YOUNG WORKERS' TOOLKIT

Brought to you by:

the Young Workers' Committee

of the

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

OFL.CA/YOUNG-WORKERS



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Introduction

Whether you feel that the conditions at your workplace suck or not, we promise you'll want to read this guide! 😉

The labour movement in Canada and globally has existed in one form or another for almost 200 years. The power we hold and the gains we have won are not because we have always done things the same way but because we are a movement open to all ideas and perspectives.

In this guide, we hope you will begin your journey to becoming a new *or more active* member of the labour movement. This movement has fought for countless gains for working people, such as weekends, limited working hours, paid maternity leave, a childhood based on education, and basic on-the-job safety. Today, we fight to protect these gains and ensure all Canadians have the right to health care, education, liberty, and decent employment.

We hope this guide will empower you to join us as we protect these essential wins and fight new battles for our future together!

How is a Young Worker defined?

Many unions define a Young Worker as any worker under thirty (30). Some unions have raised this to age thirty-five (35). But age is just a number, after all! 💃



PART 1

WHY IS YOUNG WORKER PARTICIPATION IMPORTANT?

The Role of Young Workers (YW) in the Labour Movement



Young workers bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and energy to the labour movement. We can challenge outdated practices and push for modern, future-thinking, and inclusive policies.

One day, you will have to lead this: As the circle of life continues, young workers represent the future of organized labour. Our active participation ensures the movement remains strong and adaptable.

Connectors within the Movement: Young workers are an equity-seeking group that can connect with every other equity-seeking group. We can also weigh in on broader societal challenges, such as climate justice, racial equity, and gender equality. You might not think about it much, but we all have networks online, in person, in the workplace, or on campus. We talk about intersectionality all the time in a theoretical sense, but this is putting it into action – truly learning the different layers that make up an individual and harnessing them into collective action.

Challenges Faced by Young Workers:

~ PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT:	Many of us are in temporary, part-time, or gig roles, often lacking benefits like healthcare, insurance, vacation time, sick days, pension, or job security.
~ LOW UNIONIZATION RATES:	Because of the types of roles many of us have, we are less likely to be unionized, which limits our power and workplace protections.
~ LACK OF OPPORTUNITY:	The same financial opportunities afforded to previous generations are not as easily attainable for us.
~ KNOWLEDGE GAPS:	A lack of understanding about unions and labour rights can discourage participation or lead to disengagement. Please don't blame yourself! Much of this has been taken out of the school curriculum and popular conversation. That is what we are trying to fix here.

PART 2

ALL ABOUT THE UNIONS

What Do You Gain from a Union?

A VOICE AT WORK

Unions give workers the power to negotiate for better wages, benefits, job security, and working conditions. They ensure that workers' voices are heard when decisions about their lives are made.

A STRONGER COMMUNITY & CHOSEN FAMILY

Being part of a union means being part of something bigger than yourself. It connects you with peers, mentors, and allies across industries, generations, and backgrounds - creating lifelong networks of solidarity and support.

For many, especially trans and non-binary workers or those whose families don't support them, the labour movement becomes more than just a workplace organization – it becomes a chosen family. Within unions, workers find not only advocacy and protection but also the support, care, and solidarity that everyone deserves.

POWER WHERE IT BELONGS

Our employers, big banks, corporations, and the ultra-wealthy already have power. Workers only win when we stand together. Through collective action, we shift the balance – fighting for fairness, dignity, and a future where working people set the terms, not just the wealthy few.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Getting involved in a union means learning to organize, advocate, and lead. Whether speaking up in a meeting, planning a campaign, or mobilizing coworkers, unions build confidence and real-world leadership skills that stay with you for life.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Through union-led education, mentorship, and activism, members gain access to training, workshops, and connections that help them grow personally and professionally.

BUILDING POWER FOR CHANGE

Unions aren't just about the workplace - they have historically been at the forefront of broader social movements for justice, equity, and democracy. As young workers, we are the bridge between workplace issues and larger struggles for a better world.

CONNECTIONS THAT MATTER

The labour movement brings us into direct contact with key figures who shape our communities – city councilors, activists, researchers, educators, lawyers, and professionals working for social and economic justice. These relationships provide mentorship, guidance, and collaboration opportunities that empower us to make real change. By organizing together, we gain access to knowledge, resources, and networks that help us build not just stronger workplaces, but stronger communities.

PART 2.5

HOW THIS WORKS IN CANADA

In Canada, we have something called the Rand Formula. During a strike in 1946, a judge named Ivan Rand established a formula for how unions can operate in Canada. If you want more on the history of the labour movement in Canada, check out the last part of this document.

