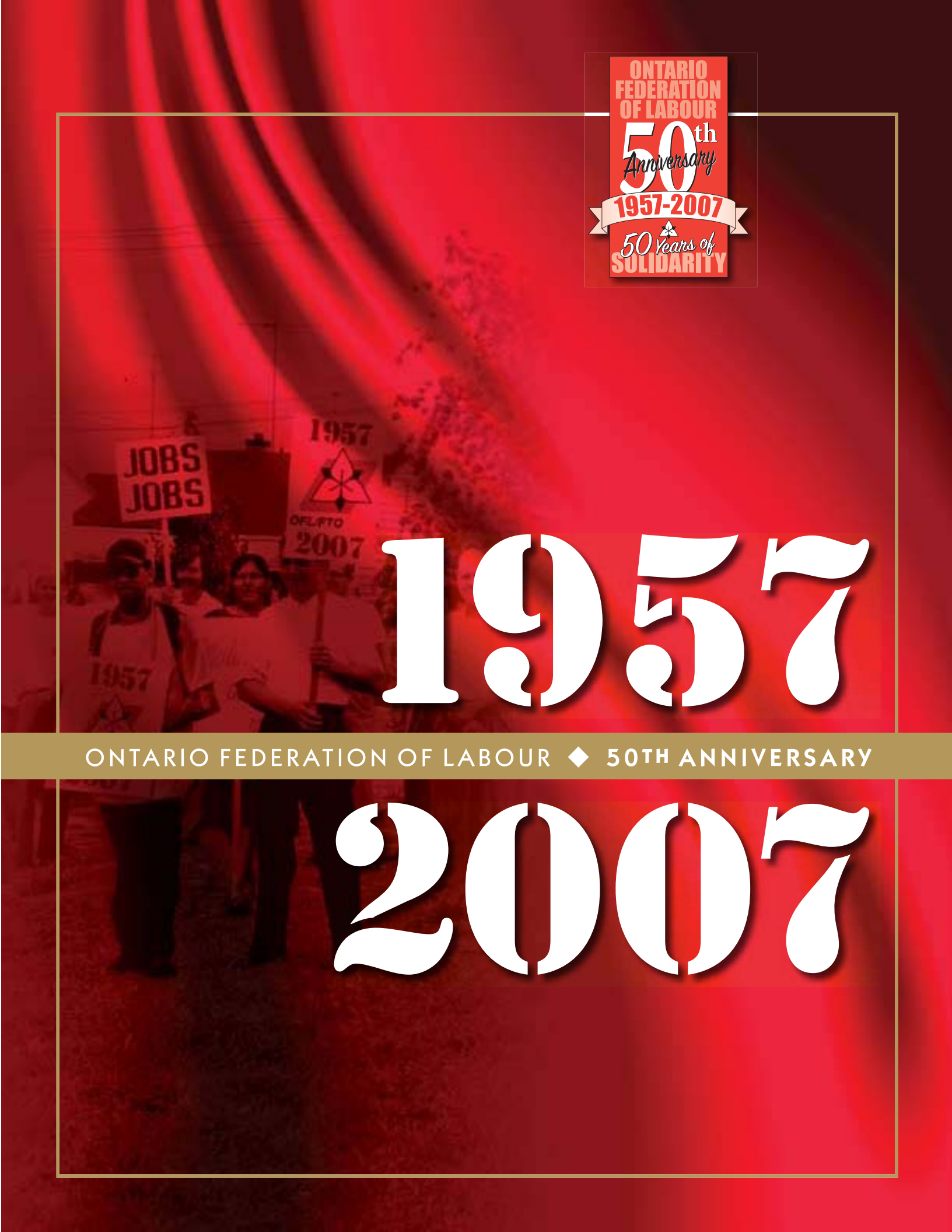
ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR
50th Anniversary
1957-2007
50 Years of SOLIDARITY
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OFL/FTO
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ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR ◆ 50TH ANNIVERSARY
2007

WAYNE SAMUELSON
President
IRENE HARRIS
Secretary - Treasurer
TERRY DOWNEY
Executive Vice-President
OFL/FTO

November 2007

Wayne Samuelson
President,
1997-Present

Irene Harris
Executive Vice-President,
1997-2005
Secretary-Treasurer,
2005-Present

Terry Downey
Executive Vice-President
2005-Present

50 Years of Solidarity
Honouring Our Past – Organizing for the Future

The history of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) is the collective history of the working people of this province. It is a history of 50 years of hard work and solidarity. Something to celebrate.

Over five decades ago in 1957 unions came together at the founding convention of the OFL and spoke with one voice to better the lives of all workers. Ever since then the OFL has been at the forefront of labour's struggles, building coalitions and taking social and political action to protect workers' rights and build strong communities.

Over 50 years ago the workplace and society at large needed change. Union members and activists were first in line to push for human rights for many groups. Unions supported affirmative action for women and the protection of the rights of racially visible persons, aboriginals and persons with disabilities. Union members walked the line for better wages, pensions, benefits, workplace safety, workers' compensation and respect for workers.

Workers' lives began to change. They worked in safe workplaces and for decent wages. They secured the future for their children.

But some of the struggles begun 50 years ago are still continuing. Strikebreakers and the unscrupulous employers who hire them are still free to interfere with collective bargaining. Injured workers are still not being adequately compensated for the loss of their livelihoods. Workers are still losing their lives on the job and discrimination still prevents far too many workers from reaching their full potential. Therefore we must be steadfast in our resolve to see all workers treated with equal dignity and respect.

Affiliated unions in Ontario come together under the umbrella of the Ontario Federation of Labour to improve the lives of workers, their families and communities. This job is never done. Justice and fairness for the people who have built this province is an ongoing struggle for us all. Union members have proven time and again that they are ready to meet the challenge and they will not rest until every person in our society has rights which are respected.

The Ontario Federation of Labour's 50th Anniversary yearbook is dedicated to the workers of Ontario. The OFL's history is your history. In this book we applaud your strength and your victories.

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR (CLC) • FÉDÉRATION DU TRAVAIL DE L'ONTARIO
15 Gervais Drive, Suite 202, North York, Ontario M3C 1Y8 Telephone: (416) 441-2731 Fax: (416) 441-1893 Web http://www.ofl-ftlo.on.ca

1957-2007

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Cleve Kidd

President, 1957-1958

Gord Wilson

President, 1986-1997

David Archer

President, 1958-1976

Wayne Samuelson

President, 1997-Present

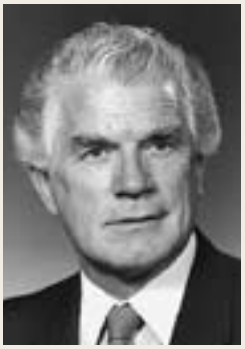
Cliff Pilkey

President, 1976-1986

Douglas Hamilton
Secretary-Treasurer, 1957-1970

Terry Meagher
Secretary-Treasurer, 1970-1984

Wally Majesky
Secretary-Treasurer, 1984-1986



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Julie Davis
Executive Vice-President, 1986-1988
Secretary-Treasurer, 1988-1995

Ethel Birkett-LaValley
Secretary-Treasurer
1995-2005

Ken Signoretti
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Irene Harris
Executive Vice-President, 1997-2005
Secretary-Treasurer, 2005-Present

Terry Downey
Executive Vice-President
2005-Present

The

Canadian Labour Congress

grants this

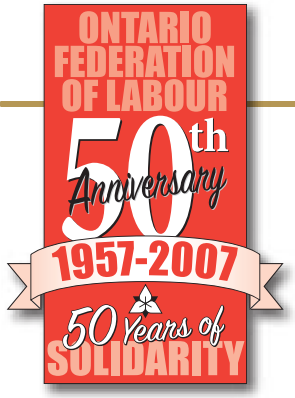
Charter

To the

Ontario

Federation of Labour

In Witness Whereof we have subscribed our names and affixed the Seal of the Canadian Labour Congress this Twenty Fifth day of March Nineteen Hundred and Fifty Seven



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ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR ◆ 50TH ANNIVERSARY

2007

Principal Writer for the Ontario Federation of Labour: Lynn Simmons

Design by Artifact Graphic Design

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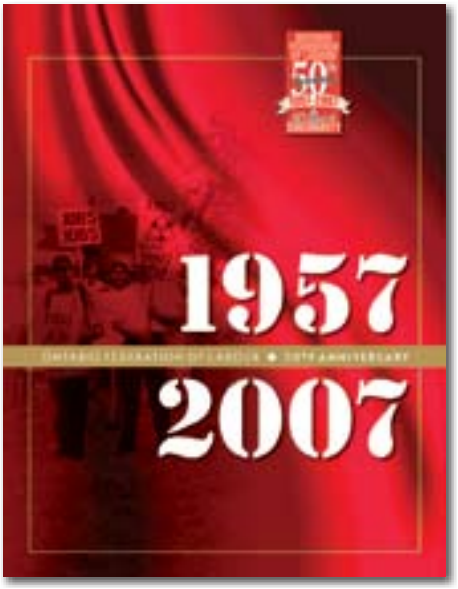
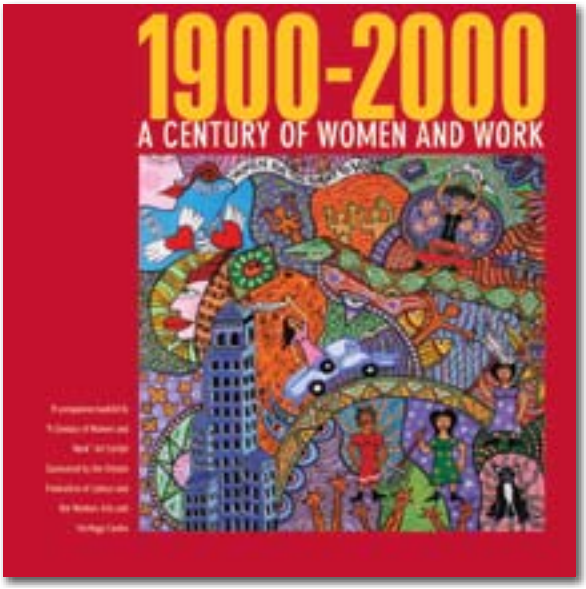
The 50th Anniversary publication is a companion piece to *"A Century of Women and Work,"* sponsored by the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre.





To order copies of either publication, contact the OFL at:
15 Gervais Drive, Suite 202
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M3C 1Y8
Telephone: 416-441-2731
Fax: 416-441-1893 Or
416-441-0722
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1957-2007

Preface

The full and rich history of the OFL and contributions of officers, staff, executive board members, affiliates, and the many community organizations the OFL has created or worked with over decades is a much larger story than this limited space will allow; however we hope that in this retelling of triumphs and losses we have been able to make many of our highlights as real and vivid to readers as to those who experienced them.

Our struggles for social progress and a sharing of wealth that we have created are reflected in the union movement's earliest beginnings.

We thank the following officers whose insights and comments have helped to illuminate the past. Former OFL Presidents Cliff Pilkey (1976–1986), and Gord Wilson (1986–1997); Julie Davis (Executive Vice-President 1986–1988, Secretary-Treasurer, 1988–1995); Ethel LaValley (Secretary-Treasurer, 1995–2005); and especially Secretary-Treasurer Irene Harris (1997 – present) for coordinating and overseeing publication of this work. And thanks to the many OFL directors and support staff who gathered historical records, pictures and documents and assisted with contacting past officers and board members.

In addition, this publication has been much strengthened, in particular by editorial and photo contributions from historian Ed Seymour; John Eleen (OFL Research Director 1964–1987); final draft and continuity editor Peter Gorrie (Communications, Energy & Paperworkers Union of Canada, Local 87-M (SONG), and the staff of the Ontario Archives (OPSEU).

Communications staff from six unions each lent a hand in chapter editing. Our thanks to Pat Van Horne, United Steelworkers; Frank Saptel, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers; Paul Bilodeau, Ontario Public Service Employees Union; Mary Morison, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario: Melanie Levenson, Ontario Nurses' Association; Derek Johnstone, United Food and Commercial Workers, Canada

We also thank Service Employees International Union Local 1.on; Public Service Alliance of Canada; Ontario Public Service Employees Union; Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario; Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation; United Food and Commercial Workers, Canada; Canadian Union of Public Employees, Ontario Division; and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association for their contributions of text and photos.

Finally, and most of all, we thank all of those who came before us.

1957-2007

Introduction

The labour movement's long history of achievements has been profound, and transformational. Ontario is a much different province from what it might have been had our struggles not helped to shape it. Yet, history books and the public record obscure these struggles or, worse still, ignore them completely.

Ever the rule, rather than the exception, our triumphs of social policy and democratic rights are often expressed as follows: "The federal government, working in co-operation with the provinces, introduced social welfare measures such as unemployment insurance, universal old age pensions, and hospital and health insurance provisions to improve the lot of working people."

The idea that politicians, or employers, had a sudden change of heart that expressed itself in socially progressive measures and improved working conditions, is reprehensible.

For more than 100 years, tough, bitter struggles have been waged for every improvement, inside and outside the workplace.

The right to form a union, and to choose a union free from employer interference, to bargain collectively, and to strike, were the foundations that enabled workers to achieve progress and at least some measure of balance in the totally uneven workplace and societal relationship that still exist today.

After unions became legal, their growing strength produced such significant contributions that Canadians often define their national identity with reference to them. Medicare, quality public education, human rights protections, old age pensions, unemployment insurance, social services, employment and pay equity – all of these measures and many more were the products of struggle and sacrifice.

The strength of unions inside the workplace won for all working people shorter workdays, improved wages, life-saving health and safety workplace protections, workers' compensation, vacation time and basic entitlements that are often taken for granted.

Who is work for?

In 1957, automation and technological change were fuelling mass layoffs, prompting angry challenge and numerous campaigns from the OFL. "Who is work for? Prosperity for whom?" President David Archer demanded of governments and employers.

We are a hard-working nation. Productivity is up and so are profits. But working people are not benefiting. Wealth is concentrating in fewer hands, not more. The inevitable results of pushing people harder and faster are in-

juries, deaths, and for workers and the public, loss of a quality of life. The time to rest, dream, play with our children, bond with family and friends, and contribute to the community is almost non-existent for millions of people.

That is what makes our struggles for a sharing of the wealth that we have created, and for social progress, so significant. Without the labour movement, and the efforts and courage of millions of members, there would be very little of benefit for the vast majority of people.

How is it, for example, that after decades of legal actions, confrontations and campaigns, that women's wages are still not on par with men's? Despite years of effort, women still earn approximately 71% of what men earn. The lower pay and ghettoization of jobs for women and racialized workers eloquently demonstrate that nothing is ever just given; that every measure of progress must be hard fought and is never, as many histories would like us to believe, the result of a desire by politicians and employers to empower the overwhelming majority of people.

Order, please! Will the convention please come to order.

Our story opens March 27, 1957. Delegates from the two rival labour federations – the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) and the Ontario Provincial Federation of Labor (OPFL) – have just held their own conventions to formally endorse the merger that had been agreed to in January.

Exhausted, but elated, 700 of them gather at Toronto's Royal York Hotel.

The founding convention is played out against a tense international backdrop fraught with the chilling possibility of nuclear war. The showdown between the United States and Soviet Union known as the "Cold War" has resulted in huge stockpiles of bombs, missiles, and other weaponry. The rabid red-baiting of U.S. Senator Joe McCarthy has spilled over the border. The Korean War is underway and there is threat of a new war over the Suez Canal.

In the United Kingdom, the call has just gone out to 500,000 additional factory workers to join the one million already on strike in aviation, electrical and machine tool factories in ten major industrial centres.

Although productivity and profits are up in Ontario, intractable employers are resisting wage increases and using the most terrible excesses of power to break strikes and unions. Both the federal and provincial governments are dragging their feet on health care, unemployment insurance and other social programs.

And so the story of the 700,000-strong Ontario Federation of Labour begins ...

The first resolution of the newly formed Ontario Federation of Labour

March 27, 1957

Delegate Hearn (Building Service Employees International Union, and Resolutions Committee Chair)
Resolution No. 11 covering No. 11, 8, 9. Submitted by the Upper Ottawa Valley Labour Council

Whereas our Labour Council has continuously opposed Section 78 of the *Ontario Labour Relations Act* which provides Municipalities with the power to remove their employees from the *Act;* and

Whereas, on several occasions, Civic Unions in the Province have signed up groups of employees and been denied the right to process Application for Certification by the use of this most iniquitous Clause; and

Whereas we have gained the support of organized labour generally in our battle in this regard and are also being supported by sections of the Canadian Bar Association;

Be it resolved that this Labour Council place itself on record as being violently opposed to Section 78 of the *Ontario Labour Relations Act,* and request that the Ontario Federation of Labour place this resolution before the Ontario Government for the immediate abolition of this rank discrimination against Municipal Employees.

Your Committee recommend concurrence and I so move.

First speaker to Resolution #11

Delegate Sharp (5328 Steelworkers)– "Mr. Chairman I, myself, was ignorant of the fact that a municipality could take an organization out from within the *Act* and therefore deny them the right of a bona fide trade union to organize and collectively bargain with their employer which, in these cases, is the municipality. But, it's in the *Act.* I hope that every delegate to this federation realizes that it is in that *Act* and tries to do something about it. We in Hamilton participated very actively last summer in the strike of the Haldimand County Council Workers in Cayuga and after a number of months on the picket line, the municipality broke that strike by the use of this *Act* even though we in Hamilton tried with our money and with our help on the picket line to support them; they broke that strike and they brought in scab workers from Brantford and paid them more money than the people on the picket line who were 100 per cent solidly behind their union were asking for. So, it is good that this comes before the convention, and they realize the viciousness of the *Act,* and I certainly hope that the Federation will do something about it."

Motion Carried

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR 50th Anniversary 1957-2007 50 Years of SOLIDARITY

The New Parliament of Labour:

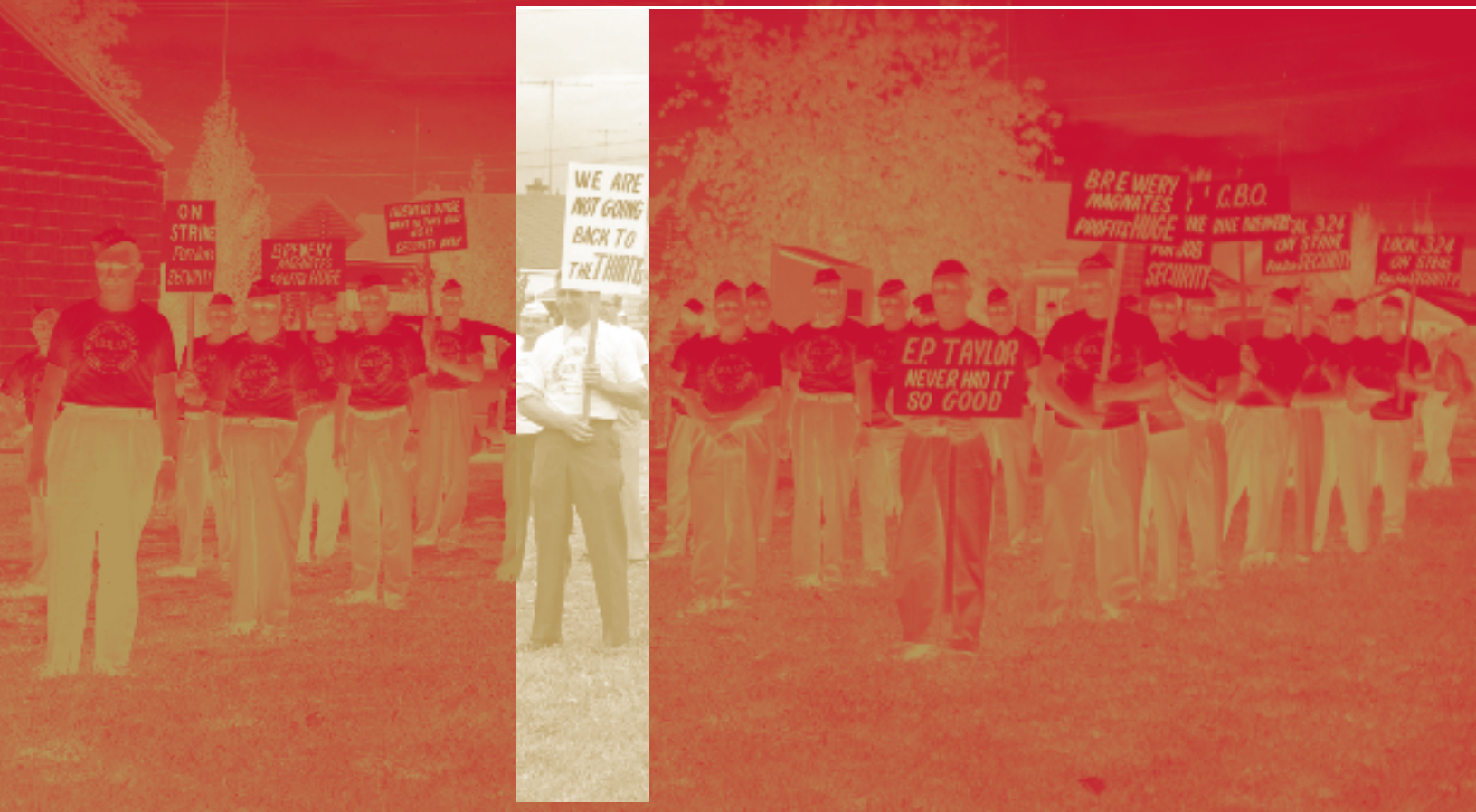
"This is where we reason things out"

CLEVE KIDD

United Steelworkers of America

First President of the Ontario Federation of Labour

March 1957, Toronto



1957-1960

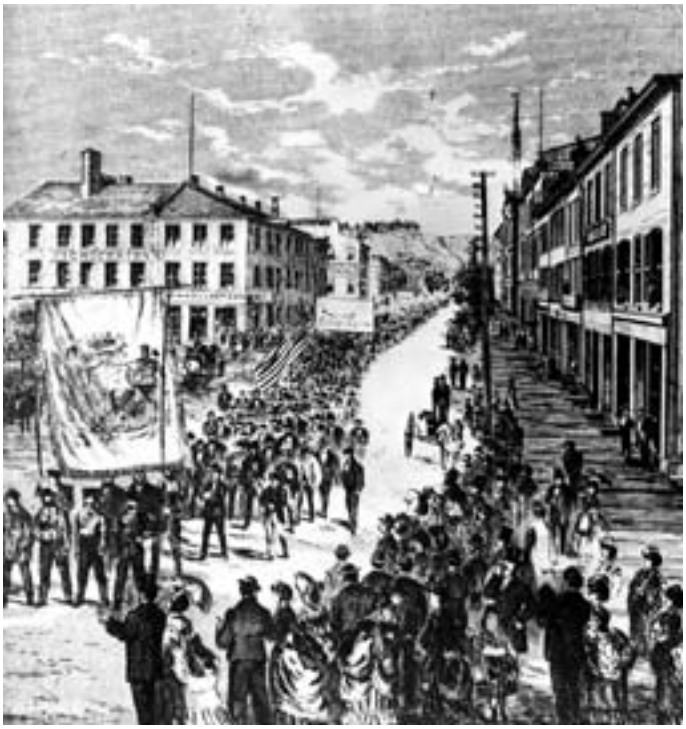
The 1957 founding convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour was also known as the Unity or Merger Convention. More than 700 delegates gathered at the Royal York Hotel to launch a new beginning for the labour movement.

