

June 5, 2018 - Vol. 7 No. 9

Speaking Out on Matters of Concern

Manufacturing Yes! Nation-Wrecking No!

- Pierre Chénier -



Speaking Out on Matters of Concern

- **Manufacturing Yes! Nation-Wrecking No!** - *Pierre Chénier*
 - **Town Hall Meetings Put Workers' Concerns on Agenda During Election**
 - **East Danforth Immigrant Women Speak About Their Concerns**
 - **The Need to Properly Fund Hospitals and Paramedic Services** - *Jason Fraser, Chair of CUPE Ambulance Committee of Ontario*
 - **Opposition to Privatization of Public Services** - *Jack Jackson, President, ATU Local 1572 (Mississauga)*
 - **What Is Taking Place with Teachers' Pensions?** - *Laura Chesnik, Independent Candidate in Windsor-Tecumseh*
-

Speaking Out on Matters of Concern:
Manufacturing Yes! Nation-Wrecking No!
- Pierre Chénier -



United Steelworkers Local 1005 from Stelco in Hamilton at day of action against closing of Caterpillar EMD plant, January 21, 2012.

Manufacturing in Ontario has suffered a serious setback over the last 18 years. In the year 2000, direct manufacturing employment represented over one million jobs. In 2015, instead of growing along with the population, the number of manufacturing workers had fallen to 743,000.

The wrecking of Ontario manufacturing is reflected in a fall in wages. Between 2000 and 2015, the earnings of the middle or median worker in the Ontario economy fell by 4 per cent after inflation. The fall of 4 per cent in the median real wages or individual reproduced-value of the working class, which was the greatest reduction in real wages of any province over the period, can be attributed to the loss of better paying manufacturing jobs and greater competition for the remaining jobs. (From research compiled by the University of BC and the C.D. Howe Institute)

The closure of manufacturing plants employing hundreds of workers, often in cities and towns where the factory was the biggest employer, was widespread across Ontario. Examples of this abound:

U.S.-based heavy machinery producer Caterpillar closed its Electro-Motive Diesel (EMD) plant in London in 2012 and the Lovat tunnel-boring machine (TBM) facility in Toronto in early 2014, depriving hundreds of workers and people in those communities of their livelihood.

U.S. food monopoly Heinz in 2014 shut down its Leamington plant, which was by far the biggest employer in town. The shutdown deprived 740 workers of their jobs and put downward pressure on the income of hundreds of farmers supplying tomatoes to the plant.

Siemens Canada, a subsidiary of the German Siemens multi-manufacturing oligopoly, announced on July 18, 2017 the closure of its wind-turbine plant in Tillsonburg slashing over 340 jobs and shuttering one of the town's largest employers.

The Campbell Soup Company announced this past January its plan to stop soup production in Canada within the next 18 months. The closure of its last Canadian manufacturing facility, located in Etobicoke, Ontario will put 380 workers out of work.

The list includes the wrecking of basic steel production, such as at Stelco which is now a shadow of its former self. A modern economy cannot exist in any self-reliant way without the production of its own steel.

The issue boils down to who controls the economy and for what aim. The working class constituted as the nation must assume control of the economy and replace the aim of maximum profit for private supranational interests with an aim of nation-building to serve the people and the harmonious extended reproduction of their economy. This aim requires a new direction for the economy towards self-reliance and diversity within all the regions of the country. Modern manufacturing acts as the anchor or economic base of the regions such as southern and northern Ontario within an overall economy that includes resource extraction, public services, social programs and international trade based on cooperation and mutual benefit.

Manufacturing Yes! Nation-Wrecking No! is a demand of Ontarians to empower themselves now! With empowerment now! comes control over those affairs that directly affect the people's lives, and at the heart of the people's lives is the economy on which everyone depends.



Town Hall Meetings Put Workers' Concerns on Agenda During Election

Working people across Ontario are fighting every day for their rights and pressing that their demands be met. During the election, more than ever, they are holding meetings, town halls, round tables and other activities to ensure they have an independent voice in the election and argue out how to intervene to make sure their concerns are heard.

Peterborough Action Against Poverty Town Hall



Thirty people participated in an Action Against Poverty town hall meeting with local candidates organized by the Youth Political Action Coalition in Peterborough on May 24.

