



Youth in unions  
Engaging youth to  
make a difference



Education and training  
Larry Slaney on  
apprenticeships

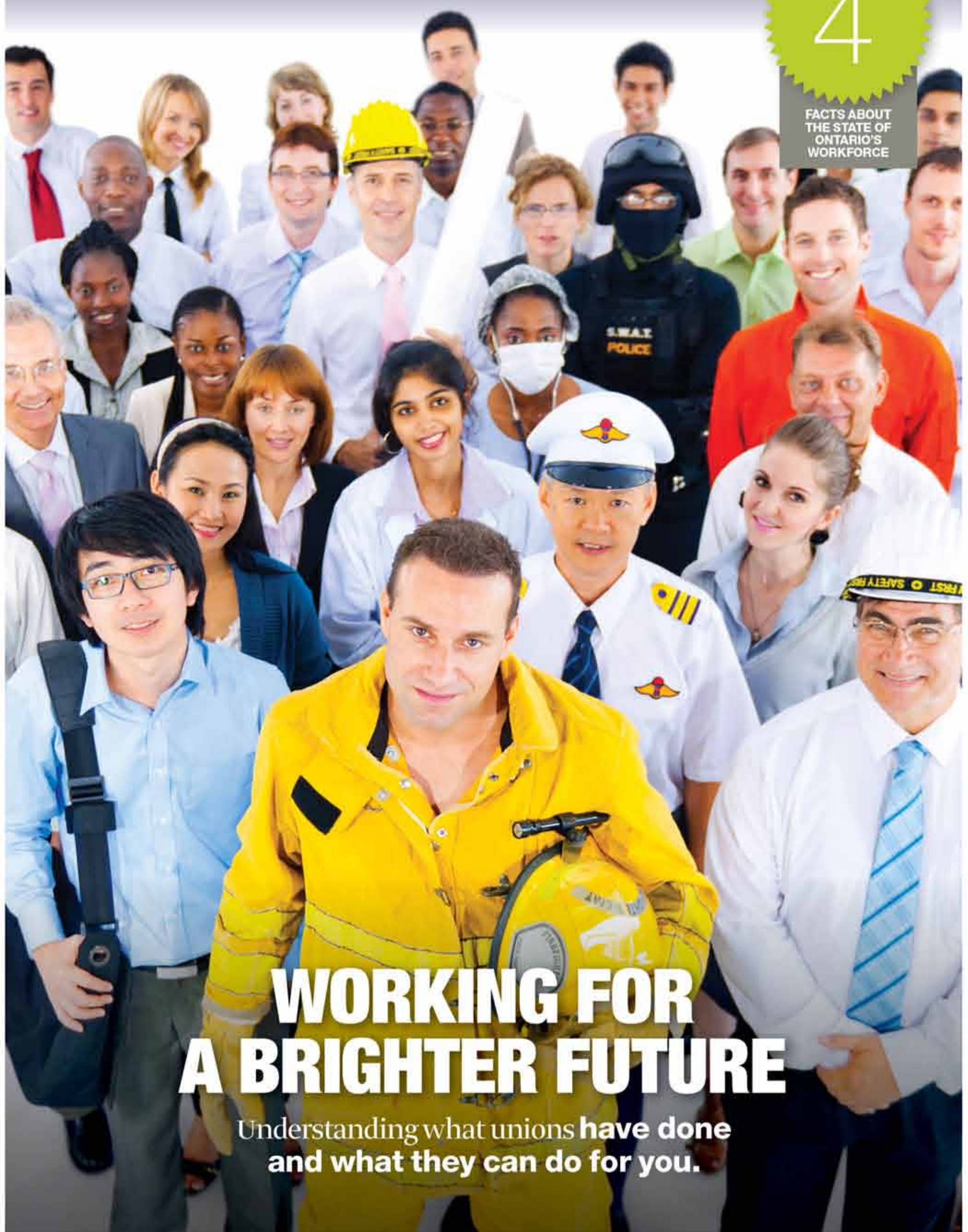
**MEDIA  
PLANET**

February 2013

# UNIONIZED LABOUR IN ONTARIO

4

FACTS ABOUT  
THE STATE OF  
ONTARIO'S  
WORKFORCE



## WORKING FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Understanding what unions have done  
and what they can do for you.



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## CHALLENGES

FACT

1

1.6 MILLION ONTARIANS BELONG TO A UNION



Unions not only raise the standard of living for their members but society as a whole. Understanding the impact of the labour movement will **help us move forward with greater equality for all.**

## Unions lead to the rising of us all

For decades, Ontarians have prided themselves on a living standard that was among the highest in the world. Our cities have consistently ranked among the world's most livable. Our public education system has produced a citizenry that has boasted the highest educational attainment rates in the country. Our public health care system has not only removed financial barriers between patients and the health care they need, but also saved billions in private health care costs for our businesses. We have also been proud stewards of bountiful natural resources and shared vibrant cultures and a thriving arts community.

### Improvements for working people

It took a century-and-a-half to win the rights and protections that Ontario workers now rely upon to improve and uphold our standard of living. Throughout that time, unions have championed improvements for all

working people, from our efforts in the late 19th century to stop child labour and establish minimum wages — to 20th century campaigns to prevent workplace deaths and injuries, secure public health care and establish public pensions — and, more recently, in the struggle for equal pay for women.

In fact, there are few social programs and benefits in our society that unions did not have a hand in creating. We have worked — both at the bargaining table with individual companies and by working with governments to change the laws of the land — to improve the lives of the middle and working classes, the poor, and marginalized groups across our society.

### Maintaining equality

Today, no Ontarian can afford to take these gains for granted and much of what we have been proud of is currently in danger. Aggressive government cuts to public services will not only cost hundreds of thousands of jobs, they will hurt every family that relies on these services to get by.