When hearing about unions, you may have heard terms that are used a lot in other countries thrown around, like "closed shop" and "open shop." These terms are sometimes used in Canada, but they are less relevant, due to how we are organized. When you join a unionized workplace in Canada, you automatically become a union member, and your employer ensures union dues are automatically deducted from your pay.

This strengthens unions here compared to the United States. The trade-off is that the labour movement in Canada cannot initiate strike at the drop of a hat. All negotiations must be exhausted before we can take action.

PART 3

PARTICIPATING

If you Already Have a Union:

Congratulations! Start to identify workplace leaders such as your union local's President, Steward(s) (representatives of the union in each department/area of your workplace), committee chairs, and other members of the union's executive. Not all workplace leaders are executive members; some are rank-and-file activists who are heavily involved in the union and have the respect of their coworkers. If you notice anyone participating in union activities, introduce yourself to them.

Each local union is a democratic organization made up of its members. The roles within a local, such as President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Stewards, are elected by the membership. These elected leaders are responsible for carrying out the union's business, representing members, and advancing collective goals.

Local unions operate according to a set of bylaws, which outline how decisions are made, how meetings are run, how elections are held, and how different roles and committees function. These bylaws are like a rulebook for how your union operates, and you have a right to access them and understand how they impact your involvement.

Participating in your local union means not only attending meetings, but also understanding how it governs itself. That knowledge gives you the power to ask questions, make proposals, and eventually take on leadership yourself.

PARTICIPATING *CONTINUED*

Offer to support your union's work with any applicable skills you may have.

- Are you skilled with digital tools? Are you always happy to talk to people?
- Are you good at keeping data well organized? Do you enjoy event planning?
- Are you a people person who likes talking to folks one-on-one?
- Do you like tasks that you can complete by yourself?

Any applicable skills will be a welcome addition to your union!
There is always a job that needs filling!

Everyone has something to contribute

Identify your strengths and consider how you can use them to benefit your fellow workers.

Ask workplace leaders if there is a new member orientation explicitly offered in your Collective Agreement that can be taken on company time. A Collective Agreement (sometimes also known as a CA for short) is the agreement between the union and the employer that outlines aspects such as wages, hours of work, working conditions, benefits, and all other relevant workplace matters. This agreement is negotiated by both parties during Collective Bargaining, sometimes referred to simply as "negotiations." The agreement is in effect for a defined period, meaning that it is renegotiated upon expiry. This time serves as an opportunity for the union to propose improvements, such as wage increases and more.

If there is no paid orientation offered, reach out to your shop Steward or an experienced worker for an informal introduction to your union and the workplace. They will be an excellent resource to help you navigate the lay of the land and to assist in understanding your agreement.

PARTICIPATING *CONTINUED*

Attending Your First Meeting:

Now that you have connected to your union, using available resources, identify general membership meeting times and the meeting times of any committees that may be of interest to you.

Don't forget to mark them down in your calendar!

Ask an identified workplace leader/activist if you can attend the meeting with them to help show you the ropes of union activism. Attending with someone else is also a great way for new members to feel more comfortable.

At Your First Meeting:

Review the rules of order prior to attending your first meeting. While you may have a lot to say, there is a formalized structure for conversation and debate during a union meeting. There is no need to be overwhelmed by it. After listening at the first meeting, you will start to pick up the lingo and flow pretty quickly. When entering the meeting, sign attendance records, get a copy of minutes from the last meeting and the current meeting's agenda. (This may be a physical or digital copy.) If they don't recognize a new face, feel free to introduce yourself to everyone!

If you have a topic you want to discuss, consult with a local leader (President, Recording Secretary, etc.) to inquire when the appropriate time is in the agenda to speak to that issue. Observe and listen closely to what issues are being discussed in the meeting. During the meeting, you can expect to hear reports on topics such as correspondence, president's reports, finance reports, servicing staff or "rep" reports, current 'hot' issues in the workplace that members may be experiencing, various committee reports, unfinished business, and more.

Identify upcoming elections for positions with your local union that may be relevant to your interests and/or skills. See if there are any openings for elected positions. Research what educational and training resources your affiliate has to offer. If there is an upcoming convention (CLC, OFL, Provincial or National Affiliate), inquire if there is a YW delegate spot available.

Get involved in community actions that can help create linkages between the labour movement and broader progressive struggles (environmental movement, 2SLGBTQIA+ movement, anti-racism, progressive political parties, etc.). At its best, the labour movement has been at the forefront of linking class struggle to other struggles for equality.

Congratulations on becoming a labour activist! Now you can use what you have learned to help transform your workplace, and join the labour movement in other important causes that impact the lives of all people.

Together we are stronger, and we can do anything!

PARTICIPATING *CONTINUED*

If You Don't Have a Union:

While it may seem daunting at first, forming your own union is the best way to improve the conditions in your workplace. You have a right to organize a labour union and to be a member of one.

