

**THE ONTARIO**

**WE**

**WANT**

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR  
CONVENTION 2015

13<sup>TH</sup> BIENNIAL CONVENTION  
TORONTO • NOVEMBER 23-27, 2015

CONVENTION REPORT

**YOUNG WORKERS**



**ONTARIO  
FEDERATION OF  
LABOUR**



### **CONVENTION REPORT: YOUNG WORKERS**

#### **13<sup>th</sup> OFL Biennial Convention • November 23-27, 2015 • Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL)**

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) represents 54 unions and one million workers.  
It is Canada's largest provincial labour federation.

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# 1.

## **FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE WE WANT: INTRODUCTION**

**“ The scope and depth of the challenges facing young workers demand a new, progressive approach to public policy and managing the economy ”**

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In Ontario, the recent recession and the austerity measures that followed have had a disproportionate impact on youth and young workers. Their struggles foretell a broader low-wage future that awaits all Ontarians if governments at every level do not change course. However, Ontario’s dramatic shift from manufacturing to a service economy has greatly undermined the middle-class job prospects that previous generations took for granted. At the same time, deep cuts to the social programs that have supported Ontarians for decades will have the most significant impact on the next generation – today’s diverse students and young workers – and threaten to undermine the advancement of young people, especially those from equity-seeking groups. At the bargaining table, two-tier wages and benefits and the full-scale replacement of defined-benefit pension plans with defined-contribution schemes are some of the most significant ways in which today’s decisions are most adversely affecting tomorrow’s workers.

The scope and depth of the challenges facing young workers demand a new, progressive approach to public policy and managing the economy. Young people across the province are calling on the provincial government to put job creation and the well-being of people and communities ahead of deficit reduction and corporate profits.

The OFL Young Workers’ Committee has responded to these circumstances by broadening participation in the Committee, working in collaboration with community and campus based youth and student groups, as well as forming an alliance between young worker committees within the various affiliates of the OFL. The focus of this mobilization is to reverse the trend towards an increasingly precarious workforce.

## 2.

# TACKLING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDER-EMPLOYMENT

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**Far too many young people can't find work or are working in low-wage jobs that don't value their skills.**

Denise Martins, OFL Vice-President  
Representing Young Workers

The reality for youth in today's job market is grim and growing worse. Just last year, Ontario's youth unemployment was at 16 percent, more than double the general rate and well above the national youth unemployment rate of 13.7 percent. Making matters worse, those who are employed are too often working in low-wage, precarious jobs without job security or benefits. The youth unemployment and under-employment crisis was the central theme of a February 2014 meeting that was jointly hosted by the Ontario Federation of Labour, Ontario Common Front, Unifor, Workers United Canada Council and the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario.

Event participants learned that just to return to pre-recession employment levels, over 89,000 jobs would need to be created for youth in Ontario. In response, they demanded bold action from the Wynne Government to create good jobs and support accessible education and training for young people.

Representatives of the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities attended the meeting to receive the recommendations prepared by young workers from community, student and labour groups. The recommendations included proposals to link infrastructure spending to youth job creation; expand the Youth Jobs Strategy to create more jobs with decent pay and opportunities for advancement; raise the minimum wage to \$14 an hour and eliminate the student minimum wage; reduce tuition fees by 30 percent over 3 years; eliminate exploitative unpaid internships; and implement a levy to ensure employers invest in apprenticeships and training.

The event organizers sought contributions and feedback from the Workers' Action Centre, Parkdale Community Legal Services, United Food and Commercial Workers, Public Service Alliance of Canada, Canadian Labour Congress, CUPE-Ontario, Canadian Apprenticeship Forum and Students Against Unpaid Internship Scams in the production of a comprehensive set of policy recommendations on youth opportunities.

A full copy of the preport is available at: <http://ofl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014.02.27-SUB-UnderEmployment.pdf>

### 3.

## EXPOSING THE ECONOMIC OBSTACLES FACING YOUTH

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**Today's youth are feeling the squeeze of part-time work, high tuition fees and a minimum wage that leaves them below the poverty line.**

On May 14, 2014, the OFL teamed up with the Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage and the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario to demonstrate the hurdles that students and young workers face while juggling rising tuition fees and low-wage work. The event took aim at the stunning fact that Ontario students need to work at least 20 weeks at minimum wage in order to pay for a year's worth of undergraduate tuition fees - four more weeks than there are in a summer. Two decades ago, eight weeks of work would have covered tuition fees for the year, leaving students eight more weeks to earn enough to cover the cost of books and living expenses. There is no question that today's youth are feeling the squeeze of part-time work, high tuition fees and a minimum wage that leaves them below the poverty line.