**Sid Ryan**  
President,  
Ontario Federation of Labour

Meanwhile, the wages of every worker are under threat from proposed American-style laws that aim to dismantle unions and drive wages down across the board by forcing corporations to compete with the lowest wage jurisdictions. It is a race to the bottom and it has already started.

Compared to 17 other countries evaluated in a recent report, Canada

recently earned a “D” grade in poverty and a “C” grade in inequality. Within Canada’s borders, cuts to social programs have caused Ontarians to fall behind every other province. Over 40 percent of Ontario families have seen their wages stagnate or decline over the past ten years while the richest 10 percent saw their income leap by 50 percent.

### Ensuring prosperity

As Ontarians chart our society’s path through the difficult fiscal terrain ahead, we must recognize that in today’s globalized world, negative competitiveness won’t buy prosperity for most of us. It will simply drive down living standards that took centuries to build.

Strong unions are needed now, more than ever, as a balance to the greed of the corporate elite and as a voice for all working people. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., “the simple truth is that the rising of the unions is the rising of us all.”

**SID RYAN**  
editorial@mediaplanet.com

## Strong unions mean a prosperous Canada

### There is a clear correlation between collective bargaining rights and a healthy, stable middle class in Canada.

In fact, both the International Monetary Fund and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development now say that access to broadly-based collective bargaining is the only way to build a healthy middle class in the developing world.

Unions have been able to ensure that workers share, at least to some extent, in the success of the companies they work for. The Canadian Labour Congress released a research study in 2012 showing that, on average, unionized workers in Ontario earn \$6.19 an hour more than comparable non-union jobs. Obviously this is important for union members who negotiate for a fair family supporting wage that allows them to pay their mortgages and put their children through school. This extra money in the pockets of in-



**Ken Georgetti**  
President,  
Canadian Labour Congress

dividual workers means the union advantage is worth a cumulative \$343 million per week, which contributes significantly to the Ontario economy. Union members spend most of their earnings directly in their communities here in Ontario.

### Benefits for all

So, the benefits of free collective bargaining are felt far beyond union households. Our research shows that those communities with more union members enjoy relatively higher incomes overall and support a richer mix of businesses and services, small and large — dentists, chiropractors, therapists, health specialists and family lawyers. These services benefit everyone.

In short, communities with a higher density of union workers are better places to work and live. Think of all the community and neighbourhood businesses that have sprouted up, and thrived since unions first negotiated dental, vision care and other benefits into our collective agreements.

### Raising the bar

Historically, we know that the labour movement played a key role in winning pensions for work-

ers, the 40 hour week, the weekend, safer workplaces and benefit packages that often include dental and prescription drug plans. Many of these benefits were won not just for union members but for all workers — think of Employment Insurance or worker’s compensation and many more.

The same thing is true today. Unions and their members want a fair and prosperous Canada for everyone and not just the one per cent of people at the top. When unions stand up and win fair deals for working Canadians, they raise the bar for everyone.

Free collective bargaining really does work for the common good. A healthy middle class means working Canadians get their fair share too.

**KEN GEORGETTI**  
editorial@mediaplanet.com



### WE RECOMMEND



**Trish Hennessey**  
The Ontario Director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives debunks the biggest myths about unions

PAGE 5

“The main demand of unions is to bargain freely and collectively, and to do so together with the employer...”

**Protecting workers rights** p. 8  
How unions are raising the standards for human rights

**Health and safety** p. 9  
Ensuring the best possible work environment

## MEDIA PLANET

UNIONIZED LABOUR IN ONTARIO  
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### MYTHS ABOUT UNIONS

#### 1 Union dues are forced on workers

**Fact:** A majority of workers in any work place must vote to form a union. Dues are collected from everyone in the workplace because everyone benefits from the union protection and the union has an obligation to represent every worker.

#### 2 Union wages threaten productivity

**Fact:** By elevating the living standards of working people, unions helped to create Canada’s middle class. They pay taxes and spend money on services and small businesses that help communities thrive. The World Bank found that by every meaningful economic indicator, countries with higher rates of unionization have lower unemployment and inflation, higher productivity and speedier adjustments to economic shocks.

#### 3 Unions only care about their members

**Fact:** The gains made by unions at the bargaining table often set the standard for the law of the land. Paid maternity leave, public pensions and the minimum wage came about because of the work of unions. Without the standards set by unions, negative competition between increasingly global corporations would drive wages down.

**BEN FALLINGBROOK**  
editorial@mediaplanet.com

LAUNCHING  
Monday, February 25

# Ontario THE PEOPLE'S BUDGET.CA

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YOUR IDEAS  
TO MAKE ONTARIO  
BETTER FOR EVERYONE

## AN INVITATION FROM SID RYAN

Ontario has a new Premier, but we have the same challenges.

Cuts to jobs and services have hurt communities just like yours and more than 40 percent of Ontario families are falling behind.

We need to change the conversation on Austerity and make Ontario better for everyone.

I'm inviting you to join with community groups, small businesses, trade unions and your friends and neighbours to share your ideas for a "People's Budget" for Ontario.

Visit our website at [www.ThePeoplesBudget.ca](http://www.ThePeoplesBudget.ca) to share your ideas and to make yourself heard.

We will compile all of the submissions into a "People's Budget for Ontario" that we will present to the government.

After all, this province belongs to all of us!

Thanks,

Sid

Sid Ryan  
President of the Ontario Federation of Labour

Here are MY IDEAS for the next provincial budget that will make Ontario better for everyone...

