

General Assembly

December 8, 2012 | University of Toronto (OISE)

REPORT



Nancy Hutchison, Ontario Common Front Chair

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Josephine Gray - Low Income Families Together, Keynote Speaker

Introduction

The mission statement adopted at the General Assembly of the Ontario Common Front (OCF) on April 20, 2012 calls for the common front *“to bring together groups, organizations and individuals across Ontario that are working to expose growing inequality and propose workable solutions to fix it.”*

Working with over 90 labour and community organizations across Ontario, OCF is a coalition that is continuing to mobilize against austerity and growing inequality. We pursue horizontal democracy, meaning we are focused on people/grass roots power. We organize across Ontario bringing together diverse community and labour activists. Our ‘deep’ organizing involves working with organizations to open dialogue and engage non-union, non-organization based people, often in low-income neighborhoods. We are also working with organizations like the Latin American Trade Union Coalition (LATUC) organizing is happening with Latin American activists in Toronto. There is also a very active London Common Front (LCF). On October 13, 2012, the London Common Front held a very important Southwestern Ontario Regional People’s Assembly.

In 2012, working with the Ontario Federation of Labour, the Ontario government

austerity budget was opposed by the Ontario Common Front | 'We Are Ontario' campaign. www.weareontario.ca This campaign held focus groups, conducted polling, ran radio/print ads, and mounted the April 21 Day of Action that drew over 15,000 people to the lawns of Queen's Park.

Picking up the legacy of the Occupy movement, OCF highlighted the exploitation of common people by the economic and political right-wing that relies on neo-liberalism ideology and austerity economic framework.

The OCF, released on Wednesday August 29th a report entitled, Falling Behind: Ontario's backslide into widening inequality, growing poverty, and cuts to social programs. Ontario ranks as the worse place in Canada for income inequality, and the second highest increases in poverty rates. Per capita, Ontario ranks as the poorest funding for public services; lowest funding of hospitals; worst access to affordable housing; as well as the highest tuition fees and levels of student debt. Meanwhile, profitable corporations are handed tax breaks and CEOs earn 250 times the average salary, which is up from 25 times a generation ago.

The Ontario Common Front used this report to draw public and media attention to Ontario's backsliding into inequality and the concomitant cuts to public services. It has been said by progressive economists that in Ontario we don't have an expenditure problem, but a revenue problem. Corporate tax cuts and a flat tax system have allowed the wealthiest in society to hold on to more and more of their wealth, while the public purse is impoverished.

The December 8th 2013, Ontario Common Front General Assembly was structured along the lines of workshops and plenary. This document provides succinct summaries mainly of the workshop actions ideas. Also provided herein are updates, where applicable, from the Ontario Common Front Steering Committee meeting on Friday February 15th



Women and Inequality Workshop Report

Facilitator

Anna Willats, Step It Up

Women and Families

- *Step It Up Ontario.ca* (Resource)
- Engaging women in politics and having them come out and vote!
- Access to employment for women of all ages.
- More women in the trades.
- Women's anti-violence agencies.

Issues! What are they?

- Language training.
- Child care.
- Bill 115 – Most teachers are women.

- Older Women's Issues:
 - Medicated;
 - Live longer;
 - Harder to find work.
- Migrant Justice and Immigration.
- Austerity.

Real Problems for Women

- Community start-up being stripped to people on social assistance as of January 1, 2013.
- Women in abusive relationships and children specifically affected.
- Women being criminalized due to poverty.
- Creation of good jobs for women and child care need to go hand in hand.
- Affordable child care.
- Educate women on the need for them in trades, e.g. Ontario Power Workers -
 - Pre apprenticeship programs
 - Electrical
 - Construction
 - Automotive
- Long-term strategy in terms of grants to keep the focus of women getting involved in trades.
- Bill 115 – Right to free collective bargaining.

Migrant Justice

- Women who immigrate to marry a Canadian man.
- Must stay married for 2 years to be able to stay in Canada.
- Women stay in abusive relationships to stay.
- Jailing people who are not legitimate refugees.
- They are the most vulnerable people.
- Law is vague to the consequences of illegitimate refugees. Immigration minister decides.
- Women are not safe in any no-funding country.
- Counselors not available to help women who have nowhere else to turn.
- Refugees have no one else.
- No professional help.
- Abusive relationships.
- Only being talked about federally.

