

## **Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) Convention** **Nov 23-27, 2015**

**Reported by:** Vito Beato, Tricia Brown, Gwen Campbell, Lisa Contini, Joe Gorgi, Mary Lou Muck, Danny Price and Deb Valentine, OFL Delegates

The 2015 OFL Convention kicked off with an inspiring [music video](#), featuring original music written and performed by Toronto's Mohammad Ali, aka [Socialist Hip Hop](#). The title track was written around the convention theme and calls on labour and community activists to demand the change we need and fight for the [Ontario We Want](#). The full convention video clocked in at 20 minutes and provided a powerful account of Ontario's reinvigorated labour movement. You can watch the full video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7GFjfP4HwAA&feature=youtu.be>

### **Sid Ryan delivers a heartfelt final convention address**

Out-going OFL President Sid Ryan marked his final convention address with a bold call for "labour to get its mojo back" that was characteristic of his firebrand leadership in Ontario's labour movement. However, Sid proved that he is still capable of a few surprises, when his address took a heartfelt turn, reflecting on emotional touchstones as he acknowledged that "Ontario's labour movement has some healing to do." The speech reminded delegates of the historic opportunity to redraft Ontario's labour laws so that every job is a pathway out of poverty.

### **OFL Officer Candidates to Address Convention on Tuesday**

As the first order of business, Convention delegates resolved to make room on the busy convention agenda for candidate speeches immediately before the vote on the new OFL officers.

### **CBTU's Terry Melvin Called for Equity Solidarity**

"In order to be successful we must all work together, to motivate and mobilize our members, our communities and our leaders," said Terry Melvin, president of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists in an electrifying speech on unity and equity.

Racialized workers are the future of the labour movement, he said, but added that it is not enough to have equality positions on our union executive boards.

"We must stop unionizing our sisters and brothers of colour then expecting them to sit in the corner and wait to be seen," he said. "Stand with me for a united movement."

### **Human Rights Panel Talks Intersectionality**

Five remarkable activists spoke about intersectionality and being a good ally during the Human Rights panel Monday afternoon.

Activist and journalist Desmond Cole moderated the panel, which included school board trustee Ausma Malik, Pam Dogra from ETFO, Jessica Burnie from OSSTF and Elaine White from Unifor.

“To be an ally is to be supportive, to speak out and to be an agent of change. Allies recognize that we all have a stake in equity,” said Dogra. “We must say to each other, ‘your life is connected to mine.’ We can’t do activism in isolation. We build our movement through those alliances.”

### **Team Elected to Lead the Ontario Federation of Labour: Chris Buckley (Unifor), Patty Coates (OSSTF) and Ahmad Gaied receive strong mandate**

In a packed convention hall, 1539 delegates to the OFL 2015 Biennial Convention elected a new leadership team to take the helm of Ontario’s house of labour.

The election marked the end of six years of bold leadership from outgoing OFL President Sid Ryan, along with Secretary-Treasurer Nancy Hutchison and Executive Vice-President Irwin Nanda. Earlier this fall, all three officers announced their intention to not seek re-election. Former Unifor Local 222 President, Chris Buckley from Oshawa was unanimously elected OFL President and Barrie and District Labour Council President Patty Coates was also elected without opposition as the OFL Secretary-Treasurer. After a three-way race for the position of OFL Executive Vice-President, Ahmad Gaied from UFCW Local 1000A was given a strong mandate to join the team of OFL Officers.

“My job is to make sure that this Federation pulls together! My goal is to unite our labour movement across Ontario and that starts with unity at YOUR OFL,” incoming President Chris Buckley belted out to thunderous applause from delegates. “We owe it to workers today and to our collective future to champion a province-wide campaign to reshape labour laws in the interest of every worker in Ontario.”

Coates, who hails out of OSSTF District 17, cited the current fight between Ontario’s education workers, the province and school boards at a time of cuts to education as a case study in labour unity. “It is only when the fight of any worker becomes the fight of every worker that the labour movement can defend good jobs and strong public services that make our economy work for everyone.”

At 33 years old, newly elected Ahmad Gaied, is the youngest officer in the 58-year history of the Ontario Federation of Labour. “I started work at a No Frills grocery store when I was 17 years old and I got my first experience with the incredible power of the union,” said Gaied. “I am part of the new generation of workers who are facing the most precarious labour market in our country’s history. I am committed to mobilizing youth and young workers to stop Ontario’s race to the bottom.”

The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) represents 54 unions and one million workers in Ontario. For information, visit [www.OFL.ca](http://www.OFL.ca) and follow the OFL on Facebook and Twitter: @OFLabour.