*I'm a single mother and a  
child care program would help  
me get back into the workforce.*

My name is: Jane Smith

My address is: 1234 Main Street

Ajax, Ontario L1S 0A1

My email is: JaneSmith@emailaddress.ca

MAIL: The People's Budget c/o The Ontario Federation of Labour,  
15 Gervais Drive, Suite 202, Toronto ON M3C 1Y8  
FAX: 416 441-1893 EMAIL: [Ideas@ThePeoplesBudget.ca](mailto:Ideas@ThePeoplesBudget.ca)  
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visit [thepeoplesbudget.ca](http://thepeoplesbudget.ca)

READ our "Green Paper" *Towards a People's Budget for Ontario*.

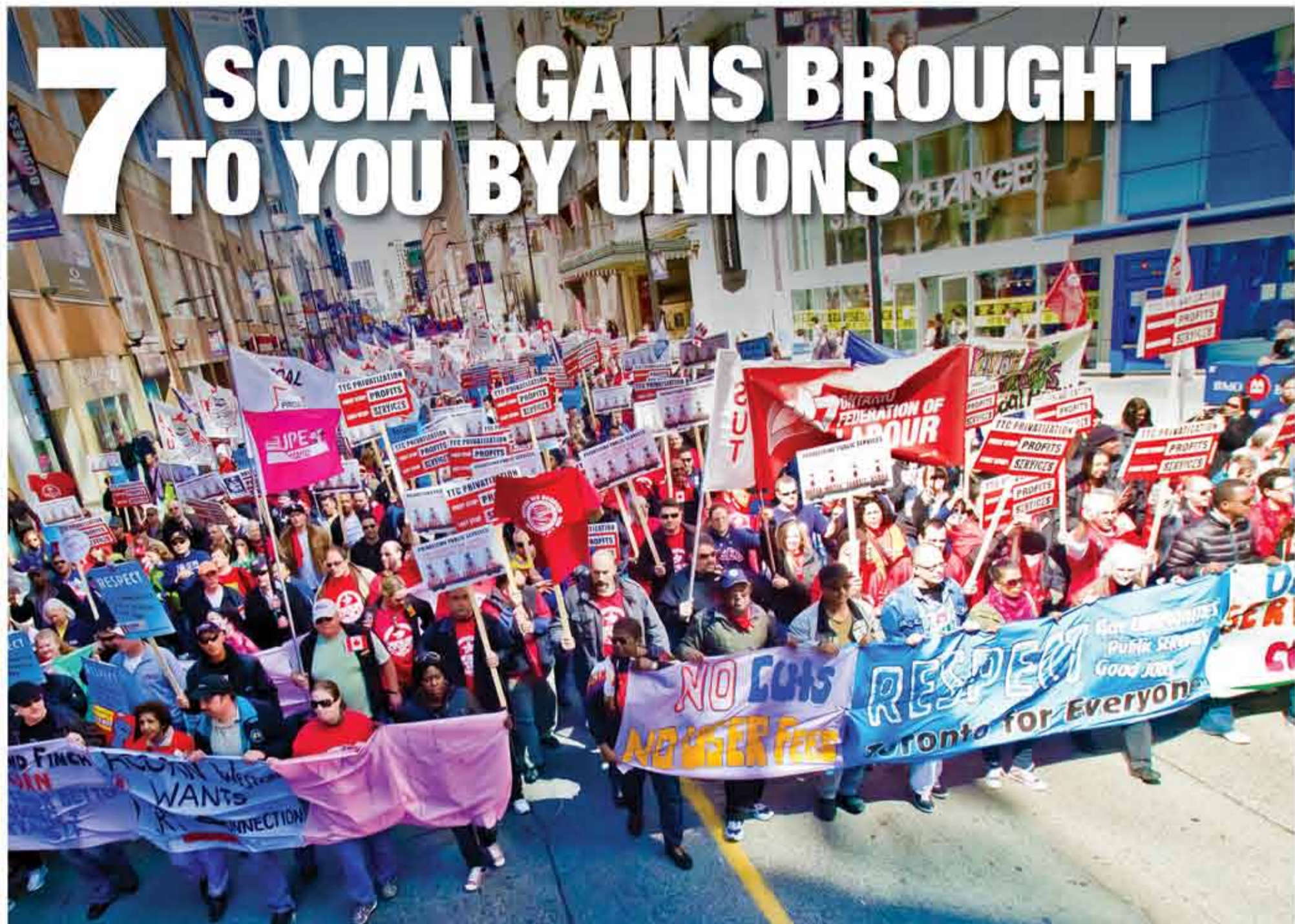
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INSIGHT

# 7 SOCIAL GAINS BROUGHT TO YOU BY UNIONS



Unions don't just fight for their members, they work to change the law to **improve the lives of everyone.** Here are seven social gains that were brought to you by unions:

1. An end to child labour
2. The 40-hour work week
3. Unemployment insurance
4. Paid maternity leave
5. Public pensions
6. The minimum wage
7. Pay equity for women

BEN FALLINGBROOK  
editorial@mediaplanet.com



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**Many of the good things we take for granted start at the bargaining table.**