‼ BE CAUTIOUS AND SNEAKY ‼

While you have a right to organize a union, *if your Employer finds out, they can and most often will try to find a reason to fire you before the union becomes official*. This interference is an attempt to block your efforts to unionize the workplace, so they can continue to have the power and control over workers.

You can take one of two options: either you can contact existing unions to help you organize, or you can start one from scratch.

We recommend trying to find an existing union. You can start one on your own, but having the help of an existing organization can help guide you through the process and provide resources.

When trying to find a union to join, oftentimes the types of workers they represent are in their name. For example, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers has many electrical workers and electricians in it. Sometimes, though, a union which does not seem on the surface to be a good fit for your workplace might actually be a good fit. For example, the United Steel Workers represent many workers at the University of Toronto.

You can find a list of unions who have some affiliation with the Ontario Federation of Labour here:

WWW.CANADIANLABOUR.CA/WHO-WE-ARE/AFFILIATES

THE PROCESS TO UNIONIZE

1. **GATHERING SUPPORT**
   - **Union Membership Cards:** A union must collect signed membership cards from at least 40% of employees in the proposed bargaining unit.
     - Cards must clearly state the worker's intent to join the union.
     - Membership cards are valid for six months from the date of signing.

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PARTICIPATING *CONTINUED*

2. APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATION

- **Submission to the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB):**
  - The union files an application for certification, along with proof of signed membership cards.
  - The application must be filed within 10 days of collecting the final card needed to reach the 40% threshold.
- **Notice to the Employer:** The OLRB notifies the employer of the application and instructs them to post a notice about the application in the workplace.

3. DETERMINING THE BARGAINING UNIT

- The OLRB examines the proposed bargaining unit to ensure it is appropriate.
  - It should include employees who share common interests, in terms of job functions, work location, and conditions of employment.
  - Supervisors, managers, and independent contractors are typically excluded.

4. CERTIFICATION VOTE

- **Secret Ballot Vote:** The OLRB schedules a vote within five business days of the application being filed.
  - Employees vote on whether they want to be represented by the union.
- **Majority Required:** At least 50% + 1 of employees who cast ballots must vote in favour of the union for certification.

5. EMPLOYER'S OBLIGATIONS DURING THE PROCESS

- Employers are legally prohibited from:
  - Threatening or intimidating employees to discourage unionization.
  - Offering benefits or promises to sway workers against the union.
  - Retaliating against workers for participating in any union activity.
- Employers can:
  - Express their views about unionization (provided they do not cross into coercion or undue influence).

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6. CERTIFICATION BY THE OLRB

- If the union wins the vote, the OLRB certifies the union as the employees' exclusive bargaining agent.
- If the union loses, it cannot reapply for certification for one year, unless there are significant changes in workplace conditions.

7. FIRST CONTRACT NEGOTIATION

- **Duty to Bargain in Good Faith:** Once certified, both the union and employer are legally required to negotiate in good faith to establish a first collective agreement.
  - This agreement covers wages, working conditions, and other employment terms.
- If the parties cannot reach an agreement, they may seek assistance from:
  - Mediation (voluntary) or conciliation (mandatory) through the Ministry of Labour.
  - If mediation fails, the OLRB may impose a first collective agreement under certain conditions.

8. RESOLVING DISPUTES

- **Unfair Labour Practices Complaints:**
  - Either party may file complaints with the OLRB if they believe the other has violated the Labour Relations Act (LRA).
- **Strikes and Lockouts:**
  - Strikes or lockouts are prohibited during the certification process and first contract negotiation.

9. ONGOING LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

- **Union Dues:** Once a union is certified, all employees in the bargaining unit (whether they support the union or not) must pay union dues.
- **Representation Rights:** The union must fairly represent all members of the bargaining unit in negotiations and disputes.

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PARTICIPATING *CONTINUED*

KEY DEADLINES AND TIMELINES:

STEP	DEADLINE/TIMELINE
Filing union certification	Within 10 days of collecting enough cards
Certification vote	Within 5 business days of filing
Reapplication if union loses	After 1 year



PART 3.5

STAYING CONNECTED & HOLDING SPACE: MAKING UNION CULTURE WORK FOR YOU

Being a young worker in union spaces can be empowering, but it can also feel like you're shut out, especially if the same people have held power for years. It's common to feel like your presence is more symbolic than meaningful.

This movement belongs to you just as much as it belongs to anyone else.

This section is about sustaining relationships, reshaping expectations, and making sure the spaces you enter are not only open to you, but responsive to your voice. Union culture has to be a two-way street: You make the effort to participate, and leadership must make the effort to welcome, respect, and support you.

