

OFL and NDP complicit in Liberal attacks

Workers need a new perspective and new organizations to mount class political struggle

The Socialist Equality Party (Canada)
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The following statement is being distributed at today's "Rally for Rights and Democracy" that has been called by the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) to protest the austerity measures implemented by the provincial Liberal government. The rally will conclude with a protest outside the Liberal leadership convention, where a successor is being chosen to Premier Dalton McGuinty. We encourage WSWs supporters in the Toronto area to download and distribute this statement.

Thousands of workers and young people will march today on the Ontario Liberal leadership convention to voice their opposition to the brutal austerity measures and attacks on democratic rights being implemented by the provincial 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 complicit in the Liberals' assault on public services and worker rights.

The social-democratic NDP has propped up the minority Liberal government at Queen's Park, including making a deal last spring to ensure adoption of the Liberal budget—the centerpiece of its austerity agenda. The unions have contained and suppressed working class opposition to the Liberals' social spending cuts, public sector wage freeze, and anti-worker Bill 115.

Only through a political and organizational break with these pro-capitalist organizations will the working class be able to mount a counteroffensive against big business' drive to make working people pay for the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression.

On the part of the union bureaucrats, today's show of opposition to Liberal policies is political theater. It is meant to camouflage the fact that they and the NDP plan to continue sustaining the Liberals in office and to impose the Liberals' two-year public sector wage freeze.

Last week, Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath

proclaimed herself ready to work with whomever is selected as the new Liberal leader, after briefly flirting with the possibility of a more formal partnership with the Liberals in the form of a coalition. Pointing to her role in helping outgoing Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty and Finance Minister Dwight Duncan secure passage of their budget—a budget containing greater spending cuts than any adopted under the Conservative Mike Harris—Horwath, saying more than she probably realized, declared that if she was able to collaborate with McGuinty and Duncan to “make parliament work,” she can work with anyone.

The unions' “resistance” to the Liberal wage freeze has predictably proven to be cynical bluster. Concessions contracts have been signed by CUPE and OPSEU officials, recommended to their memberships, and ultimately ratified.

The union bureaucrats who bargain on behalf of Ontario public elementary and secondary school teachers signaled early on their acceptance of the Liberals' wage freeze and sick-day cuts, but chafed against the imposition of contracts over their heads. Late last year they negotiated several concession deals virtually identical to the contracts the government has now imposed on teachers under Bill 115, but to their chagrin couldn't, in most cases, prevail on rank-and-file teachers to ratify them. In response to the government's imposition of concession contracts under Bill 115 earlier this month, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) called separate one-day walkouts—whose innocuous character they sought to emphasize by calling them “political protests,” not strikes. But, no sooner had the Ontario labour board ruled such action “illegal,” they scuttled even these.

Many of those who will address Saturday's rally come from unions that actively promoted the re-election of Premier 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. This includes Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) President Ken Lewenza. He campaigned alongside McGuinty and touted as one of the Liberals' 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 \$20 per hour wage and benefit cuts for every auto worker.

The unions and NDP attempt to justify their role in implementing the Liberals' austerity agenda by arguing that to do otherwise would open the door to Tim Hudak and his right-wing Conservative hordes. The reality is that the Canadian ruling class is united in its determination to carry through a social counterrevolution—to destroy what remains of the social benefits and rights the working class won through the convulsive social struggles of the last century. Decent pensions, Medicare and other public services, protection from unemployment, and collective bargaining rights are all under systematic attack.

While the current Liberal government seeks to impose this agenda by enlisting the support of the NDP and the union bureaucrats, Hudak, Toronto Mayor Rob Ford and federal Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper deliberately snub the union officialdom, so as to push them further to the right.

The three-party system at Queen's Park and in Canadian national politics is a mechanism through which the ruling class regulates class tensions so as to divert and diffuse social discontent and politically suppress the working class. The unions and social-democrats have responded to the NDP's emergence as Canada's Official Opposition by shifting still further to the right so as to demonstrate to big business that they can supplant the Liberals as their "left" party of government. To this end, the NDP, now led by the ex-Quebec Liberal cabinet minister Thomas Mulcair, refused to even nominally support the Quebec student strike or oppose Quebec's draconian anti-strike law Bill 78. And the NDP has endorsed one overseas Canadian military intervention after another, including Canada's leading role in the NATO war on Libya and its logistical support for the current French invasion of Mali.

Just prior to Christmas, Mulcair boasted that his party would be even more miserly with the budgetary purse strings than Harper's Conservative government. "What's a paradox," he told the Canadian Press, "is that these are essentially conservative themes that I'm evoking in the sense that it would be very conservative to say 'Don't look for a handout, be self-reliant, pull yourself up by your bootstraps', that sort of stuff."

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."

These pro-capitalist organizations cannot be reformed or pushed to the left.

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 bureaucratic apparatuses 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 to the wage and spending cuts being implemented by the Ontario Liberal, federal Conservative, and provincial and municipal governments across the country, 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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