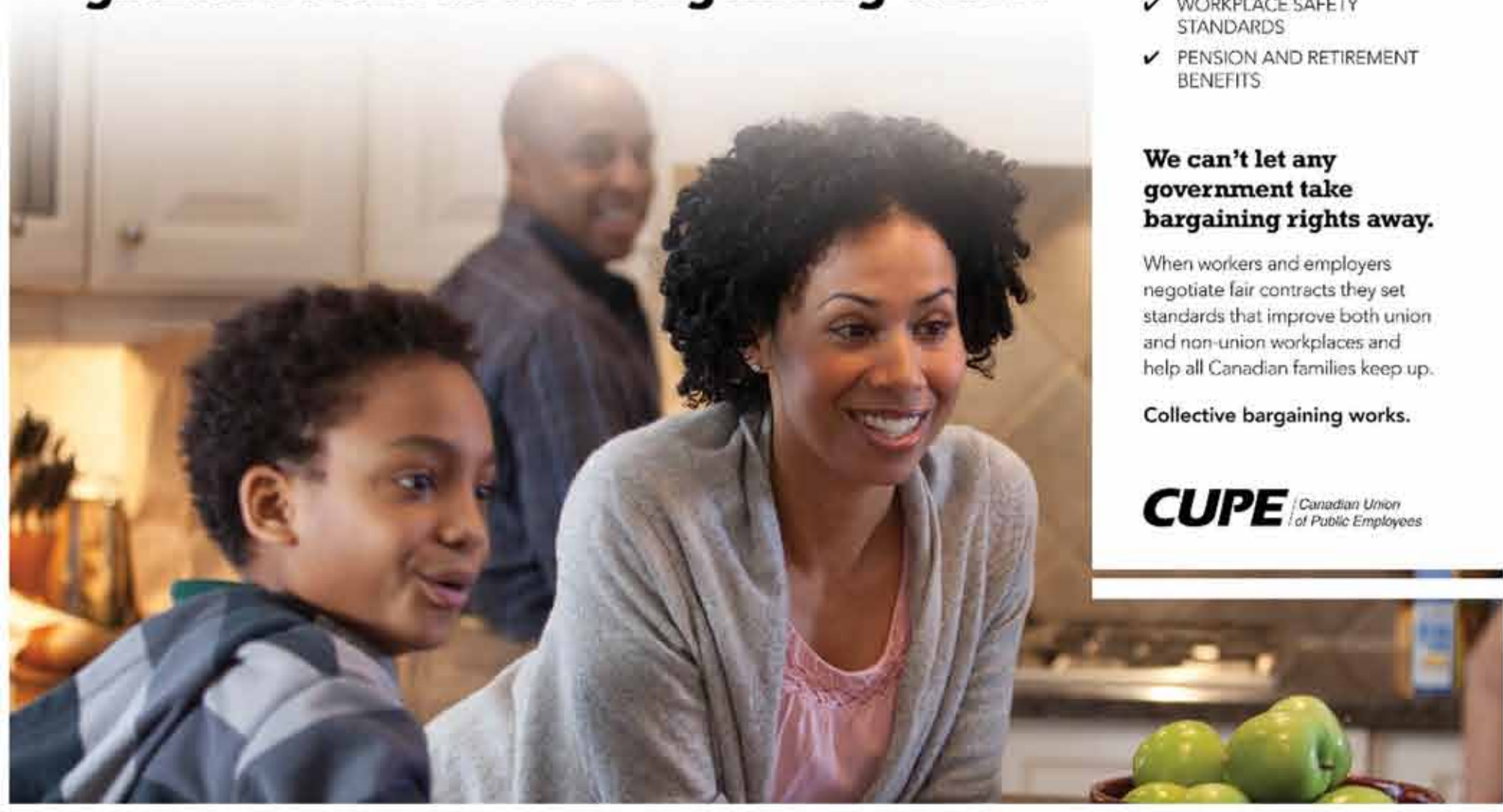
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- ✓ CAREGIVER'S LEAVE
- ✓ WORKPLACE SAFETY STANDARDS
- ✓ PENSION AND RETIREMENT BENEFITS

**We can't let any government take bargaining rights away.**

When workers and employers negotiate fair contracts they set standards that improve both union and non-union workplaces and help all Canadian families keep up.

Collective bargaining works.

**CUPE** / Canadian Union of Public Employees



NEWS

# Debunking myths about unions

FACT  
**2**  
WOMEN MAKE UP 60% OF PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS

**Question:** Do Canadians have an accurate understanding of unions?

**Answer:** There are several misconceptions about unions that need to be corrected.

Too often Canadians only hear about unions when something dramatic happens such as a strike or lock-out. People are inconvenienced, services are withdrawn or profits are jeopardized. Without a balanced view, it's far too easy to form negative views of unions and accept myths as facts.

"It's not surprising that anti-union perspectives develop if the public has no understanding of the history and truth of unions," says Trish Hennessy, Ontario Director for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

**Some of the most common myths about unions include:**

- They are always making unreasonable demands
- Unions are only interested in money
- Unions always go on strike
- Union demands are driving jobs away

**Demands**

"The truth is that unions are acutely aware of the economic environments in which they are bargaining," says Hennessy. That said, she adds, while demands are not unreasonable unions do seek to make gains for workers. "History teaches that once those gains are achieved, unions fight for them on behalf of all Canadians." Hennessy cites hard-fought benefits such as the 40-hour work week, pensions, vacations, parental leave, all of which have become Canadian cultural norms first won at the bargaining table.

"Unions are very reasonable in their demands and they make concessions all the time, but they do exist to protect the rights of workers."

"The main demand of unions is to bargain freely and collectively, and to do so together with the employer..."



**Trish Hennessy**  
Ontario Director,  
Canadian  
Centre for Policy  
Alternatives

**Money**

As for the perception that unions are only interested in money, that too is a myth, says Hennessy. "The

main demand of unions is to bargain freely and collectively, and to do so together with the employer," says Hennessy.



1

When you look at the range of issues that unions have fought for outside of wages, it's evident that there's little truth to the notion that money is paramount. However, middle-class standards of living are closely connected to unionization, says Hennessy. "There's a direct correlation between the decline in rates of unionization and the rise in inequality in Canada."

**Strikes**

While striking workers walking a picket line are often the only union stories that make the news, the fact is that they are a rare occurrence in Canada according to Hennessy.

"Strikes are often the only time Canadians hear about unions but it's a distorted picture. In fact, the average Canadian worker is on the job 96.4 percent of the time. And since 1976, the hours lost to labour strikes in Canada declined."

**Job drain**

There is "absolutely no evidence" to support the myth that union demands are driving jobs out of the province, says Hennessy. In fact, unions have taken cuts to pay and benefits in certain instances and companies have still packed up and moved elsewhere.

