



September 3, 2010

**A Labour Day Message from
Sid Ryan, President, OFL**

Work, or lack of it, is the central element around which our lives are organized. But the very nature and value of our work are being upended.

The dramatic reshaping is not only a response to the 2008 financial crisis but is also being used as an opportunity to further destabilize our economic security.

In Canada, public money financed billion-dollar bailouts to the corporate sector - the little publicized \$75 billion gift to Canada's chartered banks comes to mind as well as last year's more than \$50 million in earnings of five CEO's of Canadian banks. But we're being asked to flow even more of our steadily decreasing wages and savings to support corporations and financiers.

Today, there are 250,000 fewer full time jobs and 355, 000 more unemployed workers. That's only half the picture. Thousands of "new" jobs being created are part-time, contract, unstable, unpredictable and low waged. This explosion of precarious work is fast becoming a new normal.

Life is getting a lot tougher since this transfer of wealth and it is getting much more so.

The Ontario government's \$3.6 billion corporate tax is a case in point. It goes hand-in-hand with its freeze on public sector wages and its ambition to curtail social protections and vital services. All of this of course is part of a much broader game plan, one that has as its objective an accelerated transfer of public to private and fewer social protections. The tax windfall to the corporations is once again at the public's expense and raises the question of whether whatever savings we might have are enough to cover new fees, expenses and missing services.

While the government is not reticent to use its treasury to bolster those at the top, it has no such qualms when it comes to the rest of us. Bill 68, an act to promote Ontario

as open for business, relaxes and removes protections for non-union workers. The *Employment Standards Act* is the minimum threshold for rights in the workplace and more workers are relying solely on it. But planning is underway to make securing your unpaid wages, forced overtime, and firings more difficult to fight.

It is indeed a turbulent time with labour disputes unnecessarily mushrooming into long, full-blown strikes for lack of Ontario's action to restore anti-scab legislation. Workers, families and whole communities are being left to their own devices while employers spend small fortunes on security personnel, lawyers, busloads of scabs. The most recent poster child in this devastating scenario is Local 1-500 of the United Steelworkers at Engineered Coated Products in Brantford. This strike, now entering its third year, has left decent, hardworking women and men twisting in the wind because they refused to accept wage cuts of 25% and egregious concessions. Without anti-scab legislation, companies really don't have any incentive to negotiate in earnest.

How can this be good for our province? Governments and employers have used their combined strength to make it more difficult to organize and to squelch the strongest protection that working people have: a union.

But then that's the point, isn't it?

Since its inception, the labour movement has always been the key force in society seeking to restore a balance of power— not just for their own members but for all working people. The accomplishments and victories have fundamentally changed millions of lives: Medicare, pensions, weekends, minimum labour standards, social housing, social services are there for the benefit of the overwhelming majority of us and not the elite few.

Our recent and first victory in the campaign to ensure retirement security for all Canadians through an expanded Canada Pension Plan (CPP) is the result of an intense and widespread campaign. Average Canadians joined with us to convince governments that we have a right to a future that enables us, at the end of our work lives, to live in dignity and health. That significant first step now has to be followed up to make sure the CPP cap and contributions are adequate.

As thousands of trade unionists gather across Ontario to celebrate this Labour Day, we renew on our determination to do just that and to restore a balance of power so that the vast majority of Ontarians are able to profit from their work.

Won't you join us?

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