

To defend worker rights, jobs, and public services:

Ontario workers need a socialist strategy

Socialist Equality Party (Canada)
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The following is a statement issued by the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) to the protest the Ontario Federation of Labour is sponsoring in Toronto this Saturday.

Throughout Ontario and across the country workers and young people are seeking a way to fight against the big business assault on jobs, worker rights, health care and other vital public services. Consequently, thousands will be drawn to the Ontario Federation of Labour's "Rally for Respect" on April 9.

But the organizers of this event—the unions and their allies in the New Democratic Party (NDP)—are adamantly opposed to an industrial and political counter-offensive of the working class to challenge the stranglehold that the banks and conglomerates wield over socio-economic life.

The aim of the union bureaucrats and the social democratic politicians is to restrict workers' opposition to futile appeals to the big business politicians to abandon what is the *class strategy* of the entire Canadian bourgeoisie and its US, European, and Asian rivals. Big business the world over is seeking to make the working class pay for the crisis of capitalism through job cuts and speed-up and by eliminating what remains of the welfare state.

No one should be taken in by the bombastic speeches of OFL President Sid Ryan and the various other union officials and NDP leaders who will speak from the podium at Toronto's Dundas Square. They will bluster about the slash and burn policies of Toronto Mayor Rob Ford and Windsor's Eddie Francis, deplore the recent Ontario law that strips Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) workers of the right to strike, and decry Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper's reactionary agenda. But the rhetorical fireworks will only serve to perpetuate the ruinous course they have stubbornly pursued for decades and which is responsible for an unending series of reversals for working people—subservience to big business and its profit imperative, and to the parties and politics of the establishment.

For the past quarter century, the unions have actively suppressed the class struggle. Who can forget the shutting down of the working class upsurge against the Harris Conservatives' Common Sense Revolution or the USW's

complicity in the scabbing operation against the Vale-Inco miners? As for the NDP, whenever it has held office it has come into headlong conflict with the working class, most notoriously in Ontario, where the NDP will forever be associated with the wage-and job-cutting "social contract."

The response of the unions and the NDP to the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the Hungry Thirties has been to lurch still further right. The Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) joined with the Obama administration and the federal Conservative and Ontario Liberal governments to impose massive wage and benefit cuts and job losses on workers employed by the Detroit Three. With the full support of the unions, the NDP agreed in December 2008 to become junior partners in a national Liberal-led coalition government committed to implementing the Conservatives' corporate tax cuts and waging war in Afghanistan. And such a right-wing coalition remains the fondest hope of the NDP and Canadian Labour Congress, as evidenced by federal NDP leader Jack Layton's repeated assertions that the NDP is ready to work and partner with the other parties.

In Ontario the unions are staunch allies of the McGuinty Liberal government, which left in place all the key elements of the social policy counter-revolution implemented under Harris and is now, in the name of eliminating the deficit, initiating a new, sweeping assault on public services and on the workers that administer them.

In February CAW President Ken Lewenza lauded the Liberals' for the "positive initiatives that have been taken in numerous areas," including its backing of the "auto bailout" that was used to gut autoworkers' wages, benefits and working conditions. Moreover, the CAW endorsed the Liberals' timetable for balancing the budget on the backs of working people.

Last week the Liberal government delivered an austerity budget that contained the next stage in the government's multi-billion dollar corporate tax-cut program and established a task force, headed by a vice-president of the Toronto-Dominion bank, to propose "restructuring," i.e., downsizing and privatizing, all government operations. But that did not stop the unions continuing to promote their claim that McGuinty can be pressured into supporting workers' aspirations, this time in the

form an anti-scab law. Predictably this all ended in a fiasco. The proposed private member's bill banning scabs went down to a resounding defeat in the Ontario legislature.

Earlier this year, when the Liberals announced that they intended to act on Toronto Mayor Ford's call for a law abolishing TTC workers' right to strike, the local head of the Amalgamated Transit Union, Bob Kinnear, rushed to give an undertaking that TTC workers would not walk off the job during the contract negotiations. Kinnear's response to the law's recent passage was to reiterate his no-strike pledge.

Similarly, Mark Ferguson, leader of the union representing outside city workers, has responded to the Ford administration's threat to begin privatizing garbage collection next year by promising that his members will not strike when their contract expires in January.

These retreats have only encouraged Ford and big business as a whole. Toronto's municipal government has demonstrably begun preparations to use scabs against the city's workers; Toronto's corporate dailies regularly carry commentary pointing to the cross-Canada significance of inflicting a major defeat on municipal workers in the country's largest city.

While the ruling elite is preparing for all-out class war, the unions are preparing to once again promote the Liberals as "the lesser evil" in the provincial election this fall. They will cynically point to Ford's close association with the Conservatives to justify support for McGuinty—even as the premier connives with Ford to attack public services and worker rights.

The prostration of the unions and their allies in the NDP and their transformation into appendages of corporate management and enforcers of capitalist austerity is the result of global economic processes. The end of the post-Second World War boom, the globalization of production and the associated dismantling of much of industry in the advanced capitalist countries fatally undermined the ability of the unions to pressure capital for concessions in a nationally-regulated labor market. Subservient to capitalism, the unions in Canada and around the world have responded to the emergence of a global labor market by joining with the bosses in demanding workers make their employers more "competitive," i.e., accept concessions, speed-up and job cuts. This has been accompanied by their promotion of economic nationalism, which serves the trans-nationals by pitting workers against each other in a fratricidal struggle for a dwindling number of jobs.

To defeat the big business offensive, workers require a radical change of strategy and new organizations of struggle.

Workers must reject the demands of big business and its governments that they pay for the economic crisis. The claim that society lacks the resources to provide decent jobs and quality services to all is a lie. What prevents the huge gains in labour productivity that have resulted from the telecommunications-computer revolution from benefiting society as a whole is the capitalist organization of economic

life. Recent decades have seen a vast growth of social inequality, as the ruling elite appropriates ever more wealth, to the point that the richest one percent today monopolizes wealth to an extent not seen since the *ancien régime* on the eve of the French Revolution.

All cuts in social spending and demands for worker concessions must be rejected and met with militant opposition, including strikes and occupations. Above all the working class must undertake a political struggle through the development of an independent political movement aimed at establishing a workers' government dedicated to securing the social rights of all the working people. The economic and political dictatorship of the financial lords must be broken and economic life reorganized to meet the needs of the majority, not the parasitic few.

Spending must be sharply increased to protect the victims of the economic crisis and expand access to high quality education, health care, decent housing and a secure income to all. This must be paid for through a sharp increase in taxes on the top corporations and richest individuals, who presently pay virtually nothing. The ill-gotten gains of the financial elite must be confiscated and put to use for social needs. The major banks and corporations must be nationalized and placed under the democratic control of the working class.

The eruption of the class struggle throughout Europe and in Wisconsin, Ohio and other American states, coming on the heels of the revolutionary upheavals in Egypt and the Middle East, herald a new period of class confrontation and revolution in which the working class will once again take its rightful place as the protagonist of a new social and political order.

The trade unions, no less than the NDP, are thoroughly compromised and a part of an ossified, rightward moving political establishment aligned against the working class. New organizations of struggle, based on the democratic control of the rank and file, must be built in opposition to the union apparatuses so as to wage an uncompromising fight in defense of the interests of working people.

Above all the working class needs its own mass socialist party to prosecute the struggle for a workers' government.

We urge all workers and young people to join with the Socialist Equality Party in fighting for this perspective and to read and support the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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