

Canada: To defeat McGuinty and Harper, workers must rebel against OFL and NDP

Socialist Equality Party (Canada)
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The following statement is being distributed at today's "Day of Action Against Cuts" called by the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) to protest the draconian austerity budget introduced last month by the provincial Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty.

We encourage WSWS supporters in the Toronto area to download and distribute this statement.

Thousands of workers and young people are rallying today outside the Ontario legislature to voice their opposition to the brutal austerity measures being implemented by the McGuinty Liberal government. Their anger is entirely justified. But they will be little more than props in a political charade, if they do not recognize that the trade unions and their allies in the New Democratic Party (NDP) are conspiring to contain and suppress the mounting working class opposition to the austerity measures.

On the part of the union bureaucrats, today's show of opposition to the Liberal cuts is political theater meant to disguise the fact that they and the NDP are preparing to prop up McGuinty's minority Liberal government, ensure passage of its austerity budget, and surrender before its two-year public sector wage freeze.

The unabashed and unrelenting march of the NDP to the political right has exposed the bankruptcy of social democracy. In the name of "making parliament work," the NDP has for weeks been "negotiating" its support for a budget that is even more draconian than the attacks launched on working people under the Conservative government of Mike Harris.

The most "radical" NDP demand is for a slight increase in the taxes of the top 1 percent—those who have monopolized income gains over the past three decades

even as their taxes have been radically reduced. Millionaires will potentially have to pay two or three thousand dollars in additional levies. But even this "demand" is but a suggestion, since Ontario NDP (ONDP) leader Andrea Horwath has explicitly ruled out drawing any lines in the sand.

The NDP's readiness to support the Liberal budget is not a matter of being "boxed-in" by parliamentary arithmetic. The NDP has at most minor, tactical differences with the Liberal austerity measures. It agrees with the Liberals that the budget must be balanced by 2017-18 and that this must be done principally through spending cuts—that is at the expense of the public and social services upon which working people depend and by gutting public sector workers' wages, pensions and other benefits. In a demonstration of callousness aimed at winning approval in the editorial rooms of the corporate dailies, the NDP has effectively endorsed the Liberals' freeze on social assistance benefits for "able-bodied" recipients and done so under conditions where in real-dollar terms welfare benefits are lower today than they were after the punitive cuts of the Harris Conservatives.

The NDP's opposition to the Liberal wage freeze is nominal at best. Horwath failed to even mention the threatened wage freeze in her keynote address to last weekend's ONDP convention. But she had no qualms about championing the need to work with big business, while urging the NDP to, forego "the path of easy, simple opposition to everything" and to "make minority government work."

The unions, no less than the social-democrats, insist that the needs of the working class must be sacrificed so as to ensure the "competitiveness" of the Ontario and Canadian economies. They declare that workers must submit to a pro-employer collective bargaining regime that guarantees the union officialdom's privileges, in exchange for suppressing worker resistance.

Many of those who will address today's rally come from unions that actively promoted the re-election of Dalton McGuinty and his Liberal government, through their Working Families Coalition, while knowing full well the Liberals were preparing to implement massive spending cuts once the election was over. Hence McGuinty's appointment of the banker and former federal finance ministry austerity advocate Don Drummond to head a task force on shrinking government.

Canadian Auto Workers President Ken Lewenza campaigned alongside McGuinty and touted as one of his government's major achievements its role in "saving the auto industry—that is in making it once again a lucrative source of profits for investors—by tying government assistance to GM and Chrysler to a \$20 per hour, per worker cut in wages and benefits.

As for the readiness of the public sector unions to impose the ruling class' austerity agenda, it has been amply demonstrated by the Canadian Union of Public Employees' (CUPE) imposition of concessions laden contracts on Toronto City workers—contracts that by gutting job security provisions will facilitate the Ford administration's plans to slash and privatize services. First CUPE, with the complicity of the entire labour officialdom, deliberately kept the Toronto city workers' anti-concession struggles apart from the fight against the Ford administrations budget cuts. Then it capitulated before Ford's threat to impose contracts and deploy scabs, insisting that the workers were isolated.

The union and NDP leaders will attempt to justify their role in implementing the Liberals' austerity agenda by arguing that to do otherwise would open the door to Hudak and his rightwing Conservative hordes. The reality is that the entire ruling class is united in its determination to make working people pay for the greatest crisis of capitalism since the Great Depression by destroying decent pensions, quality public health care, indeed all the gains made by the working-class through the convulsive social struggles of the last century. While McGuinty seeks to impose this agenda by enlisting the support of the NDP and the union bureaucrats, Hudak, Ford and Harper deliberately snub the union officialdom to push it further right.

All over the world workers confront the same strategic problem.

They are bitterly resisting big business's austerity drive. But everywhere they are coming up against the same obstacle—the unions and the ostensible parties of the left are utterly opposed to any mass struggle and any

challenge to the dictates of the financial markets. When in office the British Labour Party, PASOK in Greece, Spain's Socialist Party and the NDP function as enforcers of capitalist austerity, while their union allies impose wage concessions and jobs cuts, all in the name of "saving jobs."

The working class has immense social power, but that power can only be mobilized in so far as workers break politically and organizationally from these pro-capitalist organizations and advance their own program to reorganize socio-economic life so as to make the fulfillment of social needs, not private profit, the animating principle.

To organize opposition to plant closures and wage cuts and the spending cuts being implemented by the federal Conservative and provincial and municipal governments, workers must build rank-and-file committees of action independent of the union apparatuses.

Militant industrial action—strikes and occupations—must be organized to resist the big business offensive and assert the strength of the working class. This must be done in lock-step with the development of a mass political movement of the working-class aimed at bringing to power workers' governments in Ottawa and the provinces committed to placing the banks and key industries under the democratic control of the working class.

Workers in Canada must adopt a socialist-internationalist perspective. This means opposing the Canadian elite's participation in imperialist wars, fighting for an international working-class offensive against the austerity measures being imposed by governments around the world, and organizing international action against the job cuts and concession demands of the transnationals.

We urge all those who recognize the need to build a revolutionary working class party to lead the fight for socialism to read and promote the World Socialist Web Site and to join and build the Socialist Equality Party.



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