As the gavel signaled the start of the 1957 founding convention, delegates were intensely aware of how historic the moment was. They were reminded of the debt owed to early pioneers, such as the 1872 Toronto Typographical Union strikers and their fight for a nine-hour day without loss of pay. The arrest of that union's 24 members and the 10,000-strong demonstration at the provincial Legislature were pivotal events.

The "Nine-Hour Movement" that began in Hamilton and spread throughout the province sparked vicious counterattacks from employers. Infamous Globe publisher George Brown fought the workers with scabs and legal action citing the union for "'seditious conspiracy." Under a law dating back to 1792, it was a crime to take collective action for higher wages or shorter hours. But his plan backfired. The *Trade Unions Act* was passed, making unions legal and the printers won their demand.

The fight for more humane working hours and conditions persists. The decades-long struggles waged by the OFL and its affiliates emerged from the resolutions of the "Unity" convention: Workers' compensation, comprehensive Medicare, pensions, human rights, minimum wages, housing, education, the right to employment, and the Ontario *Labour Relations Act* have been changed for the better by the efforts of the OFL, its members, and the trade unionists who preceded them.

The 1957 resolution that set off the boisterous floor demonstrations described by the Toronto Daily Star as "stamping, shouting, and filling the air with paper streamers," was a political action resolution calling for support for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF).



The Nine-Hour Movement, conceived by Hamilton unions, was the labour movement's first coordinated strategy in Canada.

(Courtesy of the Ed Seymour Collection)

(OFL archives)

Support for the CCF: Politics belong to us – not to someone else

> *... Canadian Labour can no more hold aloof from politics than they can hold aloof from the very air that surrounds them . . . we are in politics whether we like it or not.*
>
> **Donald MacDonald,**
> Secretary-Treasurer, Canadian Labour Congress

> *I saw after years of Toryism, the Labour Party in Britain put in power. We saw the Health Bill come into effect. If the Labour Party did nothing else, in my opinion it justified itself with this alone. We saw the conditions improve in the mines, the houses go up for the people ..."*
>
> Delegate **Olive Smith,**
> Textile Workers Union of America

All it took were the words "Motion Carried" for the OFL to launch itself into action. With the 1957 federal election looming, it forged a Political Action Committee and recruited workers, canvassers and donations in preparation for the first campaign to see a united Ontario labour movement supporting labour candidates.

Three CCF Ontario members won, up from one. In particular, the OFL-led effort to elect Douglas Fisher in Port Arthur produced a 2,000-vote win over Liberal heavyweight C.D. Howe. Labour campaigns also produced victories for Timmins firefighter Murdo Martin, and Arnold Peters, a Woodworkers' staff representative in Temiskaming. The CCF ran third nationally, winning a total of 25 seats.

The unexpected victory by John Diefenbaker's Progressive Conservative Party ended 22 years of Liberal government and created Canada's first postwar minority government. Less than three months later, the OFL established a Political Action Department and began its preparations for the next election.

We come here to work, not to die

Industrial accidents, the WCB and "the Mutual Admiration Society"

Industrial accidents and what was then known as Workmen's Compensation were issues of such central importance that one of the OFL's full-time staff members (there were only three) spent half his time addressing the rising tide of problems. The refusal of the province and employers to make labour a full partner in accident prevention, lack of coordination between the Ministry of Labour, Workmen's Compensation Board (WCB), and industrial accident prevention associations were placing workers in daily jeopardy and impoverishing their families.

The eight accident-prevention associations were controlled by the employers. Workers often referred to them as being nothing more than a mutual admiration society. They drew nearly $1 million out of the WCB treasury but delivered no service and blocked union participation.

Anger and frustration had reached its peak even before 1957.

But at that first OFL convention, a resolution calling for all accident prevention to be put under the direct supervision of the board intensified the struggle to prevent injury and death and ensure appropriate compensation. The OFL organized annual compensation seminars to provide members with the skills to represent injured workers, and its leadership training courses and lobbying campaigns recruited hundreds of participants from affiliated unions.

That first year, a special committee of the OFL toured the province to conduct its own hearings and a thorough investigation of all aspects of accident prevention and safety. The report back in 1958, combined with the voices of delegates to that year's convention – who not only spoke of its accuracy, but also of their personal experiences in mining camps, construction sites, factories, and other Ontario workplaces – are powerful testimonies to the changes wrested from governments and employers on behalf of all the people of Ontario.

Workers' compensation and health and safety are central to the daily work of the OFL, whose objective has remained constant for 50 years: To ensure that all workers are able to retain their health and well-being, and if injured, receive appropriate compensation.

Ontario *Labour Relations Act:* A powerful tool to restrain labour and prevent strikes

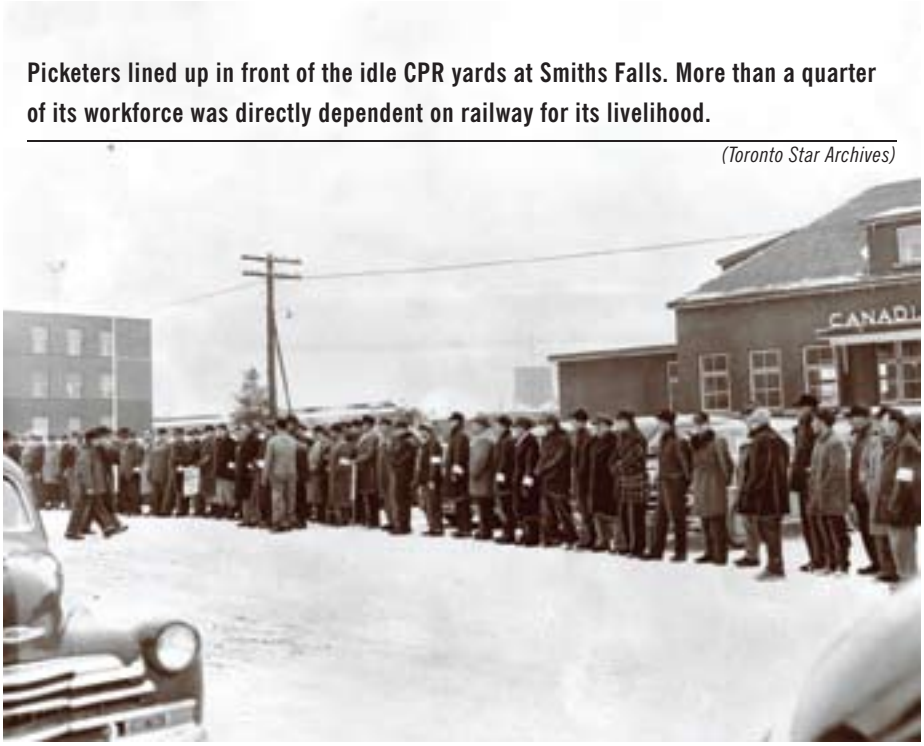
The *Labour Relations Act* was such an impediment to organizing and the ability to achieve and retain hard-fought gains that many of the more than 120 resolutions at the 1957 convention reflected growing frustration and fury. As the first resolution hit the floor calling for the OFL to place itself on record "as being violently opposed to Section 78" of the *Act*, Ontario's Progressive Conservative government, led by Premier Leslie Frost, announced the appointment of a Select Committee on Labour Relations.

The last train out of Toronto's Union Station, No.21, before the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen shut down the railway. More than 65,000 workers went on strike. Automation, mechanization and technological change were fuelling massive layoffs and the extinction of whole trades.

(Photographer Frank Teskey/Toronto Star)

As a *Toronto Daily Star* editorial noted, it was long overdue:

> "The law is out of date and needs recasting and strengthening ... A serious weakness is that when a company changes hands its employees automatically lose their contractual benefits, including seniority and pensions. These have to be renegotiated with the new owners. This strikes directly at hard-won union security and should be a major concern of the special committee."



Picketers lined up in front of the idle CPR yards at Smiths Falls. More than a quarter of its workforce was directly dependent on railway for its livelihood.

(Toronto Star Archives)

On Oct. 1, a delegation of OFL officers led by secretary-treasurer Doug Hamilton presented more than 20 recommendations for changes that included a preamble to the *Act* to guide courts and administrators in interpretation: "Too often it is taken for granted that the *Act* was designed for the purpose of restraining organized labour and to prevent strikes," Hamilton noted.

The OFL called for voluntary mediation, the elimination of Section 78, under which municipal authorities could exclude themselves from the *Act,* bargaining rights for provincial government employees, changes to certification procedures, and other critical alterations.

Second OFL Select Committee presentation "COUNTER-ATTACK: Intervention, Intimidation, Bribery!"

After listening to Ontario employers present brief after brief with little more substance than the intention to damage the position of the organized labour movement, the OFL issued a second and damning summary of employers' practices.

"Management, for all its pious pleas that it has the interests of its workers at heart, has never stopped its vicious and ruthless war to destroy union organization. Although incidents of bloodied heads and broken limbs have decreased, management has recently increased its pressure against workers– both physically and psychologically." The OFL's submission stands today as a testimony to the disgraceful and often criminal behaviour of Ontario's industry and business owners.

Health-care employers, too, were berated for their outrageous proposals to remove hospitals from the *Labour Relations Act*.

Management for all its pious pleas that it has the interests of its workers at heart, has never stopped its vicious and ruthless war to destroy union organization.

Ontario Hospital Association's "anti-labour tract"

These were the days before a national, publicly funded health-care system. When the Ontario Hospital Association, operator of the Blue Cross hospital insurance plan, appeared before the Select Committee on Labour Relations with proposals to take hospitals out of the *Act,* exclude nurses and nurses' assistants from bargaining, and ban the union shop, it confirmed what hospital workers had known for a long time: Management was aggressively anti-union, often inept in its analyses, and lacked an understanding of how best to achieve quality patient care.

The OFL's newsletter story, "Hospital Association Brief is Anti Labour Tract," described hospital employers as refusing to accept orderly grievance procedures, seniority rights, job security, or legitimate improvements in earnings and other benefits.

For delegates to the 1957 and 1958 conventions whose unions had bargained health and welfare plans, even comprehensive ones, the fears of ruinous bills for medical services and the consequent loss of loved ones were ever-present realities. Huge and frightening gaps in coverage existed:

Whereas the existing system in operation in Canadian hospitals for the collecting and dispensing of blood or plasma makes it necessary for patients to pay the sum of Twenty-five Dollars ($25.00) for each pint administered or alternatively, compels the patient to provide replacement at the rate of two pints for one; and

Whereas this has the effect of placing hardships upon the poor patient who, lacking funds, must find donors, while the more affluent patient contentedly remits in terms of cash, thus establishing a measure of class distinction; and

Whereas the blood is donated to the hospital in the first instance, not sold;

And Whereas the ability of the individual to donate blood without danger of impairment to his health is a God-given gift not to be improperly exploited;

Therefore be it resolved that the Provincial Federation demand of the Ontario Legislature that the charging for blood or plasma shall be made an offence against the law;

Be it further resolved that the facilities for the collection of blood be greatly expanded to ensure there will ever be an abundant supply in all hospitals.

Motion carried.
Resolution No. 95
Submitted by:
Windsor & District Labour Council, 1957

The more success unions had in establishing health and welfare plans, the more apparent it became that the provision of health care through private agencies could not hope to look after their needs or those of the public. The OFL's objective was a national, government-sponsored system of health insurance that would provide universal coverage and comprehensive care, preventive as well as curative, rehabilitative as well as diagnostic.

A national health care system and nothing less

The OFL appointed a coordinating committee to meet with government officials to push for a comprehensive hospital services plan. But even the partial public plan drew attacks from the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) with dire warnings that it was the first step to "socialized medicine." An OFL editorial noted that "one of the doctors' chief complaints is that prepaid hospitalization available to all would overcrowd the hospitals with hypochondriacs, people who almost enjoy being sick." The OFL interpreted the CMA's vocal opposition as a strategy to head off a national health plan.

By the end of the decade, the OFL's second president, David Archer, summed up the labour movement's experience:

> *"We have had and shall continue to have serious criticisms of the present hospital plan insofar as it falls short of doing the job in the limited field that it was designed to cover. Even more important is the fact that it leaves the major share of the cost of illness – doctors and specialists, prescription drugs, dental and other expenses – to be paid either through inadequate voluntary plans or by the patient at the time of treatment. Many cannot afford the high and ever increasing cost of private insurance plans, and a great many could not join these plans even if they could afford them due to strict eligibility requirements.*

Opening Address,
Ontario Federation of Labour Convention
Niagara Falls – November 2-3-4, 1959

Access to care, the political shaping of the health system, and determined efforts to ensure a national health plan were to become top priorities of the OFL for the next 50 years.

Enriching the Human Rights tradition

From its predecessor organization, as well as the Jewish Labour Committee, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and many of its affiliated unions, the OFL inherited the responsibility of fighting pernicious racism that was commonplace in Ontario.

Excerpts from the Ontario Federation of Labour's publication

Ontario Labour Review

Excerpts from 1957, 1958, 1959

Strike breaking reminiscent of pre-war days with all of the old devices, and some new ones, has reared it ugly head. Lever Brothers in Toronto (Chemical Workers L.32), Canadian Vitrified Products in St. Thomas (USW), Canadian Name Plate in Midland (UAW) ,and Canadian Laundry & Machine Company in Toronto (Machinists L. 438) are all classic examples of union-busting campaigns in progress. All started as legal strikes for improved wages and working conditions or for basic bargaining rights. (July-Aug. 1957)

The OFL Welfare Department holds its first province-wide meeting Nov. 9 – 10, 1957, in Hamilton with more than 100 delegates in attendance. The meeting is the first in a series of workshops designed to equip union officers to advise members on the availability of welfare services and focus attention on areas where services are inadequate or absent.

David Lewis, well-known Toronto lawyer who has acted for unions in numerous cases, is guest speaker at the OFL's Nov. 22, 1957 conference on the use of injunctions and the serious problems they pose for all unions. He urges the OFL to fight for changes to Ontario's *Labour Relations Act,* and the Criminal Code, that would curb the use of injunctions and permit peaceful picketing.

Right-to-work laws newest threat: OFL kicks off its campaign against newest threat posed by "the employers' new front organizations" and their "Right-to-Work" laws that would prohibit the union shop. The sounding board for these groups is the Select Committee on Labour Relations. "Prattle … A nice pious phrase that raises a timely question," says OFL President Cleve Kidd: "What about the right to work for Canada's 800,000 jobless who can't find work even though ready and willing, and the other thousands who are being laid off week after week? Right-to-Work laws passed in some U.S. states have 'given' workers the right to work in the lowest-wage areas, to work out grievances directly with the boss, to use union dues money to buy drinks for the foremen, and to move somewhere else if they don't like the pay or working conditions." (Dec. 1957)

In its 1958 annual brief and meeting with Tory Premier Leslie Frost and cabinet, the OFL calls for immediate and urgent action on unemployment. The legislative brief calls for a minimum wage of $1.25/hr; the establishment of a Fair Wage branch to enforce observance of prevailing union wage rates and working conditions on government contractors; a minimum vacation for employees of two weeks after one year's service; and extension of the *Fair Employment Practices Act* to cover all employers regardless of number of employees.

The OFL's First Educational Conference, held jointly with the CLC, packs in 500 delegates, making it the largest educational conference ever held by a trade union group in Canada. Public relations, political education, unemployment insurance, welfare services, fair employment practices, and international problems were the key policy areas under discussion. (March 1959)

First OFL Workers Compensation course is held Sept. 1959 with 170 officials from the Compensation Board and OFL attending. Key subjects include: rejected claims; use of WCB forms; appeals; investigations; and provision of medical benefits. The event takes place at the new WCB Rehabilitation Centre in Downsview.

OFL and University of Toronto consultations on higher education: In the first ever policy consultation to take place between the Canadian labour movement and a major university, OFL President David Archer calls for labour representation on governing bodies and notes that "this situation encourages a belief among organized labour that the University is run by the rich for the rich … and that students are taught an unqualified affection for the existing social order and an equally profound distrust of trade unions and radical political movements "Other key problems discussed include the university extension program and the need for completely free higher education for those with proven ability," (Sept. 30, 1959)

Massive AVRO Arrow layoffs fuel unemployment. Feb. 20, 1959 will be remembered as "Black Friday" by the 15,000 Avro Aircraft and Orenda Engines workers, members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. More than 8,000 layoffs were announced by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker in the House of Commons on this day. The decision to cancel the Avro Arrow program resulted in a funeral procession of hundreds of cars lined up bumper-to-bumper, carrying toolmakers, engineers, and office workers from the plant for the last time. More than 45,000 Canadians were connected to the Arrow project.

Racist assumptions and discriminatory practices pervaded all arenas: employment, recreation, education, immigration laws, hotels, housing, and the labour movement itself.

The last racially segregated schools in Ontario did not close until 1965. And the attempt to destroy First Nations' cultures, communities, and lives was still in progress.

The annual OFL Fair Employment Practices Conference was the continuation of a tradition started five years earlier at which strategies were devised to remove the structures of racism. The OFL's first conference in November 1957 was preceded by the appointment of the OFL Standing Committee on Fair Practices (FEP) – and by action.

On a hot summer's day in 1957, three Windsor trade union activists went to a private club to play a round of golf. Despite offering to pay the green fees, they were told the course was open to members only. The men's skin was black. But the trap had been set.

An hour later, three white non-members were admitted to the same golf club with open arms. The men were members of the OFL's Fair Employment Practices Committee. The trap was sprung: the club owners were convicted of racial discrimination.

Labour's Voice in Ontario, 1957 – 1997

This was one of the incidents contained in the OFL's 1958 brief to provincial hearings on the proposed *Anti-Discrimination Commission Act*.

The Fair Employment Practices Committee kept watch on anti-discrimination laws, and organized the annual conferences, campaigns and educational projects in human rights. OFL vice-president from the United Packinghouse Workers, Sam Hughes, was its first chair, joined by committee members Stan Little, National Union of Public Service Employees; W. MacDonald, UAW; Alex Maxwell, Toronto Labour Committee for Human Rights; Gordon Milling, OFL research director; and Eamon Park, Steelworkers.