Privatizing social assistance programs

- Can pick and choose from year-to-year who gets/keeps funding and who doesn't.
- Not healthy enough to work
- Where do we go to get help with issues?
- Old age pension recipients have to pay a lot for things that were provided before from OW to old age pension
- Live Longer than Men
- Home care/assistive services
- Long term hospitalization detrimental
- A lot of women don't have pensions
- Cuts to women's shelters not only affect the abused/displaced women but the workers as well
- Funding should be government supported - Not privately funded

Actions! Local Level

- Rally and write letters to MPPs to demand change – Petitions of numbers who feel the same way.
- Self esteem and positive reinforcement.
- Changes to CPP and old age supplement.
- Affordable child care.
- Educating MPs and MPPs about what issues are and that always remembering the people made the rules – people can change them.
- What “divides” do we have to overcome to move forward?
- Confront the issues.
- ACTION not ANALYSIS -
- Week of action to protect the community start-up.
- OAS and CPP need to be reviewed and re-evaluated to provide better for older people/retired people.
- Need to get women into government positions.
- Inequality leads to more interpersonal violence.
- Local community involvement in change.
- Community gardens.
- Cooking groups.
- Joint venture between groups – labour and community coming together.
- Unified leadership so there isn't duplication in message. Working together makes small groups larger.
- How do we engage low income women?



Anti Poverty Workshop Report

Facilitators

**Carrie Lynn Poole, CUPE Ontario
John Clarke, OCAP**

The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) is calling for a week of action from December 7th - December 14th to put pressure on Liberal MPPs throughout the Province to reverse the decision to eliminate the Community Start Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB).

Recommended Actions

Growing Solidarity with Unions

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE Ontario) has worked with OCAP for three years now on the Raise the Rates Campaign that created the basis for this challenge to the CSUMB cut. CUPE continued to provide organizational and communications support as the week unfolded. The Public Service Alliance of

Canada (PSAC) Ontario Region provided material assistance and encouraged its local activists to be part of the week. The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) supported the organizing in key ways and helped mobilize for the local actions.

Updated list of Actions to Defend the Community Start up (December 1-14)

Provincial Week of Action to Stop the Cut to Community Start-Up

What can you do in your community?

- Organize a delegation, rally or protest to 'your' MPP's office
- Deliver a letter - use our model MPP letter if you want:
- Occupy your MPP's office and show them such a despicable attack as the cutting of the CSUMB will mean it will not be business as usual
- Set up an emergency shelter in that MPP's office or other provincial government office
- Hold a clinic and deliver the applications on-mass

Mass Protest and Actions

Liberal Party Leadership Convention

January 25 – 27th

Maple Leaf Gardens

February 15th Ontario Common Front Steering Committee Anti-Poverty Updates:

Raise the rates campaign

CSUMB – partial victory

Largely due to community pressure: Community Start-up and Maintenance Benefit Fund (CSUMB) (\$42 million) put into the funding envelope for one year. This didn't save CSUMB but it's a win and these \$ are a start.

Fight back

Municipalities handed the CSUMB funds but in some areas nothing exists and other areas programs exists, like in Toronto. T.O. has a housing stabilization fund but you have to be homeless -- hard to stabilize if you don't have shelter but OCAP has won an exception, women in crisis for example. Cuts to CSUMB have intersected with other cuts from the province. In T.O. 7 homeless people have died so far this year; people are routinely turned away from shelters.

Lawyer called and explained she couldn't get a client out of jail unless they have shelter but she can't find shelter.

Friday February 15th OCAP direct action: people brought into city hall where they set up an emergency shelter outside the office of the mayor so they have to respond to the crisis.

Social Assistance Review (SAR)

Issue backgrounders are available. But with a new premier a different strategy is required.

Kathleen Wynne said she will implement the Lankin, Munir Social Assistance Review report. Francis Lankin is on Kathleen's transition team which is a good signal.

For people with disability the SAR isn't great. SAR spoke about the adequacy only of OW not ODSP.

ODSP increases tied to minimum wage so wage goes up and ODSP goes down, and no mention about inflation.

SAR recommended OW and ODSP to be merged, but the division is important since ODSP is different to OW.

Downloading means they cap the money and provide fewer standards across the province. The previous minister said they want municipalities to be innovative. Flexibility goes into frustration and people choosing where to live based upon city support available.

Major problem: ODSP is reduced by 15% if living with someone.

What about employment equity it's not addressed in the SAR report?

SAR wasn't good for people on ODSP.

SAR is recommending OW to be increased at the expense of ODSP.

SAR starts by getting people to work rather than addressing poverty.

FOOD Security

Huge corporate agenda at work re: food banks.

Food banks Canada paper recommends tax incentives to corporations that provide food to food banks. This covers their losses by recycling surplus food.

Food strategy (food secure Canada isn't there) Conference Board of Canada has corporations like Nestle around the table.

Global food banking and network is promoting "let's start more food banks" under the guise of helping poor people. It's like a cartel.

Colour of Poverty

Color of poverty forum brought forward 13 policy recommendations.

Disaggregated data was an essential recommendation.

City of TO collects disaggregated stats.

Equity division, City of Toronto has said yes to providing this information.

