

GOOD JOBS, STRONG SERVICES AND RESPECT

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The recent spate of gun violence in Toronto requires a response that fully addresses the issues of youth violence and community safety. At the core of that response are three elements: good jobs, strong services, and respect.

The facts are clear. There is increasing poverty and racialization of poverty in Toronto, as good jobs are replaced by precarious work in both the private and public sectors. Young people growing up in many Toronto neighbourhoods don't see a hopeful future for themselves. They watch their parents out working two or three jobs to make ends meet, and older siblings graduate with huge debts and few career offers. And despite the improvements in community policing, far too often they experience harassment and racial profiling.

The narrow-minded law and order agenda being promoted by the Mayor and Prime Minister has proved time and again to be a failure. Ford says that a job is the best solution at the same time as he is turning a thousand decent city cleaning jobs into poverty wage jobs. Harper plans to throw more young people into prison, mimicking the American approach that features the highest rate of incarceration in the world, while refusing to crack down on the gun trade.

The reality is that gun violence would be far worse if it wasn't for the investments made in recent years in community services, school programming, and youth outreach. But much of that has been cut or paralyzed with the advent of the austerity measures and the Ford regime's attack on quality of services and the front-line workers who deliver them.

Residents need to feel safe in their neighbourhoods, and there is no short-cut to attaining that goal. It is vital to reinforce the wisdom of investing in community services, and requiring pro-active roles for public institutions including the city, TCHC, the police, school boards and the province as well as local agencies. The most basic recreational programming can end youth isolation while teaching important life skills and providing jobs to young people.

We don't need more reports – the excellent recommendations of past studies on the Roots of Youth Violence and Falconer on School Safety provide all the advice needed. It is the implementation of these measures that runs squarely up against the austerity agenda of right-wing politicians.

But the glaring problem, that many will refuse to tackle, is the need for good jobs and job equity. When the highest paid CEO in the country hires only through temp agencies, and has people working in the auto industry earning only \$11/hour, something has to change. When the contractor taking over solid waste collection this summer has workers toiling in the heat for just above minimum wage, something has to change. When people cleaning office towers, serving food, working retail or welcoming tourists have to work two or three jobs to survive, something has to change.

Only when those who control our economy accept their responsibility, and choose - or are forced to - create good jobs, will the next generation feel they have a chance to build healthy, safe and respectful communities. And only when those jobs are accessible to all our diverse communities will our prosperity be fully shared. In the coming weeks, it will be tremendously important to build a powerful campaign and political momentum to demand real solutions – good jobs, strong services and respect.