From 1957 to 1960, pressure and challenges from the OFL, many of its affiliates, and other concerned groups eventually led to the creation of the Ontario Human Rights Commission in 1961.

Its formation was a victory for the labour movement, but as delegates to early conventions pointed out, it was not an end in itself: Strenuous work in all arenas would be required to achieve the fundamental social and political changes sought.

In 1958, the Ontario Liquor Licence Board and brewer E.P. Taylor tried to break the legal strike of the Brewery Workers Union by running scab trucks through the picket lines. Demands to outlaw the use of scabs and strikebreaking agencies was a central demand of the OFL and affiliates from its founding in 1957, and onwards.

More profits, more productivity, fewer workers

Automation, mechanization and their attendant layoffs, high interest rates, the high cost of goods and rental housing, and inadequate unemployment insurance of $30/week made jobless aid a priority in the OFL's early conventions and annual meetings with the provincial government.

Noting that unemployment in Canada "is the highest in the English-speaking world outside of the West Indies," the OFL squared off against the provincial Tories, with its *Crash Program on Unemployment* and demanded the immediate start-up of public works programs for the construction of schools, hospitals, low-rental housing and other urban renewal projects.

The recession also brought to light the operations of numerous hiring agencies that often charged a week to one month's pay just to put a worker's name on their list. The OFL branded the despised agencies as "modern-day finks who will gladly undertake to break a strike or a union by supplying non-union workers to an employer. In those cases they collect from the worker and the boss."

By 1960, unemployment in Canada stood at 517,000, an increase from the previous year and rivaling the post-World War II peak. For the OFL and affiliated unions, unemployment, and its associated ills would trigger major showdowns with both John Diefenbaker's Tories in Ottawa and Ontario's Leslie Frost government.

UNIONS, LOCALS AND LABOUR COUNCILS AT THE FOUNDING CONVENTION OF THE OFL

MARCH 27, 28, 29, 1957 - TORONTO, ONTARIO

UNITED STEELWORKERS OF AMERICA

Locals 343, 2853, 2868, 1004, 1005, 2899, 2900, 2904, 2931, 2940, 2946, 2950, 3129, 3208, 3250, 3295, 3325, 3394, 1031, 3466, 1111, 3505, 1817, 3534, 3561, 3564, 2251, 3684, 3696, 3697, 3767, 3813, 4025, 2288, 4115, 2469, 4151, 2458, 4175, 2514, 4305, 2537, 4379, 2699, 4423, 2729, 4440, 2766, 4444, 2771, 4460, 2784, 4509, 4528, 2837, 4582, 4592, 200, 4694, 4752, 4885, 4912, 4947, 4967, 4970, 5009, 5112, 5128, 5297, 5328, 5449, 3390, 4515, 3975, 3466, 4440, 5068, 1226, 2375, 4606, 4790

UNITED AUTOMOBILE WORKERS

Locals 28, 112, 127, 195, 199, 200, 222, 252, 399, 439, 444, 456, 458, 673, 707, 303, 27, 397

CANADIAN BROTHERHOOD OF RAILWAY EMPLOYEES

Divisions 24, 26, 96, 89, 106, 110, 114, 123, 194, 216, 283, 262, 270

RETAIL/WHOLESALE

Divisions 414, 422, 440, 461

RUBBER WORKERS

Divisions 67, 73, 80, 113, 118, 132, 136, 232, 455, 494

BREWERY WORKERS

Division 173

TEXTILE WORKERS

Divisions 76, 720, 723, 725, 736, 741, 806, 822, 825, 836, 962, 979, 1066, 1070, 1153, 1236, 1294, 1305, 1314, 1347, 1356, 1379, 1381

AMALGAMATED CLOTHING WORKERS

Divisions 132, 211, 212, 235, 210, 521, 233

OIL, CHEMICAL ATOMIC WORKERS

Divisions 16-14, 16-351, 16-593, 16-620

INTERNATIONAL WOODWORKERS

Divisions 69, 169, 178, 42

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS

Locals 510, 512, 526, 557, 523, 567

UNITED PACKINGHOUSE WORKERS

Divisions 114, 208, 293, 416, 452, 459, 469, 480, 530, 587, 427

LITHOGRAPHERS

Division 12

NEWSPAPER GUILD

Division 87

COMMUNICATION WORKERS

Divisions C-4

CONGRESS LOCALS

Dairy Utensils Workers, St. Mary
Marine Etc. Local 20
Nabet, Local 71
N.U. Brewery Workers
N.U. Natural Gas Workers, 89
N.U. Public Service Employees, Local 1
Office Employees, 343
Orillia General Workers, Local 141
United Glass & Ceramic Workers, Locals 200, 295, 202, 237

LABOUR COUNCILS

Belleville, Brantford, Cornwall, Galt, Hamilton, Kapuskasing, Kingston, Kitchener, London, Oakville, Oshawa, Ottawa, Owen Sound, Peterborough, Renfrew, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Windsor

TORONTO

Asbestos Workers Union
Bakery Workers No. 181
Bricklayers No. 2
Building Service, 204
Capmakers Union No. 47
Carpenters, Nos. 27, 1163
Chemical Workers, Nos. 159, 161, 279
Boilermakers No. 128
Civic Employees, Locals 43, 79, 94, 149

FEDERAL UNIONS

Metal Foil Workers, No. 23624
Saw Workers, No. 23650
Nail, Wire, Steel Rollers, No. 23651: Locals 24223, 24574, 24712
Precious Metals, Nos. 24739, 24762, 24892
Fire Fighters, Nos, 418 (East York), 113 (Toronto), 411 (Etobicoke), 1137 (Etobicoke)
Fur Workers, No. 82
Electrical Workers, Nos. 636, 1788,
Beverage Dispensers – Hotel & Restaurant Employees, Nos, 280, 254, 299
Labourers Union, Locals 183, 506
Machinists, Lodges 235, 438, 717,1184, 1922, 2030
Marble Tile and Terazzo Workers, Locals 31, 56
Meat Cutters and Butchers, Locals 175, 633
Metal Polishers, Local 19
Millinery Workers, Local 46
Operating Engineers, Locals 793, 796
Plumbers and Steamfitters, Local 46
Photo Engravers, Local 35
Printing Pressmen, Local 10
Printing Specialties, Local 466
Sheet Metal Workers, Local 30
Stereotypers, Local 21
Street Railway Workers, Local 113
Teamsters, Locals 230, 352, 419, 647, 938
Commercial Telegraphers, Local 1
Upholsterers Locals 30, 602
Essex County Building Trades
Bro. Painters and Paperhangers, Local 557
Plasterers Union

WINDSOR

Boilermakers, Local 704
Civic Workers, Local 82
Distillary Workers, Local 61
Hod Carriers
Laundry Workers, No. 338
Teamsters, No. 880

HAMILTON

Bricklayers Union No. 1
Barbers' Union, No. 131
Carpenters' Union, No. 18
I.B.E.W. No. 105
Can. Workers Union, No. 354
Fire Fighters' Association, No. 288
Hamilton Trades and Labour Council
Hod Carriers, No. 837
Motion Picture Projectionists
Municipal Employees Association, No. 167
Operating Engineers, No. 700
Plumbers and Pipefitters, No. 67
Street Railway Union, No. 107
General Truck Drivers, No. 879
Textile workers, Nos. 247, 275, 314

BRANTFORD

Fire Fighters, No. 460

DUNDAS

Machinists, No. 1740

FORT WILLIAM

Lakehead and District Trades Council
Building Service Employees, No. 268
Pulp and Sulphite Workers, No. 39

FRANKFORD

Boot and Shoe Workers, No. 715

GEORGETOWN

Electrical Workers, No. 788

GODERICH

Federal Labour Union, 23736

HAGERSVILLE

Fire Fighters

HAWKSBURY

Office Employees, 165

KAPUSKASING

Lumber and Sawmill Workers, 2995
Pulp and Sulphite Workers, 89

KITCHENER

Fire Fighters, 457

LONDON

London & District Trades Council
Electrical Workers, 120
General Labourers' 1059
Railway Carmen, No. 488
Street Railway Union, 741

TRENTON

Trenton & District Trades Council

MARATHON

Pulp and Sulphite Workers, 548

NIAGARA FALLS

Niagara Falls Trades and Labour Council
Chemical Workers, 154, 215
Civic Employees, 133
Machinists, 1909

OTTAWA

Ottawa Trades and Labour Council
Fire Fighters, 162
Office Employees, 225
Typographical Union, 102

WELLAND

Textile Works, 261

STRATFORD

Federal Labour Union 563

WOODSTOCK

Textile Workers, 138

1957-2007

The Ontario Federation of Labour would like to thank and acknowledge

the work of the labour councils across Ontario. You are always there to help get labour's message out into your communities. Every day, labour councils strengthen the fabric of our communities and the workers who live there.

Algoma-Manitoulin & District Labour Council
Atikokan & District Labour Council
Barrie & District Labour Council
Brampton-Mississauga & District Labour Council
Brantford & District Labour Council
Brockville & District Labour Council
Chatham-Kent & District Labour Council
Collingwood & District Labour Council
Cornwall & District Labour Council
Dryden & District Labour Council
Durham Region Labour Council
Fort Frances & District Labour Council
Grey Bruce Labour Council
Guelph & District Labour Council
Hamilton & District Labour Council
Huron & District Labour Council
Kapuskasing & District Labour Council
Kenora & District Labour Council
Kingston & District Labour Council
Kirkland Lake & District Labour Council
Lanark & District Labour Council
Lindsay & District Labour Council
London & District Labour Council
Niagara Falls & District Labour Council
North Bay & District Labour Council
Northumberland & District Labour Council
Oakville & District Labour Council
Orangeville & District Labour Council
Orillia-Muskoka & District Labour Council
Ottawa & District Labour Council
Oxford & District Labour Council
Peterborough & District Labour Council
Port Colborne & District Labour Council
Quinte & District Labour Council
Renfrew & District Labour Council
St. Catharines & District Labour Council
St. Thomas & District Labour Council
Sarnia & District Labour Council
Sault Ste Marie & District Labour Council
Simcoe & District Labour Council
Stratford & District Labour Council
Sudbury & District Labour Council
Thunder Bay & District Labour Council
Timmins & District Labour Council
Toronto & York Region Labour Council
Tri-Town & District Labour Council
Waterloo Regional Labour Council
Welland & District Labour Council
Windsor & District Labour Council

1957-2007

The Ontario Federation of Labour wishes to thank our dinner patrons

for their generous contribution towards our 50th Anniversary celebrations

CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS (CLC)
Ken Georgetti *President*
Bill Chedore *Ontario Regional Director*

CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES (CUPE) NATIONAL
Paul Moist *National President*

CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES (CUPE) ONTARIO
Sid Ryan *President*

COMMUNICATIONS, ENERGY & PAPERWORKERS UNION OF CANADA (CEP)
Cec Makowski *Ontario Region Vice-President*

ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION OF ONTARIO (ETFO)
David Clegg *President*

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MACHINISTS AND AEROSPACE WORKERS (IAMAW)
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POWER WORKERS' UNION
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SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION (SEIU CANADA)
Sharleen Stewart *Canadian International Vice-President (ROC)*

UNITED FOOD AND COMMERCIAL WORKERS CANADA (UFCW CANADA)
Wayne Hanley *National Director*

UNITED STEELWORKERS (USW)
Ken Neumann *National Director for Canada*

Friends & Allies of the Ontario Federation Of Labour

Ontario Federation of Union Retirees (OFUR)
519 The Church Street Community Centre
Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Alliance
Acorn Canada
Asian Canadian Labour Alliance
Black Coalition for Aids Prevention (B.C.A.P.)
Campaign 2000
Campaign for Public Education
Canadian Arab Federation
Canadian Association of Labour Media
Canadian Federation of Students - Ontario
Canadian Peace Alliance
Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto
Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
Community Arts Ontario
Conservation Council of Ontario
Egale Canada
Employment Standards Work Group
Equal Pay Coalition
Great Lakes United
Income Security Advocacy Centre
Industrial Accident Victims' Group of Ontario
Injured Workers' Consultants
Inter-Faith Social Assistance Reform Coalition
Jamaican Canadian Association
Leonard Peltier Defense Committee (Canada)
Mayworks
National Anti-Racism Council of Canada (NARCC)
Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses
OCASI – Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants
Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care
Ontario Coalition for Social Justice
Ontario Health Coalition
Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups
Toronto Workers' Health & Safety Legal Clinic
Urban Alliance on Race Relations
Workers' Action Centre
Workers Arts & Heritage Centre

Reaching for Justice:
A decade of transformation

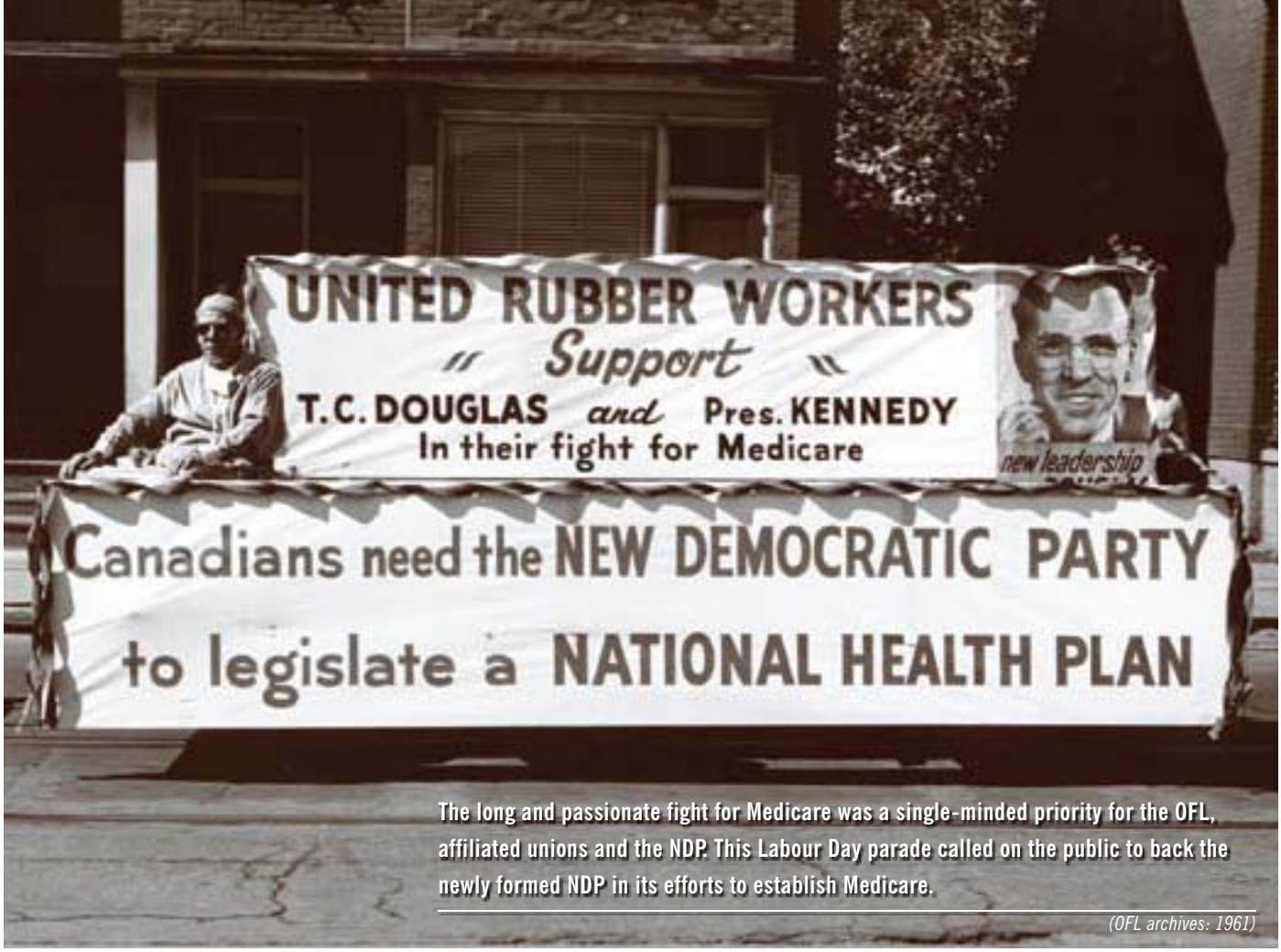
"'What we desire for ourselves, we wish for everyone,' has never been a maxim of management."

DAVID ARCHER

Second President Ontario Federation of Labour

1958 - 1976

1960-1970



The long and passionate fight for Medicare was a single-minded priority for the OFL, affiliated unions and the NDP. This Labour Day parade called on the public to back the newly formed NDP in its efforts to establish Medicare.

(OFL archives: 1961)

The turbulent decade of the 1960s was marked by strikes, demands for equality, a surge in unionization, universal social programs, and an end to some of the worst constraints imposed on the labour movement.

The U.S. war in Vietnam was raging. Women's Liberation, and Civil Rights, Native, and Lesbian and Gay Rights movements were powerful forces pushing for change both inside and outside the labour movement. Labour was instrumental in the birth of the New Democratic Party in 1961. The remarkable and visionary Tommy Douglas, the father of Medicare and a person to whom Canadians will forever owe a debt of gratitude, became its first leader.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the efforts of generations of workers and their unions, the NDP and its CCF predecessor, resulted in universal social programs: the Canada Pension Plan, Medicare, Canada Student Loans, Canada Assistance, Guaranteed Income Supplement, and the expansion of Unemployment Insurance. The National Housing Act was also amended in 1964, clearing the way for more public housing. Homosexuality was decriminalized; abortion and divorce laws were liberalized.

Public sector unions, workers, and women new voices for change

Across Canada, public sector workers, demanding improvements, recognition, and collective bargaining rights, were squaring off against intractable federal and provincial governments, and winning.

The 1965 strike by the Canadian Postal Employees Association – later to become the Canadian Union of Postal Workers – helped to fuel passage of the *Public Service Staff Relations Act,* which enabled federal workers to choose either compulsory arbitration or the right to strike.

The founding of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) in 1963 and the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) in 1966 transformed Canada's labour movement: The concerns of thousands of women members in these newly formed unions produced changes in the OFL's political and economic priorities. New directions and initiatives were reflected in convention resolutions, government briefs, and action.

In 1967, the OFL appeared before the Royal Commission on the Status of Women calling for an end to

> **"To many on our side of the fence this new militant mood is a welcome sign of an alertness, an awareness, a sense of concern, a reaching for justice …"**
>
> **David Archer,** OFL President

wage discrimination, including equal pay for equal work legislation; maternity leave; daycare; the liberalization of abortion laws; and the introduction of family planning and birth control to the school curriculum.

> *Even today, there still exists a prejudice against women working. Strangely enough this prejudice does not extend to occupations which are badly paid and where men do not want to work."*
>
> **From OFL submission to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women**

In the next decade, the OFL's women's committee would become a leader in the fight for women's rights, aggressively pursuing the social and economic equality recommendations of the Royal Commission report.

In the mid-sixties, thousands of women in the public sector became the newest members of the labour movement. These workers and their unions fought for union security and an end to their exploitation as cheap and expendable labour. In 1963, a year after SEIU gained certification at Trenton Memorial Hospital, members waged a long and bitter strike over the hospital's refusal to negotiate.

(Photo courtesy of Service Employees International Union Local 1.on)

Cheated, swindled, and chiseled:
Building trades force industry clean up

The construction industry's miserable exploitation of workers was exposed in 1960 when five young Italian men were crushed underground while constructing a tunnel. The Hoggs Hollow disaster was national news and a pivotal event that produced long-sought changes by building trades workers.

The demands for an industry-wide clean up were backed by waves of strikes, 200 flying squads, and single-minded determination, especially from the Brandon Union Group, which represented more than 5,000, mostly Italian, workers.

Dogged media coverage, especially by Toronto Telegram reporter Frank Drea, helped to ensure

The Hoggs Hollow disaster triggered massive organizing in the building trades for better protection and the formation of the Union of Injured Workers, Toronto in 1974. Translation of poster: UNION OF INJURED WORKERS STRUGGLE TO PROTECT ALL WORKERS. We must change the law of the WCB.

(Photo: Vincenzo Pietropaolo)

> *" 'Prosperity for whom?' What kind of peculiar prosperity is this" that forces a mass dislocation of workers?"*
>
> **David Archer,** OFL President

the issues stayed before the public. Drea's fiery reports slammed the industry for having created a system that had workers "systematically exploited, cheated, swindled, and chiseled by wave upon wave of unscrupulous contractors and builders who captured a sizeable segment of the house and apartment building field."

