

MY OECTA

2nd Edition

A guide to member
engagement and activism

ONTARIO ENGLISH
Catholic
Teachers
ASSOCIATION

President's message



Member engagement lies at the heart of OECTA's capacity to successfully confront the challenges – in bargaining and politics – that will confront us over the next few years. If this Association is to protect our collective agreements and to continue to play an active role in working for the Common Good, then we must be able to inspire a greater number of our members to join their union in fighting against policies that would end any hope of seeing a more just society grow in Ontario and across Canada.

What are some of these challenges? At the provincial level, Ontario citizens elected a majority Liberal government in June 2014, ending the provincial Progressive Conservative dream of curtailing labour rights. OECTA's political involvement and that of other like-minded organizations helped this happen.

At the very least, the election has provided stability and a measure of predictability — important on a number of fronts. We have begun the process of renewing members' collective agreements in the first-ever legislated central bargaining process. All agreements expired August 31, 2014. Since early 2012, citing economic problems, the Ontario government has been reining in expenditures, including salaries and benefits, in the broader public sector. That has not changed with the majority government, and OECTA's negotiators face major challenges at the bargaining table to protect members' interests.

On the federal scene, an election is currently set for October 19, 2015. Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper's years in power since 2006 have seen repeated attacks on organized labour, with bills such as C-4, C-377 and C-525 that would gut safety provisions in the federal labour code, put all union activities under a financial microscope not required of business and professional organizations, and make it harder for unions to organize and easier for companies to de-certify. The government is working with organizations such as Merit Canada and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business to achieve a "free enterprise system of commerce," often at the expense of workers' well-being. There is little or no recognition of unions' role in Canadian civil society. At the same time, Harper's Conservatives have cut taxes, downsized the public service and the services it provides, and demonstrated a general lack of accountability and transparency. Canadians can expect more of the same if we re-elect this government.

Since the 2008 economic crisis, the gap between rich and poor has widened, and efforts to cripple unions have increased. OECTA, like most other unions, provides a myriad of services to members beyond collective bargaining. They include employment counselling, and legal defence when Children's Aid or police level charges against our members or when they must answer to the College of Teachers. And, of course, the Beginning Teachers Conference, Leadership Training Program and the Common Good Conference help members in their lives as teachers and community members. Evidence shows that strong unions, effective public services and decent wages go hand in hand. These services and objectives are worthy of defending.

You, as OECTA's local and provincial activists, are the leaders who must engage our members across the province. The leadership and members-at-large ARE OECTA. This booklet has been developed with input from activists and is designed to energize, inform and inspire you to play the leadership role that your fellow teachers have chosen you for.

James Ryan
President

A special thank you to the 2013 & 2014 PAC Seminar participants for their contributions.

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**Preparing students for the future,
that's what teachers do.**

ONTARIO ENGLISH
**Catholic
Teachers**
ASSOCIATION

Members matter

There is no single way to improve member engagement. There is no silver bullet or magic formula. Every member is different, so we need to employ different strategies to reach them all. Similarly, there is no one definition of an engaged member. There are different types of engagement and different levels.

We need members to be informed, engaged and hopefully, active in the fight for unions and the common good.

Our goal is to identify and enhance each member's level of engagement with OECTA so that all members describe OECTA as "MY UNION," not "the union."

As economic, political and social forces become more intertwined, there is a lot at stake for teachers, unions and Ontario's common good.

It has been decades since we have witnessed the kind of anti-union and neo-conservative attack on workers and the middle class that we are seeing today. The forces of the right-wing agenda are using the deficit to make deep structural changes that will damage Canada and Ontario. Anti-union federal legislature confirms that the labour movement is in the crosshairs.

We must work together to protect the rights of our members and of unions themselves.

As one of the few institutions that can counter the corporate agenda, unions are a critical target for conservatives. Weakening unions helps to silence opposition and gives businesses more economic leverage.

This should worry every citizen. Looking at the state of wages, health and safety provisions, workers' rights and income disparity in the United States, it should be clear why we do not want Ontario to turn into Alabama.

Unfortunately, messaging is often confusing and laden with emotional baggage.

Using terms like "union bosses" is an attempt to drive a wedge between the leadership and membership.

Messages from the "right" may indeed resonate with members who feel alienated from their union.

However, engaged members will not be fooled by the misleading rhetoric. More importantly, engaged members are more likely to defend unions from attack.

Engaged members are our best ambassadors.



Engagement redefined

The current understanding of engagement is defined by activists involved in unit activities.

For example, an activist might interpret low turnout at unit meetings as a reflection of disinterested members. This may or may not be true. There are many reasons for low attendance. Members are busy. Meetings may not appeal to everyone. That doesn't necessarily mean members are not engaged.



OECTA members have always stood together in the face of adversity and have repeatedly demonstrated their commitment to working with other like-minded organizations to support the common good. Perhaps it is a question of looking at “engagement” in a different manner.



An engaged member may be a person who attends a PD conference, participates in an

online survey, or joins colleagues at the Friday social or a unit's volleyball games.

Engagement can occur on many different levels, and we must not discount the various ways that members demonstrate their commitment to OECTA.

Engagement does not drive value. Value drives engagement.



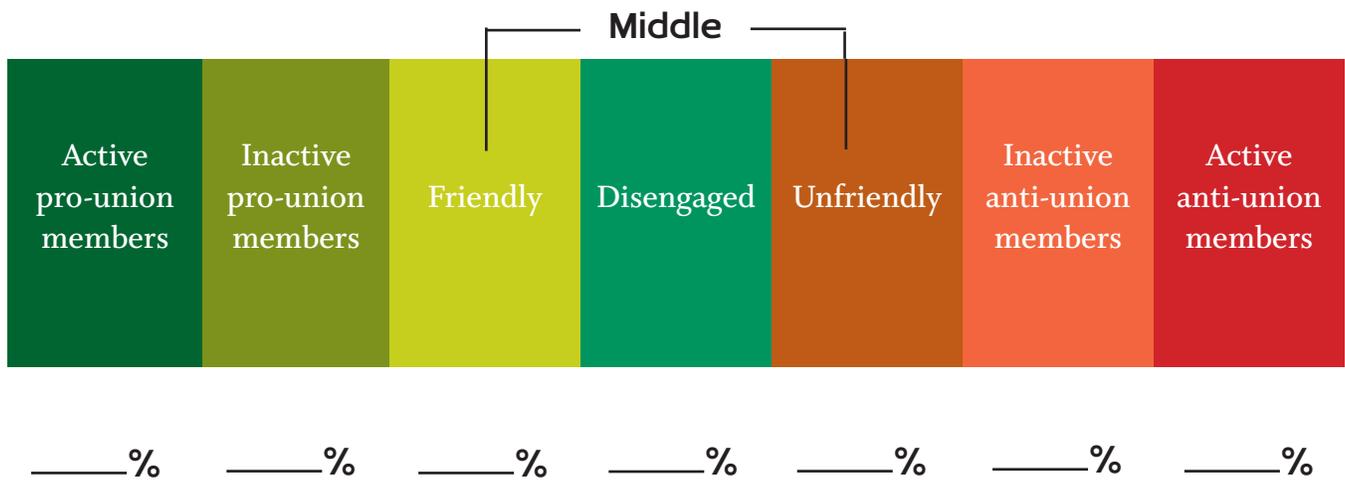
Members do not engage *first* and then find value in what the union has to offer. Members have to first find value in what the union has to offer and then they will become engaged. The goal is not necessarily to convince more members to come to meetings. While injecting “fun” into committee meetings may help, it will not solve all of the problems. A better solution for attracting and retaining members is to offer more opportunities based on what they value.

We must discover members' interests and needs, and then satisfy them.

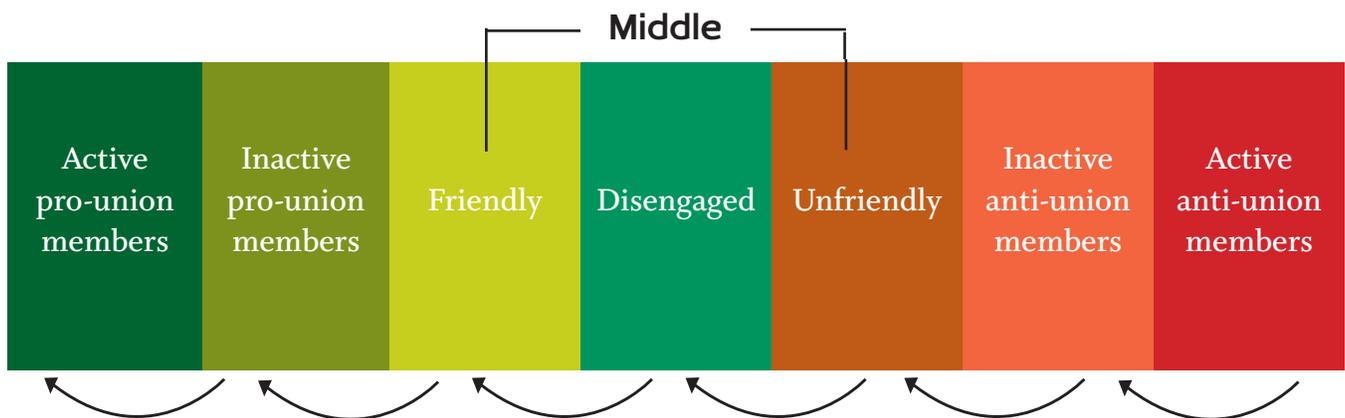


Spectrum of member support

What percentage of members is in each category?