Framework for action: bringing back Employment Equity -- racialized people over-represented among poor and unemployed.

Color of Poverty is sponsoring a forum at Ryerson University: April 29-30, 2013.







Bill115 Workshop Report

**Facilitator
Valerie Dugale, ETFO**

Recommended Actions

- Link with other workers who have experienced similar circumstances (Air Canada, CUPW).
- Create our own media – use social media.
- Bigger demonstrations with messaging about Right to Work threat.
- General Strike.
- Link with cultural workers in local communities.
- Get beyond the divisions – between unions/between non-union.
- Collective bargaining means everything to trade unionists – we need to message differently for broader community.
- Bring back “Days of Action”.
- Leafleting in community.
- Need to be more aggressive.
- Engage parents/school councils.
- More social media/community newspapers.

- Inclusiveness.
- Focus on government not other tactics that affect students.
- Mobilize in local communities.
- Individual stories about impact - it's about all of us.
- 186 languages in Canada – we need to translate.
- Value for money argument.
- Teach-ins a la Chicago teachers.
- Micro PACs – school communities.
- Letters to the Editor

Government's Repeal of Bill 115 Meaningless for Public Education-ETFO

January 21, 2013

The government's intent to repeal Bill 115, used to take away the democratic rights of educators, is a meaningless gesture and shallow response to the chaos it has created in schools, according to the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO).

"The premier and education minister are deluding themselves if they think the repeal of Bill 115 will promote goodwill and stability in the education sector and restore their popularity," said ETFO President Sam Hammond. "They used the bill and are now trying to make it disappear in the most crass of political acts. It's a sleight of hand that ETFO members and most Ontarians will see through."

"It's time to focus on real solutions. We are hoping the next premier and education minister will engage in fair and respectful discussions to help find solutions to the problems and chaos that has been created by this bill," added Hammond.

"The government has not achieved fair and balanced collective agreements. It dictated terms and conditions of employment and, by its own admission, took over \$1.6 billion out of teacher collective agreements which to that point had been fairly negotiated. Of 450 agreements, only 65 were negotiated; the remainder were imposed."

When the education minister promised to repeal the bill as she invoked its powers on January 3rd, ETFO called the move a 'cynical misuse of government power'.

"The education minister will never erase the stain of Bill 115 on the democratic rights of Ontarians. Nor will the bill's repeal cause those judges who hear our Charter challenge to look on this government benevolently because Bill 115 is no longer on the books."





Civil Disobedience Workshop Report

Facilitator

Randy Kay, OPIRG – McMaster University

Recommended Actions

- Leadership training – 1 day workshops – awareness of various types of action – get people involved, and then use civil disobedience in our own daily lives. Emphasize that the right to mobilize is a democratic right.
- Any large action, but let the idea be doable in all communities.
- General strike – to demonstrate that Harper government has lost control – G20 showed the world that HE was in control.
- Common Front should acknowledge with resolutions what kinds of strategies of civil disobedience are recognized.
- Plan now to include some actions of civil disobedience as part of the demonstration at the Liberal leadership.
- Move away from the “Polite” narrative.



Environmental Activism Workshop Report

Facilitator

Keith Stewart, Greenpeace

Recommended Actions

- Education has to be part of everything we do.
- Including a different approach to “economy”.
- Environment encompassed social justice, and health.

Themes

- 1) Focus on issues where we can mobilize
 - Victories are infectious.
 - BC pipeline → line 9.
 - Site 41 → Mega quarry → what’s next.
 -
- 2) Solidarity with First Nations and affected communities
 - Need to learn how to be good allies.

- Talk to those who have been dealing with the issue for a long time.
- 3) Focus on who is making the decisions now versus who **should** be making the decisions
- Human rights →talked about by Josephine Grey in keynote speech.
- 4) Fertile Ground
- Organizing along the route of Enbridge's Line 9 pipeline, which the company and the federal government want to reverse to carry tar sands oil - rethink jobs – green jobs.
 - Food security →implement Grow T.O. Action Plan, other local food initiatives, including in public space.
 - Water→Bill C37 (Omnibus Bill) changes to water protection.

February 15th Ontario Common Front Steering Committee Environmental Justice Updates:

Enbridge Line 9

If there are spills 9 million people will be affected. It goes through first Nations communities. It goes through Jane and Finch.

Kalamazoo, Michigan tar sand crude spilled and still cleaning it up 2 yrs later because tar sands is heavy and sinks deeply. People have sever health effects. Enbridge selling this as a job creator but its only estimated at providing 3,000 jobs over 30 yrs -100 jobs a year.

Temporary jobs related to establishing pumping stations.

The corporate coalition promoting “Ethical oil” says line 9 is important to having an alternative to conflict oil from places like Nigeria. However, Tar Sands is creating conflict with First Nations.