The OFL joined with building trades locals in their demands for an end to the dangerous and demeaning conditions. It sent out an appeal to all affiliates for moral and financial support for the 10,000 striking workers; when arrests were threatened, OFL President David Archer challenged the police to make him the first arrest and pushed for a royal commission, which was subsequently appointed. The recommendations of the Goldenberg Commission led to dramatic changes in Ontario's *Labour Relations Act*. In particular, union recognition, successor rights, area certification, and a separate section of the Act designated for the construction industry are legacies of the Hoggs Hollow workers and many others who lost their lives at work.

Modern Paradox:
More Production, More Unemployment

When, finally, Liberal Prime Minister Lester Pearson acknowledged unemployment as Canada's number one problem, the OFL had already ramped up its work to maximize pressure on employers and the government.

Ontario's welfare department issued its 1960 annual report warning that automation might replace four out of five industrial workers, and that older workers would be the biggest casualties. The OFL responded with educational conferences, workshops, publications, and media work, highlighting its demands for workers' retraining and reeducation programs and entitlements.

Employers' drive for profit was masked with false promises of shorter work days, increased leisure, and better quality of life for working people; meanwhile, entire trades were once again threatened with extinction due to automation, mechanization, and technological change. Work speed-ups were requiring more, not less, effort. Productivity and profits were up, but at the beginning of the decade employment was down.

L-R: Charles (Bud) Clark, International Rep,. TWUA; Stan Rouse, member of the International Association of Machinists; Lillian Downer, President of local at Tilco, Vic Skurjat,Greater Toronto Textile Joint Board. Clark, Rouse, and Skurjat were among the 26 who were jailed for taking part in the demonstration against ex - parte injunctions.

(Photo courtesy of the Ed Seymour Collection: 1966)

The OFL's work in the area of automation and technological change led to a request from the railway unions to appear before the Freedman Commission in Winnipeg. At issue was the Canadian National Railway's unilateral decision to run trains through Nakina, Ontario and Wainwright, Alberta where crews normally would have been changed. The central question was about management's responsibility when technological change forced a mass dislocation of workers.

Freedman's recommendations were far-reaching and put in play a new principle that required employers to serve notice of contemplated changes to the unions affected and to consult and negotiate with them. It was a significant victory.

Poverty always a priority issue

Since its founding in 1957, OFL campaigns to counter unemployment were broad and included demands for low-cost housing, minimum wages, organizing the unorganized, strong federal and provincial social programs, and an end to poverty –always an end to poverty. Like the fight against injunctions, poverty, and the political decisions that created it and sustained it, to this day evoke a passionate response from the OFL and its affiliates.

The OFL's booklet, "Poverty in Ontario 1964," almost qualified as a best seller. Newspapers gave it ample coverage. Prime Minister Pearson called it "a valuable contribution to the public appreciation of the extent of this problem in our country." It was raised as a question in the House of Commons. An Ottawa Journal editorial congratulated the OFL for "bringing home the dimensions of the problem," and noted:

> *But while there are anything like these numbers of hidden poor, our consciences should be troubled and our best minds and resources given over to the challenge.*

"Bad Laws must be Changed!"

When the miserably paid women of Tilco Plastics, members of the Textile Workers Union of America, voted to strike in December 1965 their action led to a royal commission and an all-out OFL campaign to rid the labour movement of one of the most hated weapons of employers: the ex-parte injunction.

Justice Ivan Rand's chilling 1968 report on labour disputes set off huge waves of protests and demonstrations. Public and private sector workers, building trades, and labour councils' outrage forced the Ontario government to bury the report and adopt reforms to the Ontario *Labour Relations Act* and the *Judicature Act.*

(Photo courtesy of the Ed Seymour Collection)

These one-sided injunctions required no notice to unions and no opportunity for a response. Time and again, they had been used by employers to break strikes and picket lines. Since 1957, the OFL played the central role in leading challenges to injunctions and to the provincial *Judicature Act* that governed them.

When Tilco's boss, Harold Pammett, secured his ex-parte injunction all hell broke loose. Two days of angry protests organized by the Peterborough Labour Council and the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers Union led to the arrest of 26 demonstrators. The OFL posted bail, hired a lawyer to defend the men, and prepared an extensive media campaign to amplify its views. Tilco became a cause célèbre. As the accused men departed for court, they were preceded by Scottish pipers and more than 200 supporters.

Oshawa Times workers at the Thomson newspaper also quickly felt the weight of the law in January 1966 when an ex-parte injunction was served within hours of their picket line going up. Word spread quickly and large numbers of solidarity picketers rallied to defy the injunction. This strike ended much more quickly than the one at Tilco.

The OFL and affilates repeatedly dared Tory John Robarts to call an election on the issue of injunctions. Instead, Premier Robarts named Justice Ivan Rand to head a Royal Commission on Labour Disputes.

Rand Report:
"A time bomb planted under the house of organized labour"

Rand's hostile report went beyond labour's worst expectations: It condemned mass picketing, and boycotts, and even recommended public sector workers be prohibited from striking. His proposal for an all-powerful labour tribunal was rejected by the 1,000 delegates at the OFL's 1968 convention who voted

instead to allocate $125,000 for an all-out *Tell the Public,* TV, radio and newspaper campaign.

In May 1969, a 10,000-person demonstration at Queen's Park, organized by the Hamilton and Toronto Building and Constructions Trades Councils, set off a wave of protests, including CUPE Ontario's *Bill of Wrongs* demonstration. The accumulated pressure resulted in long-sought changes. By 1970, important revisions, including an end to ex-parte injunctions, were finally made to the *Judicature Act*.

By the end of the decade, the major strikes in the industrial and public sectors had produced significant gains and legislative entitlements.

A home for labour: Official opening of OFL building

June 21, 1968 marked the official opening of one of the most impressive trade union headquarters in Canada. The OFL building was the central meeting place and hub of union activity. Its first tenants included CUPE Ontario, Building Trades Council, UAW regional offices, CLC Ontario, Metro Toronto Labour Council and 25 other unions and councils. Its list of first tenants provides a snapshot of labour's history.

(Photos OFL archives)

Tilco strikers, members of the Textile Workers Union of America at a public rally held in their support. The women wearing headbands are the actual strikers who set off the huge battle against ex-parte injunctions.

(Photo courtesy of the Ed Seymour Collection: 1966)

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR 50th Anniversary 1957-2007 50 Years of SOLIDARITY

Militancy and momentum

"No other organized group in our society has done so much, for so long, to break down the social and economic barriers that deny this country the full expression of its human potential."

CLIFF PILKEY

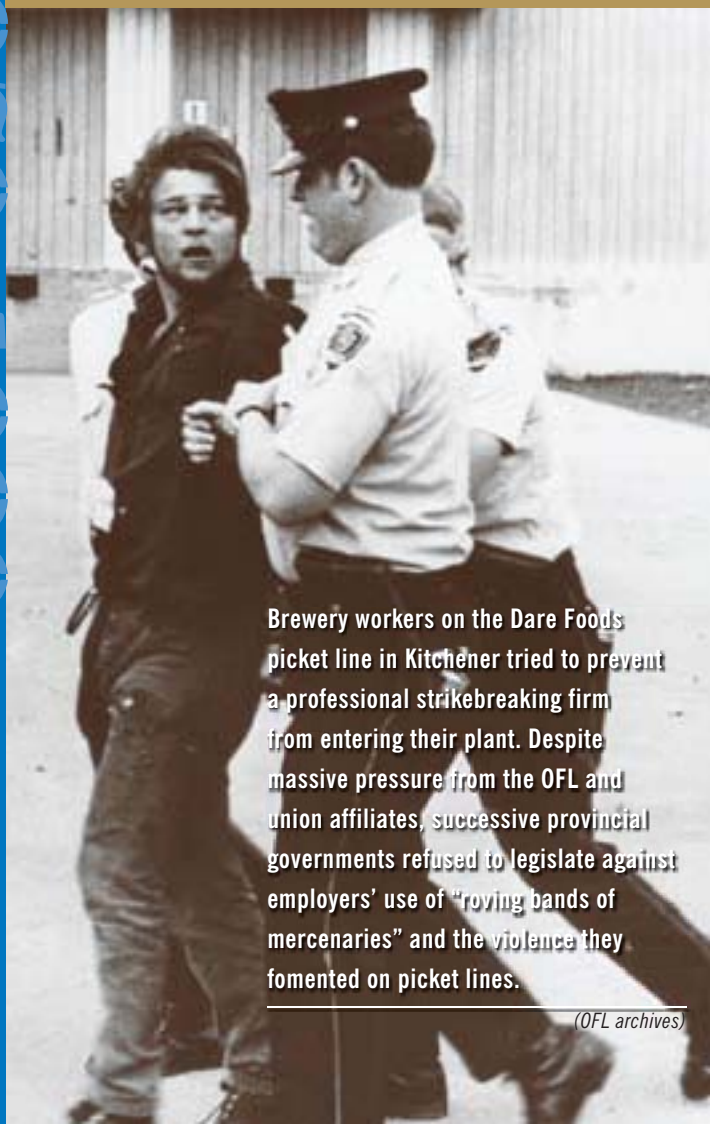
Third President Ontario Federation of Labour,

1976 – 1986

1970-1980

There is no way we could accept a society with no minimum wage laws, no basic protections or rights for working people, no system to guarantee that the sick and aged have adequate care. Yet the labour movement is forced to fight hard for every bit of progress. It is never a given.

Cliff Pilkey, OFL President 1976 - 1986



Brewery workers on the Dare Foods picket line in Kitchener tried to prevent a professional strikebreaking firm from entering their plant. Despite massive pressure from the OFL and union affiliates, successive provincial governments refused to legislate against employers' use of "roving bands of mercenaries" and the violence they fomented on picket lines.

(OFL archives)

Turmoil, militancy, and optimism surged into the new decade and achieved more breakthroughs for the labour movement. Waves of strikes (1976 marked an all-time high), demonstrations, teach-ins and sit-ins reflected labour's impatience and expectations. Above all, the 1970s was a decade of ideas and debates.

The national dialogue was enhanced by a strong NDP presence. By 1972, the party had formed governments in British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. In B.C., Rosemary Brown became the first black woman elected to a legislature in Canada. In what came to be known as the "Three Happy Provinces," pioneering legislation was passed in social services, daycare, health and safety, programs for the elderly, housing, government auto insurance and other progressive measures. David Lewis and Ed Broadbent were successive leaders of the federal NDP who carried the party to the height of its popularity and influence over national issues.

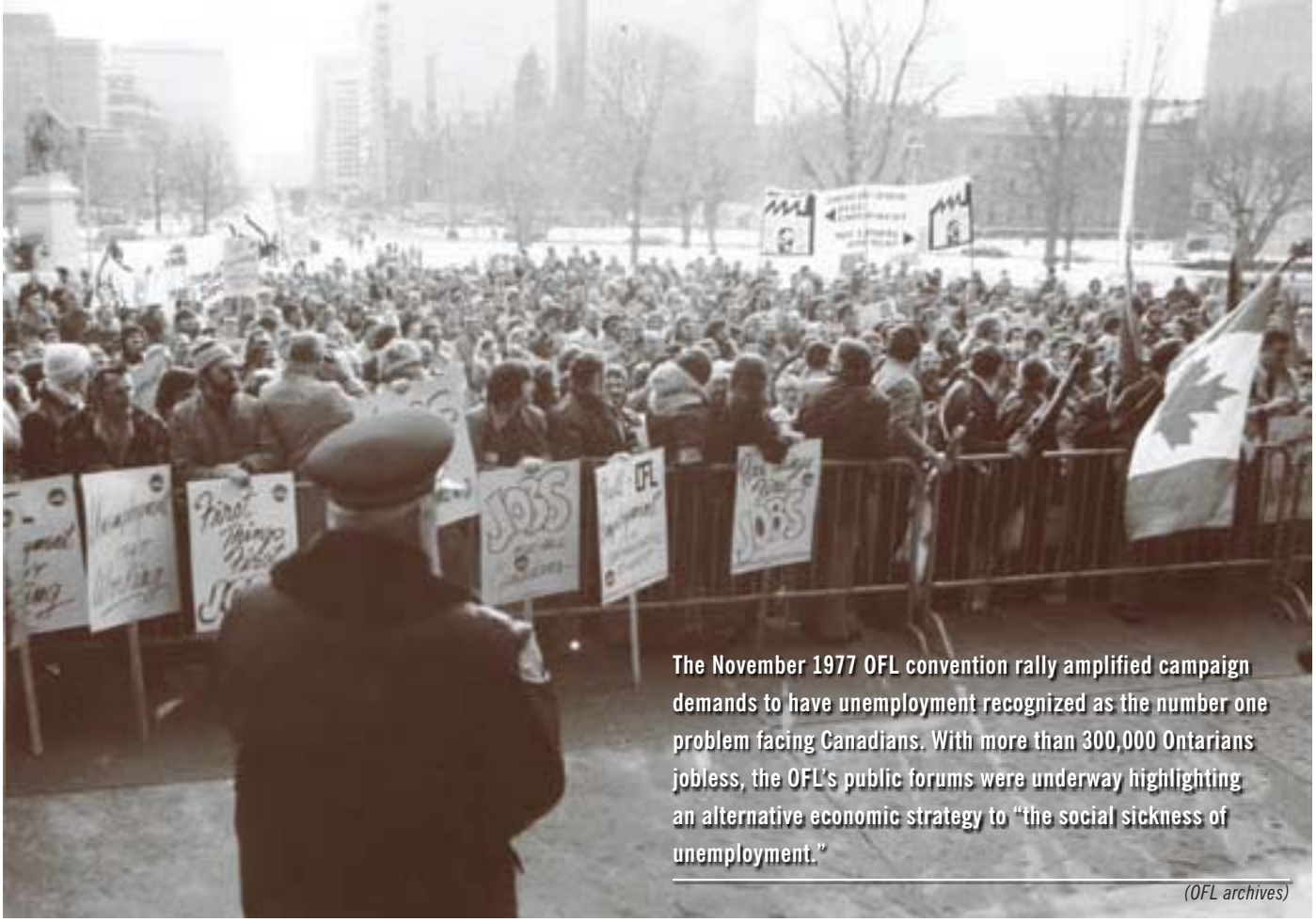
Trudeau Liberals enact wartime-era legislation

The headway made by workers in the first part of the 1970s was slowed when, in 1975, Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau reached back to war years' legislation to resurrect wage and price controls. For years, labour and the NDP had called for an industrial and economic strategy, one that would prepare Canada for the sweeping global economic changes that were taking place. But Trudeau, bolstered by strong corporate allies, opted instead to use formidable federal powers to scapegoat labour and roll back wages.

The program lasted three years and had its effect: By the second year of controls, inflation had climbed to nine per cent. In 1978, one million Canadians were looking for work, the highest unemployment since 1940. By 1983, the toll of joblessness had risen to more than 1.6 million people.

> *"Politicians who promised to wrestle inflation to the ground have put the workers there instead"*
>
> OFL President **Cliff Pilkey**

The emphasis on controlling wages obstructed union progress and made economic and social gains harder to achieve. Still, the chilling political climate was a catalyst for protest and could not prevent numerous rallying points and significant breakthroughs.



The November 1977 OFL convention rally amplified campaign demands to have unemployment recognized as the number one problem facing Canadians. With more than 300,000 Ontarians jobless, the OFL's public forums were underway highlighting an alternative economic strategy to "the social sickness of unemployment."

(OFL archives)

In Ontario, the OFL, working with the Canadian Labour Congress, marshalled every resource to combat Trudeau's use of federal power to interfere in collective bargaining. Leaders and staff fanned out across the province, joined with labour councils, union affiliates, and progressive community groups to help organize the Oct. 14, 1976 day of protest. Across Canada, more than one million people downed tools, left workplaces, and marched in their communities. Many thousands massed on Parliament Hill. In Toronto, the OFL pulled together one of the largest demonstrations ever held at Queen's Park.

The lessons learned in the 1976 rallies would echo 20 years later in the OFL's province-wide *Days of Action* against the reactionary Tory government of Mike Harris.

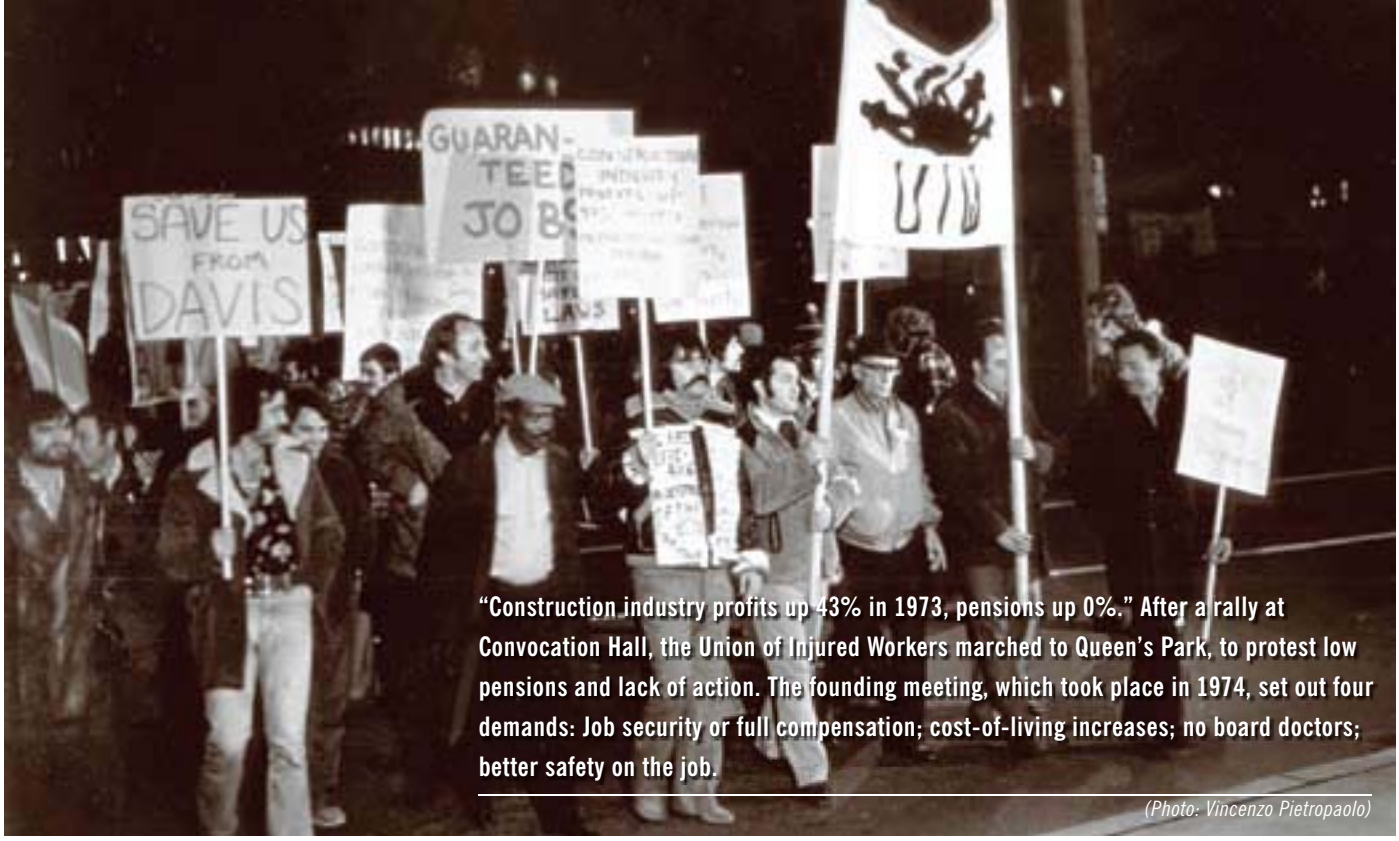
Militancy produces major gains for public sector unions

The 1970s were significant for the province's public sector unions. A succession of paternalistic provincial governments had always managed to forestall union efforts at representing their members. Public sector workers were furious at being barred from fundamental collective bargaining rights. Their leaders began to flex their collective muscles through aggressive organizing in the province's hospitals, schools, colleges and universities, and civic and provincial public services. By 1973, 63% of public sector workers had become unionized, up from 22 per cent only a decade earlier.

Aided by the OFL's Public Sector Coalition, teachers and nurses who were not then affiliated with the OFL joined with public sector unions to call attention to wages, working conditions, and the second-class status of those charged with providing crucial and often life saving services.

In 1973 the Ontario Nurses' Association was founded. It was preceded by a huge march on Queen's Park and a 1969 strike in Hamilton. And in 1973, more than 80,000 of the 105,000 Ontario teachers left their classrooms in a one-day walkout, demanding union recognition, the right to strike, free collective bargaining and improvements in wages and working conditions. Two years later, in 1975, teachers won the right to strike.