Goal: Move each group at least one category to the left.

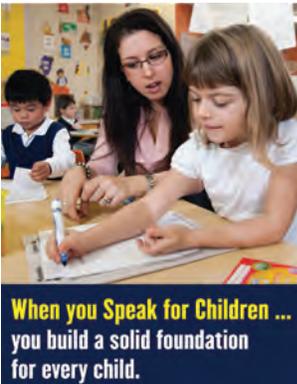


Sequence of action:
Consolidate the left;
neutralize the right;
win over the centre.

WHEN YOU SPEAK FOR CHILDREN... WE LISTEN.

The first edition of the *When you Speak for Children... 2013* booklet contains a series of five research papers that articulate the membership and the Association positions on policies affecting education and the common good.

Through the OECTAListens survey, members identified the issues that reflected their goals as teachers, parents and citizens. The concepts were researched and the booklet written using the members' input as the guide. The topics include:



The OECTA slogan
WHEN YOU SPEAK FOR CHILDREN...
is a call to action for members,
the community, and most
importantly, decision makers.

Prioritizing the needs of children must be central to government decision making. Ontario's economy will flourish when we graduate informed, engaged and caring citizens.

This goal is reflected in all of our advocacy work. Use these papers in conversations with members. Members will recognize the goals as their own.

Work together to make **WHEN YOU SPEAK FOR CHILDREN** more than a slogan.

Best Practices

At the 2013 PAC seminar, participants were asked for their “best practices” regarding ways to enhance member engagement. The following are some of their responses:

Together, we can achieve the goal of maximizing member engagement.

- The first task for every president is to delegate! The unit president cannot do it all. Getting the members engaged is everyone’s responsibility.

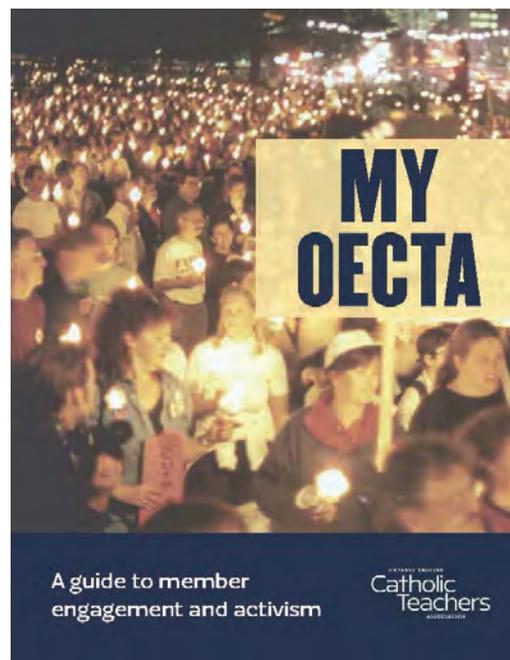
Remind members through words and actions that the essence of our union is a Christ-centred call to care for the collective.

- Ask for opinions. Conduct surveys and/or questionnaires. Make these easy and use different ways of collecting the data. Provide participation rewards. Most importantly, provide feedback to let members know that you are listening.
- Quote a wide variety of members in unit communiqués.

Use a variety of communication methods, such as newsletters, social media, and email blasts.

- Provide safe and friendly forums for discussion, such as Facebook. Let members talk freely about needs and concerns.
- Use new communication techniques like tele-town halls/virtual town halls and remote conferencing where members can ask questions or express their opinions. Treat every question or opinion with respect.

- Look at differences of opinions as an opportunity to have conversations.
- Discover what members’ time constraints are and accommodate them. If members say they only have 30 minutes per month to volunteer, do not remove them from the list of “engaged members” just because they cannot commit to the way things have usually been done in the unit. Find ways to engage them that fits in with their schedule.
- Child care is an issue for young parents. Make sure general meetings have a safe place for young children. Think about asking a member to volunteer to assist. Many teachers would be happier looking after young children than sitting and listening to the speaker.



- Include families in events such as an after-school Halloween night.
- Identify the different skill sets that different people can bring to the table. Not everyone wants to attend committee meetings, but there are other needs besides committee membership. Perhaps the computer teacher

can help update the unit website or the art teacher can assist with remodelling the unit office.

Ensure that committees have some autonomy. Delegate responsibilities. Let people fail.

- Reward committees; plan a fun meeting out of the blue.
- Provide a variety of engagement methods, such as socials events, TGIF, golf tourneys, welcome dinners, award banquets, or community picnics.
- Make sure you have an open door policy at your unit office.

Share good news stories. Sadly, many members see the union in a negative light. Communicate about successful teaching practices, fruitful social justice endeavours and other exciting or innovative education events.

- In addition to collective bargaining updates, include personal achievements such as births, weddings, anniversaries and retirements in unit newsletters.
- Schedule formal and informal visits to schools. Dropping in for no particular reason is as important as a formal meeting with school staff.
- Organize awards and contests for both serious and fun things. Have a “question of the week” with a reward. Stage a contest to win a prep day.

- Consider release time for important committee meetings and honoraria for committee members, school staff reps and executive members. Keep an open mind and offer other types of incentives for participation. Do not guess; ask members what they would like.

Demystify the union.

- For many members, unit and union operations (e.g. executive) are foreign concepts. The language we use only aggravates the problem.
- Do not assume that classroom teachers know that the CLC stands for the Canadian Labour Congress (and not Collaborative Learning Communities).
- Inform members about your good social justice work and/or charities.
- The personal touch is the best for letting members know they are important. Examples include personal letters, telephone calls, emails or cards.



- Implement a member-to-member engagement tree, similar to a telephone tree. Develop a plan where each school rep, committee member and executive member has an identified number of people to contact (in person) to talk about OECTA.
- Develop pledge cards on which members commit to some level of engagement with their union. For example, it might read, “I, _____, pledge to defend my union to family members at least once.” Provide space for personal contact information. Have the members sign their cards and return them to the unit.

Encourage members to join the OECTAListens panel.

The list is not exhaustive, but it is a good beginning. Of course, not all ideas are practical for every unit, nor is it solely the unit president’s responsibility to implement them. It is important for activists to work with their unit president.

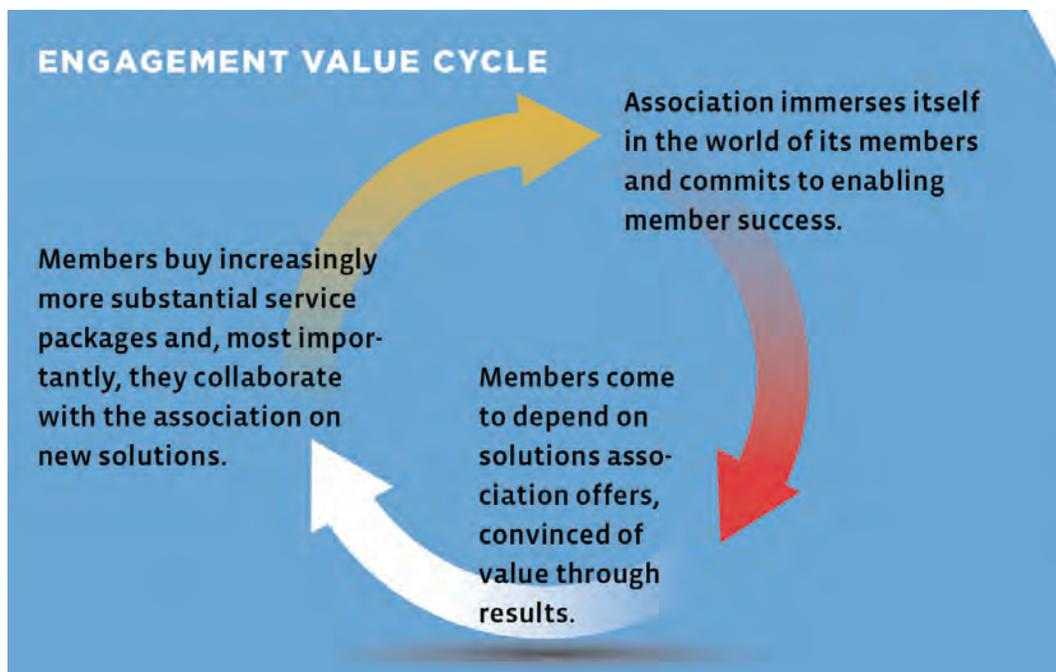
The lessons learned from past conflicts remind us we can meet our challenges when we keep members informed.

Member engagement is the key to building and maintaining a strong union.

All of these ideas are from your colleagues in OECTA and other unions. As we work to confront the Tory attacks, remember we are stronger when we work together.