1. START WITH CURIOSITY, STAY WITH CONFIDENCE	Ask questions and take the time to learn from those who have experience, but don't let that stop you from speaking up. Your ideas and perspectives are valid. Offering a new take or challenging old habits isn't disrespectful, it's necessary for a living movement. Respect should flow in both directions. If you show up with a willingness to contribute, leaders should respond with openness and mentorship.
2. PUSH FOR ACCESS, NOT JUST INCLUSION	If key meetings, decisions, or strategy sessions are happening out of sight, ask to be included. If you're invited to attend as a guest or observer, ask for a way to contribute. Suggest that young workers be given a regular place on the agenda, not as a token voice, but as an essential part of the discussion. You are not asking for special treatment. You are asking for democratic participation.

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PART 3.5

STAYING CONNECTED & HOLDING SPACE: MAKING UNION CULTURE WORK FOR YOU *CONTINUED*

3. CREATE FEEDBACK LOOPS, UP AND DOWN	After a meeting or event, consider following up with a Steward or leader. Share what worked, what didn't, and offer a concrete suggestion for improvement. Ask how you can help make that improvement happen. At the same time, check in with other new or younger members. Did they feel included? Was the space accessible? Do they know who to talk to? Share those reflections with leadership and offer to help close any gaps.
4. CLAIM THE SOCIAL SPACE	Sometimes the most important connections happen outside the formal meeting. If possible, organize casual meetups, coffee chats, or joint events that bring together new members and experienced ones. Ask seasoned members about how they got involved, and share your story too. Union solidarity doesn't just live in official minutes. It grows through personal connection.
5. NORMALIZE ROTATION AND SHARED LEADERSHIP	If the same people always speak or hold the same positions, raise the idea of rotating roles or creating co-leadership models. Suggest having young workers co-chair meetings, rotate speaking roles, or take on facilitation duties. Leadership is not about titles. It is a practice that can and should be shared.

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PART 3.5

STAYING CONNECTED & HOLDING SPACE: MAKING UNION CULTURE WORK FOR YOU *CONTINUED*

6. CALL FOR ALLYSHIP, NOT JUST ACCESS	Ask more of your leadership than just invitations. Ask them to be active allies. That can mean mentoring a young worker in their role, stepping back to create room for someone new, or advocating for young workers when they're not in the room. Real leadership creates space for others to grow. Model that expectation and hold others to it.
7. BUILD A YOUNG WORKER BLOC, NOT A BUBBLE	Young Worker Committees are important, but they should not be treated as a separate or secondary space. Use them as a base for coordination and support, but stay engaged in the broader union structure. Invite seasoned leaders to your events. Work across committees. Join campaigns outside your age cohort. Your work should be seen and felt across the organization.



PART 3.5

STAYING CONNECTED & HOLDING SPACE: MAKING UNION CULTURE WORK FOR YOU *CONTINUED*

Facing Adversity: Change Takes Time, and Persistence Matters

Getting involved in your union can be exciting. But let's be honest, it won't always be easy. You may encounter resistance, face indifference from colleagues, or feel dismissed by more experienced team members. Sometimes, your ideas will be ignored, your efforts may go unrecognized, and progress might feel painfully slow.

That's not because your contributions aren't valuable; it's because real change, especially in established institutions like unions, takes time and persistence.

You're not alone in feeling frustrated. Every generation of activists before you has faced setbacks. What makes a difference is continuing to show up, learning the processes, building relationships, and pushing for change consistently. One powerful meeting won't shift an entire culture, but regular participation and clear goals absolutely can.

<u>Remember:</u>

- *Some campaigns take months, others take years.*
- *Not every win is visible right away.*
- *Movements are built by people who keep going, even when it feels like nothing is moving.*

If you feel discouraged, connect with others. Talk to fellow young workers, find a mentor, or take a break if you need to – but don't give up altogether. Your persistence helps open the door wider for the next person who follows you through it.



Your voice matters. Keep using it.

PART 4

STRUCTURE

What is a Local Labour Council?

- Labour councils are organizations that your union local affiliates with to coordinate actions, campaigns, and cross-union solidarity in your municipality or region. Labour councils are the oldest form of union cooperation. Some in Europe can trace their traditions to old medieval guilds set up to protect craft workers.
- Unions need a way to cooperate and share our resources, especially since we are disadvantaged against our opponents. In labour, sharing is not just caring; it is survival. Your local affiliate takes a small part of your dues and pools it with other locals to fund the labour council.
- Ontario's labour councils play a crucial role in on-the-ground solidarity. They typically engage in training activists, hold rallies, organize Labour Day activities, and most importantly, promote local cross-union solidarity. Showing up for others is the currency of the activism and labour world. When a local or whole union is engaged in a strike or other action, labour councils organize everyone together when they're needed on the ground in your area, fostering a sense of unity and strength among all unions. Labour councils also organize around local issues that a municipality or region would be responsible for.
- Labour councils are the building block of cross-union cooperation in Canada and probably the best place for you to start your labour journey outside your local union.