Jane-Finch Neighbourhood Community Meeting in Toronto



A meeting at the Driftwood Community Centre, May 29, organized by the Jane Finch Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, provided a forum for residents and community groups to highlight issues of concern. In particular the discussion focussed on; public housing, in particular the state of and recent closures of Toronto Community Housing buildings; education; mental health care; workers rights and the minimum wage; and public transit.

Town Hall in Thunder Bay Concerning Long-Term Care Crisis



A Long-Term Care Crisis Town Hall Meeting was organized May 29, in Thunder Bay by Unifor Local 229. The union represents long term care workers in the city which has six long-term care facilities.

According to the president of Unifor Local 229 Keri Jefford, there remains a chronic shortage of personal support workers. "Some of the issues is legislation changes to make employers and owners of for-profit and private clinics have basic minimum staffing levels and funding also needs to increase and workers need more time with the residents," Jefford said. Natalie Mehra, Executive Director of the Ontario Health Coalition, also spoke during the meeting saying that staffing shortages is an issue impacting long-term care homes across the province.

During the town hall meeting, several solutions were offered by staff at long-term care homes in the city and family members of residents, which included not opening anymore for-profit or private homes, increasing the worker to patient ratio, and wage increases to incentivize more people into the profession.

Gender Equity Town Hall in Toronto



A gender equity town hall candidates meeting was organized in Toronto on May 29, as part of the "Ontario for All" campaign being organized by various non-profit organizations including food banks, community health centres, legal clinics, and youth services, during the election. Discussion at the meeting dealt with questions of safe and affordable housing, affordable child care, and ending gender-based violence.



East Danforth Immigrant Women Speak About Their Concerns



Immigrant women activists living in Toronto's East Danforth area organized an election forum on May 26 to inform communities in the Scarborough South West and Beaches-East York ridings of issues of concern to them in the Ontario election. The forum, in which some 100 people participated, was organized by members of the South Asian Women's Rights Organization and Unifor East Danforth Community Chapter.



The women described extensive labour market challenges as an election issue. Candidates were invited to join a "listening panel" to hear about work-related problems and the proposals immigrant

women have discussed to solve them. Six of the candidates running in the two ridings participated.

Two young women led off with a presentation about an investigation community women leaders recently carried out into the marginalization of immigrant women workers. They also outlined a set of proposals for labour market reforms worked out by community women: an inquiry into the underemployment of skilled immigrant women; third party representation for non-unionized workers; action to end chaotic work scheduling; restriction of the operations of temporary help agencies and equitable access to Employment Insurance, child care subsidies and other work-related social programs.

Interventions by three groups of women followed. They discussed their own experience with each of the reform themes and put forward questions for the candidates who were given an opportunity to respond. Lively discussion took place thanks to the initiatives the immigrant women are taking and their determination to provide the problems they face with viable solutions.



The Need to Properly Fund Hospitals and Paramedic Services

- Jason Fraser, Chair of CUPE Ambulance Committee of Ontario -

We want whichever of the political parties is elected to take a look at the services that Ontario paramedics provide and realize that they need to invest in paramedic services right away.

They must take an overall look at health care and properly fund hospitals so that appropriate bed allocations are made to alleviate the pressures on hospitals and paramedic services. If hospitals are not being properly funded and are not receiving the appropriate bed allocations, emergency departments get backlogged with patients who should potentially be admitted to one of the floors. If

no bed is available on the floor, the patient gets held up in the emergency department occupying one of its beds. When paramedics arrive with a patient on an ambulance stretcher, there is no available bed to move that patient over to.



Paramedics from many Ontario cities converged on Queen's Park December 12, 2017, to oppose dangerous changes to the *Ambulance Act* made as part of the massive omnibus Bill 160 passed that day.

Proper funding is needed throughout an entire hospital to allow proper patient flow within the hospital as well as patient flow from paramedic services into the hospital system. As paramedic services' call volume is increasing dramatically, they are in need of more funding in order to increase the capacity of paramedics working on the road to transport patients in need of our assistance. Whether it is Ontario, Quebec, or any other province, health care must be funded appropriately so that the needs and demands of the people are met.



Opposition to Privatization of Public Services

- Jack Jackson, President, ATU Local 1572 (Mississauga) -



Keep Transit Public rally at Queen's Park, May 8, 2018.