Let's keep sharing, talking and listening.

Together, we will prevail.



Communication ideas

Elements of a good newsletter/ publication should include:

- Unit contact information;
- A variety of topics to appeal to the widest group of people's interest;
- Pictures, pictures and more pictures, of as many different people as possible. Rule of thumb - one person should never appear in more than one photo in your publication;
- Personal member stories;
- Information about unit expenditures, such as charitable donations;
- A carefully proofread text, free of typos, grammatical errors or misinformation.

Elements of effective social media

Activists can use social media to start petitions, spread the word, mobilize support, educate the public and put pressure on decision-makers at every level.

- Unions must be where our members are.
- We must also take our message to the public. Online tools provide many ways to get involved.

**Engage your audience
and start conversations.
They call it "social" media
for a reason.**

- Create new entry points to join your movement or cause.
- Use photos as social media through photo sharing/tagging on Facebook.
- Reciprocate! Reply to posts, retweet or share content and give others props.
- Show the love! When new people follow you, thank them and give them a shout-out!

Tips for writing short, punchy messages

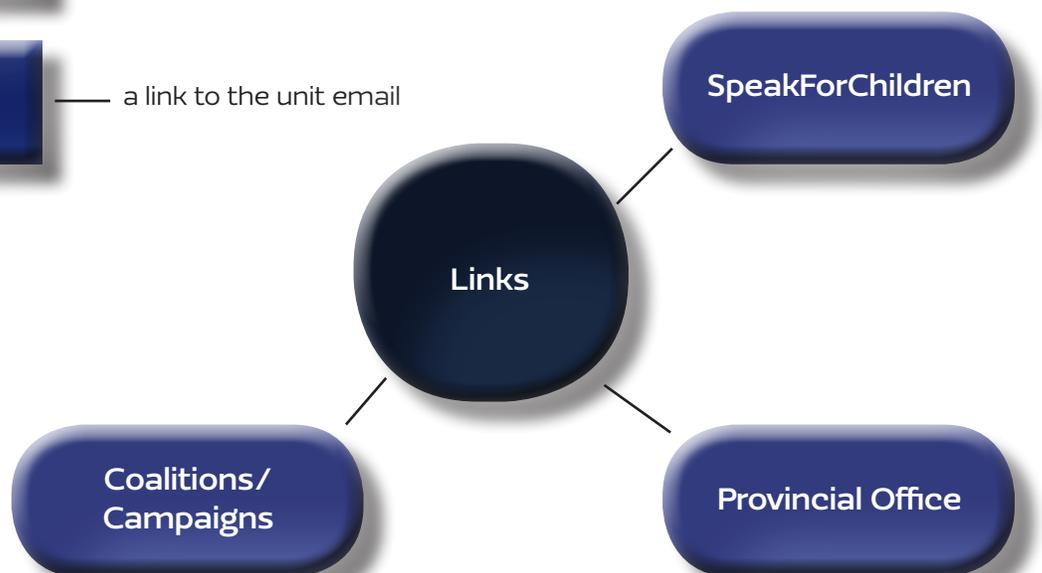
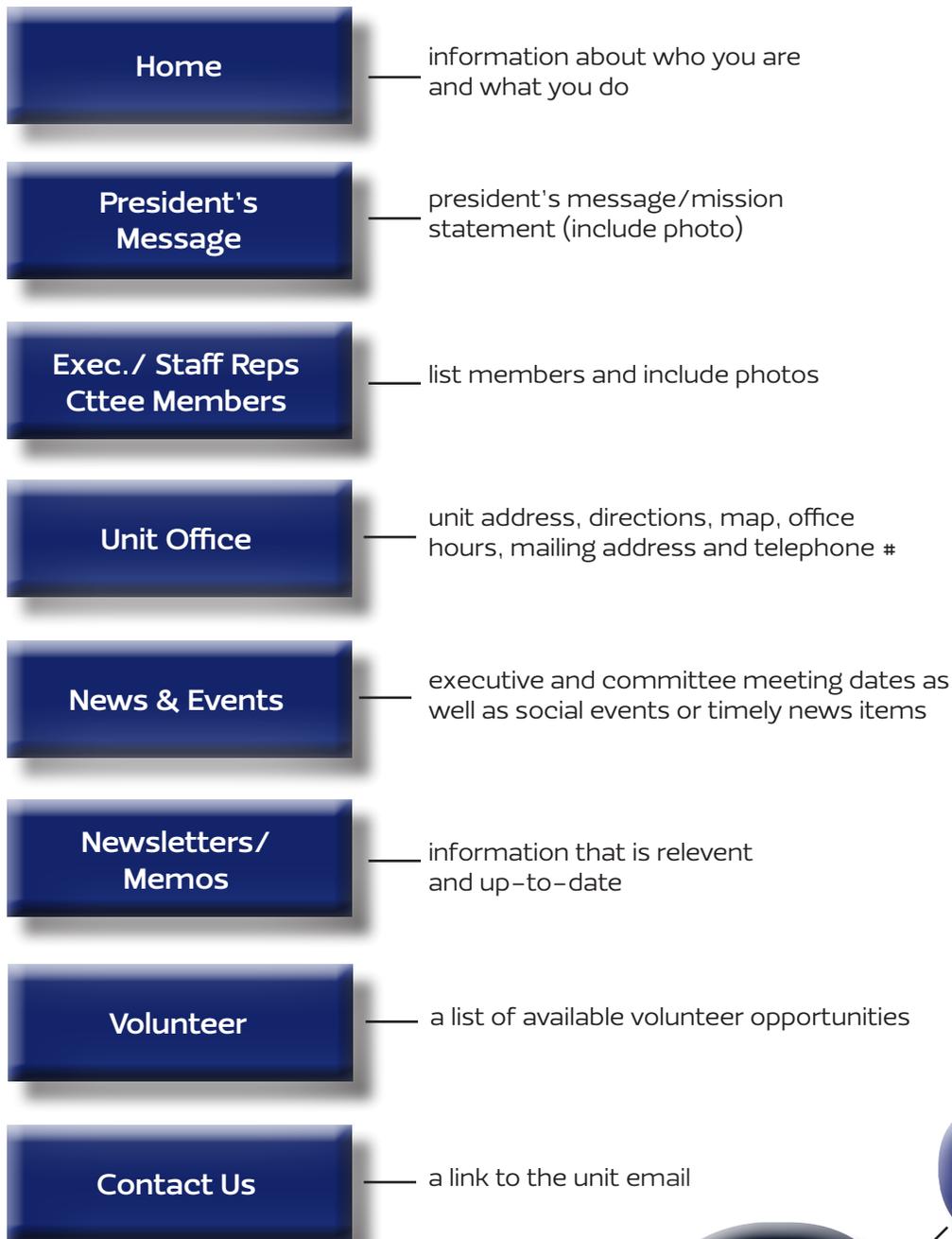
- Be USEFUL to the reader by being TOPICAL and fresh (old news is not news).
- Provide the reader with a sense of URGENCY.
- It's always better to be CLEVER than angry.
- On Twitter, write hashtags into your tweets and use the "4U" approach to cut characters (e.g. Does a low-wage economy work 4u?)
- Suggested hashtags for political and labour tweets: #OECTA, #OLP, #ONDP, #PCPO, #CanLab, #CdnPoli, #OnPoli, #StopHarper.
- Suggested education hashtags/ tweets: #OECTA, #onted, #edchat, #education, #edtech, #elearning, #whatteachersdo.

Etiquette

- If you wouldn't say it into a megaphone, don't post it online! Assume that anything you say on social media is public and permanent!
- As a community builder, strive to be inclusive. Abusive language, swearing, defamation, libel, slander, harassment or discrimination should not be tolerated.
- Don't feed the trolls!

**Participate in conversations
and challenge reactionary ideas,
but know when to ignore
toxic people who want to
demoralize you and
eat up your time.**

Elements of a good website should include:





**Lifelong learning,
that's what teachers do.**

ONTARIO ENGLISH
**Catholic
Teachers**
ASSOCIATION

Mobilizing teachers

Just like member engagement, political activism is a continuum. At one end are the members who hate politics and never vote. At the other end are the political junkies who want to do it all. In between are most of the members: those who might help on e-day, put up a lawn sign, attend a candidates' debate or make a donation.

A healthy democracy is dependent on an informed and active electorate. The continuum of political activism should begin with voting.

Mobilized members are informed and understand the issues as they relate to our profession and community. A solid appreciation of these matters increases voter participation and enhances collective bargaining participation. Informing members, including the activists, also provides opportunities to get to know members better, thus enhancing engagement levels.

Providing information about the consequences of anti-union policies and social democratic structures is difficult. Yet it is easier than addressing the prevailing attitudes among voters that there is no “good guy” in politics today. Voter apathy is a growing concern. There is a real sense of disillusionment with politics among many people and our members are no different.

Another challenge for members is trying to understand the connection between federal and provincial policies and their own collective agreement.

Teachers often feel the brunt of bad government policies.

Unfortunately, education is and always has been a political football. Every government wants to leave its stamp on the face of education. And everyone has an opinion on ways to improve student learning. The fact that education represents the second largest budget expenditure only aggravates this reality. This is most clearly evident in collective bargaining.