### **Yussuff calls on OFL Members to Hold Trudeau Liberals to Account**

The next four years present an opportunity to build the Canada we want, said Canadian Labour Congress President Hassan Yussuff in a sweeping speech Tuesday.

While the outcome of the election may not have been ideal, it ended a decade of rule by a prime minister who used racism and xenophobia as an election tool, who attacked unions and who set human rights back a decade.

We must hold Justin Trudeau to his promises to repeal Bill C-377, to begin an inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women and to restore card-check certification. We must also convince

Trudeau to repeal, not revise Bill C-51, he said, adding we must push to radically change or walk away from the TPP, which will devastate the auto and other sectors.

### **Gender Equality Presents a Powerful Performance**

Detroit union activist and political performer Lynn Marie Smith delivered a passionate message that resonated through the convention hall speakers and brought delegates to their feet in applause ... and a conga line.

Mixing speech and song in a passionate call for gender equality and activism, Smith called on delegates to “be the kind of union member that, when you wake up in the morning, the devil says ‘oh crap, she’s up!’”

### **Kill a Worker, Go To Jail**

One of the most successful and high-profile campaigns of the OFL has been the “Kill a Worker, Go To Jail” Campaign to demand the criminal conviction of any employer whose negligence results in a workers’ death or serious injury. The OFL has also been a staunch advocate for injured workers, holding the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board to account for the thousands of injured workers who are re-victimized by the cruelty of the compensation system.

### **Omar Khadr’s Lawyer Delivered a Powerful Keynote Address on the Rule of Law in the Age of Fear**

Edney spent 12 years trying to secure Omar Khadr’s release, first from Guantanamo Bay, then from a maximum security prison here in Canada. His legal victories (alongside co-counsel Nate Whitling) include: Omar’s repatriation back to Canada, three successful Supreme Court of Canada judgments regarding the violation of Omar’s legal rights, and more recently securing Omar’s release on bail while his Military Commission convictions are appealed in the United States. Mr. Edney and Mr. Whitling have defended Omar on a largely pro bono basis, reaching into their own pockets to represent Omar.

But there is still much work to be done, inside and outside the courtroom, to repair the harm done to the young man. Edney’s speech to OFL delegates on Wednesday afternoon was called, “The Rule of Law in an Age of Fear.”

At the end of the address, OFL delegates and affiliates donated \$53,500 for Khadr’s legal defence fund.

### **Action Plan Discussion Punctuated by Rally for \$15 and Fairness**

Much of Wednesday’s convention floor debate was focused on the most optimistic and forward-looking document in the delegate kit: the 2015 OFL Action Plan. This sweeping roadmap for the “Ontario We Want” contained a whopping 60 recommendations in its humble 51 pages.

“The ‘Ontario We Want’ requires our collective action and the resolve to keep fighting until our demands are met,” the document begins. “The 2015 Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) Action Plan builds on the success of effective and collective political mobilization like the #StopHudak campaign,

and applies what we have learned with the goal of replicating our success. Together, we will pursue big, bold ideas rooted in our shared values.

At the centre of the plan was a pledge to mobilize a province-wide campaign for labour law reform. Delegates put their words into action with a lunchtime rally that brought over 1,000 delegates to Queen's Park to demand "\$15 and Fairness."

Newly elected OFL President Chris Buckley called on delegates to make a province wide campaign for labour law reform the top priority for the term ahead. Enthusiasm for the plan exhausted the debate time allotted, so the conclusion of debate will take place on Friday.

### **Mehra says Ontarians are in an Economic Backslide**

Natalie Mehra presented alarming research she produced for the Ontario Common Front, called, "Backslide: Labour Force Restructuring, Austerity and Widening inequality in Ontario."

"Ontario is dead last in funding for social programs and, by nearly every measure, it is trailing every other province in income equality and poverty reduction," Mehra informed delegates. "While it is hard to start a family anywhere in Canada, young families in Ontario are struggling with the largest student debt loads, the most expensive child care, the worst access to affordable housing and highest costs for health care."

"The good news is that this report demonstrates that better choices are possible. The challenge is to convince Ontario to make them."

### **Young Worker Panel Called for End to Precarious Work**

The OFL Young Workers' Committee dedicated their forum time to what, in many ways, was the defining panel of the Convention. With Ontario's first labour law review in 20 years currently underway, the top priority of the labour movement must be to demand radical change to the basic rights of workers and their ability to join a union.