There are many factors at play driving corporate decisions to relocate, says Hennessy, including globalization, shareholder profit expectations, etc.

"It's a complete red herring to say that unions cause job losses," she says.



2

**ORGANIZED LABOUR**  
1. Union meeting to discuss upcoming agenda.  
PHOTO: TEAMSTERS CANADA  
2. The many faces of unionized labour.  
PHOTO: UNITE HERE CANADA

DIANA MCLAREN  
editorial@mediaplanet.com



## Is your work life making childcare almost impossible?

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This message brought to you by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario.

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Teaching materials • Lesson plans • Assessment rubrics • Integrated DVD and CD

# Apprenticeship: The key to Canada's success

## A MODEL OF SUCCESS

You may not be aware of this, but Canada's apprenticeship system is a model of success. For decades, skilled tradespeople who've been trained through our apprenticeship system have used their knowledge, tools, and raw materials to create Canada's infrastructure.

Today, there are over 500,000 Canadians serving as apprentices. They will become the plumbers, welders, electricians, and carpenters that build the refineries, hospitals, power plants, schools, houses, and malls where we spend our days living and working.

## Partnership and collaboration

Canada's Interprovincial Red Seal program has allowed qualified tradespeople to practice their trade in any province or territory of this nation. This wonderful model of labour mobility, not present anywhere else in the Americas, is a source of pride for Canadians working in the building trades.

In partnership with labour and industry, our provincial and territorial governments operate apprenticeship programs in ten provinces and three territories. Building and construction trades unions, vocational schools and colleges and institutes across Canada educate and train people to work in

the trades throughout the Red Seal. The health of Canada's apprenticeship system is based on partnership and collaboration and this model is one that works.

## Growing industries

Today, more than ever, there is an immediate need to promote and prepare young Canadians and new Canadians to work in the trades through apprenticeship. With new work projects in the majority of our provinces and territories, building, construction and work opportunities are unparalleled in our history.

The Construction Sector Council anticipates the need for approximately 360,000 additional tradespeople in the next ten years. For young Canadians and families thinking about the future, at a time when youth unemployment is at 15 percent and underemployment is at 25 percent, apprenticeship is the real answer.

## Creating opportunity

Unfortunately, at a time when it is needed the most, Canada is failing its apprenticeship system. Today, there are tens of thousands of Canadians who cannot complete their apprenticeships because they cannot fulfill their work requirements.

In Canada today, there are some financial support programs and incentives for employers looking to hire apprentices. However there are no requirements for employers

to actually hire apprentices. Our governments' response to the lack of jobs for apprentices is to raise the ratio that can work with a Journeyman, but we still find ourselves with fewer apprenticeship opportunities from industry.

employed apprentices will lead to more skilled tradespeople.

If we want to address the skills shortage, Canadian employers need to support hiring of apprentices and there has to be real legislation drafted from the fed-

lies. If we hired more Apprentices and kept them working, in just a few short years there would be more Journeymen and the shortage would not be an issue any longer. We need to employ our youth first and give them the opportunity to have a career in the trades.

## Invest in our future

We are strong supporters and believers of the time proven Canadian Apprenticeship model and our vision of a renewed apprenticeship system is one where it's easy for apprentices to get hired and where they are not the first workers laid off, and where they have many options for work opportunity across our great country, with true mobility. This will ensure the stay in their chosen trade and work to build the future of Canada for the next generation and beyond.

Lets not take our apprenticeship system for granted; let's invest in our future by employing apprentices. We need to make change now for the betterment of our system without downgrading the system we have in place for short term gain. Our future depends on it.



"Today, more than ever, there is an immediate need to promote and prepare young Canadians and new Canadians to work in the trades through apprenticeship."

**Larry Slaney**  
Executive Director, National Association of  
Union Schools and Colleges

## Addressing the skills shortage

Business and governments are consistently pointing to the lack of supply of skilled tradespeople as one of Canada's major economic challenges. In response to this shortage, governments are developing programs that will accelerate the immigration of skilled workers to Canada. While immigration is one part of the solution, a healthy Canadian apprenticeship system is the best solution — more

general and provincial governments that mandates construction companies to hire a minimum ratio of Apprentices for their worksites and maintain a minimum number based on how many Journeymen they employ. Currently the legislation in Ontario for example, only states that employers can hire a maximum number of Apprentices compared to Journeymen.

There is no minimum requirement and that is where the issue

**LARRY SLANEY**  
editorial@mediaplanet.com



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## INSPIRATION

4

## UNION RAIDING FACTS

**What is union raiding?**

**1** “Union raiding” refers to the act of union representatives visiting job sites and soliciting members of other unions in the hopes of filling their ranks with new membership.

**Raiding period**

**2** Ontario law dictates that all contracts within the construction sector are to be renewed every three years. During the last three months before a contract expires a Union’s membership can be raided. This year the Raiding Period is from February 1st to April 30th, 2013.

**Organization practices**

**3** The act of raiding is done by union representatives visiting rival job sites and soliciting union members to sign a ballot which

has their existing union and the raiding unions name on it. These representatives often make false promises and misrepresent facts in order to secure new signatures. This process is often disruptive and confrontational as it interrupts union workers on the job site.

**Act of raiding**

**4** By law, if the raiding party wins more votes it is then certified and the previous union’s collective agreement is automatically ended. The new union must now negotiate a new collective agreement with its new members and until an agreement is met, they are without any collective agreement rights.

BEN FALLINGBROOK  
editorial@mediaplanet.com

# Standing up for the rights of workers

**In the golden age of social justice and civil rights – from the sixties to the early eighties – unions played a vital role in shaping debates on tax policy, social spending, spreading political democracy and fine-tuning economic policy.**

Michael Lynk – a human rights/labour lawyer and professor at Western University – was fortunate enough to be born in the midst of that era, helping to cultivate a life long interest in the labour movement and its greater role in protecting people.

