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**Educating workers – especially young workers – about their rights at work and their right to a union is vital so they can improve their lives and workplaces.**

*Joshua Borja, Workers' United  
Winnipeg Tim Hortons Worker*

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**Watch Part 4 of the OFL Convention Video to see features on the “Kill a Worker, Go to Jail” and “Fighting for Injured Workers.”**

**ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR**  
**13<sup>TH</sup> BIENNIAL CONVENTION**  
**NOVEMBER 23-27, 2015**  
**TORONTO, ONTARIO**



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# THURSDAY REPORT

NOV. 26  
2015



## YOUNG WORKER PANEL CALLED FOR END TO PRECARIOUS WORK

The OFL Young Workers' Committee dedicated their forum time to what, in many ways, was the defining panel of the Convention. With Ontario's first labour law review in 20 years currently underway, the top priority of the labour movement must be to demand radical change to the basic rights of workers and their ability to join a union.

The packed panel was moderated by Brynne Sinclair-Waters, from the Fight for \$15 and Fairness campaign. The panel was kicked off by Rabia Syed and Joshua Borja, who spoke about Western Canada's first successful Tim Hortons unionization in Winnipeg. They shared stories about harassment and intimidation in their workplace as they faced down an aggressive multi-national retail chain that was hellbent on keeping unions out of their locations. Workers who were sympathetic to the union were interrogated and fired, anti-union propaganda was distributed and workers were told that unionization would result in the closure of four retail outlets in Winnipeg. These actions were so aggressive that they resulted in a Manitoba Labour Board decision to grant automatic certification to Workers' United that secured a union foothold in the precarious fast-food retail sector.

Deena Ladd from the Workers' Action Centre called on union members to champion the rights of every worker by fighting, not just for changes to the *Labour Relations Act* but, to improve the province's *Employment Standards Act*.

“With union density at less than 30 percent, unionized workers are surrounded by workers who have almost zero benefits,” Sister Ladd told delegates. “That means that the downward pressure on wages exerted by low-wage workers is stronger than the pressure from union members to pull them up. The only way to fix the system is by lifting the floor for every worker.”

The panel was closed off by two passionate speakers from the Toronto Airport Workers' Council. Baggage handler and IAMAW LL2323 Vice-President Dan Janssen explained how airport workers have come together to form a united campaign to demand that a workplace-wide “living wage” be established for every one of the 40,000 workers who work at Pearson International Airport. This campaign represents a united front against all of the scores of employers operating out of the airport and seeks to protect workers who are vulnerable to job loss each time a contract is flipped.

Fellow airport worker, Antonios Kourteridis from UNIFOR L2002, said: “We decided to raise one flag at our airport, that is the flag of labour. We can only win if we fight together.”

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## DELEGATES DESCEND ON WSIB TO DEMAND JUSTICE FOR INJURED WORKERS

Hundreds of delegates marched on the office of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) in solidarity with the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups (ONIWG) to demand an end to "experience rating" in all its forms, an end to "deeming" and a compensation system that lifts every injured worker out of poverty.

Incoming OFL President Chris Buckley "We are here to tell the WSIB that there isn't a crisis in WSIB funding, the only crisis is a system that isn't charging employers enough to ensure the dignity of injured workers."



## NEW OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE BOARD SWORN IN

And so it begins! The OFL's new Officers and Executive Board were sworn in by CLC Assistant to the President, Chris MacDonald, before the raucus applause of the delegates in a packed convention hall. With the campaign groundwork laid by the outgoing administration, the OFL's new leadership has been charged with leading the fight for the #OntarioWeWant!

## RESOLUTIONS CORNER

The following resolutions were adopted by Convention:

#66- Workplace Safety and Insurance Board Benefit Policies, #68- Workplace Violence, ER#8 - Monday December 14th Demonstration at WSIB Offices, #72 - Young Worker Engagement Summit, #73 - "Know Your Rights" Campaign for Young Workers, Interns and Co-Op Students, #75 - Support for the CFS-Ontario "Education is a Right" Campaign, #74 - Opposition to "Net Tuition," #76 - Student & Union Representation at Carleton University, #ER1 - Promoting Licensed Taxi Services in Ontario.

## SAFETY AND SOLIDARITY! PREVENTION AND COMPENSATION TOP THE AGENDA FOR THURSDAY

The morning agenda was packed with moving real-life stories about workers facing death and injury on the job. However, the theme that ran through the panel and the resolutions discussion that followed was that employers must be forced to make accident prevention and the protection of workers' lives a top priority. And the WSIB must be transformed into a system that, once again, works for workers ... not employers.

The panel began with presentations by OFL Secretary-Treasurer Nancy Hutchison and Shawn Rouse (Unifor Local 1106) that sought to broaden out traditional understandings of workplace health and safety to include harrassment, intimidation and workplace violence. Sister Hutchison told compelling stories about gender-based violence and

domestic violence that are too often allowed to follow women to their workplaces. She shared the alarming revelation that the top cause of workplace fatalities for women is homicide and spoke about the OFL's work to make violence-free workplaces an employer obligation under provincial health and safety law.



The second half of the forum was devoted to a damning critique of Ontario's workers' compensation system.

Joel Schwartz, a staff lawyer at the Industrial Accident Victims' Group of Ontario, reported on a report he authored for the OFL that revealed millions of dollars in rebates that are being issued by the WSIB each year to Ontario employers, often in the same year that they are found guilty of killing or seriously maiming workers.

Dr. Giorgio Ilacqua explained why he and two dozen colleagues have come forward to expose

the WSIB for systematically overruling the advice of medical professionals.

Catherine Fennech from the Ontario Network of Injured Workers' Groups (ONIWG) shared moving personal stories about being re-victimized by a compensation system that is mandated to compensate and protect them.

"They can call it whatever they want," said an emotional Fennech, "but it is still a 'Workers' Compensation system' because it is our system and it is there to protect worker, not employers."