Deena Ladd from the Workers' Action Centre called on union members to champion the rights of every worker by fighting, not just for changes to the Labour Relations Act but, to improve the province's Employment Standards Act.

"With union density at less than 30 percent, unionized workers are surrounded by workers who have almost zero benefits," Sister Ladd told delegates. "That means that the downward pressure on wages exerted by low-wage workers is stronger than the pressure from unions members to pull them up. The only way to fix the system is by lifting the floor for every worker."

### **Delegates Descend on WSIB to Demand Justice for Injured Workers**

Hundreds of delegates marched on the office of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) in solidarity with the Ontario Network of Injured Workers Groups (ONIWG) to demand an end to "experience rating" in all its forms, an end to "deeming" and a compensation system that lifts every injured worker out of poverty.

Incoming OFL President Chris Buckley "We are here to tell the WSIB that there isn't a crisis in WSIB

funding, the only crisis is a system that isn't charging employers enough to ensure the dignity of injured workers."

## **Safety and Solidarity! Prevention and Compensation**

The morning was packed with moving real-life stories about workers facing death and injury on the job. However, the theme that ran through the panel and the resolutions discussion that followed was that employers must be forced to make accident prevention and the protection of workers' lives a top priority. And the WSIB must be transformed into a system that, once again, works for workers ... not employers.

## **Resolutions - Concurrence on All Throughout the Weeklong Conference**

A copy of all resolutions put forward at the convention can be retrieved at the following link:

<http://ofl.ca/wp-content/uploads/OFL2015-PolicyResolutions.pdf>

Resolutions addressed include:

#22 - Workers Rights Campaign, #21 - Fight Back Against Austerity, #27 - Minimum Wage/Living Wage

## **Human Rights Resolutions**

#6 - Equity Focused Action Plan (also covers resolution # 5), #10 - Solidarity and Pride, #2 - Racial Profiling (also covers resolution #3 and #4), #8 - Crimes Motivated by Homophobia and Transphobia, #1 - Black Lives Matter, #11 - Workers of Colour, #7 - Protect Minority Rights, #9 - Protection from Normalizing Surgery to a Child's Reproductive Organs

## **Women's Rights Resolutions**

#14 – Equity in Leadership, #17 – Violence Against Women, #13 – Income Inequality, #15 – Reinvigorating Sisters in Spirit Solidarity Actions, #16 – Pay Equity Transparency and Compliance, #18 – Women in Leadership, #12 – Violence Against Women, #20 – Employment Equity, #19 – Pay Equity

## **Health & Safety and Workers' Compensation Resolutions**

#66- Workplace Safety and Insurance Board Benefit Policies, #68- Workplace Violence, ER#8 - Monday December 14th Demonstration at WSIB Offices, #62 - Mental Injury Tool for Ontario Workers, #57- From Pain to Prevention, #65 - Violence and Harassment, #58 - Supporting the CSA Standard – Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, #60 - Asbestos in Buildings, #70 - Working Alone, #63 - Occupational Health and Safety Management Responsibility Statement, ER#7 - Prescription Over-Ruled, #64 - Funding for the Office of the Worker Advisor, #61 - Access to Information about Asbestos in Public Buildings, #67 - Day of Respect at Work, #59 - Nano-Materials, #71 - ONIWG Funding

## **Young Workers Resolutions**

#72 - Young Worker Engagement Summit, #73 - “Know Your Rights” Campaign for Young Workers, Interns and Co-Op Students, #75 - Support for the CFS-Ontario “Education is a Right” Campaign, #74 - Opposition to “Net Tuition”, #76 - Student & Union Representation at Carleton University

## **Action Plan 2015**

The Resolution Committee moves a motion to adopt the Action plan as amended.

As noted, the Action Plan also covers resolutions: #25, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 44, 46, 47, 69, 82

## **General Resolutions**

ER#1 – Promoting Licensed Taxi Services in Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) | Fédération du travail de l'Ontario (FTO), ER#3 – Protect Steel Industry Pensions and Benefits (Requires 2/3), ER#4 – New Ellis Don Bill, #93 – Support for Child Care Workers, #95 – Stop the Energy East Pipeline (Referred from EB, Requires 2/3), #81 – Revenue Tools

#42 – Bill C-51 (covers #41), #40 – Organizing, #43 – Repeal Bill C-377, An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act – Requirements for Labour Organizations, #80 – Keep Hydro Public (covers #79), #77 – Economic Development, #93 – Support for Child Care Workers, #86 – Promoting Investment in Renewable Energy (covers #87), #83 – Provincial Mass Transit Canadian Content Rules, #81 – Revenue Tools