It is critical that members have an understanding of the dynamics that influence party positions that will eventually influence government bargaining positions.

The austerity agenda is a prime example. The philosophy that deficits are caused by public sector spending results in cuts to funding, whether they be federal-provincial transfers or actual ministry cuts. If we also believe taxes are too high and services need cutting, we shouldn't be surprised to see concessions during bargaining.

We need to critically analyze all positions and make informed decisions. Let's encourage members to talk about the issues that influence politics. We need an honest dialogue about the big picture and where teachers fit in.

Begin by identifying and focusing conversations on larger socio-economic trends such as the growing gap between the rich and poor. Working to ensure everyone has decent wages, benefits and pensions serves many purposes. Improving everyone's lot in life will have a positive effect on the economy and help our students.

Teachers can play a significant role in the quest for a fairer society. The **OECTAListens** survey has identified this goal as a priority for members.

Teachers have a stake in addressing the current race to the bottom trend reflected, for example, the focus of public sector “entitlements.” These negative “me versus them” attitudes are more common during economic downturns when slaying the deficit takes priority. People turn on each other, demanding less for everyone.

Emerging populist trends prey on people’s insecurities and base emotions. Politicians manipulate, exaggerate and highlight the differences among people. People who don’t have a pension are told that they are paying for someone else’s and “that it’s not fair!” The world is explained in simple terms where emotions, not facts, take centre stage in the public debate. It’s easy to fall into that kind of trap.

But teachers are ideally suited to help stimulate an informed conversation about these destructive trends. We can challenge our community to work for a better society and rise above “junk politics”– a term to describe the refusal by politicians to lead citizens to higher ground, to challenge or inspire. Instead, it panders to our worst sentiments. Experts and evidence are derided, and the world is divided into good and bad.

Members should look outward, beyond simplistic solutions and simple slogans. Challenge members to look at the facts, understand socio-economic trends, and work together for a better tomorrow. That will help everyone and will have positive repercussions at the bargaining table.

Informed members are mobilized before, during and after the bargaining cycle.

Let’s bring everyone up, not work to drag everyone down.



Teachers earn their salaries, benefits and working conditions.

These are not entitlements, but the consequence of many years of hard work by our predecessors.

When we raise up our sisters and brothers, we raise ourselves, too.

These will be difficult conversations. Utilize a variety of communication vehicles beginning with honest dialogue (ideally face-to-face).



Election campaigns

The goal for every election is to ensure each member votes and that the ballot each cast is an informed one.

Unit Presidents

Organize a meeting with the unit executive, committee members and school reps to inform them of the issues. Discuss the issues in detail and the impact they will have on members and the common good. Ask for a commitment to work together, beginning with a plan to connect with members.

Be aware that federal election laws significantly restrict the level of involvement of unions during the writ period. Provincial and municipal laws allow for much more extensive involvement by unions and other third-party entities during the entire writ period.

Ensure the relevant issues are prominent on the unit website, in newsletters and all forms of communications (subject to election laws regarding communications found on page 15).

Local Political Advisory Committees

Step One – Member Outreach

Working with the unit executive, develop a plan for member outreach. Map the membership and create a plan to contact every member at least three times before an election. Schedule school visits for the president or designates to talk with members about the issues that will affect all teachers.

Utilize social media tools and forward articles and fun YouTube videos to stimulate member interest. Divide the schools among the committee members and have them call each school rep to ensure materials have been distributed. Collect and analyze the feedback from the staff. Regroup periodically to share experiences and conversations. Identify member concerns and focus subsequent

materials to address them. Schedule follow-up school visits with more detailed information.

Step Two – Election Preparation

Develop questions and distribute them to all candidates. Let them know that their answers will be distributed to your members. Be vigilant about getting the responses and present them to your members. Encourage your members to review the responses to help them make informed decisions when they vote.

If your unit has multiple ridings/wards, it may be advisable to divide your committee to reflect these boundaries. Make each committee member responsible for arranging meetings with the local candidates of the three major parties during federal and provincial campaigns and with trustee candidates during municipal ones. Review previous election results to determine any trends. Previous federal results can be found at: www.elections.ca/home.aspx, while provincial results are found at www.elections.on.ca/en-ca.

This information, along with responses to your questions and other factors, can be used to assist in determining what endorsements, if any, the unit makes. The information should be shared with the membership. Encourage members to evaluate all of the available information and make decisions that will be good for themselves, their families and the community.

During a federal, provincial or municipal campaign, survey members on what they are willing to do to assist a candidate: make a donation, put up a lawn sign, canvass, work in a riding office, help on E-day, and/or make phone calls.

An up-to-date member database is critical. It should include home addresses and personal contact information from the local member survey. Make sure you keep all information confidential.

To endorse or not to endorse? This is a difficult decision and should be made with input from the membership. Many teachers do not like being told how to vote. It is important that their wishes are acknowledged and their intelligence respected. However, we know that members do expect their union to provide party positions and potential repercussions on teachers and the education system. Provide members with the information they need to make informed decisions, including previous election results.

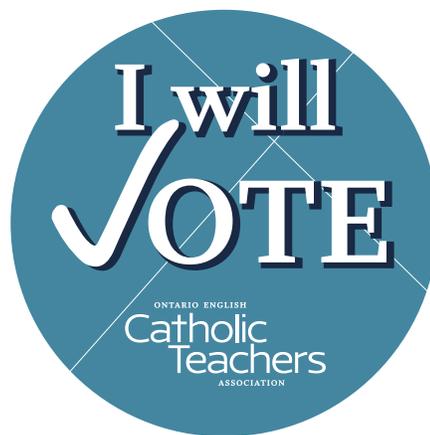
Statistics are useful but do not replace relationships.

Units may decide not to endorse any candidate, or only a few. Regardless, it is critical that the consequences for teachers of the positions of the various candidates (and, where applicable, parties) be kept at the forefront when determining whether or not to make endorsements. When making any endorsements, be cognizant of the impact of vote splitting. The important task is getting to know candidates as, in the end, all politics is local.

If you choose to endorse a candidate, make sure it is meaningful and the broader election situation is considered. Generally speaking, an endorsement means the unit is prepared to make a donation to the candidate (if permissible under the relevant law) and/or encourage members to do so. Inform the members of the decision and provide volunteers to the endorsed candidate's campaign.

Unit election checklist

- Start with your executive, committee members and staff reps. Schedule meetings to convey the importance of the election.
- Recruit workplace activists.
- Provide training on engaging members in conversations about key election issues.
- Set goals and timetables for school visits to talk with members.
- Prepare/assemble leaflets and other materials for members.
- Consider using a Pledge Card which asks members to commit, in writing, to voting.
- Update your membership lists to include current emails and phone numbers.
- Prepare riding breakdowns of your membership list and identify ridings with the highest density of your members.
- Make sure you have election information visible on your union website, in newsletters via social media.
- Hold a telephone town hall early in the year.
- Consider targeted outreach to members in key ridings by phone and house visits.
- Prepare election advertising now. Spending limits come into force when the election writ is dropped.



Election rules – donations and advertising

Making donations is an important part of politics. Running a campaign is expensive, and all candidates depend on donations.

Unlike the United States, the federal and provincial laws that regulate our donations and campaign expenses are very different and are monitored by Elections Canada and Elections Ontario, respectively. Please note that the federal and provincial rules are very different.

FEDERAL rules

The *Canada Elections Act* has undergone significant changes since 2004. This includes the recent 2014 *Fair Elections Act*, which severely restricts advertising and telephone contact with voters.

Donations

Unions **cannot** make donations to any federal political party. This includes units making contributions to local riding associations. The definition of “donation” includes human resources.

Unlike provincial rules, unions **cannot** release members or staff to work on election campaigns. Members can work on a campaign during an unpaid leave, vacation or spare time. Nonetheless, this volunteer work **cannot** be directed by their union.

An employer or union **can** give a member a paid leave to run as a candidate.

Unions, including units, **cannot** provide goods or services (i.e., photocopies, room usage) to a candidate **unless** the service is not normally provided for a fee **and** the value does not exceed \$200.

Unions **cannot** pay members a special bonus or honorarium to be redirected as an individual political donation.

Unions may purchase merchandise from a political party (i.e., t-shirts) as long as the price does not exceed fair market value.

Advertising

“Third party” advertising rules apply to unions and groups formed by unions. The rules apply only during the writ period. The definition of “advertising” includes all forms of communication, especially to transmit messages to the public.

Unions may communicate with members during the election period. However, the transition of messages to members does **not** include a website, video or webinar, as that would count as advertising.

The cost of the development of a website or any electronic messages designed for an election, is considered an advertising expenditure and is counted in the advertising limits.

Providing members of the public with information about issues, even when non-partisan, counts as advertising during the election period. The exception is the transition of a document **directly** to members.

Unions are bound by the new rules for voter contact calling services. This means that during an election period, unions must register all telephone calls, or any recorded announcements on an issue or candidate with the CRTC. This includes calls to members during the election period.