TO FIND YOURS, SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.

Typically, a large portion of Labour Council delegates and executive officers tend to be made up of more senior comrades. This is a double win for you since you can gain lessons from their experience, offer a perspective which is not often sought out, and fill roles which are growing.

PART 4

STRUCTURE *CONTINUED*

Meetings and Conventions

- Your labour council will typically have monthly meetings with various sub-committees and monthly general meetings.
- If you'd like to participate in the OFL or CLC conventions, your central union, local union, and labour council all typically send delegates, and you can apply for them. The OFL Convention occurs every two years, and the CLC Convention occurs every three years.
- Many conventions have requirements to bring along a young worker, and these places are a great way to get immersed in the wider union scene in Canada.

Getting Connected with Your Labour Council

Once you identify the Labour Council in your region, consider joining their email distribution list, following their social media accounts, and attending meetings. You can visit as a guest, meaning you will not vote on any motions, but you can listen, make connections, and offer your support with tasks and initiatives that are in your skillset.

If you would like to join your labour council as a delegate authorized by your local, connect with someone on your local's executive to let them know and to find out what the process looks like for your specific local union and labour council. Your union should be thrilled that you are getting involved and looking to represent them!

Here are some ideas for things that you can work through with folks at your labour council:

- Ask any questions that you might have about how meetings are conducted.
- Raise your concerns about issues happening within the labour movement, your community, or your workplace.
- Ask advice from other seasoned workers that may be in your field of work, or another fields of work that could be helpful.
- Attend any social events that are being conducted. This is a great way to build relationships and a sense of community.
- Offer suggestions on how your labour council can best optimize the experience of their Young Worker delegates.

PART 4

STRUCTURE *CONTINUED*

WHAT IS THE OFL?

- The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) is where the various affiliated unions come together and organize mutually beneficial campaigns and actions to further the power of labour for the whole province. It has full-time staff and officers dedicated to activism.
- National unions in Canada typically have provincial affiliates, which participate in and pay dues to the OFL.
- The OFL pushes for legislative change in every area that affects people's daily lives: health, education, workplace safety, minimum wage and other employment standards, human rights, women's rights, workers' compensation, and pensions. They make regular presentations and submissions to the Ontario government and mount internal and public awareness campaigns to mobilize political pressure to secure positive change for all workers – whether they belong to a union or not.

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

WHAT IS THE CLC?

- The Canadian Labour Congress is Canada's primary trade union centre. Like the previous two levels, its primary function is to promote cross-union solidarity and organizing. Also, like the OFL, it has full-time staff and officers, and the dues structure is similar.
- While labour councils and provincial federations like the OFL often provide training opportunities, the CLC offers constant, ongoing training for union organizers and activists. The CLC also plays a more "big picture" role when it comes to planning and organizing among labour unions within Canada.

CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS
CONGRÈS DU TRAVAIL DU CANADA

PART 4

STRUCTURE *CONTINUED*

Equity Caucuses

- Within the OFL and the CLC are something called "equity caucuses." Like many institutions of the past, unions were generally dominated by white, older men. While it is not perfect, significant progress has been made in labour, and some of that can be attributed to equity caucuses.
- The OFL Young Workers' Committee is one of these equity caucuses. All equity caucuses meet at Convention and elect a Vice President who will represent their marginalized group at board meetings.
- At the OFL, the other equity caucuses include Black and Racialized Workers, Women, First Nations Metis and Inuit, Persons with Disabilities, and LGBT.