That year, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union emerged from the old Civil Service Association of Ontario. OPSEU launched its first province-wide actions four years later as 5,000 college support workers hit the bricks in an illegal provincial strike. Public sector unions had emerged as a potent force for progressive change.



"Construction industry profits up 43% in 1973, pensions up 0%." After a rally at Convocation Hall, the Union of Injured Workers marched to Queen's Park, to protest low pensions and lack of action. The founding meeting, which took place in 1974, set out four demands: Job security or full compensation; cost-of-living increases; no board doctors; better safety on the job.

(Photo: Vincenzo Pietropaolo)

Health and safety also wrenched from past

For more than 80 years, Ontario's deplorable history of protecting employers' interests had left workers to fend for themselves in dangerous workplaces. Successive governments used every possible tactic to bury and delay real health and safety protection.

Lost lives, families ruined by poverty, individuals destroyed by injury, and indescribable emotional pain accompanied every tragic workplace incident. Yet governments refused to be moved by the thousands of injuries and deaths.

From its founding in 1957, the OFL both led and joined the many battles to improve workplace health and safety.

Toronto's Hoggs Hollow disaster in 1960, where five immigrant workers died of carbon monoxide poisoning and drowning, led to a strike by the mostly Italian construction workers and eventually to a major overhaul of Ontario's health and safety laws.

Pressure from the building trades, the OFL, the labour movement and the public left the government with no place to go and nowhere to hide. It was compelled to revise the old *Factory Act* of 1884 to incorporate a definition of safety as the "freedom from injury to the body or freedom from damage to health." The Act's name was changed to the *Industrial Safety Act* of 1964. It was major progress, but still a half-measure.

It took the Elliot Lake uranium miners and their health and safety strike of 1974 to win a final break with a tortured past and propel new legislation. The miners, members of the United Steelworkers, made work-induced lung cancer and silicosis front-page news and triggered the Ham Royal Commission Report on Mine Health and Safety in 1975.

A new *Occupational Health and Safety Act*

Knowing too well the realities caused by government stalling and backsliding, the OFL set up a health and safety task force in 1976. It provided affiliates with the most up-to-date research for use at all bargaining tables, and dug in to force government action.

The NDP, led by Stephen Lewis, who had become Opposition Leader in 1975, hammered the government inside the Legislature, while the OFL and affiliates kept up the pressure in the public arena. But enormous efforts were still required as the Tory government tried to gut the protections.

Finally, in 1978, Bill 70 was proclaimed. The new *Occupational Health and Safety Act* ordered mandatory joint committees in many workplaces, the right of workers to know about workplace health and safety hazards, and their right to refuse work if it endangered health or safety.

In 1979, in another historic first, the OFL's Occupational Health and Safety Training Centre opened. Its four-week intensive training courses produced the first worker-experts who fanned out across the province to protect

the hard-won gains, advocate for new protections, and train members in the workplace.

Progress on health and safety represented a break from the past and the beginning of a new wave of OFL efforts to broaden and strengthen workers' protection.

Women's equality: The time is now!

In the 1970s, women's frustration and anger at their second-class status was expressed through every conceivable avenue: strikes, demonstrations, civil disobedience, marches, lobbies, and self-help groups.

Maternity leave, equal pay for work of equal value, family law reform, child care, full access to abortion and midwifery, an end to violence against women, lesbian and gay equality rights, and union recognition were all frontline issues. Rape crisis centres, child care and battered women's shelters were established.

As early as the 1950s, Ontario's teachers had been pressing for maternity leave. The Ontario Teachers' Federation and the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario campaigned and bargained for this fundamental coverage and made some headway. But the real breakthrough came when the Canadian Union of Postal Workers won maternity leave after a 42-week strike in 1981. A year later, the Communications Workers of Canada became the first Canadian private sector union to negotiate paid maternity leave for its members at Bell Canada and Northern Telecom.

The OFL Women's Committee was part of every hard-fought battle for equality and was used as a model by affiliates. Backed by the OFL's program of providing expertise and assistance to local unions, women's committees flourished. *Ontario Labour,* the OFL's official publication, launched a human rights section highlighting the social and economic changes needed to ensure equality. Organized Working Women drew sisters from the labour movement who fought for progress within the OFL and in their own unions.

The OFL helped to found and sustain many new equality organizations such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, the Equal Pay Coalition, child care organizations, and the pro-choice movement for abortion rights.

OFL-sponsored conferences on "Sex Discrimination in Ontario" and "Bargaining for Equality" drew hundreds of delegates from across the province and produced hard-hitting campaigns. Equal pay for work of equal value became a central demand and urgent necessity.

The OFL assisted the NDP which, inside the Legislature, challenged the Bill Davis Tories to stop "subsidizing the economy with women's underpaid labour."

Women and union security legislation

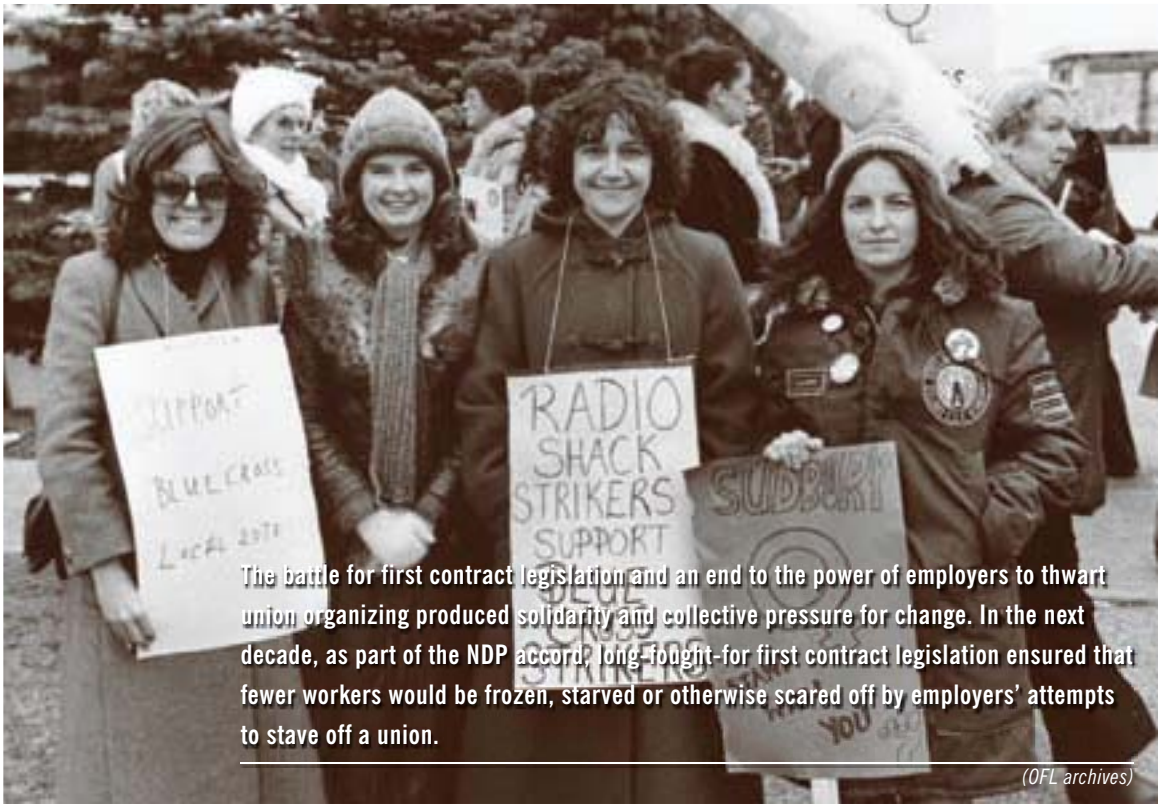
For more than 100 years, the buoyancy of the Ontario economy and its ability to deliver profits to business owners had depended on low-waged workers and job ghettos.

This was powerfully demonstrated in 1978 at Fleck Manufacturing near London. On one side were 120 workers – mostly women – determined to win union security with the United Auto Workers and the higher wages that would come with it. On the other side were the well-to-do business owner, provincial government, and 500 Ontario Provincial Police stationed around the industrial park. The policing costs at Fleck were higher than for any previous event in Ontario history.

Raising funds, organizing solidarity, bolstering picket lines, and pressure at Queen's Park were some of the OFL's contributions to the successful outcome of the Fleck strike. But the courage and stamina of the women

OFL president Cliff Pilkey at strike-bound Fleck plant in Huron Park (L-R: UAW international representative, Al Seymour; Negotiating committee chair, Sheila Charlton; Cliff Pilkey; and UAW Local 1620 striker.

(Photo courtesy of the Ed Seymour Collection: 1966)



The battle for first contract legislation and an end to the power of employers to thwart union organizing produced solidarity and collective pressure for change. In the next decade, as part of the NDP accord, long-fought-for first contract legislation ensured that fewer workers would be frozen, starved or otherwise scared off by employers' attempts to stave off a union.

(OFL archives)

strikers in the face of police harassment, violence and intimidation won the struggle for themselves and for the labour movement.

At Radio Shack, the battle of women warehouse workers to become part of the United Steelworkers was met by resistance from its huge parent company, Texas-based Tandy Corporation, which threatened to pull out of Barrie. At that time, no Tandy location in the world was unionized. But by 1980, Radio Shack women had won their first contract.

These pivotal strikes and others were instrumental in pressuring Ontario's Conservative government to give way and legislate union security as a part of the *Ontario Labour Relations Act*.

Human Rights: Labour urged to lead by example

The 1960s had produced improvements to human rights legislation. The 1962 anti-discrimination code had tied together three areas – housing, employment, and public accommodation – but left huge loopholes. The OFL's broad-based lobby in 1965 succeeded in extending the *Human Rights Act* to cover the provincial government and commercial units, and expanded the definition of rental housing.

Important links with Aboriginal organizations and groups representing immigrant and racialized people had already been established in the 1960s. In Kenora, the OFL lent organizing expertise to a 400-person march on town hall that enabled Native leaders and protesters to deliver a hard-hitting message on discrimination and exploitation.

The OFL Human Rights Committee had developed a good working relationship with the Union of Ontario Indians and worked with them to highlight the broken treaties and overt discrimination that were rampant in Ontario.

> *"Even if we had the most comprehensive and effective legislation conceivable, vigorously supported by the government and aggressively administered by a determined commission, such a commission would not, even then, be a panacea for all of the problems related to the community which it serves."*
>
> **Dr. Daniel Hill**
>
> Human Rights Commissioner , Nov. 1970

The Ontario Human Rights Commission's case-by-case approach was restricting its ability to make change. The OFL campaigned for amendments to enable the commis-

sion to examine the overall practices of institutions that came within its jurisdiction.

But as Human Rights Commissioner Dr. Daniel Hill pointed out, racism and sexism were deeply entrenched societal ills and required a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach.

Calling on the OFL, convention delegates, and their unions to be in the vanguard, he urged the labour movement to take stock of itself to correct its shortcomings: to express in clear and unequivocal terms its policy of non-discrimination and to put the principles into action, including the recruitment of workers from minority and immigrant communities.

"Change Tory-care to Medicare"

The OFL has always fervently championed universal Medicare. Since 1957, it has been a major catalyst in the battle for a quality not-for-profit, and comprehensive public health-care system. Its 1969 demonstration, sponsored jointly with the National Farmers' Union, engaged large numbers of unions and private citizens to support a "Six Point Program" that called for an end to health premiums, the phasing out of private carriers, and the extension of Medicare coverage to drugs, appliances, dental care, nursing, physiotherapy, eye glasses and hearing aids.

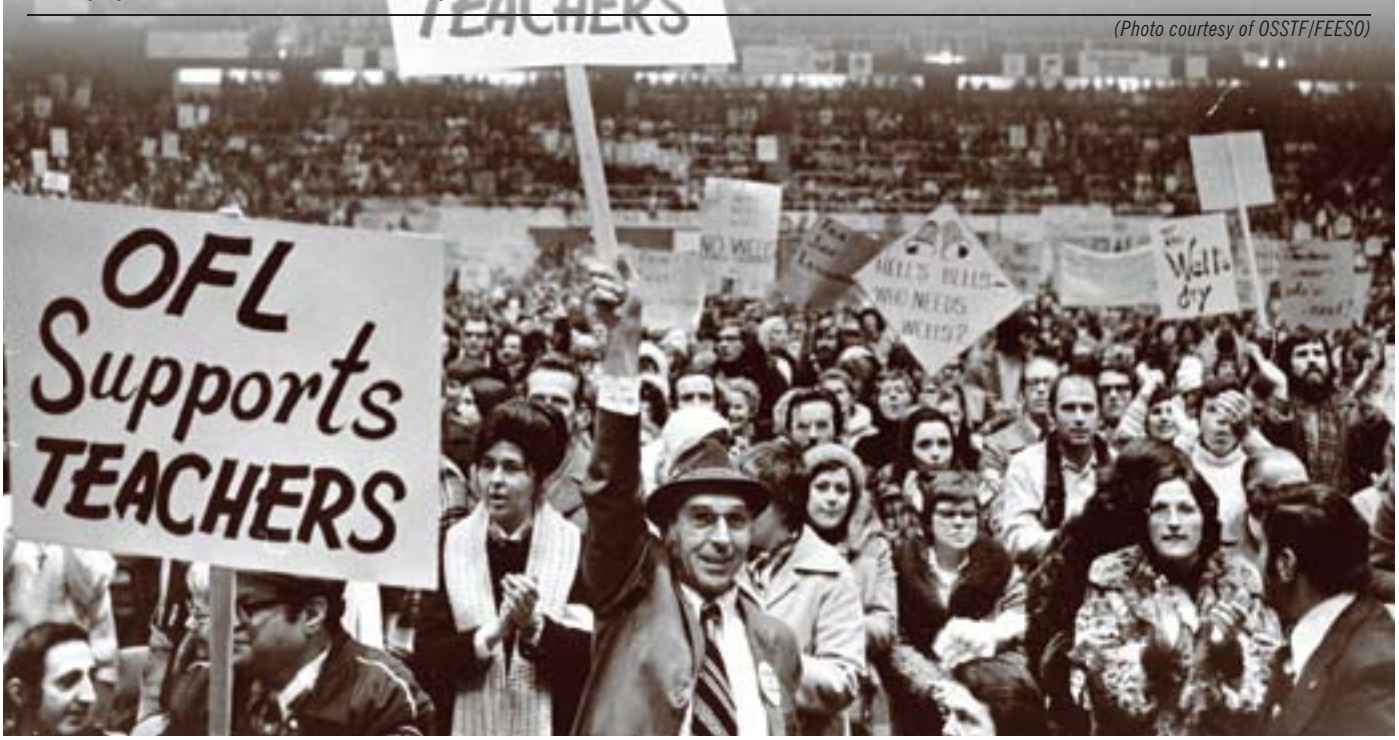
Throughout the 1970s, high-energy conferences, demonstrations and lobbies upped the pressure on the government. In 1979, the "I Care About Medicare" campaign focused public attention on doctors' extra-billing and user fees. The campaigns not only secured changes for all Ontarians, but also represented a formidable achievement in union-community organizing.

The OFL formalized this broad coalition with its founding of the Ontario Health Coalition, a new organization designed to build on the strong working relationships that had developed between health-care activists and unions. Funding and staff support flowed to one of Ontario's most active and long-lasting coalitions.

In the next decade, the OFL's vital support would enable many other coalitions and organizations to achieve progress for all Ontarians.

In 1973, 30,000 teachers rallied in Maple Leaf Gardens and then marched on Queen's Park. OSSTF and OECTA teachers had submitted mass resignations after reaching an impasse in bargaining. But the Ontario government weighed in with Bills 274 and 275, postponing the date of the resignations and mandating compulsory arbitration while excluding the right to strike. The OFL was one of the key speakers at the Queen's Park rally.

(Photo courtesy of OSSTF/FEESO)



The New Era

"Power concedes nothing unless confronted by demands. It never did, and it never will. Our history chronicles that workers gains are defined by the depth and determination of their struggle."

GORD WILSON

Fourth President Ontario Federation of Labour

1986 – 1997

1980–1990

By 1980, communities were on overload, struggling with the economic and social traumas of a serious recession. Inflation, massive unemployment, runaway plants, and public service cutbacks spawned anxiety and confrontation. Neither the federal nor Ontario governments had produced any coherent economic and industrial strategy. Instead, they continued to flog old ideas, namely restraints for those at the bottom and rewards for those at the top.

"There's no plan," charged OFL President Cliff Pilkey. "Can any government be more dogmatic than one that continues to rely on the corporate sector to create employment when plant after plant is closed down by companies whose only consideration is for their shareholders?"

"We now have the spectacle of free-enterprise Tories frantically running around shoveling taxpayers' money into company after company with no guarantees that the few jobs we have today will be around tomorrow."

Workers revived plant occupation tactics from the 1930s to secure a modicum of economic justice.

In 1980, for example, 200 UAW members at the Houdaille plant in Oshawa dug in for 13 days and won improvements to pension and severance pay. And the Windsor Bumper occupation succeeded in keeping the plant open. Although the numerous confrontations and occupations were no substitute for government planning, they did help to achieve an important change to the Employment Standards Act that the OFL had been pushing for: severance pay became obligatory, requiring one week's pay for every year of service.

OFL fills policy vacuum with *Ontario Can Work*

In June 1980, at its presentation to Premier Bill Davis and the cabinet, the OFL launched *Ontario Can Work,* an ambitious campaign with a single message: Ontario works only when its people work.

A large Queen's Park demonstration preceded the province-wide launch that targeted every unionized worksite and every worker in the province. Labour councils and the OFL partnered, organizing workshops, meetings and publicity to mobilize union members and the public.

On the day before the OFL was scheduled to present the 120,000 postcards collected at job sites across the province, the government announced the creation of a select committee of the Legislature to study the plant shutdown crisis. While the politicians went through the motions of structuring their inquiry, the OFL, its union affiliates and the NDP continued their planning and pressure. More strategies were devised to combat some of the worst consequences of government policy failures, and to head off another round of public sector wage controls.

"Ostrich economics" and the New ERA campaign

The political cop out by governments that would rather stick their heads in the sand than confront the worst economic crisis in half a century unleashed another attack on public sector workers.

In 1982, the federal government abolished bargaining for two years and imposed wage ceilings of 6% and 5% respectively. Ontario's *Inflation Restraint Act* curtailed bargaining rights for 500,000 public sector employees, extended collective agreements and removed the right to strike and the right to arbitration.

The OFL responded with its second, and more extensive campaign, the *New ERA (Economic Recovery Al-*

(OFL archives)

1986 OFL convention with the new OFL team. L-R: Sean O'Flynn, (OPSEU) – Secretary-Treasuer; Julie Davis (CUPE)- Executive Vice-President; Gord Wilson (CAW)-President. Outgoing President Cliff Pilkey is in the background.

(OFL archives)

ternative). It was the largest ever political education program undertaken by Ontario's labour movement. It put a personal face to unemployment and cuts with hearings in 26 communities. Working with labour councils, the OFL organized forums, media conferences, and one-to-one canvasses in the workplace, and also kick-started Controls and Concessions Committees

The NDP new brokers at Queen's Park

The Ontario election of May 1995 led to the end of 42 years of Progressive Conservative rule. The NDP agreed to support a Liberal minority government for two years in exchange for the implementation of specified reforms. With the NDP's new leverage, the OFL and union affiliates achieved reforms. Long-fought-for first-contract legislation, for example, ensured that fewer workers would be frozen, starved or otherwise scared off by employers' attempts to stave off a union.

Basic Education for Skills Training (BEST)

This cherished program transformed the lives of everyone it touched and in doing so demonstrated the power of education to forge profound personal and systemic change. The 5,000 workers it assisted – who, by the end of the course, could read their paychecks and collective agreements, and participate in their home life with nighttime stories to their children and grandchildren – will never forget it. Nor will the 800 workplace instructors who not only developed professional expertise as literacy instructors, but also were rewarded and enriched by the achievements of the students.

It was a massive initiative. BEST became the model for North America. In California and New York, across the U.S. and Canada, its name evoked respect and gratitude from unions, as well as literacy, poverty and immigrant organizations.

The NDP had helped to clear the path for provincial funding in 1986. After almost two years of planning and program development by labour's best and brightest educators, the program rolled out in 1988. It delivered English and French literacy classes in the workplace. Eight regionally based full-time staff trained workplace instructors to deliver basic reading, writing and essential mathematics. In what was to become the nastiest and most confrontational era in Ontario's history, the Mike Harris Tories cancelled this lifelong learning skills program. It was a devastating blow for thousands of workers who were relying on access to the BEST program.