It does exploit workers and relies on migrant workers in Alberta.

First Nations People

United Nations have criticized Canada for their treatment of First Nations people. Chippewa people most affected in Alberta because they live close to tar sands. Since 1970s cancer rates have grown. Carcinogens are travelling and affecting watersheds.

Aamjiwnaang + Sarnia Against Pipelines (ASAP) sponsored a toxic tour for the Ontario Common Front in Sarnia – one of the most polluted place in North America, as decreed by U.N. 63 petrochemical refineries in this area. On-reserve women have an average of 7 miscarriages. Cancer rates are through the roof.

If line 9 goes through it would double the amount of processing in Sarnia.

Harper water policy is making it easier for water pollution.

Line 9 would be an expansion of production in Alberta which is bad for First Nations communities in Alberta.

Folks in B.C. have stopped some lines so we have to do our part in Ontario.

NASA scientist says tar sands means game over for the climate.

Rising Tides Toronto - Petitions circulating, Line 9 goes right through York University.

On Feb 20th an attorney is presenting to T.O. Council on Line 9.

Regional gathering of all communities, March 15, 16, 17.

Come together and strategize around a campaign or joint initiative.

Rising tide is doing training in direct action.

If going through council doesn't work in terms of lobbying we are doing direct actions.

Common Front can promote supportive statements from community and labour organizations.

NDP is supportive of Line 9.

For more information search Rabble.ca using keywords: ethical Enbridge and line 9.

Target is federal government | Target TO council.

C-45-- big oil was behind pushing for this bill.

A difficult conversation within labour, but Rising Tide is available to come and talk about Line 9.

Colonization continues environmental racism continues...

Treaty rights are continued to be broken.



Falling Behind Workshop Report

Facilitator

Natalie Mehra, Ontario Health Coalition

Recommended Actions

- Purpose: To provide those who attended with background information, resources and tools that help activists counter the austerity agenda.
- The Falling Behind Report and Fact Sheets are available on line – weareontario.ca
- The “Train the Trainer” Workshop is available through the Common Front.

- The workshop breaks out inequality on the basis of income, race disability, gender etc.,
- Workshops cover economic literacy.
- The training also covers messaging and actions for change.
- The format can be either two or four-hour.
- www.weareontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/OCF-RPT-FallingBehind-20120829.pdf
- www.weareontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/OCF-RPT-Factsheets.pdf

February 15th Ontario Common Front Steering Committee Organizing Updates:



Engagement Organizing - ACORN

In KW, using the Falling Behind report the Common Front, ACORN and Ontario Health Coalition with local community and labour partners did some engagement organizing.

Before Dec 8, 2012 Common Front Assembly -- ACORN spent 4 weeks organizing as a Common Front | OFL | ACORN pilot.

ACORN knocked on doors in Scarborough low-income housing and asked people about what issues they're confronting.

ACORN asked people if they will help take collective action.

They explained the Common Front and extended invitations to the Dec 8th General Assembly.

Two major concerns: 1. Employment or minimum wage--it's too low; 2. Lack of services, like getting rid of school EAs or lack of community centre-- kids don't have anywhere to go.

1,000 doors knocked and 300-500 responded.

100 people said they would show-up and 55-60 people showed up on Dec 8 General Assembly.

People more engaged because Dec 8 was a productive General Assembly.

Leadership development and talking about issues and work of the common front is the next step.

Leadership school on March 2.

Existing ACORN leaders teaching new ACORN leaders -- minimum wage campaign is an example of issue around which to engage.

Falling Behind workshop can be offered.

Engagement organizing attempts to replace fear and anger with hope.



Immigration & Temporary Foreign Migrant Workers (TFMW) - Workshop Report

Facilitators

Pablo Godoy, UFCW and Hassan Huey, Workers' Action Centre (WAC)

Proposed Actions

- Build alliances between local unions and migrant workers and promote solidarity among workers and our communities.
- Educate unions members and leaders as well as our community allies in order to take the corporations on.
- Take on legal actions, push for the right to unionize of TFMW.
- Push for labour legislation change to reflect the needs of migrant workers and to protect them.
- Expedite and Enact Bill 210.