Unions may communicate directly via telephone with members to encourage voter participation. However, the telephone calls are considered “advertising” and must be registered with the CRTC if the calls are made during the election period. This does not include member newsletters or brochures.

To be clear, tele-town halls and robo calls to members are deemed advertising. However, email blasts, texts and newsletters are **not** considered advertising.

Registration with the CRTC must be made no later than 48 hours after the first call. The information will be maintained on a Voter Contact Registry and published 30 days after the election day. Failure to register with the CRTC will result in a fine.

The limit on third-party election advertising is \$150,000 in total, and \$3,000 for a specific riding. These limits include the costs of producing the advertisement, even if the ads were produced before the election period.

The limits on advertising increase by 1/37th for every day that exceeds 37 days (the minimum election period).

Regardless of, or because of, the rules that limit union election donations, individual members should be encouraged to make donations to political parties. The maximum donation to any one party is \$ 1,275 (2014 figures). Remind members that all donations are tax deductible: 75% of your contribution up to \$ 400, 50% of the next \$ 350, and 33-1/3% of the last \$ 525
The maximum credit is \$ 650.

Don't forget to VOTE

Every registered political party that gets at least two per cent of the votes nationally receives \$1.75 per vote per year from the federal government. It might not sound like much, but it adds up to millions. So, every vote supports your political choice financially into the future. This is an additional reason to vote!

PROVINCIAL rules

Maximum limits apply to OECTA units and the Provincial Office separately. All donations above

\$25 are posted on the Elections Ontario website. The maximums are adjusted for inflation.

The 2014 limits are as follows:

One registered party

\$9,975 per year and for each and every election or by-election period.

Ridings

\$1,130, but not more than \$6,650, to all ridings of one party per year.

Candidates

\$1,130, but not more than \$6,650, to any number of candidates in a party during an election period.

Voluntary labour is not considered a donation. However, payments in excess of the volunteer's regular salary would be a donation. Where a volunteer would not normally receive a salary, any kind of payment, including an honorarium, would be considered a donation.

Individual teachers should be encouraged to make donations which qualify as tax credits. Donations on the first \$336 receive a 75% credit. Donations beyond \$336 and less than \$1,120 receive a 50% credit, and donations beyond \$1,120 receive a 33.3% credit.

Units should consider organizing fundraising events for local candidates.

Fundraisers are a popular way of raising money for a party, riding or candidate. They provide opportunities to meet and discuss issues directly with politicians and their staff. They also help develop relationships.

Coffee socials also provide opportunities to talk with candidates in a relaxed manner. These socials are held at a person's home with a limited number of invited guests including the candidate.

Trustee Elections

The goal for trustee elections is to have education-friendly trustees elected.

Local PACs should always have an eye open for potential candidates. Review the Municipal Election Guide on the government website <http://bit.ly/MIc0n9>.

Employees of any Ontario school board who want to run for a trustee position in any school board in Ontario must take an unpaid leave of absence before filing the nomination forms. If elected, the trustee must resign from his/her job. No one can work for a school board and be a trustee in Ontario at the same time.

The next municipal election takes place October 2018.

Plan an information campaign for members in early September. Provide members with previous election results, drawing attention to the number of votes it takes to win. Remind members that every vote counts, especially in trustee elections. Give members examples of the kind of trustee decisions that influence teachers' working conditions. Provide a summary of important board decisions and how individual trustees voted on the matter.

Send every trustee candidate questions that are provided by provincial office, or develop questions that reflect local circumstances. Ensure that members have the candidates' responses a few days before the election.

Encourage members to look at trustee candidates' characteristics:

- Does the candidate think independently and objectively about issues?
- Does the candidate demonstrate respect for the opinions of others?
- What are the candidate's motivations for running?
- Does the candidate want to work cooperatively with others?
- Does the candidate have a positive image of the Association?
- Is the candidate endorsed by other people or groups?
- Will the candidate have the courage to explain unpopular decisions or policy?

Except for those committed to a cause or a candidate, most voters in municipal and trustee elections do not make up their minds until they enter the polling station. Therefore, the last week of the election period is the most important.

Trustee elections are among the worst for voter participation rates. Fewer people cast ballots for trustees than any other elected office. Trustees can win with only a handful of votes, making incumbency an important factor.

The ultimate goal should be ensuring every member votes. Trustee election results can be significantly influenced when all members vote and encourage their families to do the same.

GOTV

Get out the OTE

Political parties have spent a lot of time and energy fine-tuning election strategies. Local campaign managers understand that elections are not won or lost by convincing people of the “rightness” of the issues or presenting arguments to change people’s minds. They understand that is the responsibility of the central party. Successful local campaigns work to identify voters and then get them out to vote. The campaign that develops the best system for contacting and identifying supportive voters and then getting them to the polls on election day, aka E-Day, is usually the winner.

Voter canvassing is the established procedure for identifying favourable voters. A canvass may be accomplished door-to-door or by telephone. Canvassers are usually provided with a script that has many questions. The intent is to find out where the voter’s support lies and his/her level of commitment.

E-Day is the most important day in the campaign period.

Americans have done a lot of research on the best methods for ensuring high voter turnout. The research indicates that the personal touch works best. Door-to-door canvassing or telephone calls are better than emails or letters. Furthermore, messages should be personalized.

Calling or speaking directly with one voter has a positive spin-off.

Research shows that voter participation increases among people living with the contacted person.

Radio, television and newspapers are capable of reaching a large number of voters simultaneously. However, their success depends on many variables. Research indicates that non-partisan GOTV ads are most successful. Non-partisan GOTV radio ads are a cost-efficient means of reaching a large number of members. Don’t ignore social media; it has been shown to have a contagion effect.

The content of the message is not as important as the delivery. Studies conducted on messages that focus on civic duty or a tight election have found that they don’t have a significant impact on the voter turnout. However, messages that are delivered passionately and speak to personal issues can have a positive impact.

There are many lessons we can learn and apply to our membership.

Make it personal and communicate one-on-one as much as possible.



Meeting with decision makers

The following are general guidelines for meetings with decision makers such as MPPs and trustees. Formal lobbying involves the specific request for a law or policy change. Use the ideas below for any meeting where you are seeking a position from a decision maker or meeting with a candidate.

Before the meeting

- Be prepared. Know the personal background. Find common links, such as schools.
- Review and understand the information you will discuss.
- Try to anticipate the responses or positions you may hear so that you can prepare counter-arguments.
- It is advisable to attend the meeting with another OECTA representative. Decide who will be the spokesperson and who will act as recorder. The recorder is important and should also help to keep the spokesperson on time.
- Remember, these meetings should work to build relationships. Regardless of whom you are meeting, long-term goals must include the development and maintenance of relationships that foster healthy, open dialogue.

During the meeting

- Introduce yourself. Highlight any connections you may have, including the schools in your unit.
- Explain the purpose of the meeting. Introduce the topic(s) and state the key message(s). Provide the “Speak for Children...” booklet and any other useful background information.
- Describe the issue(s) from a local and personal point of view. Provide local examples (without identifying specific

schools or individuals in the community) to illustrate your position(s) on the issue(s).

- Make it very clear why the issue(s) is a concern for you and the community.
- Be specific. Discuss each of the important points you planned to cover during the meeting. Ask the official’s position(s) on the issue(s). Listen carefully.
- Press for specific answers or positions. Remain pleasant, but don’t allow a change of topic.
- You will probably know more about the issue(s) under discussion. Speak clearly and use plain language to state your case. Avoid the use of acronyms.

Focus on the most important points rather than covering every aspect of the issue.

Concluding the meeting

- Reiterate the key message(s).
- Offer to provide follow-up information that may assist in advancing the OECTA position(s). Elected officials will respond better if they see you as a source of useful information.
- If possible, schedule your next meeting before you leave.

Staff will be present in most meetings.

Remember that political staff can play a significant role in many ways. They will likely be the contact for any follow up work and future communication. Make sure staff have your names, addresses, and phone numbers. Be sure to get their business cards. Ask for their title and duties. Are they the chief of staff, committee staff, counsel, or a legislative aide for a particular set of issues?

Following the meeting

- Ensure the notes from the meeting are reviewed, filed appropriately and available for future review.
- Inform your appropriate local representatives and the Government Relations department at the Provincial Office.
- Share your experience and information you've received with other unit presidents and PAC Chairs.
- Monitor local newspapers and forward articles and/or other relevant and appropriate materials that address the issue(s) discussed.
- Thank you notes are a good idea.

Difficult meetings

Some meetings can become awkward if there is a significant difference of opinion. Stay focused on why the issue is important. Listen carefully to the objections. Do not argue. Be prepared to discuss the opposing point of view with colleagues following the meeting. Clear notes are important for a productive de-briefing. You can learn a lot about a person or a party from these kinds of meetings.



"I regret that my poor choice of words caused some people to understand what I was saying."



"Never apologize.

Never explain.

Just get the thing done,
and let them howl."

– Agnes MacPhail

Successful meeting "DON'TS"

DON'T

prolong the meeting –
watch your time.

DON'T

get off topic or be distracted.