Workers' Compensation

> *Current benefits for injured workers are an affront to the dignity of working people. In the clearest way they tell us what value the employer community places upon us. Those who are made victims of industrial accidents or disease find they are financial victims as well. It is an offence against reason and a social crime.*
>
> OFL President **Gord Wilson**

In 1985, Workers' Compensation was finally addressed with major amendments to the Act. The Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal (WCAT) was established to bring independence and finality to the appeal process and broke new ground, for example, in the areas of compensation for chronic pain disability.

The waiting period for benefits was eliminated. Increases in compensation benefits were tied to the rise in the consumer price index. The Industrial Disease Standards Panel was created, which reduced the hurdles and hoops for workers suffering from a list of specified occupational diseases. And the Office of the Worker Adviser was established, giving injured workers desperately needed access to no-cost professional representation.

But after the Liberals won a majority government in 1987, many of the achievements were reversed. Bill 162 reduced benefits and cut the lifetime pensions for workers with permanent disabilities. It also invested the management-dominated board with new powers. The OFL's *Scrap Bill 162* campaign and its task force on workers' compensation brought the injustice of government actions and the consequences for injured workers into sharp focus. It did not, however, prevent the David Peterson government from limiting debate and ramming the bill through the Legislature. The substantial improvements outlined in the OFL's campaign would eventually come, but not until 1990 with the election of the NDP government.

Health and Safety

> *Demonstrate to employers with fines and jail sentences, if necessary, that they cannot continue, with impunity, to poison, injure and kill working people. This government penalizes and imprisons criminals who murder and attack outside the workplace. Start doing the same to those that murder and assault workers' bodies in the workplace. Then we will see how fast the economic imperatives fade away and employers will figure out that they really can afford to clean up the workplace.*
>
> OFL President **Gord Wilson**

As a result of the NDP Accord, long-sought progress in health and safety was made in 1985-86. Like workers' compensation, though, the improvements were either gutted or watered down by the Liberals as soon as they won their majority government. The reversal exposed workers to renewed and heightened possibilities of death and injury, and prompted a year-long, well-organized and huge response from the OFL. The protests and publicity revealed the government's inconsistencies and incompetence, and employers' cynical influence at Queen's Park and, in the end were among the pressures that helped to defeat the Peterson government.

The NDP Accord resulted in the allocation of $1.7 million for the establishment of the Ontario Workers' Occupational Health and Safety Centre, and two government-funded and worker-controlled occupational health clinics opened in Toronto and Hamilton as pilot projects in 1989. And, at last, Ontario adopted the federal Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System requiring the identification and labeling of hazardous substances.

The Accord created a bipartite committee that had power to recommend. maximum levels of exposure to toxic substances in the workplace. Bill 208 created a bipartite agency and gave trained, certified workers the

In addition to strike support, the OFL provided boycott support . In 1984 the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union launched an organizing drive at six Eaton's stores in southern Ontario. A huge benefit at Massey Hall was organized to support the struggle to organize women in the growing retail sector.

power to protect lives by shutting down unsafe operations until hazards were removed. If employers hated both of these proposals, they were utterly enraged with the OFL's proposed amendments to include public sector and construction workers in the legislation.

OFL President Gord Wilson lambasted the Liberals on radio. TV, and in newspapers across the province, calling attention to the spectacle of a government trying to gut its own proposed legislation. An extensive battle, led by the OFL, engaged all affiliated unions in huge protests, demonstrations, public forums and wide-ranging tactics to secure the promised reforms.

The Peterson Liberals, though, were listening only to the employers. After their defeat the following year, more progress would be made.

On April 28, 1989, the billboard outside the OFL building bore the slogan: "Fight for the Living: Mourn for the Dead," and noted that 300 Ontario workers die each year, and half-a-million are injured.

A new era inside the OFL:

For women, the exhilarating decade of the 1980s was unparalleled. The full integration of women's issues into the union movement's economic and social analyses was achieved. And the first woman executive officer, Julie Davis, was elected as Executive Vice President.

When the OFL's Women's Committee organized the floor at the 1982 convention it wanted to ensure that women's perspectives were part of every debate, on every resolution. That streams of women lined up at the mikes represented a watershed moment and the culmination of seven years of intense effort to enshrine women's issues as core politics – and not just secondary, or add-on issues.

Affirmative Action, Equal Pay, Pay Equity, Employment Equity

Major OFL campaigns in the 1980s

1980: Groundbreaking conference calling for universal, publicly funded childcare. ***Bargaining Guide on Parental Rights and Day Care*** produced.

1981: OFL launches its first child care campaign: Sharing the Circle holds public forums in eight cities and leads to the formation of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

1981: ***Racism Hurts Everyone.*** The OFL launches one of the largest anti-racism campaigns ever sponsored by a non-governmental organization, with more than $100,000 dedicated to leaflets, posters and TV advertising. Eight seminars are organized by labour councils.

1982: ***Our Fair Share: Affirmative Action and Women.*** Conference produced recommendations to the 1982 convention.

1983: First Race Relations Coordinator hired to implement the second phase of the anti-racism campaign. Weekend workshops ***Confronting Workplace Racism*** launched for labour activists.

1983: The OFL became the first major labour body in North America to establish its own internal affirmative action program. Convention delegates increased the number of vice presidents on the executive council from 16 to 21, with the proviso that at least five positions be held by women.

1983: Nine cross-province public hearings that gathered testimony on discriminatory practices. Report produced: ***Making Up The Difference***

1984: Report findings presented to Tory government and used as basis for lobby of all MPPs

1984: Conference ***Community Stand on Affirmative Action*** led to another province-wide campaign

(Photos OFL archives)

The famous Morgentaler Clinic at 85 Harbord Street in Toronto. Unions and their members were at the forefront of support for women's right to choose. They often helped with clinic defence when right-wingers tried to block women from accessing abortion services.

The sisters at that convention were part of an era of exciting progress. Everything was in flux. The OFL women's committee had become a leading light in Ontario. Its members were connected to every hard-driving equality campaign in the public arena. "Call the OFL," was heard at the launch of every political endeavour: Activists in child care, abortion rights, equal pay, immigrant women's and lesbian and gay rights organizations, as well as union affiliates counted on the OFL for support, participation and leadership.

Labour movement celebrates huge wins

Bonnie Robichaud's long battle for justice ended with a decision that would forever change women's experience in the workplace.

The question: Is the employer liable for the discriminatory acts of its supervisory personnel? The answer finally came in 1987, "Yes."

"An employer is responsible for the unauthorized discriminatory acts of its employees in the course of their employment under the Canadian Human Rights Act." (*Robichaud et al. v. The Queen. 40 D.L.R. (4th) 577 Supreme Court of Canada, July 29, 1987*).

PSAC member Robichaud's exhausting seven-year fight with her employer, the Department of National Defence, finally concluded in a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada on employer responsibility for a harassment-free workplace and liability when harassment occurs. For all working women, this decision asserted a fundamental right that, even today, aids them in fighting sexual harassment and exploitation.

Pro-Choice triumphs with the Henry Morgentaler decision

In 1988, women's organizations, the OFL and affiliated unions celebrated one of the most important victories in women's history when the Supreme Court of Canada struck down Canada's abortion law. The law was declared unconstitutional, infringing on women's right to "life, liberty and security of the person."

It had been a long battle and the labour movement had been central to its successful outcome. Debates at OFL conventions featured labour leaders vying for positions at

1984: Judge Rosalie Abella's report of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment is released and coins a new phrase "Employment Equity," and became the first, and even today, the final word on the hidden and pervasive economic barriers faced by a majority of the population. Noting that "Equality in employment will not happen unless we make it happen," it called for immediate measures to counterbalance the systemic discrimination that barred millions of women, disabled people, native and racialized people from jobs, better wages and promotions.

1985: Third stage of ***Racism Hurts Everyone*** campaign is launched, with the OFL traveling across the province to address local leadership. Stewards Guide, ***Steps to Resolving Racial Conflict in the Workplace*** produced.

1985: Conference ***Organizing for Affirmative Action*** drew 400 delegates; first Pay Equity campaign pegged to the OFL model legislation is an extensive grassroot campaign to lobby all MPPs in 48 cities and towns.

1986: OFL conference, **Building the Participation of Workers of Colour within our Unions,** attracting more than 350 delegates.

1986: Julie Davis, elected as Executive Vice-President – the first women to hold executive office at the OFL.

1986 - 89: Liberals' first pay equity legislation, **Bill 105,** is horrendous and ignores women in the broader public and private sectors. OFL and Equal Pay Coalition launch ***One Million Denied Campaign*** and succeed in having the bill withdrawn and replaced with improved legislation, **Bill 154.** One million women were still excluded; it was to be phased in over six years; and it would allow wage comparisons only within (and not between) establishments. Women who worked in female-dominated workplaces such as child care and crisis centres and nursing homes would not be covered. The OFL produces its ***Pay Equity Guide to Bill 154,*** and continues campaigns to force changes.

1987: Kids Not Cash Child Care campaign in 13 cities, followed by lobbies.

1989: OFL awarded the provincial Achievement in Employment Equity Award.

1989: OFL Video: ***No Foot In the Door*** debuts at convention, with its companion Educators Kit.

1990: OFL launches major Employment Equity campaign and is joined by the Alliance for Employment Equity and Disabled People for Employment Equity to demand legislation.

Mulroney and the other proponents of the trade deal do not view free trade as an end. They see it as a means to the end: the end of forced social responsibility in the economy and the business world, the end of people being able to stand up collectively for their rights and to have someone in the workplace or the legislatures listen to them, the end of help for the aged and the disabled and the end of a direct sense of what it is to be a Canadian. **Gord Wilson** speech to the 1987 OFL convention.

the mikes to defend women's right to abortion and control of their own bodies. The strong resolutions passed at OFL and other union conventions in defence of free-standing abortion clinics aided in the pressure for change.

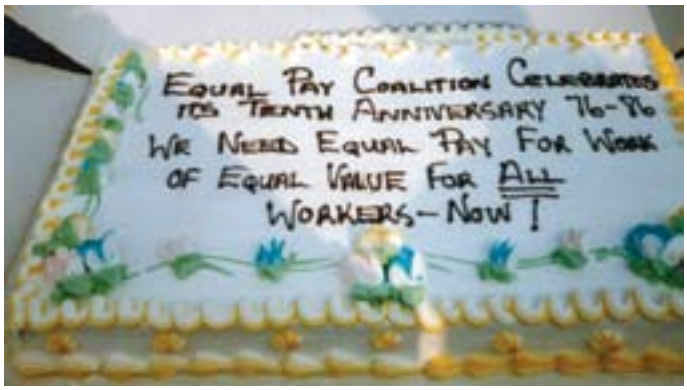
President Cliff Pilkey received an anonymous package containing 30 pieces of silver in an attempt to intimidate and silence him. Instead, labour support for the Morgentaler Clinic and for the pro-choice movement grew.

Today, there is no law in Canada that criminalizes abortion although ongoing cuts continue to threaten access to all aspect of women's reproductive health care.

Removing the obstacles to employment equality

The publicity and pressures from the OFL's Affirmative Action, Equal Pay, Pay Equity, and Employment Equity campaigns coalesced to spark public comprehension that there were barriers to employment for the majority of the population; that discrimination thwarted and barred access to jobs, promotions, and good pay rates.

The NDP Accord with the Peterson Liberals in 1985 had helped to intensify the pressure for change. In meetings with government and in the media President Gord Wilson lashed out at the government for its inaction on pay equity and employment equity: "Your efforts on social legislation in this province can best be characterized as ranging from inertia to immobility, with occasional high peaks of paralysis. Working people get no help."



In partnership with the Equal Pay Coalition, the OFL campaigned, lobbied and mobilized for equal pay for work of equal value and for pay equity. Bill 105, the Liberals' first pay-equity legislation, was horrendous and ignored women in the broader public and private sectors. The OFL and Equal Pay Coalition responded with the *One Million Denied Campaign* and succeeded in having the bill withdrawn and replaced with improved legislation. When in 1988, the *Pay Equity Act* was proclaimed, it was the most encompassing pay equity legislation in North America. But it still left many women out in the cold and only allowed wage comparisons within (and not between) establishments. Women who worked in female-dominated workplaces such as child care and crisis centres and nursing homes were not covered.

Demanding further improvements to the Act, the OFL and Equal Pay Coalition drove the issue right smack into the middle of the 1990 election campaign.

> *"This is the second election in which the Liberals have misled voters in promising equal pay for work of equal value for all women in Ontario.*
>
> *The bitter irony here is that the women who have so far been denied pay equity are the ones who desperately need the wage increases – women in female-dominated workplaces like nursing homes, daycare centres and the garment industry."*
>
> Equal Pay Coalition Chair **Mary Cornish,**
> Aug. 20, 1990 televised debate

Their efforts paid off with more progress that would come, but not from the Liberals who were defeated less than two months later, in October 1990.

The Free Trade Agreement

From the first mention of Free Trade, the OFL was out the door and in high campaign mode. Recognizing how profoundly the agreement could change everything about Canada, it set up urgent meetings with labour and community leaders and produced a spate of briefs, booklets and documents.

Working with affiliates and local labour councils, the OFL held public forums across Ontario.

The OFL's efforts, coupled with aggressive media outreach and education, were an enormous contribution that enabled Ontarians to more intelligently discuss the most controversial agreement of its kind in Canadian history. Its analyses were relied on and utilized by hundreds of organizations that were grappling with the issue.

One of the key obstacles was Liberal Premier Peterson who was still equivocating on Ontario's opposition to the FTA. After a series of meetings with OFL President Wilson and labour representatives, the province finally declared its opposition to the trade deal.

The OFL's actions countered Prime Minister Brian Mulroney's assurances that the trade deal would not compromise social programs; that workers would either retain their jobs or have access to innovative and generous retraining and adjustment programs; and that all Canadians would enjoy an increase in their standard of living.

The egregious lies were exposed almost immediately as massive economic dislocation, attacks on social services and Canadian sovereignty, and the downgrading of citizens to "clients" and "consumers" rocked Canada. Working people and the public increasingly became pawns of emboldened and empowered employers and corporations.

As Ontario elected its first NDP government in 1990, the turbulent backdrops of free trade and a recession were in full swing.

Even before Tory Prime Minister Brian Mulroney signed off on the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the U.S. in January, 1988, the OFL was out the door and in high campaign mode. Warning of massive economic dislocation, attacks on social services and Canadian sovereignty, the OFL was a national leader in economic analyses and actions.

(OFL archives)

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR 50th Anniversary 1957-2007 50 Years of SOLIDARITY

One step forward. Two steps back.

"The struggle for social progress is never over. For more than 100 years, we have fought for equality and a different vision of society. It has always been this way; it will always be this way. It is who we are."

WAYNE SAMUELSON

Fifth President Ontario Federation of Labour

1997 – Present

1990-2000

"So far, the hardest part of my new job has been trying to explain to the Financial Post how a cabinet minister can have a husband who is out on strike."

Revenue Minister **Shelley Wark-Martyn**

In October 1990, the Ontario NDP won 74 seats and the provincial election. The new government was sworn in just as the North American economy was sliding into the deepest recession since the 1930s. Job losses and plant closures as a result of the Free Trade Agreement were underway.

Its Throne Speech and first budget were bold declarations of change that rocked Bay Street. In an about-face from a century of federal and Ontario government policies prizing corporate interests, Finance Minister Floyd Laughren announced the government would target the recession, rather than the deficit; that it would increase social spending as a lever to stimulate job creation, the economy, and productivity.

The howls of protest and rage from the banks, insurance companies, industrial movers and shakers and business moguls were loud and well-financed. Plant shutdowns and investment boycotts were threatened. Front groups with populist sounding names like the *More Jobs Coalition, Project Economic Growth and Ontarians for Responsible Government* were created.

Nevertheless, significant reforms rolled out of Queen's Park, as well as unprecedented and broad consultations with the labour movement.

Reforms and progress

The OFL and union affiliates' lobbying, submissions and campaigns achieved reforms: amendments to the *Employment Standards Act* included the extension of pregnancy leave to 17 weeks and introduced parental leave: the *Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act* finally gave government workers the important and long-fought-for right to strike. Significant progress was made in the areas of pay and employment equity.

An *Agricultural Labour Relations Act* enabled workers to unionize. The UFCW Canada moved quickly to begin organizing Ontario agricultural workers.

The government yanked Ontario out of a court battle over hospital workers' pension funds. The Ontario Hospital Association (OHA), backed by the Liberals, wanted a one-year vacation from contributions. The NDP reminded Ontarians that plan money was deferred wages and rightfully belonged to the workers who had contributed to the fund and, further, that fund surpluses were there to cover workers' benefits.

Bill 40 and the Ontario *Labour Relations Act*

The always-outdated and unbalanced OLRA sought to control labour relations at the expense of workers and their unions. When Bill 40 was finally introduced, it contained wide-ranging reforms to the *Act*. Negotiating first collective agreements was made simpler; minimum collective agreement requirements were established; more effective grievance and arbitration processes were put in place; and, most important, the legislation contained anti-scab provisions and restrictions on strikebreakers.

The business community, its front groups and other right-wing organizations marshaled their forces and finances. The OFL's campaigns to counter their fear-mongering and condemnation included a 15-city speaking tour, radio ads and publicity campaigns that included fans at Blue Jays baseball games.

The NDP withstood the heat. On Nov. 5, 1992, Ontario had its first labour law overhaul in 15 years. Finally, after decades of maximum effort and pressure, the OFL and unions had won anti-scab legislation.

But there was a lack of progress and reversals on other key issues. Premier Bob Rae buckled on the introduction of public auto insurance, ignored union opposition to Sunday shopping, and failed to pass amendments to the *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act* to give part timers in faculty and support staff the right to organize. But it was the imposition of Bill 48, the Social Contract, and its the repudiation of basic tenets of trade unionism, that sparked a political firestorm.

Bill 48: The Social Contract

In its response to the mounting deficit and economic deterioration, the NDP introduced social contract legislation that opened collective bargaining agreements and suspended the right to strike for nearly a million public sector workers. Targeting a $6 billion spending cut

Excerpt OFL FOCUS, Nov. 30, 1994

ONTARIO TORIES VOW TO BURN LABOUR LAW REFORM

Mike Harris' Ontario Progressive Conservatives ended their recent convention vowing to burn Ontario's reformed labour legislation.

"I now own Bill 40," Harris shouted to the crowd. The Tory convention hall rang with cheers and laughter as the document was carried in to the theme song of the film *Chariots of Fire.* Harris told the crowd of 1,600 that he would hold an auction, between now and election day, with the successful bidder joining him at Queen's Park to actually light the match when they burn and rip up this Bill – putting it where it belongs, six feet underground.

The Simcoe West Riding Association immediately bid $5,000 for the privilege.

over three years, it imposed a wage freeze on those who earned more than $30,000 per year, and gave powers to employers to garner savings through takeaways, cuts and staffing reductions.

The legislation undermined the principle of contract inviolability that was a foundation of collective bargaining.

Bill 48 produced an uproar in the labour movement. Never, since its founding in 1957, had the "House of Labour" gone through a period of such great strife and division. The 1993 OFL convention was split with mostly public sector unions on one side, and mostly private sector unions on the other.

In a low-water mark in the history of Ontario labour's relationship with the NDP, the convention voted to withhold support from the party, to work to defeat government members who supported Bill 48, and to shift political action resources away from the Ontario NDP towards progressive coalitions until the law was repealed.

Before the vote was held, delegates from a number of affiliates walked out to caucus among themselves. They issued their own joint statement (on pink paper) declaring that the policy did not speak for them: that they would work with public sector unions for the repeal of Bill 48, but would not campaign against incumbent MPPs and would work to re-elect the NDP government.

In the June 1995 election, the NDP was relegated to third place. The victor was the Progressive Conservative Party led by Mike Harris. Facing a hostile majority government, OFL delegates voted to reverse the 1993 decision and renewed the Federation's support for its longstanding ally.

The Mike Harris Progressive Conservative Party years in Queen's Park

> *This government constantly displays hostility, contempt, and love of force and appears to hate the vast majority of the people. It seems more like an occupying army than a government."*
>
> **OFL President** Wayne Samuelson

In June 1995, Mike Harris and his Conservative government were elected to office. The Conservatives had campaigned on their Common Sense Revolution.

From the outset it was clear that the Premier and his government preferred confrontation to dialogue. Early on, the Harris government created a Canadian tragedy when it unleashed the OPP on Ipperwash land claims demonstrators. The subsequent killing of Stoney Point Ojibway band member Anthony O'Brien "Dudley" George on Sept. 7, 1995, became an internationally publicized event. He was the only Aboriginal person killed by a police officer in a land claims dispute in Canada in the twentieth century. For more than 10 years, Dudley's brother, Sam George, led the fight for justice, and for a public inquiry.

Ipperwash and the killing of Dudley George:
One of the top priorities for the OFL was lending its support and efforts to the demand for a public inquiry into the killing of Dudley George in the Ipperwash land claims' dispute. This fundraiser, at Osgood Hall, was one of many to ensure the continuation of the legal fight for justice, and for a public inquiry.