Young Workers Committees

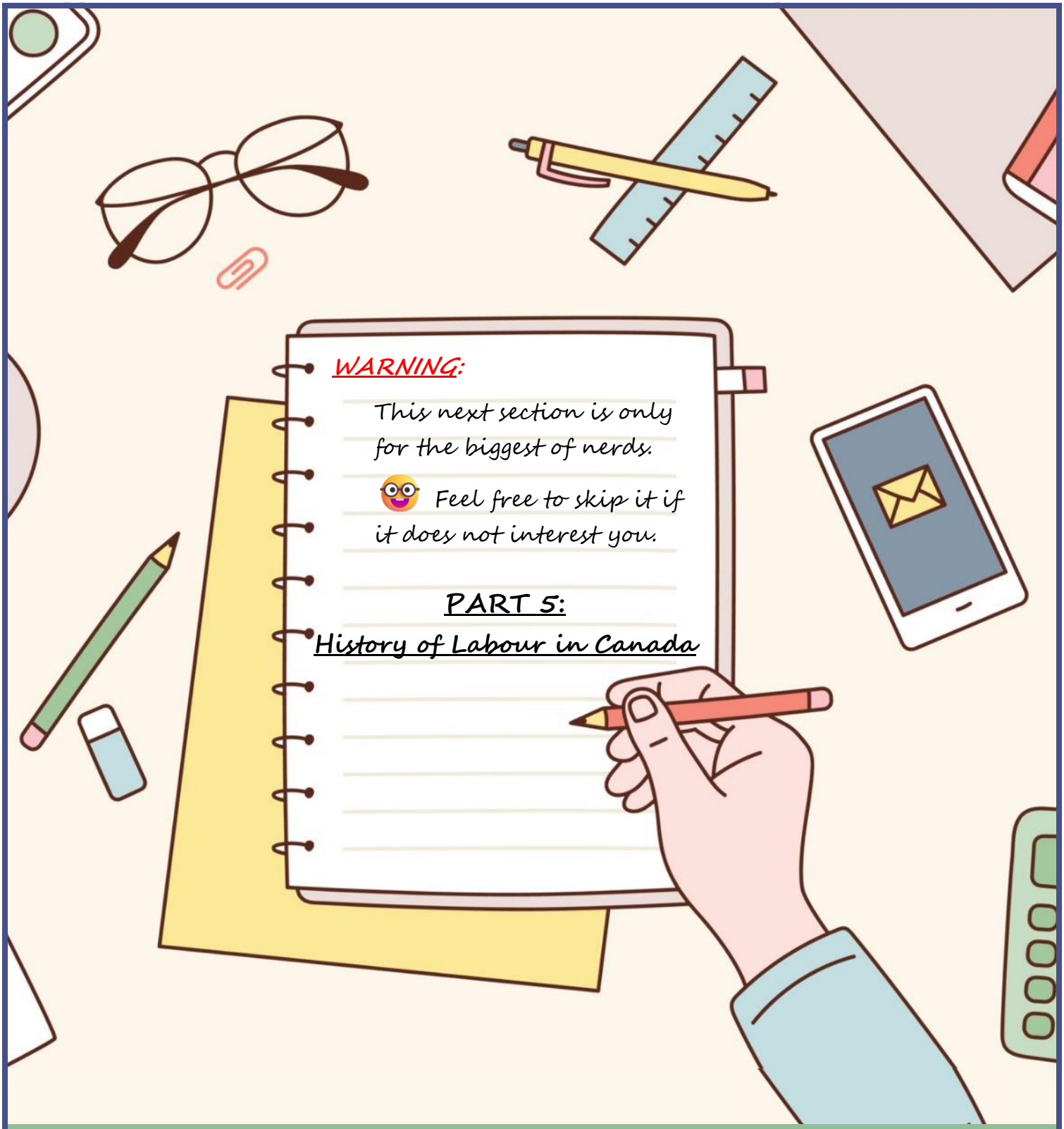
Many unions and locals have a Young Workers' Committee, which is a great way to come together on common issues that Young Workers face and work towards solutions within your workplace. Speak to your executive to find out who to contact, introduce yourself, and attend a meeting! Labour councils also have Young Workers' Committees where young workers from all different unions in the region can come together.

If there is no Young Workers' Committee, consider starting one! This is a great way to be the positive change that you wish to see and to steward positive change in your union and workplace. Reach out to any of the new connections that you have made for some advice and support with how to get this going.

This guide has been prepared by the Young Workers Committee of the OFL!

We are *so* happy that you are interested in supporting the movement.

Don't hesitate to get in touch with us!



WARNING:

This next section is only for the biggest of nerds.

Feel free to skip it if it does not interest you.

PART 5:

History of Labour in Canada

BEGINNINGS

Canada has one of the richest labour histories of any country. The first unions in Ontario were formed in the 1830s, and more popped up throughout the Industrial Revolution in Canada's new industrial heartland of Ontario and Quebec. In the late 1800s, the fight was for a shorter workweek. In 1872, the Typographical Union (now part of Unifor) fought and won a 9-hour day in Toronto. In Montreal in 1912, the city's tailors organized and fought for a 10-hour reduction in their work week, to be limited to 49 hours. These victories were important in the burgeoning Canadian labour movement.

AFTER WW1

In the aftermath of the First World War, there was a wave of labour unrest across Canada, as returning veterans found low pay in the few jobs available during the post-war economic slump. Women were forced out of the workplaces where they had worked while the men were in Europe fighting. The unrest boiled over in many Canadian cities, and strikes became common. The most notable was in Winnipeg, where the town walked out in a general strike. The unrest was so notable that Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci proclaimed that in Canada, "Industrial strikes have taken on the overt character of a bid to install a Soviet regime." Instead of the meaning it would acquire later in the 20th Century, in this context, "soviet" means a state run by the workers. The strikes were suppressed harshly, and the federal government continued wartime restrictions on unions and labour propaganda for a decade after the war's end.