DON'T

do all the talking. It's important
to listen and understand.

DON'T

let the candidate interview you.

DON'T

be rude, sarcastic
or argumentative.

Working with others

We are not alone in our mission to protect labour rights and promote social and economic justice for everyone.

Examples of some organizations that do great work at home and abroad:

Ontario Association for Parents in Catholic Education (OAPCE) www.oapce.on.ca

Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC) www.childcareontario.org

Canadian Labour Council (CLC) www.canadianlabour.ca

Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) www.ofl.ca

Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) www.isarc.ca

KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives www.kairoscanada.org

Habitat for Humanity www.habitat.ca

District Labour Councils

- Barrie & District Labour Council www.bdlc.info
- Brampton-Mississauga District Labour Council www.bmdlc.org
- Brantford & District Labour Council www.brantfordlabourcouncil.ca
- Chatham-Kent Labour Council www.kent.net/cklc
- Collingwood & District Labour Council www.collingwoodlabour.ca
- Durham Region Labour Council www.durhamlabour.com
- Grey-Bruce Labour Council www.greybrucelabour.com
- Hamilton & District Labour Council www.hamiltonlabour.ca
- London & District Labour Council www.ldlc.on.ca
- Niagara Regional Labour Council www.niagaralabour.ca
- Oakville & District Labour Council www.odlc.co
- Ottawa & District Labour Council www.ottawalabour.org
- North Bay & District Labour Council www.northbaylabour.org
- Peterborough & District Labour Council www.ptbolabour.ca
- Sault Ste. Marie & District Labour Council www.ssmdlc.com
- Sudbury & District Labour Council www.sudburylabour.ca
- Toronto & York Region Labour Council www.labourcouncil.ca
- Waterloo Regional Labour Council www.wrlc.ca
- Windsor & District Labour Council www.wdlc.ca



Stand up for Canada

As a provincial association operating in a field of exclusive provincial jurisdiction, our attention is generally focused on provincial politics. But as teachers, union members, and citizens, we should be taking a keen interest in the upcoming federal election. Stephen Harper has been in power for more than eight years. During that time, he has introduced attitudes and policies that have profoundly changed the country— and not for the better.

The Conservatives have survived this long in government because they have successfully manufactured and perpetuated the notion that they are a source of reason and calm. But the evidence clearly shows that on almost every separate issue, Stephen Harper is offside with the views of most Canadians. At some point this year, we will have the opportunity to make a momentous decision about the principles that should guide this country. It is imperative that we engage our families and neighbours, detail the facts, and get out the vote.

To get started, here are a few important issues we might consider...

The myth of the prudent fiscal manager

Stephen Harper has staked much of his reputation on his supposed economic prowess. He has even spent millions of dollars of government money on billboards and prime time television advertising telling us how well he is handling our finances. Needless to say, the claim is highly suspect.

To be fair, the government has been dealt a challenging hand. The recession that began in 2008 sent shockwaves around the world and prompted many individuals and businesses to cut back spending. And, to their credit, the Conservatives initially responded with new infrastructure investments to stimulate the

economy. However, on the whole, Harper has remained wedded to his well-documented free market ideology, relying mainly on corporate tax cuts to spur economic activity.

Unfortunately, while Canada's businesses have boosted profits and executive salaries, they have not invested in research, equipment, or employees. As a result, Canada's GDP growth remains modest. Meanwhile, month after month, labour force statistics indicate that more full-time, well-paying jobs are being lost than created.

The dedication to tax cuts has also affected the government's budget. Of course, Harper has done his best to limit the amount of money the government needs by slashing veterans' benefits, food inspectors, and many other public programs and employees. Still, reductions in corporate, personal and sales tax rates have constrained the government at a time when revenues would have already been reduced due to the economic slowdown. Moreover, they have created a structural revenue problem that will make it incredibly difficult for the next government to address its priorities.



The policies Harper will promote in the upcoming campaign will do further damage. For example, the long-promised and recently announced income splitting plan will give a tax

break to some of the country's wealthiest families, while providing financial incentive for the lowest paid workers in Canadian households (usually women) to stay out of the labour force. The decision to continue issuing meagre cash payments, rather than pursuing a national child care program, means that millions of families will continue to be unable to access or afford the child care and early learning opportunities that would benefit children and parents in the short and long term. Harper's strategy has been to portray the other party leaders as unseasoned and immature when it comes to serious money matters. But Canadians need to know that it is the Conservatives who have put our economy and finances at risk.

The attack on unions

Stephen Harper does not openly identify as anti-union. Unlike, say, Tim Hudak, Harper's political instincts are far too sophisticated to risk attracting unwanted attention by using antagonistic rhetoric or enacting noisy, radical change. However, skepticism about organized labour is a cornerstone of neo-liberal philosophy. As collective organizations, unions are believed to hamper individual ambition and ingenuity. Also, since they negotiate better wages, benefits and working conditions for employees, they cut into corporate profits. The aversion is particularly apparent when it comes to public sector unions.

During the past few years, the government used back to work legislation to stop strikes at Canada Post, Air Canada, and Canadian Pacific. With Bill C-4, the government granted itself the unilateral ability to designate services as essential, taking away public employees' collective bargaining rights. Bill C-525 requires a majority secret ballot vote before bargaining units in federally regulated public service unions can be certified or decertified.

Bill C-377 imposes such overbearing financial reporting obligations on unions (which do not exist for other organizations), even Conservative senators refused to pass it without amendments.

At the Conservative Party policy convention in 2013, the majority of delegates supported a motion to allow union members to opt out of contributions to political and social causes. And Pierre Poilievre, who Harper recently promoted to Minister of Employment and Social Development, is on record as saying he believes in "free choice for workers" and plans to "make a dedicated push" toward right-to-work legislation at the federal level. Given what we know about Harper's ideology, and his history with anti-union organizations such as the Fraser Institute and the National Citizens' Coalition, we can safely assume he is on board with these measures. If he is given another mandate, he will continue to undercut the labour movement and the collective bargaining process.



The counter-enlightenment

The Harper government appears bound and determined to make laws and policies that ignore reality. For example, while the scientific community is virtually unanimous about the existence of climate change, the Conservatives have proudly acted as boosters for Canada's oil industry and refused to implement any measures to reduce carbon emissions.

Meanwhile, the “tough on crime” agenda, which introduces more jails and longer sentences at a time when crime rates are on the decline, enjoys almost no support among sociologists or criminologists. Perhaps this is why Harper has put in place strict policies that prevent bureaucrats and government scientists from presenting their research to the public.

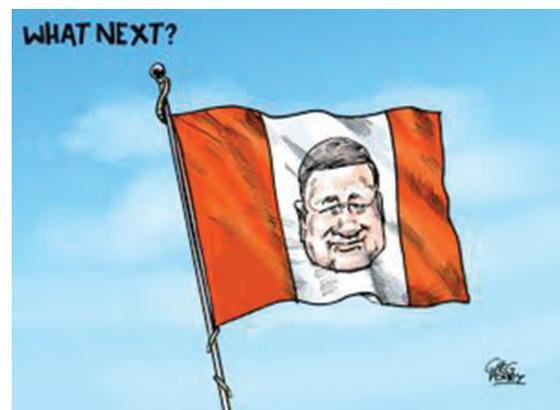
Even more baffling was the decision in 2010 to eliminate the mandatory long-form census. The ostensible motivation was that citizens were concerned about privacy and the government's ability to force participation. However, only a handful of formal complaints were ever launched. It seems much more likely that the Harper government's “principled” stance against census data was about preventing future governments from designing large-scale social programs. This is a problem in itself, because many of these programs tangibly improve lives. But it is not just governments that use census data; academics, religious organizations, community groups, businesses and others use these vital statistics to learn more about our country and its needs. The government claimed the Chief Statistician of Canada was in favour of the decision, but instead he resigned in protest. It has now been confirmed that the new, voluntary survey gives us much less reliable data, at significantly higher financial cost. As the *Globe and Mail* put it in a recent editorial, “The decision to kneecap the census was transparently ideological, a rash exercise in partisan narrow-casting, and was quickly exposed as such.”

Teachers, who spend their days fostering exploration and discovery, should be particularly appalled by this blatant disregard for scientific knowledge. We encourage students to gather facts, debate ideas, test hypotheses, and build solid arguments. What does it say when our country's political leaders are steadfastly opposed to approaching issues with an open mind, hearing divergent opinions, and making decisions based on the best available evidence?

The contempt for democracy

It would be one thing if the Conservatives had merely introduced questionable laws and policies. However, the Harper government has gone much further: it has eroded the very foundations of our system of governance.

The rules under which Canada's federal and provincial legislatures operate are arcane and often confusing. Many of them are not even codified, but depend on decades of convention in which governments and opposition parties have shown goodwill and good faith about their roles in maintaining responsible government.



Of course, these arrangements have not always been harmonious. Governments of all stripes have, on occasion, fiddled at the margins to limit debate or maximize advantage. In fact, the Conservative Party came to power in large part because it promised to be more open and honest than the preceding Liberal

governments. But Stephen Harper's low regard for the House of Commons, and the scope and scale of his cynical actions, are truly unprecedented. According to Peter Milliken, former Speaker of the House, "Harper can't go much further without making the institution dysfunctional."