**Change over the years**

“(During that time) unions had roughly 33-35 percent of the Canadian workforce represented by them,” says Lynk.

With that support base, unions created the social pressure to push liberal policies forward; policies that brought about a rise in income, wealth and equality in the country.

Since the late 1980s, Lynk – who has worked as a lawyer both for unions and in private practice and as an arbitrator – has watched the ascension of conservative politics in Canada and along with them a slow fizzling out of labour law reform.

But there is a silver lining, he says. “(One of) the greatest success stories that unions have had in the last 25 years is they played a contributory role in the growth of human rights in society generally – and the workplace in particular,” says Lynk.

**Protecting the workforce**

From pushing forward human rights cases on gender equality, rights of religious employees in the workplace, sexual orientation, age discrimination, racial discrimina-

“Unions have played a very important role in pushing the law forward”



Michael Lynk  
Associate  
Professor of Law,  
Western University

tion and in more recent times, issues involving family status and ability of parents to balance work demands with home life – unions have often played a tireless role in protecting the workforce. “Almost all of those cases have union fingerprints on them,” he adds.

Despite a tempering of union influence and power over the past 30 years, says Lynk, one of their greatest contributions has been devoting a fair amount of their resources to litigating important human rights

issues in the courts and in front of human rights tribunals and labour arbitrators.

“We now have in Canada probably the best human rights legal system anywhere in the globe and unions have played a very important role in pushing the law forward on all those issues,” says Lynk.

**Future steps**

The next big challenge facing unions in protecting its membership, he suspects, is finding a way to give a voice to an increasingly temporary workforce filled with part-time workers.

“Unions were built in the 1940s and 1950s on the assumption that people would have that job for life,” says Lynk admitting that that’s not the case anymore. “The rise of the temporary workforce means a devaluing of jobs, a decline in wages and benefits and a spreading of economic equality with all the ills that attend to that.”

The next step is finding a way to heighten job and social security in this ever-changing workplace.

“The law keeps on changing, the demands of our society keep on changing,” he says.

But Lynk is up to the challenge brought on by the changing paradigm. “It’s intensely fascinating to see how the law and social justice can be married in productive ways,” he adds.

ANDREW SEALE  
editorial@mediaplanet.com

## WE ARE THE

# UNITY COALITION

The Unity Coalition is a groundbreaking partnership of building trade unions committed to positive growth in the Greater Toronto Area residential sector. By making the most effective use of our collective assets, the Unity Coalition will draw on the most creative and dynamic strategies in organizing, supply the highest skilled trades people working under the fairest collective agreements, guarantee harmony and cooperation with contractors and clients, and tirelessly work towards safe and productive worksites each and every day. The foundation of the Unity Coalition is the understanding that in unity lies unparalleled strength, and that the dedication of its members to working together in a coalition will deliver highly valued results to all employer partners in the residential sector.

**The Unity Coalition is 15 construction unions representing over 100,000 residential construction workers in the GTA.**



www.theunitycoalition.ca

**Contact a Unity Coalition representative**  
1-800-416-3594  
info@theunitycoalition.ca



INSIGHT

# On the job health and safety

**Unions have an illustrious history of acting as the catalyst for safer workplaces.**

"We've always been pushing for those positive changes to impact the lives of workers," says Carmine Tiano, Director of WSIB Advocacy and Occupational Services at the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario. "The union side not only has a duty to protect our unionized workers, we also have a bigger duty to help put legislation in place that protects the little guy who's non-union."

**Growing concern**

Despite Canada's continuously evolving occupational health and safety (OHS) standards — workplace safety is an ongoing and concerning issue.

In 2010, 1014 workplace deaths were recorded in Canada, an increase from 939 the previous year.

"Unfortunately most of the health and safety legislation in Ontario has been the result of some tragedy," says Tiano.

He points to the Hogg's Hollow tragedy in 1960, where five immigrant workers died while working on a water main under the Don River.

A lack of safety standards at the project was ultimately deemed a factor in the deaths and the inci-

dent led to the strengthening of Ontario's labour laws. "That's where we got the modern occupational health and safety report," says Tiano.

Flash-forward to Christmas Eve 2009 when four construction workers died in Etobicoke after the scaffolding they were working on collapsed.



Thirty charges were brought under the Occupational Health and Safety Act against Metron Construction Corporation, the employer of the workers.

The accident sparked a provincial review of the system that protects Ontario workers and led to the shut-down of 784 dangerous jobs on sites throughout the province.

In light of the accident, Tiano — along with other labour groups, employers and safety experts — sat on an advisory panel for the Dean report, a series of recommendations surrounding structural, operational and policy improvements to the province's OHS system.

"The government can't inspect all the jobsites," says Ferreira. "Some small contractors take advantage of that." That's where unions come in.

**Safety training**

Through safety training, accreditation and establishment of joint health and safety committees represented by both workers and employers — unions look to bolster safe practices in the workplace.

"Through my experience in Europe and Africa and North America I have been exposed to unionized and non-unionized job sites in different capacities," says Ferreira. "I choose to work for unions when I can because the job sites are more organized and the safety factors are better."

At the end of the day, says Tiano, having safety programs and training just makes good business sense — a sentiment he feels both employers and employees recognize.

"First and foremost we have a moral interest but we also have an interest in making sure this worker can be as productive a possible," he says. "Our unions spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on training and instructors to keep this worker at the top of his trade so why is it that an accident should take him out of the trade?"

ANDREW SEALE  
editorial@mediaplanet.com

## LABOURERS' INTERNATIONAL UNION OF NORTH AMERICA ONTARIO PROVINCIAL DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**Robert Petroni  
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**Jim MacKinnon  
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**Mike Maitland  
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## INSIGHT

FACT

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# Passing the torch: Youth involvement in unions

When Amanda Atwell decided to speak up about the way other employees were being treated at her workplace, she didn't realize she was aligning her goals with the entire labour movement.