- Provide migrant workers with residence and the possibility to stay.
- Make migrant workers issues central in the Ontario Common Front Action Plan and mobilize labour and community organization to support this fight.
- Unmask the government double standards. Their discourse versus it practice.
- Employment Equity and Promote full employment.
- We need more union support politically, legally and financially.
- **Support the Protecting Rights and Building Solidarity Conference on April 6, 2013 led by the OFL and the Steering Committee on Migrant workers.**





Living Wage: Good Jobs Workshop Report

Facilitator

Deena Ladd, Women's Action Centre

Recommended Actions

- What if a minimum wage was a living wage?
- 1995 to 2006 – Minimum wage frozen.
- 2004 - \$6.85.
- 2010 - \$10.25 - now frozen.
- Government silent about child poverty now
- The working poor – 1 in 3.
- The “living wage” is a minimum hourly wage to meet basic needs.
- “Bare bones” actual expenses varies in different communities.
- Rather than the question “Can businesses afford it”
let's change that to “can people afford to live”
- Toronto - \$16.60 - 2008 living wage

- Kingston - \$16.25 - 2011 living wage
 - B.C. started a living wage campaign - had conversations with employers and had some results.
 - Hamilton has been trying this as well.
 - “Corporate Canada” the employer doesn’t know what a “living wage” was.
 - It has shifted to a more human discussion.
 - How did we bring that minimum wage up and how can we do that again:
 - We want to be able to support ourselves;
 - Service jobs are growing but not the wages – more people living in poverty;
 - We need a province-wide campaign
 - ¾ of a million – let’s hope at least that many.
- 1) Bring minimum wage 10% above poverty line by 2015.
 - 2) Assume a 35-hour work week
 - 3) Update with the cost of living each year once we are above poverty line
 - 4) – Good jobs for all – has begun discussion.
- Looked at campaigns in U.S.A.
 - We need a province-wide campaign.
 - A unified 2-pronged approach - local and provincial.
 - CAW CEP union trying to join forces.
 - The poor spend their money – the rich hoard theirs.
 - We need to raise minimum wage to bring us out of poverty.
 - Expenses continue to increase.
 - Consider that a living wage = pensions, insurance, transportation.
 - What about seniors?
 - Guaranteed annual Income.
 - Rich people need to pay more tax.
 - Banking system – aren’t you worried about collapse!
 - We need to engage everyone’s ability to communicate to form coalitions.

February 15th Ontario Common Front Steering Committee Minimum Wage Campaign Updates:

Worker’s Action Centre – Raise Minimum Wage Campaign

People shouldn’t be working full-time and living in poverty – minimum wage should be at least 10% above poverty line.

Looking at low-income measure, - single person would need \$14 above poverty line with no dependants.

\$14 minimum wage is the target for the WAC campaign. In Toronto the living wage is estimated at \$17 per hour.

This would impact union workers many who are close to the minimum wage.

This is a positive campaign; it's not just fighting against cut-backs but our vision for some basic principles for how people should be living.

WAC doesn't want another commission studying minimum wage as recommended by Kathleen Wynne. We don't want to wait another 1-2 years. Research has been going on for long time.

WAC still putting materials together: Campaign launch – “Melt the freeze” (March 21st) – 1st day of spring.

Direct Action -- block of ice delivered to MPPs – Melt the Freeze.

Looking for endorsements and organizations that want to get involved

4 or 5 cities already on board

The campaign is doing a lunch time action outside Minister of Labour.





Post-Secondary Funding Workshop Report

Public Education for the Public Good: Defending Public College and Universities from Privatization

Facilitator

Kaley Kennedy, CFS - Ontario

Discussion & Personal Statements

Discussion Questions: How do folks think that we can work together to address issues such as student debt? All kinds of communities haven't been able to get in the door -- how do we engage?

“If we could do some free workshops and start doing some introductory courses to teach workshops on how to talk to the public and get them more involved. Many groups have been disengaged.”

“I’m coming from something I can see here is the connection between profs and students, secondary students and community. In your presentation you send me back in my past when I was a secondary student. In my country when we have these problems we organize the students, the professors and students, workers in secondary schools. When governments attack schools, we all take to the streets. Different times and culture, but I can’t see how teachers don’t react when they see that the students are in trouble. WE need to recognize the mistakes we are making. It is time to do something together. I’m working in the elementary school and it is hard when my students can’t concentrate because they are hungry. It is really hard for me to think about why when the majority of people in developed society do not have access to free education. I paid \$60 a year for education.”

“More of the teaching staff and the teaching are shifting to part time and casual workers who don’t have job security and lack rights. But it is very difficult in the context of seasonal staff. The shift in funding creates barriers to fighting back. We see students who are working and spending time at their job. They can’t prioritize organizing because they are just trying to make ends meet. The system puts them in a situation where they lack organizing.”

“Want to thank you for the presentation - just a few comments. You are missing the most important aspects. We need to hear solutions. I come from Uruguay. The universities are public. We don’t work, we spend time doing volunteer work. That is a way that generates a community based approach. It is funny because I came here in the late 70’s. Now Canada is going down and Latin America is going up. First, we target politicians that are coming from the student movement or the other movements. We organize the base. The students, the political parties, we organize. The people are engaged. At least now, we’re thinking that we need to organize. But I think we need the student association to begin working with the boarder community. We should go for public education period. If you think that education is expensive. Look at what happens in un-educated societies.”