We are pushing to have public services kept in the hands of the public. In my case it is transit, in other cases it may be health care, etc. It is not just the Amalgamated Transit Unit (ATU) but all the unions are pushing it. There is the "We Own It campaign" by the Ontario Public Service Employees

Union as well.

What we are pushing for is that politicians at all levels understand and support the keeping of public services in the hands of the public. We saw a little bit of movement with respect to Toronto recently. The Toronto City Council passed a motion which declares that transit in the municipality remains public and must continue to be operated and maintained by the Toronto Transit Commission. That is only half of a gain because at the end of the day there is the high likelihood that Metrolinx or the province may respond by saying, "You you can operate it but you still have to fund it, maintain it, design it and build it" which obviously they are not in a position to do. This is a small move, but it is truly one day at the time. The Keep Transit Public campaign had an influence on City Council passing the resolution.

A while back we held a rally at Union Station in Toronto which is a big transit hub. Since we did that, we got some media attention, we started to see politicians coming around. Municipally, councillors wanted to start talking. Now the Mayor is paying attention, now the NDP. We believe it is building steam.

Does it have enough steam for the provincial election? We will find out. We are not done after that. We still have the municipal and federal elections. Our work is not directed solely towards this campaign, it is about the issue of privatization in general. We are trying to address this in a manner that is about public services. We know that governments do not stop at one spot. There is not a single example where privatization works, whether it is Highway 407 or Hydro. It is about raising awareness on the need to keep public services in the hands of the public.



What Is Taking Place with Teachers' Pensions?

- Laura Chesnik, Independent Candidate in Windsor-Tecumseh -



In conversations with teachers during this election campaign a question that keeps coming up is what the government is up to with our pension plans.

Since 2016, Ontario's Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk, an officer of the Legislature, has been raising the alarm about the government's accounting practices. In her pre-election review of its financial projections she noted that the government is forecasting revenues from the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan and insufficient pension expense for the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union Pension Plan. Our pension funds however are not a government asset. They belong to us. According to Lysyk the pensions are

not a "true asset" because the government does not have the unilateral legal right to withdraw funds from the plans or reduce future minimum contributions to the plans without the express agreement of the plans' joint sponsors.

The sponsors of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan are the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and the Ontario government. Each appoint five members to the plan's Board and, together, they select the chair. Each Board member is appointed for a two-year term and can serve for up to four

consecutive terms.

The OTF is overseen by a Board of Governors made up of 10 representatives of each of the provincial teachers' unions in Ontario: Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

The government is forecasting that it will receive \$3.4 billion in revenue from the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan over the three-year period ending March 31, 2021. However, what it labels "revenues" are not the government's to use. They belong to the pension fund. The auditor general speaks of the government's accounting method distorting the forecasted resources available for its decision-makers to allocate in their fiscal planning. It also distorts the fact that the government appears to be unilaterally taking possession of our pension funds.

Lysyk goes on to note that after adjusting for the overstatement of revenue from the teachers' pension plan and the understatement of expenses for the Ontario Public Service Pension Plan, Ontario's annual deficit would be \$11.7 billion for 2018/19 (or 75 per cent more than the reported \$6.7 billion), \$12.2 billion for 2019/20 (or 85 per cent more than the reported \$6.6 billion) and \$12.5 billion for 2020/21 (or 92 per cent more than the reported \$6.5 billion).

The government is padding its books with pension funds, which is not acceptable. Those funds are not the government's to do with as it pleases. They belong to us. The government should not withdraw funds from our pensions or reduce its contributions to the fund without negotiating with our representatives. The auditor general has repeatedly asked that the government produce proof that it has the consent of the various public sector pension plan boards, on which it also sits, to account for claiming the funds as an asset under its control. No such proof has been provided.

Security in retirement is a right. The value teachers and other public sector workers produce is immense. A portion of the value produced by those actively working must be allocated towards ensuring that in retirement we can live at a Canadian standard of living and not in poverty. For governments to seize this value to pay the rich is unacceptable.



Whatever is going on, neither the current government nor any future one has our consent to take control of our pension funds. It is a serious matter that deserves everyone's attention, as the silence from the main contenders for political power -- one of whom will inherit the situation -- suggests that something unsavory is afoot.



Read Ontario Political Forum
Website: www.cpcml.ca Email: ontario@cpcml.ca