



## **COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, POLITICAL BARGAINING**

**October 3, 2019**

The labour movement in Canada has always recognized that it needs to bargain with both employers and with governments in many different ways. In 1872, the first mass labour rally in Toronto brought 10,000 people to the streets to demand the release of union printers jailed for the 'crime' of striking for an eight hour day. That was our first major act of political bargaining, and the ensuing victory changed labour laws for the entire country. It showed that creating collective strength for workers is crucial to challenging the immense power of corporations and the state.

The major advances we have made as working people have come through combining workplace and community action with electoral politics. The struggles for women's rights, the fight against racial discrimination, the setting of safety standards or minimum wages— all were intertwined in contract language and in political movements. Most social programs were the product of immense efforts of political bargaining. So too were key public services – including the creation of the TTC after a referendum on public transit supported by this Labour Council.

Our Labour Day slogan “Organize, Educate, Resist” draws from our extensive struggle against the Harris regime, and today is focused on the Ford government. We know that if the Conservatives were to win the federal election the assault against labour and social equity would dramatically increase – we see the agenda played out in Ontario, Alberta and south of the border. Mobilizing against the Ford agenda is a key dynamic in defeating Scheer – which means we need to ramp up the fights on education, health, social services, public transit and workers rights.

Labour's goal in the federal election is to both stop the Conservatives and elect as many New Democrats as possible in October. The NDP has been our electoral partner in challenging the business agenda of the governing parties, and the absence of an equivalent social democratic party in the U.S. is a critical weakness in American politics. The NDP platform in this election is clearly on the side of working people. Tommy Douglas challenged us to “dream no small dreams” – we need champions in public office who will fight alongside mass movements to win legislation on childcare, transit, climate change, housing, poverty and so much more.

The fact is that the real decision-makers for both Conservative and Liberal parties sit in corporate offices in Bay Street and Calgary. Business leaders are divided in their approach to politics – do they invest in public services and fair working conditions, or drive a hard line of austerity and low-wages? Much depends on the resistance that we build, engaging our members both where they live and where they work. This is more than social unionism. It is the ability to see our workplaces, our neighbourhoods and communities as places to build power.

Today the labour movement is assessing how it bargains politically on many fronts. We will hold rallies and demonstrations to share our message with the public and build our confidence. We will deepen our support for climate action. In the coming months, there will be tough bargaining in education and municipal sectors, with job action almost certain. Our movement needs to be

ready to support every worker in these key struggles, and start now to consider what it would take to carry out widespread action in their support, up to and including a general strike.

Collective bargaining, political bargaining... they are two sides of the same coin. In the coming months, Labour Council will be working with our affiliates to forge common purpose and commitment, and deepen our collective capacity in both.

On October 3, the Labour Council resolved to:

1. Work with affiliates and the CLC to engage union members in the federal election to stop a Conservative majority and elect as many New Democrats as possible in greater Toronto;
2. Help to win broad public support for workers engaged in collective bargaining in a number of sectors in the coming months;
3. Immediately engage with affiliates about possible co-ordinated direct action in support of strikes that confront the agenda of the Ford government;
4. Continue to demand the restoration of labour rights lost under Ford's Bill 47, as well as the right to strike for transit workers;
5. Engage affiliates and community allies to stop the provincial takeover of Toronto's subway, fight privatization of transit, and determine the viability of a "Free Transit" campaign.