A decade later, Atwell — a United Food and Commercial Workers Canada Local 1000A member — sits on the executive board of the Ontario Federation of Labour as Vice-President of Workers Under 30. Juggling a full-time job at supermarket chain Loblaws and her role as an ambassador to young people interested in unions is time consuming but well worth it.

"Sometimes people say we don't need unions any more, people aren't dying on the job," says Atwell. "But it happens, and there are bad employers out there that try to take advantage of people." She points out that young people should be able to "make improvements to their workplace" without fear of being fired or reprimanded.

## Empowering youth

Kate Walsh, strategic coordinator for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) NextGen Initiative, says it's that very sense of empowerment that has been drawing young people into the movement.

"I think it's important for young workers to learn how to get involved within their locals — it's such a unique situation in a career where you actually have a voice and vote on the conditions of your employment," adds Walsh. "In many other non-union environments you don't get that."



### YOUTH IN UNIONS

1. Zacary Tait gains experience as an automotive mechanic apprentice. PHOTO: ACCESS
2. Engaging youth in workplace issues gives them a stake in the wellbeing of the organization.
3. Unions help to represent gender equality in the workforce.

## Motivating engagement

As Canada's aging demographics take hold and current skilled trades workforce retires, it will be up to a new generation to carry the torch and continue the struggle for workers right.

"I think young people are already

conscientious," says Atwell pointing to a heightened political understanding driven by social media and the Internet. "Getting involved requires a certain amount of initiative on a young person's part but it is up to the union to make the labour movement more inclusive," she adds.



movement it's kind of at a cool time — there's a really old school traditional environment that's evolving."

And it goes beyond workers rights. The new generation is looking for a greater social aspect — that sense of camaraderie and solidarity that often flows through a movement like this.

Walsh says although the social aspect is seeing a resurgence, that sense of camaraderie hasn't wavered. She remembers a story about a young electrician from the East Coast who had just started a new job out in Alberta and within a week of being there found out about a family emergency back home.

He hadn't received his first pay, so he couldn't afford to travel home. "The guys from the union put a collection together to help pay his way," says Walsh. "It didn't matter that they had just met him — he was IBEW and he needed to get home so they made it happen."

ANDREW SEALE

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# PANEL OF EXPERTS



**Question 1:**  
What is the biggest misconception about unions?

**Unions are seen by many** as institutions run for their own self-interest by union bosses. In fact, labour unions are the expression of a movement of workers acting collectively to achieve better wages, working conditions and social justice. Unions in Canada are democratic collective organizations that are run by their members — the workers. While I lead CUPE, I am not CUPE. CUPE is the health care worker in your local hospital, the care aide in your mother's nursing home, the city water worker, the employment counsellor, the librarian, the school bus driver, the janitor in your child's school. Those and the many, many more public sector workers in your community are the union and it is they that determine our priorities and our actions, because workers know what is best for workers.

**Question 2:**  
Why does Ontario need unions?

**Income equality is growing** at an alarming rate. That is bad for the economy and bad for society. 82 percent of Canada's GDP is consumer spending and public spending. Our economic recovery needs a strong and vibrant middle class. That means good wages, benefits, and strong public services. The gains we make through collective bargaining and our political action like improved working conditions, maternity leave benefits and workplace pensions make a huge difference in the lives of all workers in Ontario, not just union members.

**Question 3:**  
Why did you join a union?

**I have been a CUPE member** since 1975 when I went to work at the City of Winnipeg. My union membership came with my job. City workers in Winnipeg have a pension plan, safe workplaces and decent wages among many other workplace standards and benefits achieved through the years of collective bargaining. The City of Winnipeg, like all communities with unionized workforces, benefit from the achievements that CUPE has negotiated into our collective agreement. The City of Winnipeg is a clear example of why mandatory dues collected through the Rand formula is so important — and why we should all be concerned about the pending attacks on the Rand formula by Harper and Hudak.



**Paul Moist**  
National President,  
Canadian Union of Public Employees



**Sharon DeSousa**  
Regional Executive Vice-President for  
Ontario, Public Service Alliance of Canada

**One myth is that** unions act like corporations. Unlike corporations, unions are made up of workers who democratically vote on how the union runs and elect leaders to represent them. Corporations are driven by profit, unions on the other hand are non-profit and work to improve the lives of workers. Unions also work on social justice issues that help all Canadians. From anti-poverty projects, advocating for environmental protection and promoting human rights, unions do much more than negotiate contracts.

**It's getting harder and harder** to find good jobs. Workers need benefits, pensions and security that only unions can provide. When a large segment of the population is unionized the economy does better. It's no coincidence that as unions have been attacked, our economy has suffered. Unions provide the balance between corporate power and a good quality of life for families. Corporations care about making profits, unions care about protecting people.

**I joined a union** to protect my rights at work. As a young contract worker, I was looking for full-time stability. For years I was promised by my boss that my job would become a permanent, full-time job. When I realized my boss wasn't going to fulfill that promise, I was left feeling powerless. A friend told me I needed the support of a union to hold my boss accountable. The union helped me face my boss and I became full-time. My situation made me understand that unions give workers power, which workers need to create healthy workplaces.



**Mark McKinnon**  
President, Ontario Professional Fire  
Fighters Association

**Too often, people** only hear about unions when there is controversy, such as a strike that impacts services or in the skewed context that unionized workers' wages, benefits and pensions are somehow the root of current economic problems. They don't think about the millions of workers and working families who benefit every day from safer workplaces, living wages and workplace protections, and about people able to retire with dignity because they have a reliable pension. The misconception is that unions exist only to generate conflict.