A "Young Worker Obstacle Course" was staged on the lawn of Queen's Park to show the necessity for an increased minimum wage, lower tuition fees and elevated employment standards. The theatrical event captured media attention and engaged scores of students in impossible games, including a Student Debt Challenge, an Unpaid Bills Balancing Act and a Child Care Juggle.

Event participants were also joined by Crown workers, members of United Steelworkers Local 9176, who's two year strike was nearing the half way mark. The event organizers made the connection between the next generation and the aluminum can workers by focusing on the two-tier concessions that the employer was seeking in a brutal round of hard-ball bargaining. On the table in the strike was a vicious corporate attempt to create an underclass of young workers by asking new hires to do the same job for 42 percent less pay, fewer benefits and a volatile market-driven pension.

## 4.

# THE FIGHT FOR FAIR WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS

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**Fairness means making it easier to join a union and seeking new standards for hours of work, paid sick days, scheduling, job security, and much more.**



In 2014, the Ontario government caved to pressure from the OFL and the Campaign to Raise the Minimum wage, when Premier Kathleen Wynne announced plans to introduce an annual inflationary increase to the minimum wage. By enshrining automatic yearly increases, this historic policy took much of the politics out of the annual minimum wage debate. However, campaign organizers welcomed the news with mixed emotions because the immediate increase in the base minimum wage rate to \$11 per hour fell far short of the campaign's original objective of \$14 per hour.

However, the victory none-the-less revealed the incredible possibility for collective action. Inspired by the accomplishment, the OFL Young Workers' Committee eagerly partnered with the newly established "Fight for \$15 and Fairness" campaign to join the popular movement that is sweeping North America.

On April 15, 2015, labour and community groups in 15 Ontario cities took action to fight for decent work. These actions coincided with American workers in 100 cities who walked off the job to protest sub-poverty wages. However, the Ontario version of the campaign added a crucial "fairness" component to the campaign that demanded changes to the *Employment Standards Act* and the *Labour Relations Act* that would make it easier to join a union and sought new standards for hours of work, paid sick days, scheduling, job security, and much more. The campaign also called for proper enforcement of labour and employment standards, safeguards for temporary and contract employees and better rules to protect every worker.

While this campaign has implications far beyond young workers, it is the next generation of workers who have the most at stake. The announcement of the Ontario Government's "Changing Workplaces Review" presents the first opportunity in a generation for meaningful labour law reform. While the government has sought to explicitly exclude discussion about the minimum wage from the purview of the review, the OFL Young Workers' Committee has maintained its determination to continue to campaign for a minimum wage that is permanently pegged above the poverty line.

The OFL Young Workers' Committee continues to actively participate in the Fight for \$15 and Fairness campaign.

## 5.

# CAMPAIGNING FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

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**The mobilization demonstrated massive and growing public support for a new economy that creates thousands of jobs, tackles inequality, honours Indigenous rights and stops runaway climate change.**

Naomi Klein, Author and Activist

The OFL Young Workers' Committee has also been active in supporting the call for “climate justice” and the creation of a new economic model that puts justice at the centre.

On June 5, 2015 the OFL joined an unprecedented alliance with environmental activists and Indigenous communities to “March for Jobs, Justice and the Climate.” In Toronto, 15,000 people gathered at Queen’s Park to demand a justice-based transition to a clean-energy economy in Canada on the eve of the Climate Summit of the Americas and Pan American Economic Summit. This shifting focus from environmentalism to “climate justice” seeks to empower those who are most impacted by the climate crisis – Indigenous, racialized, poor and working people – to become the first to benefit from this new economy.

The rally marked the emergence of an impressive movement that prominently features youth in a central organizing role. The OFL Young Workers' Committee remains dedicated to tackling the climate change as part of a broader commitment towards defending the next generation of workers.

