

THE 1% AGENDA

“The only thing certain is the certainty of change”. There will be an avalanche of change in Ontario in coming months, and little of it will benefit working people. The real power brokers in this province have a political agenda, both at Queen’s Park and the municipal level in greater Toronto. While Doug Ford may not initially have been their first choice for Premier, they wasted no time before supporting his rapid roll-back of workers rights and expansion of corporate privilege. Bill 47 unravels most of the Employment Standards gains made by workers under the previous government, cancelling the \$15 minimum wage and making it harder for workers to unionize.

A few enlightened corporate leaders may have seen the wisdom in the former government’s efforts to address growing precarity in the new economy, but the core group of market fundamentalists never consented to even these small steps toward more workplace justice. They relentlessly seek more profit regardless of the long-term consequences to our society. The death of yet another temporary agency worker at Fiera Foods on October 25 is the logical consequence of the economic race to the bottom.

When Ford hijacked the Toronto elections mid-way through the campaign, the voices of the economic and political elites were eerily silent about this stunning attack on democracy.

Despite their claim to want an inclusive and caring city, they believe their financial self-interest is better served with a smaller Council and a “strong mayor”. Bay Street does not want to waste time with democratic niceties – they like the idea of getting deals done with onestop shopping at the Mayor’s office.

The other major player in municipal politics – the development industry - was alarmed at the possibility of a new crop of diverse, progressive Councillors recruited by Progress Toronto. No doubt their lobbying efforts lined up with Ford’s personal instinct of revenge on Toronto City Council, leading to the decision to impose a drastic reduction to 25 seats through Bill 5. They will be pressuring the new Council for more tax giveaways and less community say over new developments.

John Tory started the race with over a million dollars in funds from his wealthy backers. After the threat from Keesmaat was contained, Tory was able to reach into a number of Councillor races to help defeat progressives. He wants a City Hall team that will fall in line with his priorities for the next four years. It remains to be seen if he will revisit the attempt to sell off Toronto Hydro, or resist Ford’s drive to take over the TTC subway operations.

The people of Toronto will have to mobilize strongly around preserving these key public assets, as well as other priorities such as childcare, tax fairness and affordable housing.

There will be a significant difference of opinion within the elites around education. Some recognize the folly of the Harris approach of disastrous cuts, while others can't wait for U.S. style vouchers and charter schools. It is not clear how Ford will handle the low investment levels in post-secondary education funding that conflict with employer demand for a highly skilled workforce.

There are some influential voices supporting carbon pricing and shifting to a low-carbon economy, but the Conservatives across Canada are on a Trump-like crusade to sideline any measures that interfere with the dominance of fossil fuels and extreme resource extraction.

Where there is strong business consensus is on privatization and deregulation.

Corporate Canada wants a piece of every public service and public asset, as well as commercializing every possible human interaction.

The biggest growth area for profit today is in the disruptive technologies that fuel the FANG billionaires – Facebook, Amazon, Netflix and Google. It's no mystery why John Tory sided with Uber over Toronto's taxi drivers, or why the Canadian government is hesitant to tax multinationals running digital businesses.

While some of these newest capitalist leaders don't agree with politics of racial and ethnic division, there is a lot of money behind the social conservatism that swept Trump and Doug Ford to power. Conservatives in many communities have been using divisive messaging on refugees and "family values" to mobilize their base, both in the provincial and municipal elections. Trump's behaviour has encouraged Neo-Nazis like Faith Goldy to campaign for public office and gain thousands of votes. The tragic murders of Jewish Americans at prayer on October 27th is a shocking outcome of the toxic stew that is being brewed here and across the globe.

We need to understand these dangers in order to respond effectively. Much was learned through the resistance to the Harris "common sense revolution", and the mobilization against Rob Ford's agenda at Toronto City Hall. Labour should be at the centre of a broad resistance movement, working with community allies, newly elected NDP MPPs, and progressive Councillors and School Trustees to offer a different solution to the challenges people face.

Our message must be grounded in an inclusive vision of justice that reaches deep into our own memberships and the communities they live in.

Our entire movement must be committed to redoubling our efforts to challenge hate and division, based on a profound appreciation of the impact of systemic racism. The direction we set out in the statement "Step Up and Speak Out" from April 2017 is even more relevant today.

The 1% may have wealth and powerful connections, but there is a fundamental contradiction between their agenda and the interests of the 99%. How we rally the majority to see their own interests - and build solidarity among working people of every background - is the task facing our movement in the coming years.

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