L-R: Irene Harris, Sam George, Wayne Samuelson, Ethel Birkett-LaValley at Osgoode Hall fundraiser.

(Photos, OFL archives)

The hostile and combative style of the Tories set the tone for the era. The Harris years gave rise to unparalleled setbacks but also to widespread resistance. New and significant alliances were marked by cooperation between the labour movement, grassroots organizations, religious organizations and whole communities as they struggled to retain crucial services.

Every progressive measure the NDP government had introduced was demolished.

To find at least $4 billion for the promised 30% income tax cut for the most well-to-do, the government dramatically cut public services. The income tax cut represented the largest transfer of wealth in the history of the province.

Labour legislation stood at the very top of the Tory hit list. Bill 7 was the most omprehensive anti-union legislation in the country. It made certification much more difficult, and decertification much easier. It removed the ban on strikebreakers and eliminated automatic access to first-contract arbitration. Bill 91, the law enabling farm workers to organize, was repealed.

Funding for health care, education and social service sectors was slashed. Workers providing these crucial services were vilified by the provincial government; their contributions dismissed. The *Employment Equity Act* was scrapped; so was the *Advocacy Act,* which provided rights' advice and assigned advocates to represent elderly and disabled people; Funding was cut for battered women's shelters, child care centres and children's aid societies.

Welfare rates were cut by 21.6% for more than one million women, men and their children, as was the NDP's training program designed to get people who had been out of work for a long time back into the workforce. Work-for-welfare legislation created a new class of worker, the conscripted worker, and denied them the right to unionize.

Sept 25, 1998: Nelson Mandela speaks to 40,000 children and adults at the Skydome. Premier Mike Harris' welcoming speech drew boos and could barely be heard over the "cacophony of jeers and heckles." The Toronto Star noted that "Even the mention of the Premier's name earlier in the ceremonies, when the attending dignitaries were being announced, caused howls of outrage."

(Ken Fraught/Toronto Star Sept. 25, 1998)

Creating and intensifying crises

> *"The legislation and undoing of everything we've built is bad enough. But Mike Harris and the Tories like to stick your nose in it; they seem to take personal glee in denigration."*
>
> – OFL President **Wayne Samuelson**

Having the power to implement their cuts was not enough for the Tories. They needed to verbally attack public servants and public services as well.

When thousands of health-care workers lost their jobs, hospitals closed and health care services crumbled, Harris compared nurses to obsolete hula hoops.

When the Tories imposed the welfare cuts, the *Toronto Star* asked if the new welfare rates would give parents enough money to feed their children. "I don't know," Harris replied. "But I don't think it's the goal of welfare to say to a parent 'Here, society will feed your kids for 18 years or 21 years.' "

Social Services Minister David Tsubouchi suggested poor people haggle with shopkeepers over the price of food and stock up on tuna when it went on sale for 69 cents a tin. He told single parents to leave their children with neighbours if they could not afford child care.

Education minister calls on bureaucrats to "invent a crisis" in education

Who can ever forget new Education Minister John Snobelen's desire to "invent a crisis" in the education system? Armed with charts, the newest corporate buzz words and zealous arrogance, Snobelen paced to and fro as he unveiled his plan to paint Ontario's schools as being in much worse shape than they were.

The millionaire businessman, with no experience in

From the Tory Free Fall Fair, that traveled to seven communities

(OFL archives)

July 20, 1995, the day before the first Tory Economic Statement, the Canadian Union of Public Employees shut down 80 child care centres to protest the already announced spending cuts to subsidies and spaces.

Throughout the Harris years, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, supported by the OFL and its affiliates, organized demonstrations, protests and an array of actions to push the need for not-for-profit, publicly funded, universally accessible, and high quality services.

education, rhapsodized about firms like Reebok and Disney. What was needed, he told the senior bureaucrats at the meeting, was a crisis in education; manufacturing one would prepare the public for a massive overhaul of the system.

The hour-long meeting was captured on videotape and leaked to the media. The public was horrified. So were teachers. But an undaunted Snobelen pressed on. In speeches and interviews he began calling the system "broken," in need of rebuilding. Teachers were to be service providers, students were clients and parents were customers in the new Ontario.

Never in the province's history, had a minister responsible for such a critical portfolio made it his mission to destroy it. He and his successors cut funding, consolidated school boards, took principals out of the teachers' unions, imposed standardized testing, teacher testing and mandatory extracurricular activities.

Queen's Park becomes a guarded palace

On Sept. 25, 1995, the Throne Speech marked the opening of the 36th Ontario Legislature.

> *"The ceremonial phrase is 'the opening of the Legislature' but this is more like its closing. It's like a guarded palace rather than a house of public and legislative debate."*
>
> – OFL President **Gord Wilson**

As the Progressive Conservatives let loose plans that contained approximately $9 billion of cuts, 7,000 people protested outside.

Doors to the Legislature were chained shut. Police in full riot gear with pepper spray, batons, shields and horses went into action as some protestors tried to gain entry. It was the most raucous opening of the Legislature that had ever taken place and set the tone for a bitter and unforgettable era.

"Tories hell-bent to dismantle every aspect of Ontario life"

– OFL President **Gord Wilson**

The efforts of the OFL, affiliated unions and labour councils to safeguard public services, social programs, and the gains of generations of workers produced the most massive and prolonged fightback in the OFL's history.

In cooperation with labour councils, community groups and other unions, the Federation dedicated its resources, staff and efforts to launch

OPSEU's five-week strike in 1996, involved more than 65,000 Ontario Public Service members on 2,000 picket lines. It not only won improvements in contracting out language, but also sent an all-important signal to the Tories: The labour movement would take the measures needed to defend itself against government attacks on public services, workers and their unions.

An OPSEU Queen's Park demonstration held March 18, 1996, the opening day of the provincial legislature, drew thousands of strikers and supporters. It also sparked violence from Ontario Provincial Police (OPP): Workers were clubbed and injured.

OFL President Gord Wilson shot off an angry and public letter to the OPP demanding an explanation of the rampage against 30 peaceful picketers. "You might be well advised to review your file tape of the Fleck strike in the 1970s if you wish to understand the results of the last time the OPP attempted to beat workers into submission on behalf of their employer."

That same week, Wilson and OPSEU led 5,000 people through the streets of Toronto to protest the violence created by the OPP and the government. The protesters maintained silence as they walked slowly to the beat of drums in the "Funeral March for Democracy."

The Days of Action kicked off in the bitter cold in London on Dec. 11, 1995 and moved to Hamilton (Feb. 23 & 24, 1996); Waterloo Region (April 19, 1996); Peterborough (June 24, 1996); Toronto (Oct. 25 & 26, 1996); Sudbury (March 21 & 22, 1997); Thunder Bay (April 28, 1997); North Bay (Sept. 26 & 27, 1997); Windsor (Oct. 17, 1997); St. Catharines (May 1, 1998); Kingston (June 8, 1998); and Ottawa (Oct. 17, 1998).

The massive protests, co-sponsored with community organizations, drew more than a million people in opposition to the Mike Harris Tories' bitter policies and cuts. Union members also engaged in cross-picketing of workplaces, shutting down operations, and sending a message to the business community that there would be a high price to pay for its ongoing support for government cuts.

(OFL archives)

Thousands of women turned out for the 1997 International Women's Day march in Toronto to express their outrage at Mike Harris and his government's cuts to vital services and programs. Tory policies were tearing down decades of progress. Women's organizations condemned his efforts as "a forced march back to an era when women had few rights and little respect. "

(Ron Bull/Toronto Star, March 8, 1997)

Days of Action protests in London, Hamilton, Waterloo region, Peterborough, Toronto, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, North Bay, Windsor, St. Catherines, Kingston and Ottawa. These mobilizations, which took place from 1995 to the fall of 1998 brought out more than a million people and inspired the formation of new organizations.

As legislation rolled out of Queen's Park, resistance grew. Omnibus Bill 26, the *Savings and Restructuring Act,* was 2,000 page long. It effected 44 separate statutes, created three new Acts, repealed two others and set the stage for the next assaults on health care, education, and public services. It gave the Minister of Municipal Affairs powers to abolish local governments and to force mergers and amalgamations of municipalities.

The Tories' Health Services Restructuring Commission travelled the province shutting down scores of hospitals and laying off thousands of desperately needed health care workers. Hospital budgets were cut by hundreds of millions of dollars. The OFL and the Ontario Health Coalition fought back with demonstrations and protests at Queen's Park and across Ontario.

Forums on public health care drew thousands of participants to devise strategies to deal with the terrible effects of hospital closures, mergers, staff and service cuts, and the tragic effects of shortened lengths of stay that sent patients home quicker and sicker.

As the campaign travelled, it heard about new crises: the shortage of hospital beds, ambulances turned away from overcrowded emergency rooms, the rationing of home care, the downloading of patients into long-term-care facilities, and the elimination of the regulated standard of 2.25 hours of daily nursing and personal care per resident. There was less access to services and more out-of-pocket expenses.

Mental health services were slashed. The almost 20% cut to psychiatric hospital beds triggered a massive outpouring of needy people on to city streets where they became the new homeless.

As services were cut in the public sector, the private sector moved in to provide for a fee what was once available in the public sphere.

Demonstrations, campaigns, coalition building, publicity initiatives, occupations, legal challenges and strikes were part of Ontario's landscape as the OFL, its members and labour councils sought to fight back

against impossible odds.

The OFL's *Ontario Speaks Out* town hall meetings and *Growing Gap* workshops swept across the province heightening the profile of the "new" jobs – part-time, temporary, lower paid – and the growing disparities between rich and poor.

A Common Front was formed to target Bill 136, *The Public Sector Transition Stability Act* and to organize a huge demonstration to support teachers in their protests against Bill 160. The 126,000 teachers of Ontario, in an unprecedented move, staged a two-week walkout to protest Bill 160. The government's attempt to have the court declare the action illegal failed. Justice MacPherson found it was a "political protest" and legal.

The battle to protect and enhance Workers' Compensation and Occupational Health and Safety

The Tories moved swiftly with their assault on fundamental protections for workers, cutting health and safety inspectors, closing down labs and a committee that was about to issue regulations on workplace toxins. The Workplace Health and Safety Agency and its bi-partite structure was abolished and the responsibility for prevention shunted over to the WCB.

As the government floated its ideas to slash coverage and reduce benefits for workers injured on the job, the OFL's *"No More Baloney"* province-wide demonstrations revealed for the public and media the tragic consequences if the Tories were successful in reducing pensions, benefits

More than 200 sick and injured workers, widows and families, and union members packed the gallery at Queen's Park as part of the OFL's *A JOB TO DIE FOR* campaign. Not just workers, but also many Sarnia-Lambton family members became ill and died from asbestos-related cancers. A 14-year old boy whose biggest mistake was hugging his father every day when he came home from work died from exposure to asbestos. The wives of some of the workers contracted lung cancer from years of washing their husbands' clothes. This photo was taken inside the Legislature gallery as participants were being evicted. They were demanding compensation for occupational diseases. They had only one message to the Harris government: "Shame."

(CP/Toronto Star/Dave Cooper)

and benefit duration for current and future injured workers. The OFL and labour councils organized media conferences, rallies and workshops to fight the Bill 99 amendments.

It's Your Life: Don't Leave Work Without It. The joint Workers' Compensation and Health and Safety workshops travelled the province and provided unionists and activists with needed information on how to protect union members at the bargaining table, on the job and in their local communities. The campaign ratcheted up the warnings that if government plans became reality, they would erode the right to refuse unsafe work; empower employers to determine the validity of a worker's WCB claim; reduce workplace inspections; eliminate from compensation some injuries and diseases that are currently eligible, and reduce the power of joint health and safety committees.

A Job to Die For, the OFL's blockbuster occupational disease campaign travelled across Ontario to publicize the toxic and deadly substances workers were exposed to on a daily basis. The first partnership with the Communications, Energy and Paperworks Union in Sarnia and the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers developed into a dramatic and high-profile campaign. As other unions joined, the collective efforts not only succeeded in blocking the government from doing more damage, but also eventually won life-saving protections.

The campaign kicked off in Sarnia's "Chemical Valley," and focused on the thousands of deaths that were the result of exposure to dangerous workplace toxins. As it moved across the province, it gave voice to widows, adult children of workers who had died, and sick workers who had been silenced for years. Their stories, testimonies and courage helped to achieve reductions in exposure limits to terrible toxins, known as "The Dirty Dozen," and the beginning of tougher enforcement.

Today, every worker is the beneficiary of the far-reaching achievements of *A Job to Die For.* It forced the system to change the way it deals with occupational disease claims It eliminated time limits for claims. It won its objective of specialized training for adjudicators. And, it resulted in the establishment of the Occupational Disease Advisory Panel. These enormous successes and institutional changes were all forged from a campaign that has benefited millions of workers, their families and communities in which they live.

Pay Equity: the battle against sexist and discriminatory wage rates

The OFL and Equal Pay Coalition's many campaigns during the NDP years had resulted in amendments to the Pay Equity Act to provide a "proxy method" of comparison, which extended the legislation to cover an additional 100,000 workers in mostly female workplaces. Recognizing the inability of community-based programs such as child care and women's shelters to fund pay equity adjustments, the NDP introduced government funding of the proxy pay equity adjustments.

In July 1995, the Progressive Conservatives repealed proxy pay equity plans and pay equity funding for those plans. It was an outrageous action that threatened women's wage rates and their hard-fought gains. The Service Employees International Union launched a successful Charter of Rights and Freedoms challenge. An Ontario Superior Court Justice found that the Bill 26 sections on pay equity, repealing the proxy pay equity plans and capping the pay equity adjustments, was unconstitutional and discriminated against women working in the public sector in predominantly female workplaces. After several years of struggle, the government paid out the retroactive adjustments but then refused to fund any further adjustments.

Five unions – the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Ontario Nurses' Association, Ontario Public Service Employees Union, Service Employees International Union and the United Steelworkers – launched another Charter challenge to overturn the government's decision. In 2003, a landmark pay equity settlement was announced amounting to $414 million and affecting 100,000 women in predominantly female, public sector workplaces. The settlement – although a victory – did not cover the full cost of proxy pay eqity adjustments.

Campaigning against Harris cuts to the apprenticeship system

The Harris Conservatives also tried to apply their slash and burn mentality to Ontario's apprenticeship system. But the OFL's huge fightback campaign prevented them from demolishing the decades-old Trades Qualification and Apprenticeship Act and, with it, important protections for both apprentices and the public. The training in a "whole"

trade is a critical protection for the public to ensure that buildings and roads are built by competent trades people.

The OFL's apprenticeship committee leapt into action utilizing every avenue available to it to block the removal of apprentices' right to be paid while learning and performing the trade, and to be trained in a whole trade. It also fought the Tories' attempt to remove the requirement for set ratios of apprentices to journeypersons.

The outcome was a partial, but extremely significant, victory. The Tories were forced to retain the longstanding *Trades Qualification Apprenticeship Act* for the building trades unions. But industrial and public sector apprentices were placed under the new *Apprenticeship Certification Act*. Today, the efforts of the OFL apprenticeship committee and its member unions are focused on the top priority of putting "whole" trades back together again, under the *Trades Qualification Apprenticeship Act*.

The end of the decade: Some things never change

As Ontario entered the new millennium, it was a much-changed province. Basic infrastructure had been eviscerated. Government moves to privatize public services flourished. As services were cut in the public sector, the private sector operation of what once were public services grew, and so did the new fees and costs for them. For the ordinary person, work, not family or community, became the central focus of life, requiring more time and effort for less pay and fewer benefits. It was a changed work world, one that represented the aims of the corporate and business world. Lower-paying jobs proliferated. So did temporary and part-time work. New generations of workers were holding down three or more low-paid jobs just to survive. But for those at the top, the beneficiaries of the Tories' realignment, there was more wealth, more leisure and more access to the good life.

Many things changed during the Mike Harris years, but some things remained the same: Labour's century-old tradition of fighting for social progress and equality endured. "Governments come and go," noted OFL President Wayne Samuelson, "but we remain unchanged in our central focus. We will always fight for the kind of progress and improvements that benefit the vast majority. Great harm has been done by the Harris government. Undoing it is our primary responsibility."

Bill 160 demonstration at Queen's Park.

(Photo courtesy of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario)

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR 50th Anniversary 1957-2007 50 Years of SOLIDARITY

Tomorrow

If the trade union movement only fought for what was fashionable and easy, we would have fought for very little over the last 100 years.

2000-2007

Good Jobs. Public Services. Rights.

Ipperwash and the killing of Dudley George was not the only Canadian tragedy during the Progressive Conservative term of government. The consolidation of eight years of Tory policies and cuts produced others.

In Walkerton, seven people died and more than 2,000 were sent to hospital when the town's water supply became contaminated with E.coli bacteria. On June 29, 2001, Premier Mike Harris faced a judicial interrogation at the inquiry into the tragedy. He was challenged on the role his government's program of budget-cutting, privatization and deregulation played. The Environment Ministry's budget had been cut almost in half, along with more than 700 jobs. An OPSEU member who was a dietary services worker at the South Grey Bruce Health Centre, was one of seven who died. Fighting under the slogan, "Remember Walkerton: Rebuild our Public Services," 45,000 government workers went on strike for 54 days in 2002.

The severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak that began in March 2003 caused 44 deaths in Toronto, including two registered nurses and a doctor. More than half of the additional 247 illnesses were health care workers: nurses, physicians, respiratory therapists, cleaners and others. Public health was so under resourced that contacting everyone who had been exposed became an enormous problem. Due to the ongoing shortage of health care workers, the system did not have the human resource capacity to deal with serious crises.

The many reasons to defeat Stephen Harper's Conservative government

The Jan. 24, 2006 federal election resulted in a minority government for Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party of Canada. With core support in the Alberta oil industry, the corporate sector and right-wing orga-

(Photo courtesy John MacIennan)

nizations, the new government moved swiftly to implement a national vision at odds with the one held by most Canadians.

Women's equality has become a new front line as the Harper government seeks to demolish decades of hard-fought progress. Representing the ideology of the conservative and religious right, the Conservatives have not only savaged funding to the federal Status of Women department, but also removed the word "equality" from its mandate. Women's organizations are no longer eligible for funding for advocacy, government lobbying or research projects as part of the new terms and conditions.

The most significant legal victories that women have won have been launched through the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL), and Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF). Decades of successful Charter of Rights and Freedoms challenges have resulted in fundamental equality gains. Same-sex spousal benefit entitlement and other landmark cases have been won through these organizations.

NAWL was forced to close its office, cease consultations and advocacy on women's legal issues, and LEAF has been severely hampered.

On the child care front, the Harper government has levelled the biggest attack in Canadian history with a $1 billion dollar cut to federal-provincial child care agreements.

The Conservative government's heavily militarized agenda (especially in Afghanistan) has compromised Canada's international peacekeeping reputation. New corporate and personal tax cuts have already destablilzed public services and programs.

Upon election, the government repudiated support for the Kyoto Protocol on climate change and broke its commitment to First Nations by scrapping the Kelowna Accord. Ignoring the crumbling infrastructure of Canada's cities, Harper has blocked a 1% transfer of GST monies; instead, he has announced a 1% cut to that tax.

With an anticipated election not far off, the defeat of Stephen Harper's Conservatives becomes a top priority for the labour movement.

Promises broken: making our own change

On Oct. 2, 2003, Dalton McGuinty Liberals, with their slogan and platform of "Choose Change," became the new majority provincial government. Numerous promises made during the campaign were either abandoned or reversed after the government took power, including the promise to rebuild public services and repair eight years of Tory damage. The government's backtracking and inaction triggered the OFL's *Keep Your Promises, Dalton* campaigns and rallies. The Liberals have retained many of the policies and underpinnings of the Progressive Conservatives, and in some cases, have gone beyond them.

The numerous OFL initiatives underway reflect the efforts of the labour movement to secure economic and social justice, as well as action on the still-outstanding commitments of the McGuinty Liberals.

GOOD JOBS

"Premier Dalton McGuinty says that his government has created jobs. My neighbour, in fact, has three of them. That's absolutely the wrong answer."

– OFL President **Wayne Samuelson.**

The Liberal inaction on the staggering job loss in the manufacturing and resource sectors has fuelled a worsening crisis that has left towns and cities to fend for themselves.

The permanent eradication of more than 175,000 jobs in the past two years threatens Ontario's economic base. Nearly half of Canada's manufacturing employment is in Ontario; in fact, the province has the second-highest number of manufacturing employees of any jurisdiction in North America. As full-time, higher-paid, unionized manufacturing jobs disappear, low-paid, largely precarious jobs proliferate.