**It's a cliché** to say that unions give workers a voice, but it's true. Employers have associations that look out for their interests, and so do banks, insurance companies and corporations, so why not workers? Certain political elements are talking about "wage suppression" and stripping away workers' hard-earned rights. Without unions, it would happen in a heartbeat, and wages, workplace rights and health and safety would diminish for all workers. And remember, if average wages decrease, workers have less money to inject into the economy.

**I consciously chose a career** in a unionized profession because I was fortunate to understand from an early age that unionized workers have better workplace protections. Our working conditions are protected by a legally-binding agreement which prevents management from acting arbitrarily or making decisions about raises, promotions or terminations based on favoritism or discrimination. Workers pay the freight in this country through our income taxes, and working families are the backbone of society. I truly believe that all workers should have these kinds of protections.



**Brigida Ruiz**  
20 year member, UNITE HERE Canada  
Room Attendant, Sheraton Centre Toronto

**Unions are disappearing** along with manufacturing jobs, because the service sector is "precarious" and can't be organized. We are strong and we are growing — last year, in the GTA alone, we organized five hotels and one food service shop. It's not easy — employers have far too much power over workers' decision to unionize — but among people working in my industry, the desire and the need for unions is alive and well.

**There are many reasons,** but here are three: without unions, you lose the middle class. We know the gap between the rich and poor is getting wider every year in Ontario, especially Toronto. This has a lot to do with the shrinking number of good, union jobs. Secondly, through political participation, unions help us achieve benefits that help everyone, like strong public health care and pensions. Thirdly, unions reduce differences in wages and benefits between men and women, immigrants and Canadian-born workers — making a more equal society.

**For me, being a union member** has a lot to do with respect. By joining a union, you are demanding that you be treated like an adult and an equal, not a child. We've won really significant things during my time in the union — for example, safer work, better family benefits, better pensions, a subsidized metropass. And by accomplishing these things together, we've also won respect — self-respect, respect for our co-workers, respect from our management.

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# What Have Trade Unions Done For You Lately?



**By DON MACKINNON**  
President  
Power Workers' Union

Sometimes we get so used to our institutions we forget how important they are to us. We take democracy for granted in Canada, but a moment's thought about life in countries without it should be enough to convince you of the importance of a democratic political system. Absent democracy, "might makes right" – tyranny and inequality prevail. If our democratic institutions aren't preserved, we risk falling back into a state of affairs where people live politically impoverished lives.

Trade unions have been around longer than representative democracy in this country. It's easy to take them for granted and, particularly now when they are under persistent public attack, to forget why they are important for all of us. Here's a reminder.

First, trade unions transformed workplaces for the better. Before trade unions, working conditions were often deplorable and workplaces dangerous, and this in the most prosperous countries in the world. Twelve or even sixteen hour workdays without breaks in workplaces that were literally a threat to the lives of workers were not unusual. There was no minimum wage, medical coverage, insurance, or workers' compensation. A worker could have wages

cut, be laid off or fired without warning or explanation. Women were paid less than men doing the same job and children were put to work in dangerous conditions.

Once working people formed trade unions, however, workplace conditions improved. Unions struggling to achieve these gains, which we now take for granted, had to fight against many employers and governments, who claimed that any improvement to the lives of workers was unaffordable and would render industry uncompetitive. Unions perse-

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vered, however, to the point where people came to see their benefits for everyone and governments decided to acknowledge and regulate their existence by legislation. Unions, traditionally democratic organizations, were now required to be democratic by law and to represent all workers fairly. By the same token, all workers in the workplace were required to pay dues to the democratically selected trade union because they all got the equal benefit of the union's representation (the "Rand formula"). But

the benefits of union activities went beyond the workers they represented to all workers: minimum wage rules, health and safety laws, eight hour workdays, mandated breaks and paid time off are all the direct or indirect result of the union movement and its commitment to better the lives of all working people, whether or not they are union members.

Even more, the union movement benefited the economy as a whole. One reason for the establishment of labour laws in the early part of the 20th century was to promote economic expansion by increasing the purchasing power of workers. What ensued was a long period of great prosperity through to the late 20th century in which the middle class expanded, sharing in the wealth it helped create, but also spending its new income and so driving economic expansion. The expansion of unionization parallels the expansion of the middle class and the reduction of income inequality, the improvement in private pension and benefits plans, and the better treatment of women and minorities in the workplace.

The last 20 years or so have seen a rapid increase in the income of the wealthiest people in the country and a decline of the middle class. It's not a coincidence that this has been a period of sustained attack on trade unions, culminating in "right to work" laws in many US states. Unions tend to equalize wages among workers and ensure that fewer people are left in low paying jobs. They protect the vulnerable and ensure that workplaces are safe and that workers are treated fairly. As long as there is unionization in an industry, non unionized employ-

ers can't afford to fall too far behind in the treatment of their workers. In the short run, some might believe that reducing wages and benefits will increase profits, but this ignores the long run: lower paid workers have no money to spend in the economy and as the middle class disappears, so does prosperity for everyone, including business.

Those who live through a period of history often don't reflect on it while it's happening, and don't realize what they've got until it's gone. This is why it is important to look back and understand.

We are again hearing that business can't afford good wages and working conditions, pensions and benefits. It wasn't true a century ago and it's not true now. "Right to work" laws do not create jobs – they diminish the quality of existing jobs by stripping workers of the benefit of trade union representation. In a race to the bottom, the worker and society as a whole always lose – and income inequality returns. Just as a country that attacks its democratic institutions courts political poverty, one that attacks the democratic institution of trade unionism courts economic poverty.

So what have trade unions done for you lately? They've protected good jobs, wages, benefits and working conditions for you and your children. They've ensured that all people, including women, minorities and the disabled – you, your friends and family, are treated fairly in the workplace. They've fought against growing income inequality and for the preservation of the middle class – the only sure way of guaranteeing economic prosperity for all of us in the future.