“I just wanted to say that one of the things that is preventing people from getting together to fight tuition: faculty is pitted against students and it looks like it is the faculties’ fault. We need a narrative that shows that the struggle is shared.”

“We need concrete suggestions. On the austerity agenda, you’re right. We’ve put on Jim Stanford town hall meetings. But we need viable alternatives to fight back at all levels. Through the CFS, we now have the common front; we have a solid and growing collection. It is Important to recognize that Quebec students have been able to keep the fees low through mass mobilization. Could not defeat the 50\$ increase because did not mobilize through a strike. But in early 90s, freeze was re-implemented because of some other pressures (not mobilizing) through other channels. “

“Different tactics work better in different political climates. We need to be thinking in the long-term. How do we create a sustainable student movement? We need massive tuition fee reductions.”



February 15th Ontario Common Front Steering Committee CFS Updates:

Quebec student mobilization was part of 3 yr organizing effort.

Canadian Federation of Student (CFS) is embarking on its own 3 yr plan for mobilization.

The plan will acknowledge differences among campuses.

There will be a toolkit for organizing.

CFS wants to avoid one mass mobilization and then nothing.

CFS wants to ensure the issues are the focus not just mobilization.

Grad student emphasis re: post-residency fees you still pay high fees it's not the norm in other provinces you pay low post-residency fees.

There is the Queen's University classification issue - teaching vs research assistant T4 vs. T4A. T4A not classified as employees.

CFS says an individual student should decide if \$ is income or scholarship/bursury.

CFS province-wide task force on food services -- at Ryerson they subsidize ARAMARK by \$5 million dollars if they don't meet their profit target. Task force report available by April or May.

Hudak and Tories attack students and middle income families. Next week CFS doing briefing note.

CFS Tuition framework is being released next week in time for throne speech.

CFS wants real reduction of 30% over three years.

Hudak is attacking CFS for supporting students on strike.

Tories want to make CFS dues voluntary – similar to the Right to Work policy.



Tory education plan attacks low- and middle-income families





Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario
Tuesday, February 12, 2013

(TORONTO) Proposals put forward in a position paper released today by the Ontario Progressive Conservative Caucus would exacerbate existing inequality amongst Ontarians and severely damage the quality of Ontario colleges and universities. The recommendations in the paper call for continued tuition fee increases, the removal altogether of controls on tuition fees in many programs and increasing the role of the private sector in providing education and training.

"Record high tuition fees and the growing role of for-profit interests on campuses are threatening the quality and affordability of public post-secondary education in Ontario," said Sarah Jayne King, Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario. "The Tory plan would continue to shift the burden for funding education onto the backs of students and their families, while forcing institutions to do more with less."

The paper, entitled *Paths to Prosperity: Higher Learning for Better Jobs*, recommends different streams of education based on a students' ability to pay. Students who can only afford minimal tuition fees would be streamed into online, non-credit based courses or into three year degree programs at colleges, while students with higher incomes would be encouraged to go into "elite" programs in universities.

Since 2006, tuition fees in Ontario have increased as much as 71 per cent. As a result, the amount of money students and graduates owe the Ontario government has more than doubled, increasing 130 per cent in just seven years.

"Affordable college and university education is a key component to a more equitable and more prosperous province," said King. "The plans put forward by Tim Hudak and his party sustain prosperity for the rich, while low- and middle-income students will continue to be forced into debt or be shut out of colleges and universities entirely."

Other problematic proposals in the paper include additional surveillance measures on student loan recipients, providing further funding to career colleges, wage freezes for college and university staff and faculty and changing the current standards for teaching and research for faculty. The paper provides no recommendations on graduate programs or international students.

The Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario is Ontario's largest student organization, representing more than 300,000 college, undergraduate and graduate students from all regions of the province.

Joséphine Gray

Welcome everyone, its good to see you all here this morning. I am honoured to be invited to help start this discussion on how best to tackle the urgent challenge of rebuilding our broken Province. The Ontario Common Front has been gathering allies and building momentum to confront the terrible consequences of decades of endless cuts, falling incomes, rising costs, and the abandonment of responsible democratic governance. The people of Ontario are being impoverished and subjected to human rights violations in order to satisfy corporate greed and power.

We have been stealthily trapped in a criminally insane financial system based on fraudulent debt manipulation. This dysfunctional system no longer qualifies as a democratic economy- because it only meets the wants of the 1%, and is destroying the quality of life and the environment for the 99% .