The lack of attention and action on this fundamental structural issue led the OFL to create its *Jobs Worth*

The United Steelworkers' occupation of the Masonite International plant in Mississauga was one of many protests and job actions to draw attention to massive job losses that have hit the manufacturing sector. The OFL's *Jobs Worth Fighting For* campaign is still underway.

(OFL archives)

Fighting For campaign. The Federation and affiliates such as the United Steelworkers, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada have managed to achieve a high profile for these issues and, importantly, pressure on the Liberals to relent on their laissez-faire, or "leave it to the market" approach.

More than 15 plant occupations and walkouts, demonstrations, and major media campaigns have focused on the need for action from the Ontario and federal governments. In particular, the campaign urges changes in severance legislation, job legislation patterned after British Columbia, the establishment of an Ontario Labour Market Board, mass layoff agreements, pension protection, and legislation aimed at creating good paying manufacturing jobs.

Jobs Worth Fighting For will continue to make both provincial and national news as it seeks to engage governments in preserving Ontario's manufacturing heartland and the quality of life for workers and communities.

PUBLIC SERVICES

Health Care: *Understaffed and Under Pressure* hits the headlines

Like the OFL's 1964 booklet on poverty, the 2005 publication *Understaffed and Under Pressure: a reality check by Ontario health care workers* almost qualifies as a best seller. It has been read by thousands and featured on numerous TV shows and in the print media.

The report, the result of meetings with hundreds of health care workers in 15 cities, exposes the consequences of severe understaffing and underfunding in mental health, emergency services, public health, home care, hospitals and long-term-care facilities.

So far, the media have focused on the disturbing

OFL officers Wayne Samuelson, Irene Harris and Terry Downey lead 2005 convention delegates in a march and demonstration against privatization of the health care system.

(OFL archives)

Understaffed and under pressure...

Right now, workers in emergency services, hospitals, nursing homes, homes for the aged, retirement homes, public health units, mental health, and home care can't deliver quality care. **There are just not enough of them left to do it.**

practices in long-term-care facilities that force elderly residents to sit in urine-soaked diapers until the diaper is three quarters full.

During the recent provincial election campaign, the OFL worked with all parties to press for a commitment to action. It has released a legal opinion challenging current practice in long-term-care facilities and is preparing to fight the government on numerous other fronts. The campaign highlights the urgent need for 3.5 hours per day of nursing and personal care and the provision of adequate standards for the province's most vulnerable citizens.

Underfunding, understaffing and escalating privatization

The Liberal government has not only retained many of the policies and characteristics of the Tories' health care system, in too many ways it has gone beyond them. Warning that provincial restructuring initiatives have always brought with them cuts to staffing, funding – especially for hospital-based services – and the removal of services from the public system to private fee-based access, the OFL has campaigned on numerous issues and kept up the pressure for a quality, single-tier, public health care system.

In addition to its many public initiatives, the OFL provides training for hospital workers through its two-day Fiscal Advisory Committee workshops. Hundreds of workers in nine cities have so far benefited from intensive budget and policy instruction, designed to enable hospital workers to get access

to basic information that is their right under the *Public Hospitals Act*.

The OFL and its affiliates also work closely with the Ontario Health Coalition that has been at the forefront of health care campaigns and has led the fight on Public-Private-Partnerships (P3s) and against privatization.

Education: OFL fights for policy changes and action

The Mike Harris years of damage to the public education system created such turmoil and chaos that, even now, the system has not fully recovered. Grade 13 was removed from the secondary school system, the curriculum compressed, and, in some cases, programs were transferred to the user-fee based, post-secondary sector. Design and technology classes in the public system were severely cut, and increasingly, students must pay for basic trades training they would have otherwise received in public school. Teachers' workloads and class sizes were removed from the realm of collective bargaining and placed under the authority of Queen's Park. School curriculum was developed and imposed by the government.

While the McGuinty Liberals have increased funding for education, it has not been enough to totally repair the damage; important policy changes have also not materialized.

As a result, significant fundraising, for basics such as books, supplies and school improvement is occurring in communities across Ontario. Private donations in affluent areas have enabled those schools to deliver more diverse curricula and after-school programs while other schools continue to struggle.

Similar to the health care sector, some of the worst elements of the Harris government policies have been retained. In addition to design and technology classes, arts programming, physical education and other programs have yet to be fully restored, especially in elementary schools. Standardized tests are still in place, negatively affecting students' ability to reach their full potential. Tuition fee increases in the post-secondary sector have barred access to higher learning and have triggered the growth of private sector services.

The Ontario Federation of Labour continues to fight for full and adequate public funding for publicly-delivered education; for a restoration of quality curriculum in Ontario's classrooms; an end to privatization and the contracting out of services; and the restoration of design and technology classes, English as a second language training, arts classes and physical education.

Without significant corrections to the education funding formula, there will be continued pressure on school boards to cut services and programs.

Child Care

The OFL was a founding organization of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBC) that today stands as one of Ontario's most active coalitions. Since 1981, the Federation has been an important ally in the struggle for regulated, high-quality, universal, accessible and non-profit child care. Women need a seamless, affordable, coordinated and inclusive service that meets a diversity of needs regardless of income, job status, geography and culture.

In the 2003 election, Dalton McGuinty promised to invest $300 million in provincial funding. Despite an escalating crisis in the child care system and repeated calls for that promise to be kept, the provincial government has failed to meet its commitments. Communities across Ontario continue to struggle with inadequate child care funding – with increasing parent fees, cuts to programs, and uncertainty that existing spaces will remain viable for much longer.

Decades of ad-hoc piecemeal federal and provincial government policies have produced a crisis for families with young children. Provincial investments in early learning and child care services were slashed under the Harris government.

In the last budget, Ontario announced the first money allocated to child care since the Harris/Eves cuts – $25 million this year and $50 million next year. Ontario women fought hard to secure the funding. While it will help, it falls $275 million short of the funding promised in 2003. New provincial and federal dollars are welcome, but so far they have done little to rebuild the damage of the past 12 years – including the $152 million cut during the Harris/Eves years.

Today, thousands of Ontario parents are forced to resort to makeshift child care arrangements because of the desperate need for publicly funded, not-for-profit, regulated child care spaces.

Health and safety coverage for agricultural workers

June 30, 2006 – after intensive lobbying by the United Food and Commercial Workers Canada and the Ontario Federation of Labour for the first time in Ontario history agricultural workers in Ontario are covered under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA).

The new threats posed by the expansion of "big box" child care into Canada have also become a focal point for collective efforts with the CLC, OFL affiliates and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

RIGHTS

The McGuinty Liberals have refused to go any further in ending long-standing wage discrimination against women. Progress on Employment Equity has been slow. The majority of Ontario workers – women, Aboriginal, racialized and persons with disabilities – are so profoundly effected by the government's intransigence that it is not possible to accept a status quo that denies them these most significant human rights.

New campaigns are underway to achieve long-sought equality.

Pay Equity

The 2003 landmark pay equity settlement of up to $414 million ended in 2006. In the private sector, the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union also achieved a historic settlement worth approximately $104 million for 5,000 current and former Bell Canada employees.

Further progress has been slowed by both the federal and Ontario governments' refusal to take further action and by obstructive employers who are simply ignoring their obligation to pay women fairly. Overall, women earn 71% of the amount earned by men in comparable jobs; Aboriginal women earn 46%; racially visible women earn 64%; and retired women on CPP/QPP receive 58% of the benefits compared to men. Women younger than 30 earn less today than women in that age group did two decades ago.

Since 1976, the OFL and Equal Pay Coalition have been allies in many successful legislative and collective bargaining efforts. It is time to do it again.

As Ontario moves towards the 20th Anniversary of the *Pay Equity Act,* the OFL and Equal Pay Coalition have mounted a province-wide campaign to draw public attention to the need for Ontario's pay equity system to be revitalized, strengthened, and adequately resourced

Raising the Minimum Wage

Minimum wage earners are mostly women, and disproportionately they are recent immigrants. Thirty-one per cent of women workers and 38% of women of colour receive poverty wages, compared to 18% of men. Forty-one per cent of immigrants of colour earn $10 or less. The majority of low-wage workers (over 55%) are full time workers aged 25 to 64 years. Most minimum wage earners are in the service sector.

After a hugely successful campaign for a $10 minimum wage by the labour movement, Ontario Coalition for Social Justice (OCSJ), other community groups and the NDP, the McGuinty Liberals finally bowed to public pressure and announced the phasing in of $0.75 an hour annual increases in the minimum wage starting next March 31.

This promise by the government to increase the minimum wage to $10 over the next three years will still leave minimum wage earners unable to raise their families above the poverty line. A single person working 40 hours a week at $8.75 an hour will still be earning $2,600 below the low-income cut-off.

The OFL, its members and community partners continue their work to achieve more substantial progress and to eradicate poverty. The OCSJ's *Ontario Needs a Raise* campaign to raise the minimum wage, social assistance and disability rates is ongoing.

and enforced. The coalition's broad-based membership of trade unions, community and social justice organizations and business and professional women's organizations have one message: Ontario women, *without exception,* are entitled to be paid free of the discrimination that pays them less than men.

Lesbians, Gay Men, Bisexuals and Trans-Identified workers (LGBT)

The OFL has long been at the forefront of this significant struggle for equality. Its 1999 *Positive Space* campaign, and educational materials highlighting societal rights and pressing for change, have been adopted by many Canadian unions as well as those in Britain, the U.S., and Australia.

In the 1990's, the Federation called for gender identity and expression to be added as a prohibited ground under the Ontario Human Rights Code, and assisted affiliates in their efforts to win contact language under no discrimination/harassment clauses.

Today, as a result of the OFL and labour movements efforts, important progress has been made in a long struggle for equality.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees' 1998 constitutional challenge, Rosenberg & CUPE v. Canada, resulted in a historic decision for lesbian and gay workers and their partners. The Court ruled unanimously that the opposite-sex definition of "spouse" in s. 252(4) of the Income Tax Act was unconstitutional and must be extended to include same-sex couples, effective immediately.

The process of guarding and improving equality rights is never over. The OFL is currently addressing issues of transphobia and homophobia through union education. It continues the struggle for inclusion of gender idenity and expression in the Ontario Human Rights Code, Canadian *Human Rights Act,* and collective agreements.

Employment Equity

> *It is not that individuals in the designated groups are inherently unable to achieve equality on their own; it is that obstacles in their way are so formidable and self-perpetuating that they cannot be overcome without intervention. It is both intolerable and insensitive if we simply wait and hope that the barriers will disappear with time. Equality in employment will not happen unless we make it happen.*
>
> **Justice Rosalie Abella,**
> Royal Commission on Equality in Employment, 1984

The aspirations of millions of women, Aboriginal and racialized people, and people with disabilities have been thwarted by both the provincial and federal governments. The lack of progress on removing the massive and discriminatory barriers to employment and higher-paying jobs has produced both anger and determination.

The OFL's two-day Employment Equity conference held in Nov. 2007 will reactivate a crucial collective bargaining and social rights campaign to achieve meaningful gains. Working with affiliated unions, and with community and human rights organizations, renewed efforts for advancing equality rights for historically disadvantaged workers will be under discussion.

Labour legislation, health and safety, workers' compensation

Labour legislation – and the right to form and join a union – health and safety and workers' compensation loom large in our history and collective struggles. From the founding convention in 1957, and at every subsequent one, these three issues have been at the heart of resolutions, debates, actions and campaigns.

Workers' Compensation, Health and Safety

> *"...we should not be driven by the scientific dogma of yesterday or even the scientific dogma of today. We should be driven by the precautionary principle that reasonable steps to reduce risk should not await scientific certainty."*
>
> **Mr. Justice Archie Campbell,**
> The Commission to Investigate the Introduction and Spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

In 1957, workers had no legal right to refuse work over safety issues, to know about hazards in the workplace or to participate in their workplace on issues that effected their health and safety.

It took decades of struggle by the labour movement and unnumbered tragedies to achieve today's basic rights. The three-week illegal strike by Elliot Lake uranium miners forced the government to appoint a royal commission to investigate working conditions in Ontario mines.

Known as the Ham Commission, its findings led to the 1978 *Occupational Health and Safety Act* that ordered mandatory joint committees in many workplaces, established the right to know about workplace health and safety hazards, and the right to refuse work if it endangers health or safety. The right to know, the right to participate, the right to refuse, and the right to be free to exercise these rights without fear of retaliation from the employer are the cornerstones of today's Act. It recognizes in law what Commissioner James Ham referred to as "rights of natural justice."

The Ham Commission report was a watershed moment. We are at another.

The SARS Commission: The Precautionary Principle

In Jan. 2007, Mr. Justice Archie Campbell released the final report of his investigation into the introduction and spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Chief among its many recommendations

The Workers Health & Safety Centre

When, in the late seventies, the OFL was successful in securing government funding for its health and safety training project, it was a cause for celebration. The Workers Health and Safety Centre (WHSC), represented labour's all-important awareness that worker training and expertise was central to maintaining workplace health and safety and for achieving progress.

Since its launch in 1979, the centre has provided training and information resources that empower workers to play a proactive role in the prevention of injuries, diseases and death in the workplace. The labour-oriented training avoids victim blaming and gets to the root causes of the hazard so that they can be eliminated or controlled at the source. Workers training workers has been its fundamental principle and greatest strength since the beginning. Workers are given knowledge of their rights, as well as the skills to exercise those rights. The centre has long shared labour's vision of hazard-free workplaces that prevent work-related injury, illness and death, and promote the well-being of workers, their families and communities.

To date, the WHSC has trained hundreds of thousands of workers and their representatives to identify, assess, and control hazards in the workplace.

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers

In 1989, the OFL made history and changed the lives of thousands of workers when it established the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW). Having secured government funding, the first of five clinics opened that year in Hamilton and Toronto. Windsor and Sudbury followed in 1992, and Sarnia-Lambton in 1999.

OHCOW provides comprehensive information and occupational health services free of charge. Doctors, nurses, hygienists, ergonomists and other experienced health practitioners make these clinics leaders in North America. In addition, OHCOW pioneers research and advocates for systemic change.

It is not possible to overstate the enormous contribution that OHCOW has made for workers and the public. Its founding was greeted with joy and celebrations. It, too, remains as one of the OFL's most important successes.

Occupational Disability Response Team another OFL success

In 1990, the OFL was successful in securing funding to establish a workers' compensation training project to enable union members to represent their Brothers and Sisters on workers' compensation issues. The program, the Occupational Disability Response Team is the most comprehensive training program in North America. More than 10,000 people have gone through its numerous programs to become advocates for injured workers at the appeals level of the Board, as well as appeals at the Workplace Safety and Insurance Appeals Tribunal.

Agricultural workers still thwarted by Liberal government

Momentum building for fundamental right to form a union

No potable water, no facility to wash their clothes or pots for cooking, aggressive and insulting employers ,illness, unpaid wages …

A new and powerful social justice campaign to ensure the extension of democratic rights is underway in Ontario.

Faith-based group, unions, community organizations, academic leaders and many others are calling for an end to the Liberal government's obstruction of agricultural workers in their desire to unionize and to bargain collectively.

Ontario is one of only two provinces that prohibits agricultural workers (foreign or domestic) from joining a union; instead, it continues to assert that agricultural workers can join an association and bring their workplace issues forward under the *Agricultural Employees Protection Act.* The Act was the government's response to the Supreme Court of Canada ruling, as a result of a challenge brought forward by United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW).

Just this summer, once again, the Supreme Court of Canada was called upon to clarify, for governments and employers, that the freedom to associate is an enshrined right in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and includes the right to bargain collectively. The government of Ontario has yet to repeal the *Agricultural Employees Protection Act* to comply with the latest ruling of the Supreme Court.

The UFCW Canada leads the campaign on behalf of Ontario's more than 100,000 agricultural workers, all of whom have been barred from the right to join a union.

is the call for implementation of the precautionary principle, or erring on the side of caution when there is uncertainty.

So important is this principle that Campbell referred to it as the "take home message" of the inquiry and recommended it as the guiding principle throughout Ontario's health, public health, and worker safety systems by way of policy statement, by explicit reference in all relevant operational standards and directions, and by way of inclusion, through preamble, statement of principle, or otherwise, in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Health Protection and Promotion Act,* and all relevant health statutes and regulations.

Currently, hazardous agents are given the equivalent of civil rights, treated as innocent until proven guilty. In the face of scientific uncertainty, corporations have been allowed to proceed with dangerous activities until sufficient evidence has been gathered requiring those corporations to implement control measures. Workers and the public have been irreparably harmed by this approach.

While the Ontario government has promised to "carefully assess the recommendations" in the final report, it has, even now, not moved to implement the precautionary principle into Ontario's health and safety legislation.

As in Hoggs Hollow and Elliot Lake disasters, the labour movement once again faces the necessity of marshalling its concentrated efforts to produce change. Without immediate government action, it will be left to the OFL and member affiliates to force the implementation of the precautionary principle to protect the health and safety of workers and the people of Ontario.

The right to join a union

Freedom of association has always been accepted as a fundamental precept of any democracy. As early as 1948, Canada was a signatory to the United Nations' International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention #87. The principle endorses the freedom of association and protection of the right to organize.

In 1998, this principle was re-affirmed and strengthened in the ILO's "Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work."

Card certification and the vote

The Mike Harris Conservative government's repudiation of democratic labour covenants was expressed through amendments to the Ontario Labour Relations Act.

In particular, the Tories demolished certification procedures, established 40 years ago, that recognized workers' right to form and join a union. This has been particularly disastrous for women, young workers and racialized workers whose best, and in many cases, only, hope for access to basic protections and improved wages is with unionization.

The *Labour Relations and Employment Statute Law Amendment Act* (Bill 7) was enacted in 1995. It contained many significant changes. One of these was the elimination of the card-based certification system and the addition of an extra step: the vote.

"Voting" sounds good; but a certification vote has very little similarity to the kind of democratic votes utilized in election campaigns, for example, where voters choose their municipal, provincial or federal representatives.

The extra step of voting meant that employees could no longer signal their desire to join a union solely by signing a confidential union membership card, known as the card certification process.

In a certification vote, the process is fully weighted in favour of the employer. The union must obtain signed membership cards from at least 40% of employees before a vote can be held. In fact, even if 100% of employees sign membership cards, the extra step of a vote must still take place.

Injured workers Queen's Park march, June 2, 2001. Health and Safety and Workers' Compensation have been priorities for the OFL since its founding.

(OFL archives)

Rather than being held in a neutral location, the vote is almost always held in the workplace, a space controlled and administered by the very party that opposes the union – the employer. The union's access to the "voters" is severely limited. It has no access to the workplace or to employees' home addresses. In fact, until two days before the vote, the union has no right to see a proper list of employees. At all times, in contrast, the employer has full access to employees.

There are no spending limits in these campaigns which enables many employers to spend significant amounts of money to run anti-union campaigns. Underlying all of this is the power imbalance inherent in the non-union employer-employee relationship. The employer retains considerable power and sway over employees simply because of this relationship. This makes it certain that a certification vote can hardly be termed democratic.

The provincial Liberal government understands all too well the undemocratic nature of the current labour laws. In a recent move, it changed the legislation to enable workers in the building trades – a predominantly male sector – to utilize the former method of organizing (the card-based certification system), but refused to extend the same rights to other workers. Workers in female-dominated sectors, in low-wage service sectors, and in manufacturing remain stuck with the Harris Conservatives' clone of U.S.

labour laws. The Liberals have set up a two-tier system of labour law in Ontario in which most workers remain second-class citizens.

For the OFL and its affiliates there is no question about whether action is needed, but rather delegates at the 2007 convention will focus on how to ensure the demand for a return to the card-based certification process is extended beyond the building trades, to all workers in Ontario.

2007: The 50th anniversary convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour

The OFL's three policy papers – "Good Jobs," "Public Services," and "Rights," – and the resolutions to come before delegates at this 50th anniversary convention remind us of how far we have come since 1957. And while we have much to celebrate, this occasion also serves as a reminder to take nothing for granted. Progress is never inevitable.

As more than 1,200 delegates from 40 unions convene for the ninth biennial convention, they will participate in historic debates and discussions that extend back in time.

And while the outcome of these debates is important, their central purpose is to trigger action and campaigns; indeed, action is the only way the labour movement has ever achieved social progress and gains for itself, and for the public.

Your votes and views will become part of the OFL and labour movement's history as we seek to achieve a more just vision of society and will give shape to the struggles and aspirations of subsequent generations of workers

As we open this convention on Nov. 26, 2007, we remember the words of the OFL's first President, Cleve Kidd: "This is the House of Labour. And this is where we come together to reason things out."

Since 1999 SolidarityWORKS! has been bringing young workers and youth together annually to learn union rights, and social justice and community organizing. SolidarityWORKS! is unique. The photo below represents one of the eight graduating classes of SolidarityWORKS!

(DavidSmileyPhotographer.com)

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