## 6.

# OFL & AIL CANADA AWARD JACK LAYTON LABOUR POST-SECONDARY SCHOLARSHIPS

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**A union is a family that stands in solidarity with each other and supports the families of its members. By offering these numerous scholarships, the OFL has presented the gift of pursuing a higher education.**



Leizl Anne Pineda, 2015 Scholarship Winner

The OFL is proud to be joined in partnership by American Income Life (AIL) Canada in awarding two scholarships every year to a member or the child of a member of a local union affiliated to the OFL.

Due to the generosity of AIL, the amount of the OFL/AIL Jack Layton Labour Post-Secondary Scholarships was increased in 2015 from \$2,000, to \$2,500 each.

The 2014-15 recipients were **Prama Roy** of Midland, who started her first year of a Bachelor of Science (Honours) degree at Queens University, and **Karlee Sobczak** of Dundas, who enrolled in the Social Sciences Program at McMaster University.

The 2015-16 award winners were **Leizl Anne Pineda** of Hamilton, who started an International Management Program at the University of Ottawa, and **Vanessa Severin** of Oakville, who began an Honours Degree in Arts and Business at the University of Waterloo.

Each year, the OFL recognizes the contribution of five retired or deceased trade union activists by adding their names to the OFL Labour Honour Roll and awarding two scholarships in their names.

### **2014 LABOUR HONOUR ROLL INDUCTEES:**

- Brother **Rob Barlow** (PSAC/UTE)
- Sister **Kathie Fowlie** (UNIFOR Local 222)
- Brother **Amando Colafranceschi** (IUPAT District Council 46)
- Brother **Romeo Le Blanc** (COPE 343)
- Sister **Beth Wheatley** (OSSTF)

### **2015 LABOUR HONOUR ROLL INDUCTEES:**

- Brother **John Ball** (Peterborough and District Labour Council)
- Brother **John Lewis** (Durham Region Labour Council)
- Brother **Ken Lewenza** (UNIFOR)
- Brother **James Moffat** (Sheet Metal Workers)
- Sister **June Veacock** (OFL)



# 7.

## FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE WE WANT

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Today's youth find themselves at the forefront of the struggle for a just economy and good jobs for all.

The challenges facing young people in Ontario today are magnified for those from equity-seeking groups, such as aboriginal youth, youth of colour, youth with disabilities, LGBTQ youth and immigrant youth, who live in a society that often does not acknowledge their history or value their experiences. Discrimination based on race, language and other factors can create barriers to finding employment, while involvement with the criminal justice system or living in neighbourhoods without access to effective and affordable transportation can also create challenges for capable youth looking for employment. Racialized and newcomer youth, as well as youth living in poverty, face higher risks of unemployment. For example, in 2006, youth unemployment rates for Aboriginals were 21 percent compared to 14 percent for the non-Aboriginal population.

The goal of the OFL Young Worker's Committee is to bring attention to the intersection of equity and youth as it gives voice to those who have the most to lose (or gain) from Ontario's economic future.

In the term ahead, the Committee will be focused on youth, student and young worker empowerment through a comprehensive new "Know Your Rights" campaign that also tackles the controversial realities of unpaid interns; a Young Worker Engagement Summit; and efforts to raise working standards for every worker. The Committee will continue to organize with key youth, student and community coalition partners to challenge income inequality and expose the perils of Ontario's increasingly precarious workforce. To that end, the "Fight for \$15 and Fairness" campaign is recognized as the most important campaign in a generation.

### OFL YOUNG WORKERS' COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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#### Members:

- Roxanne Dubois, Unifor
- Vanitha Ethiraju, COPE
- Amy Huziak, CLC
- Denise Martins, OFL Young Worker VP
- Joel Thelosen, UFCW
- Kate Walsh, IBEW

#### Guests:

- Derik Chica, OSSTF
- Dan Janssen, IAMAW
- Evan Johnston, CUPE
- Noella Ramos, CUPW
- Jessica Sikora, OPSEU
- Ryan Sparrow, CUPE

#### OFL Officer & Staff:

- Irwin Nanda, OFL Executive Vice-President
- Joel Duff, OFL Communications Director
- Brynne Sinclair-Waters, OFL Researcher
- Mojdeh Cox, CLC

The Committee would like to thank all those who participated since the last convention.

# NOTES & IDEAS

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