Exhaustive accounts of the Harper government's shabby behaviour have taken up entire books. A brief, incomplete list might include: impugning the integrity of the head of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission; proroguing Parliament to avoid a confidence motion; spreading misinformation about the functioning of our parliamentary democracy and the legitimacy of coalition governments; refusing to disclose information related to the treatment of prisoners in Afghanistan; refusing to provide the Parliamentary Budget Officer with cost estimates for new military equipment; frequently using massive omnibus bills, which bundle legislation dealing with disparate issues like budget implementation and water protection, thereby reducing legislators' ability to debate and vote on individual policies; appointing an ineligible judge to the Supreme Court; and hastily amending the *Canada Elections Act*, making it harder for citizens to vote and more difficult for Elections Canada to investigate possible violations.

Then there is the matter of Harper's relationship with media. Again, it is not entirely uncommon for a political leader to be wary of those who seek to challenge his decisions or expose his missteps. However, Harper's approach has been extraordinarily hostile. Reporters are no longer allowed to question members of the Conservative Party as they leave their weekly caucus meetings. Harper also refuses to hold media availabilities in the National Press Theatre, and he has not

held a press conference where he has taken more than two questions from reporters since the end of 2012.

Taken in isolation, each of these measures might seem fairly trivial. But in combination, they seriously undermine our ability to understand or influence what our government is doing. Voting in free and fair elections is the most basic of democratic rights. And even in a majority government situation, in which the government is sure to pass any piece of legislation it proposes, the back and forth in the House of Commons is a fundamental part of our system. Journalists provide another essential layer of scrutiny, highlighting problems and holding our government to account. When the government actively complicates the electoral process, and goes out of its way to stifle public discourse and debate in the legislature, we slip dangerously toward something less than genuine democracy.

Get Involved!

As critic Donald Gutstein points out, "Incrementalism is both practice and theory for Harper." He has implemented his agenda in stages and depended on an apathetic public, distracted by the daily grind, to allow his misdeeds to fly under radar. As informed, active citizens, we cannot allow this to continue. We must expose the lie about how politicians are "all the same," and illustrate how Harper's actions have undermined Canadian values. Most importantly, we have to encourage everyone in our community to exercise their vote and choose a smarter, more positive future.

Harper quotes

“No previous government, since the Access to Information Act came into force in 1983, has put forward a more retrograde and dangerous set of proposals to change the Access to Information Act.”

John Reid, former Commissioner of Information

“This is more than an attack on academic freedom. It is an attempt to guarantee public ignorance.”

Verlyn Klinkenborg, *New York Times* editorialist, decrying Harper’s suppression of federal scientists

“An assault on civil society... Losing libraries is not a neutral act.

It must be about ideology. Nothing else fits.”

Jeff Hutchings, Dalhousie University biologist, describing the closing of seven of nine world-famous Department of Fisheries and Oceans libraries

“An iron curtain is being drawn by government between science and society.

Closed curtains, especially those made of iron, make for very dark rooms.”

Jeff Hutchings, speaking at the Death of Evidence rally about Bill C-38

“Stephen Harper doesn’t have a clue what the UN is about... Canada’s diplomacy is hugely different under Harper. The neo-conservative idea of foreign policy is about flexing military muscle...

Now we are a country with baggage... We have become outliers. We are seen as more American than America, more Israeli than Likud. Given what our foreign policy has become,

I would not have joined the service today if I were a young man.”

Paul Heinbecker, Canada’s former ambassador to the United Nations

“During the Harper years, [Canada] the honest broker has become the rabid partisan – one of the reasons that for the first time in sixty years the world choose a bankrupt Portugal over an economically strong Canada to sit on the UN Security Council in 2010.”

Michael Harris, author

“I think Canada’s influence internationally has been diminished with Stephen’s approach.”

Preston Manning, former leader of the Reform Party

“The great tragedy of Kelowna is that the fundamental problem has only gotten worse as Harper has gone back to the old ways of doing things that has been failing since the 1920’s.”

Former Prime Minister Paul Martin

“This government has the worst record on time allocation issues of any government I have seen. It has become a charade. A glaring example is the budget bill, where there was no thoughtful debate or scrutiny of the legislation. And the legislation was massive, much of it with little to do with the budget.”

Sheila Fraser, former Auditor General

“Parliament can hardly be weakened any more than it already is. Harper can’t go much further without making the institution dysfunctional... it will have to be returned to its former state by someone if we are to have a democracy.”

Peter Milliken, longest serving Speaker of the House of Commons in Canadian history

“I see a government that is dismantling, piece by piece, a Canadian mosaic that in a small way a lot of us here helped to build. It is happening behind’s people’s consciousness of it, without the knowledge that it is happening, Canadians are sleepwalking through dramatic, social, economic, and political changes surreptitiously being implemented by a government abusing omnibus bills and stifling public and parliamentary debate. . . Mr. Harper has not played within the (Westminster) rules. Having attained absolute power, he has absolutely abused that power to the maximum.”

Robert Marleau, former Clerk of the House of Commons and Information Commissioner

“I absolutely feel vets have been abused. They are given a one-time paycheque for a lifetime of injury.”

Allan Harding MacKay, renowned war artist

“It was dirty to slag me personally. MacKay did that aggressively.

I knew there would be a big fight and they would try to destroy me.”

Richard Colvin, Canadian diplomat to Afghanistan, who testified to a special parliamentary committee that Canada had handed over Afghan detainees who in turn were tortured or abused

“They broke me in the fight after, in the dealing with my own country.

The country that I fought for has now broken me.”

Corporal Steve Stoesz, injured Afghan war vet on his fight for medical care from the Canadian government

“We took Parliament for granted, but, like the environment, it turns out that it is an incredibly delicate and fragile structure. Harper has smothered MPs and is destroying Parliament.”

Farley Mowat, Canadian author

“Where did everything go wrong for a government that came into power on accountability? I guess corruption happens the same way. It doesn’t just swoop in and take over everything. It starts as a little action, a little boundary pushing, a little rule breaking. And before you know it entire elections are tainted.”

Michael Sona, Conservative legislative assistant and Guelph campaign organizer, suspected to be “Pierre Poutine” and the only person charged in the robocall scandal

“And it is about whether we, as citizens, are prepared to pay attention, and hold people in power to account when they lie to us.”

Andrew Coyne, *National Post*, writing about the F-35 fiasco

“The NDP could be described as basically a party of liberal Democrats, but it’s actually worse than that, I have to say. . . the NDP is kind of proof that the Devil lives and interferes in the affairs of men.”

Stephen Harper, in a 1997 speech to the Council for National Policy (CNP), an American right wing ‘think tank’

“Canada is a Northern European welfare state in the worst sense of the word.”

Stephen Harper, describing Canada in his speech to the CNP

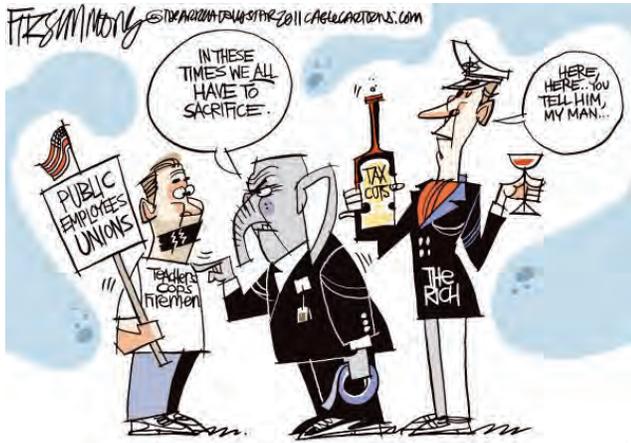
“Your country, and, particularly your conservative movement, is a light and inspiration to people in this country and across the world”

Stephen Harper, describing the United States in his speech to the CNP

Penny Wise, Pound Foolish

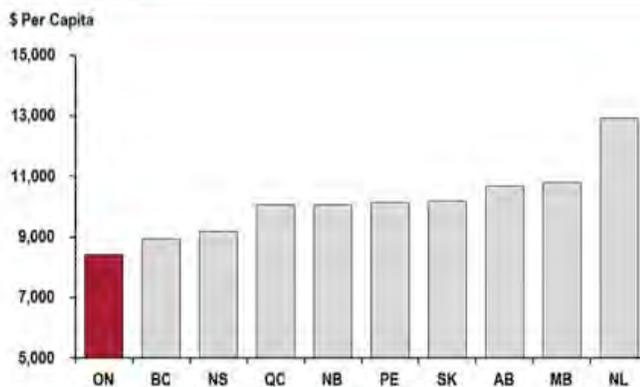
The austerity agenda is (still) dragging us down

It is intuitively appealing to think that a government's finances should be operated like those of a family. Spend a little less than you make, save a bit for a rainy day. Pay off your debts as fast as possible and get that chequebook in balance. When times are tough, tighten your belt.