We can see the profound effects of corporate rule, it's class warfare and systemic racism and exploitation-hunger, homelessness, domestic violence, substance abuse, drastic levels stress and unnatural dis-ase...too many tragic impacts to name in the time we have today. The state of our world is so bad that the very future of our children is at risk-

Meanwhile, rather than serving our public interests and addressing the crisis, our governments are mired in ever more corruption and demockery- backroom deals on illegal trade agreements, billions spent on silencing dissent and spying on activists, election fraud, exploitation of highly educated immigrants, the piroguing of parliaments, poison food, water scandals, insane pipeline schemes, more acts of genocide on native peoples, violent imperialist foreign policy and climate change denial that is turning Canada into a pariah nation. When will the people of Canada say enough is enough?

However, there has never been a better or more urgent time to mobilize resistance.

I believe we lagging behind most of the world in rising up for justice because people have been lulled by the mantra that Canada is still such a great country, we should just stay calm and carry on shopping at Walmart... I was afraid people were never going to wake up.

We can thank the occupy movement for exposing the truth of corporate greed, getting the media talking about inequality as never before, and demanding space and time for democratic debate.... They got a lot of people to start talking, But it's no surprise it was hard to sustain, or that they were not ready to answer so many hard questions: People *are* getting angry about being ripped off, and scared that we facing economic collapse, but most of have no idea what can be done or how or where to start taking action. We need to help people see that we are not actually trapped, we have the capacity to reject the status quo and create alternatives. We all need to believe that a better world is possible, if we are to find the strength and courage to make it so...

We need to coordinate and collaborate to go beyond recommending changes and start making effective demands on government. We need to encourage and support and direct community action to reclaim our local economies and public resources. We need to find more and more ways to reclaim the commons. We can organize in our communities to meet essential needs like food and water sovereignty, by making time and finding space to combine our minds and our resources to set up alternatives like inter-connected co-operatives, community credit systems, social enterprises, land trusts, food buying clubs etc... We need to link rural, suburban and urban communities, to build an intergenerational interfaith intercultural movement *and* help build up resilience to climate change and a failing global economy...

These kinds of projects can help us reduce reliance on corrupt banking systems and rapacious corporate business models. Getting out from under from the corporate domination, will give us more capacity to fight for real systemic reforms, like a fair tax system, employment equity, native sovereignty, food security, free education, and accountable government. Their power is an illusion, people created it, the only constant is change, so we can change it...

I believe we can also use human rights laws and principles to help us build a powerful inter-connected common front, bring ethics into the debate, and take issues into the courts, to make immorality of Orwellian laws more visible.

Ontario is obligated to respect HR treaties, and whether the puppet masters like it or not, we do have the right to fair decent work, accessible education, housing healthcare, healthy food and water, to legal aid and protection, to have a say in what our taxes pay for and how we are govern ourselves, so why not remind them that our human rights come first, and that's what we pay government for, not to pay debts to invisible banksters in their private jets.

We have been taught that human rights are a fanciful theory that do not apply to us...that's because they don't want us to recognize that human rights treaties are in fact binding and that the first duty of governments is to respect and fulfill the human rights obligations that were signed and ratified on our behalf.

They don't want us to understand how the human rights framework encompasses all aspects of state power and duty, or to realize that because they are indivisible and inter-dependent, human rights laws and principles can unite and engage people, organizations and governments at all levels of society to fully address all our inter-related issues and challenges.

If we choose to claim human rights at face value we can also claim that our activism is how we choose to fulfill our responsibility to defend universal human rights, for ourselves and for everyone else. When we invoke moral principle and law as we fight for justice, it becomes more difficult for those in power to abuse us with false accusations of terrorism or lawless dissent.

Though they have been rendered powerless to act, UN human rights committees have concluded that even in Canada, it is those who choose to exploit and rob the rest of humanity of their freedom and their health for the sake of selfish profit who are breaking the law, it is the corporate elite who are terrorizing the innocent and committing crimes against humanity.

The elite have made sure that governments and corporations can violate human rights without legal consequences, and they managed to invent and impose so called trade agreements and security partnerships that can somehow magically overrule national laws and constitutions. But none of this means we cannot declare these acts illegal and take determined and sustained action to legally claim and defend our inherent human rights until it is no longer politically possible to refuse us...

Here are few examples of actions we could take

Defend our youth by joining the struggle against monstrous student debt, we could build on the Quebec student movement by demanding debt cancellation and free education, perhaps mount a class action lawsuit against the disproportionate debt slavery imposed on student mothers, it's a open and shut case of discrimination that can throw the whole idea of the student debt trap into question. Such a campaign could unite parents, grandparents and children to demand justice for young people's right to a decent standard of living. I bet we would at least get tuition reductions and better supports for low-income students.

Demand 100% reduction in child poverty in 5 years— the best interests of the child happen to have primacy over all other considerations in law. If we pit the needs of children against the immoral theft of public resources and insist on taxing corporations and the wealthy to pay for the services that help children grow into healthy skilled and responsible citizens, we may be able to lift at least half of poor families with children out of needless poverty.