GREAT DEPRESSION

No country was as badly hit during the Great Depression as Canada. Western Canada was affected even worse than the rest of the country, with the price of wheat declining from $1 to $0.35 a bushel. Income plummeted in that region by almost 90%. Under such harsh living conditions, people began to organize again. Unions that had been suppressed during the previous post-war decade started to flourish again. In Western Canada, a march was organized known as the On-to-Ottawa Trek in 1935. It was stopped in Regina by the RCMP. Also, in Regina in 1933, a new manifesto was drawn up for Canada's incipient labour party, the CCF. It was the first party advocating for true workers' rights and a democratic socialist Canada. By the end of the Depression, a labour peace had settled in, due to the threat of Nazism and the Second World War. Finally, in 1940, Canada became the last Western nation to introduce national Employment Insurance.

AFTER WW2

At the war's end, a strike in a Windsor, Ontario Ford plant would set the structures under which Canadian unions would operate from 1945 to the present day. Judge Ivan Rand settled the strike in favour of the federal government. The period after World War Two was very different than the period following the previous war. Instead of suppressing labour, the government decided it would be better to work in conjunction with it. This was the attitude taken by many Western nations in the post-war period, which influenced the Canadian government's decision. It was also due to electoral pressure. Some of the first national polls were conducted in Canada during the war, and many of the polls showed that in a post-war election the CCF might beat the incumbent Liberals and opposition Conservatives. This led to the federal government intervening in the Ford plant strike, introducing old-age pensions, and creating the modern Canadian welfare system.

THE CLC AND NDP

However, labour in Canada was still not as organized as it was in other countries with large national trade union centres. Instead, there had been multiple competing federations in Canada since the end of WWI. In 1956, differences were put aside, and a new, all-encompassing national trade union centre was established, the Canadian Labour Congress. This also involved the merging of rival provincial associations. In Ontario, the Ontario Provincial Federation of Labour merged into the Ontario Federation of Labour, creating a new OFL. The new CLC set its sights on organizing a stronger political party that was linked to the new organization. The CLC was powerful in Eastern Canada, but its presence was limited in the West. Similarly, the CCF had been popular politically in Western Canada, but had limited success in the East. The two organizations came together to establish a new party, which they initially named "The New Party". After the first party convention in 1961, the word "Democratic" was stuck in between, creating the New Democratic Party, the only major party in the country beholden to the interests of labour. The NDP and the CLC were closer in these days and achieved some of its greatest accomplishments, such as the creation of universal healthcare and securing the right to strike for public employees nationally.

HEIGHTS OF POWER

The 1960s and 1970s represented a high point for labour power in Canada. Canadian workers were some of the best-paid workers in the world, and labour’s political influence was at its highest. This was not, however, a high point for workers' rights, requiring many further struggles over the coming decades. Women still faced routine discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

They also often had to leave their jobs when pregnant, and until 1971 maternity benefits did not exist in Canada. There were also few protections for racialized, Indigenous, and LGBT workers from employment and on-the-job discrimination. Finally, safety was a major problem in most Canadian worksites. Many of the immigrant workers coming to Canada in these years faced little-to-no safety protections. On average, a worker died every week in Toronto's housing construction boom, and in 1960 five Italian workers were killed in a small tunnel which had collapsed, trapping them inside. New laws were passed during these years to protect workers from discrimination and dangers in the workplace. Without organizing and pressure from the labour movement in Canada, it is doubtful that the laws we cherish and rely on to survive today would exist.

NEW CHALLENGES

In the 1970s, the post-war economic boom finally came to a halt. There was much tension in these years between employers, labour, and the government. Eventually, the tension broke in the early 1980s in the Anglophone world, and not in a favourable direction for the labour movement. Labour and union power began to be hollowed out. First, this was because unionized jobs were eliminated through new technologies, efficiencies, or sometimes sent abroad to cheaper labour markets. This led to new Conservative governments in the 1980s with a new rallying cry of free markets and crushing labour. It became the logic of a new class of businessmen in the 1980s to see labour as their most avoidable expense. The labour movement of the 1980s and 1990s had to fight against conservative governments, for its existence and relevancy in a new, changing world (especially here in Ontario). The struggles in Ontario during the 1990s allowed the labour movement here to go on fighting another day, but at great cost. Today we are beginning to face the same challenges that threatened the movement in the 1990s. You are part of a great labour tradition.

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GLOSSARY TERMS

Affiliate: A person or organization officially attached to a larger body. (For example, you attend your local Labour Council meeting as a delegate because your union, OPSEU, voted you in. OPSEU is your affiliate.)

Bargaining Unit:

A group of employees who are represented by a union and are defined in the Collective Agreement.

