

April 2007

HOW TO SUCCEED IN ORGANIZING BY REALLY TRYING

“The future of our movement is in this room,” OFL president Wayne Samuelson told union organizers at a one-day seminar held in the OFL Auditorium on March 26.

Organizers from the public and private sectors came together at the seminar to share ideas and information about how to organize better. Panels of seasoned organizers talked about the climate in 2007 for organizing workers into unions.

With union density in decline since 1995, when Mike Harris and his Conservative government came to power in Ontario, organizing workers has become vital to the survival of the labour movement as a significant power to effect change and improve the lives and all workers.

“In order to stabilize union density in Ontario we need to organize 30,000 new members every year,” Samuelson said. “But the reality is this. In 1994 under the NDP and Bill 40, 32,116 new workers became union members. After Mike Harris repealed and hacked away at Ontario’s labour laws the number of new union members has been steadily dropping. McGuinty has left in place so many of Harris’ laws and done so little to enforce existing laws so that the number of newly unionized workers in 2004-05 has dropped to 11,608.

The current Premier of Ontario, McGuinty, continues to deny that Ontario has a crisis in the loss of manufacturing jobs. “Since the McGuinty Liberals were elected,” Samuelson said. “Ontario has lost 125,000 manufacturing jobs.”

“What we have in the manufacturing sector is not a matter of de-industrialization,” said panelist Charlotte Yates the Chair of Labour Studies, McMaster University. “What’s going on here is de-unionization.”

With the loss of so many jobs we not only see the declining rate of unionization but also a shift in who belongs to a union. The workers who want and need unions are women and new immigrants. In a society as diverse as ours this is the challenge for union organizers and the hope for the future of labour.

Another barrier to organizing new union members is the astonishing rise of temp agencies and the contingent workforce.

“Right now, across the county, there are more part-time ‘temp’ agencies than there are Tim Hortons,” Samuelson said. “This is more than a trend – it’s an epidemic. We need to

organize these workers. We need laws and constraints against these agencies.”

“Temp agency workers are not covered by workers compensation, employment standards and many other basic rights that other workers have on the job.”

Panelists at the seminar talked of the ongoing campaigns to unionize workers in retail, hotel, and health care services.

Legal experts on organizing prepared an information package that outlined a checklist for organizers, filing an Unfair Labour Practices application, certification applications and federal and provincial jurisdictions.

Ethan Poskanzer from Sack Goldblatt Mitchell said that organizing should be at the top of the agenda for all unions.

John Weir, the director of the BC Federation of Labour’s Organizing Institute talked about the need for unions to share information, multi-union organizing, best practices and research. The Institute has trained hundreds of rank and file organizers since 1997 and is funded by the BC Federation of Labour affiliates.

Equality, coalition-building and social networks were mentioned frequently by union organizers and were cited as the key to success for any organizing drive.

Getting the community involved and raising the standard of living for all workers, union and non-union, was the central message and a key factor in discussions about how to really succeed in organizing.

“What the labour movement and working people are facing in Canada is the alarming fact that full-time permanent jobs make up 63 per cent of the workforce while the rise in precarious (contingent) work has reached 39 per cent.

“Being a union organizer should be considered one of the top jobs in all our unions – it’s certainly one of the toughest,” Samuelson said.



WOMEN IN TRADES AND NON-TRADITIONAL JOBS CONFERENCE A HUGE SUCCESS

Over a hundred delegates came to the first women in trades and non-traditional conference sponsored by the Toronto & York Region Labour Council, Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario and the Ontario Federation of Labour at the OFL in March.

The sisters shared their experiences and

strategies around surviving and prospering in non-traditional jobs. Although some progress has been made they came because a great deal of work still needs to be done to recruit and retain more trades women.

“Sisters Building the Future was the first conference of its kind for the Federation,” said Irene Harris, OFL secretary-treasurer. “There was an amazing energy and commitment from the sponsoring organizations and the delegates to continue the important work that was identified in workshops and plenaries.”

Participants developed a comprehensive set of recommendations that focussed on recruitment and hiring, building participation of women through their unions’ structures, and retaining and increasing representation in trades and non-traditional jobs.

Sister Harris will be working closely with the Provincial Building & Construction Trades Council of Ontario and our affiliated unions to develop an action plan for tomorrow with time lines to carry through on the recommendations.

Copies of the conference materials and recommendation are available from Carrol Anne Sceviour, OFL Human Rights – Women’s Issues Director, 416.443.7670 (direct) csceviour@ofl.ca.



OFL IN FULL SUPPORT OF COALITION TO PROTECT WOMEN FROM HATE PROPAGANDA

The OFL is in full support of Bill C-254 a Private Member’s Bill that adds women to the groups protected under the *Criminal Code* on the public incitement of hatred. The law as it stands now only protects those identified by colour, race, religion, ethnic origin and sexual orientation.

It is not currently against the law to propagate hate against an individual because of gender. “This amendment to the *Criminal Code* is an important step in the struggle to end violence against women and girls,” said Irene Harris, OFL officer responsible for Women’s Issues.

The OFL is supporting the Media Violence Coalition campaign to promote public awareness in calling for amendments to provincial and federal legislation to protect women and girls from hate propaganda.

The Media Violence Coalition has widespread support from parents, teachers, women’s organizations, human rights advocates, the legal profession and unions.

YOUNG WORKER INFORMATION SURVEY

“The OFL is in the process of strengthening our links with young workers,” said Terry Downey, OFL officer responsible for youth issues and workers under 30. “We need feedback on the events, programs, training and conferences that would be of value for young workers in unions.

“Many unions run programs for their young members and others are in the process of program development. We are interested in finding out what programs unions are already offering and what our affiliated unions and labour councils would find useful for the OFL to organize provincially,” Downey said.

Contact Pam Frache, OFL Education, pfrache@ofl.ca for copies of the survey.



APRIL 28 DAY OF MOURNING *Why We Need a Day of Mourning*

Pallbearers carried 315 Ontario workers to their graves last year as a direct result of workplace conditions. Another 341,437 claimed compensation for work-related injuries. Missing from the official record were an estimated 6,000 workers killed by cancer, lung disease and other ailments, all attributed to toxic exposures in their workplaces.

On April 28 of each year people across Canada, honour the dead and injured workers who have made the heaviest sacrifice to earn a living. On this day a minute's silence is observed by workers, while flags on many municipal buildings and provincial legislatures fly at half-mast.

In 2007 on May 31 to June 2, the OFL is holding a health and safety/workers compensation conference dedicated to political action – in our workplaces, our communities and at the Legislature. The Conference, **History – ours for the taking!** will begin to renew our course, our journey to justice, one that places the responsibility for hazardous working conditions squarely where it belongs, on the shoulders of employers who create these conditions and the governments elected to and mandated to prevent them.

For information on local Day of Mourning events contact your local labour council.

Information on the **History – ours for the taking!** Conference: www.ofl.ca or contact Laurie Hardwick, OFL at 1.800.668.9138 lhardwick@ofl.ca.