Lets support our elders' right to retire with decent pensions and dignity, we will all be old someday. We should also support Comers' legal battle against the privatization of public funds, ie using private banks to create government debt. Comer is led by old people who remember when public funds could build public infrastructure without incurring compounding public debts that neither we nor our childrens' children can ever pay, but will remain enslaved to until we refuse to be conned any longer.

A few cunning and greedy people created the dysfunctional monetary system and hijacked the economy to serve themselves. The rest of us, the 99% need to reclaim control over our public resources and services. It is within our power to recreate an economy that values what matters to everyone and ensures no one can deprive millions of their basic needs and human rights or get away with destroying our environment.

We need to fight harder protect our climate, we can claim the right of our children to a decent future by demanding green energy, transportation, housing, food system and waste management solutions and create thousands of green jobs, there is no reason not to, other than the violent greed of the few who refuse to evolve and reduce climate change so we can have a livable future

There are many challenges, people are overworked and too many are underfed, stressed and afraid. Many are aware something is wrong but don't have the time and energy to think outside the confines of corporate messaging and consumer culture. Others are beaten and wounded by the broken system and all the awful consequences. People need healing as well as awareness to be able to engage in activism. Its up to all of us to give people courage and hope by focusing on what we are fighting for, naming the issues as unacceptable violations, and by claiming our demands for justice as our right to defend and fulfill human rights...

And because we live in dangerous and trying times, when we gather, let us remember to respect motivate and celebrate each others courage and determination, invite our families and communities to join us, to uplift each other by sharing food music and laughter as well as the hard work of changing the world day by day...

On this day, as we prepare to take action, let us not dwell on the litany of horrors we know all about, but rather use this precious time to focus on how we will combine our resources and build the collective power to take back our time, our democracy, our economy, our government and our lives -let us make the best of this rare opportunity to build a massive common front to save our province and our children's future....

Please feel free to speak up with comments and questions to begin this most important discussion... we have about 10 minutes...

Josephine Grey.

LIFT

Common Front Assembly

December 8, 2012

Participating Organizations

1. Bread & Bricks Group
2. ACORN
3. AFM
4. Alliance Against Poverty
5. Association De La Cite Collegale
6. ATU
7. Barrio Nuevo
8. Brampton –Mississauga Labour Council
9. Campaign 2000
10. Canadian Pensioners Concerned
11. CASA
12. CAUT
13. CAW
14. CBTU
15. Canadian Human Rights Intl. Organization
16. Canadian Unitarians For Social Justice
17. Canadian Federation of Students
18. Canadian Labour Congress
19. Colour of Poverty
20. Columbia Alliance
21. Community on Monetary and Economic Reform
22. Communist Party
23. COPE
24. Council of Canadians
25. CSSP
26. CUPE Ontario
27. CUPE Local 1
28. CUPW
29. Durham & District Labour Council
30. Environmental Justice Ontario
31. Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario

32. ETT Teacher
33. Freedom 90
34. George Brown College
35. Greenpeace
36. Group for the Protection of Animals
37. IAVGO Community Legal Clinic
38. Independent Film Maker
39. Indigenous Sovereignty Association
40. Injured Workers Action for Justice
41. Kawartha Solidarity
42. Kensington Environment Centre
43. Kitchener-Waterloo Common Front
44. L.I.F.T.
45. LASN
46. Latin American New Democrats
47. LATUC
48. LGBT Community
49. London & District Labour Council
50. London Common Front
51. London District Injured Workers Group
52. London Occupy
53. National Farmers Union Ontario
54. New Democratic Party of Ontario
55. New Status for Women
56. Niagara Regional Labour Council
57. OCAP
58. OCASI
59. Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care
60. OCCUPY Gardens
61. OCCUPY Toronto
62. OECTA Retiree
63. Ontario Coalition Against Poverty
64. Ontario Disability Support Program
65. Ontario Alliance for Seniors
66. Ontario Health Coalition
67. Ontario Nurses Association
68. OPIRG
69. OPSEU

70. OSSTF
71. Philippine Women`s Centre
72. PSAC-GSU
73. Registered Nurses Association
74. SEIU
75. Sudbury & District Labour Council
76. Sudbury Coalition Against Poverty
77. The Free School
78. Toronto Environmental Alliance
79. Toronto & York Region Labour Council
80. Union of Politics
81. Urban Alliance Ontario
82. USW
83. Women and Work
84. Working for Change

★ Ontario Common Front ★
**South Asian
Community Activism**



Join the community and labour as we come together for a closing ceremony to celebrate South Asian Heritage Month and recognize community activists

Performances % Dinner % D.J. % Dancing

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Sagan Banquet Hall – 7180 Edwards Blvd – Mississauga, Ontario

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