Bylaws: A document that defines the rules and regulations that govern a local union, outlining things such as members rights, the responsibilities of elected officials, voting/election procedures, and any other important aspects.

Caucus: A group or meeting of people, supporters, or members of a specific union, labour council, convention attendees, etc. around a particular topic or issue.

CLC (Canadian Labour Congress):

The largest labour organization in Canada, bringing together dozens of national and international unions, provincial and territorial federations of labour, and community-based labour councils to represent more than 3 million workers across the country.

Closed Shop: A workplace where all employees are members of the union, and any new hires must automatically become a member.

Collective Agreement:

A written contract between a company's management (also referred to as the Employer) and the union that outlines the terms and conditions of employment for a group of employees.

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GLOSSARY TERMS

Constitution: A document that defines the union's objectives and how the union operates. It forms the basis for the functioning of the union's members.

Delegate: A person sent by or authorized to represent the local union, e.g. an elected member sent to attend a union conference. Many unions have an additional delegate specifically for Young Workers.

Employer: A person or organization that employes people.

Equity Caucuses:

Groups within larger labour organizations such as the OFL or CLC that represent and advocate for the specific interests of marginalized or equity-seeking groups, e.g. young workers, racialized workers, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Equity-Seeking Group:

A group of people who experience discrimination or barriers to equal access and opportunities. They are disproportionately excluded from full participation in society and actively work to achieve social justice and reparation. Some examples of equity-seeking groups are women, Indigenous peoples, Black and people of colour, people with disabilities, migrants, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Good Faith: The parties involved in bargaining are required to engage honestly and sincerely, making reasonable efforts to reach an agreement by exchanging proposals, considering all options, and acting with transparency, without deliberately attempting to obstruct or delay the process to gain an unfair advantage.

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GLOSSARY TERMS

Labour Council:

An umbrella group that brings together local unions and union members in a certain geographical area who work in the public and private sectors, so that collectively they can better represent their members, defend free collective bargaining, assist the unorganized, and generally improve the quality of life in their city. For example, the Hamilton and District Labour Council consists of local unions in the postal services, elementary and high-school teachers, musicians, theatrical stage employees, electrical workers, and many others.

Labour Movement:

Working class people coming together at a political level to improve the rights and conditions of working people.

Local: A branch of a labor union that represents workers in a specific geographic area, company, or industry.

Lockout: The exclusion of employees by their employer from their place of work, typically until certain terms are agreed to.

Member: A worker that joins a labour union. To become a member, you either work in a unionized workplace or you choose to unionize your workplace.

Mobilize(r): A person who works to increase the power of the union by educating members and encouraging participation in collective actions. Mobilization tactics can include mass rallies, picket lines, and demonstrations.

Motion: A formal proposal that a group to take action, such as sending a letter, approving a proposal, accepting a report, or spending money for a specific purpose.

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GLOSSARY TERMS

OFL (Ontario Federation of Labour):

A federation of labour unions in the province of Ontario, uniting to fight for better working and living conditions. The Ontario Federation of Labour serves as an umbrella group for working people and their unions.

OLRB (Ontario Labour Relations Board):

An independent, quasi-judicial tribunal responsible for administering the Labour Relations Act in Ontario, including union certification and resolving labor disputes.

Open Shop: A workplace where employment is not contingent on union membership. Employees can choose whether or not to join the union.

Organize(r): A union representative who helps non-union workers join a union. Their tasks include recruiting, educating, guidance through the legal process, negotiating with management and owners, representing, and helping members with concerns and questions.

Rand Formula: A Canadian labor law principle requiring all employees in a unionized workplace to pay union dues, even if they are not members, to ensure equitable support for the benefits of collective bargaining.

Rank and File: The ordinary members of an organization, as opposed to its leaders.

Ratify: To sign or give formal consent to a treaty, contract, or agreement, making it officially valid.

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GLOSSARY TERMS

Resolution: A formal proposal submitted by affiliated organizations to the Convention, defining the OFL's agenda and influence its direction on policy issues.

Robert's Rules of Order:

A set of rules and procedures that help groups conduct meetings and make decisions in an orderly and fair way. The rules are designed to ensure that all members have equal rights and opportunities to participate and that the majority's will is respected.

Shop Steward:

A union representative elected by co-workers in a specific department or area of a workplace to represent their interests and enforce the collective agreement.

Strike:

A refusal to work, organized by a body of employees as a form of protest, typically in an attempt to force their employer to agree on certain issues.

Unit: A group of employees that a union represents for collective bargaining. Also known as a bargaining unit. These are the different types of Units:

Single-unit Locals: All members work for the same employer at the same location.

Multi-unit Locals: All members work for the same employer, but in different job classifications or at different locations.

Composite Locals: Members work for more than one employer in one or more job classifications/locations.