The problem is, at least when it comes to budgeting, governments are very unlike families. Governments have access to much greater borrowing resources and face almost no risk of bankruptcy. Furthermore, government consumption has enormous power to fuel an economy, while spending on public services helps to balance the whims of the market and improve quality of life for all citizens. These expenditures are especially important when the economy is struggling.

Program Spending Per Capita 2012-13



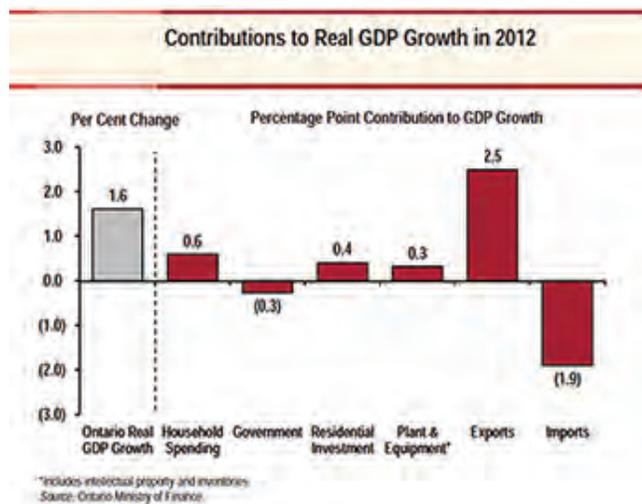
Note: Some provinces' figures have been adjusted to improve comparability.
Sources: Provincial Budgets and Ontario Ministry of Finance

Businesses are in business to make profit. When they borrow money, they do so with the expectation that they will be able to repay these debts fairly quickly because they will be realizing immediate returns on their investments. Governments, on the other hand, exist in large part to deliver those public services, such as education and health care, which will not be equitably supplied in the market. Also, the social and economic returns on these investments might take years to be fully borne out. This is why they must be undertaken by governments.

Unfortunately, these truths seem to have been completely forgotten – or worse, rejected – during the recent recession. Although there was initially some emphasis on stimulus, by 2010 there had emerged a general consensus across the Western world that government spending was counterproductive and needed to be slashed, with the focus shifting to deficit reduction policies. As has been shown by a number of notable economists, support for the austerity agenda was not grounded in sound economics or the wisdom of experience, but rather was based almost entirely on ideology. Nevertheless, once it took hold, it was difficult for any leader to resist the idea without being labelled fiscally irresponsible.

Ontario has witnessed first-hand the consequences of austerity. In 2011, with countries such as Greece, Ireland and Spain defaulting on their loans, deficit hysteria reached its zenith. Bond rating agencies – which have no legal mandate but a baffling level of economic influence – threatened Ontario with a rating reduction. This led Dalton McGuinty to make a sharp turn toward austerity. Among other things, the government cancelled a planned child benefit increase,

froze social assistance rates, and launched an attack on public servants, especially teachers. As a result of this limited spending on public programs, the government has actually acted as a drag on economic growth. Meanwhile, Ontario is falling well short of its poverty reduction targets and the long-term unemployment rate remains significantly worse than it was before 2008.



Ontario’s focus on austerity has ignored the fact that the budget was in balance prior to 2008, and Ontario already had the lowest per capita spending on government programs of any Canadian province. The deficit was not caused by excessive spending, but rather reduced tax revenues as a result of corporate tax cuts and the economic slowdown. Furthermore, Ministers of Finance have routinely overstated deficit projections, presumably to make themselves look like prudent fiscal managers when they deliver “better” numbers at budget time. Most importantly, the austerity agenda has flown in the face of the overwhelming evidence that public expenditures are key drivers of economic growth, job creation, and future prosperity.

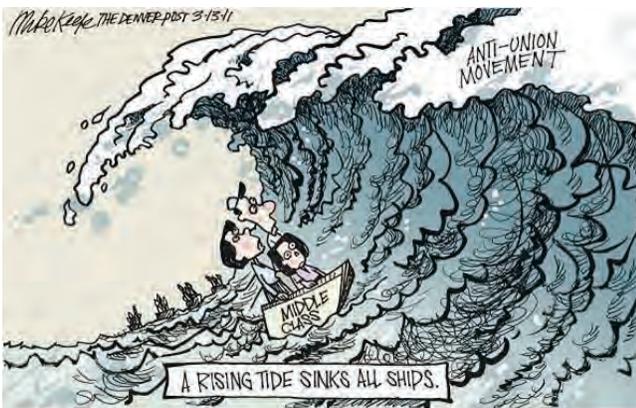
The current provincial government has partially recognized the need to move away from a singular focus on austerity. In the recent election campaign, the Ontario Liberal Party ran on a platform to “build Ontario up” by making investments in transit and infrastructure and offering support to businesses through a \$2.5 billion Jobs and Prosperity Fund. However, the government remains committed to balancing the budget by 2017-18, and it has been firm that it does not intend to increase spending on programs or compensation for public sector employees. This means we need to keep up the pressure, reminding MPPs and government leaders about the benefits of public spending and the dangers of needlessly rushing to balance the budget.



Unions work

The International Labour Organization (ILO), the first specialized agency of the United Nations, makes clear that the rights to associate and to bargain collectively are fundamental, saying: “Collective bargaining is a way of attaining beneficial and productive solutions to potentially conflictual relations between workers and employers. It provides a means of building trust between the parties through negotiation... Collective bargaining plays this role by promoting peaceful, inclusive and democratic participation of representative workers’ and employers’ organizations.”

Canada was a founding member of the ILO and supported the adoption of its key conventions. But our country’s commitment to labour rights has been wavering. As dedicated union members, we need to understand the threats unions are facing and be prepared to defend our contribution to the common good.



Unions and the public good

Unions have been active in Canada for more than two centuries, fighting for better wages, benefits and working conditions that have raised the standard of living for all workers. Earlier this year, the Supreme Court of Canada issued two rulings affirming the basic principles of workers’ rights in this country. In the first, the court ruled that members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have the right to form an association for the purpose of collective bargaining.

As the judgement stated:

“Individual employees typically lack the power to bargain and pursue workplace goals with their more powerful employers. Only by banding together in collective bargaining associations, thus strengthening their bargaining power with their employer, can they meaningfully pursue their workplace goals.”

In another decision, the court confirmed that unionized workers – specifically public sector employees delivering services that have been deemed “essential” – have the right to strike. In recent years, provinces such as Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia and British Columbia have enacted legislation to deny basic collective bargaining rights to workers that have been deemed “essential.” The Harper Conservatives have also used essential services legislation to end strikes at Air Canada, Canada Post, and Canadian Pacific, and recently enacted a law giving the government the unilateral right to say whether a service is essential.

In the decision, the Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling that Saskatchewan’s essential services legislation violates section 2(d) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which protects freedom of association. Writing for the majority, Justice Rosalie Abella said:

“The right to strike is not merely derivative of collective bargaining, it is an indispensable component of that right. Where good faith negotiations break down, the ability to engage in the collective withdrawal of services is a necessary component of the process through which workers can continue to participate meaningfully in the pursuit of their collective workplace goals. This crucial role in collective bargaining is why the right to strike is constitutionally protected.”



That these cases needed to come before the courts at all is an indication of the hostile political environment unions are dealing with. Conservatives argue that at this point in time, workers' rights are adequately protected and unions are no longer necessary. Public sector unions are believed to be particularly offensive, and public sentiment is stirred by the sight of public employees walking off the job. As unionization rates decline and more individualistic attitudes prevail, governments and employers are pursuing a variety of measures that seek to further delegitimize and destabilize unions.

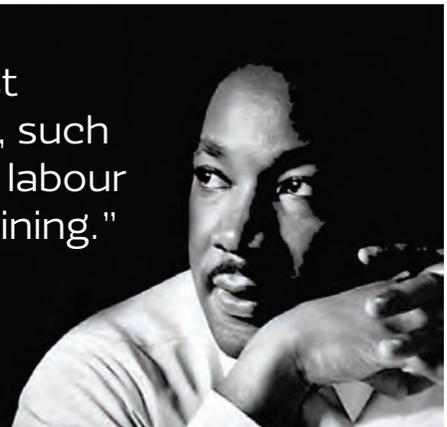
The Rand formula and right-to-work laws

One of the primary features of Canadian unionism is the notion of “automatic dues check-off”: if the majority of employees in a workplace vote to unionize, the employer must deduct union dues from ALL workers. This provides unions with the financial means to carry out the work of collective bargaining and representation. It also ensures a more predictable labour environment for both workers and management, promoting greater stability and peace. The mechanism, known as the Rand formula, was codified in Ontario in the early 1980s by former Progressive Conservative Premier Bill Davis.

These rights have been under attack in parts of Canada and the United States. Under the guise of giving workers more “choice,” conservatives argue that workers should have the right to choose whether they pay union dues. But more choice actually translates into a free ride for those who opt out of their responsibility to support the union that must still represent them. And in the long run, unions are financially crippled, which limits their ability to act in workers' interests and makes it even less attractive to belong to a union. Of course, this is real the goal of so-called “right-to-work” legislation.

“In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against being fooled by false slogans, such as 'right-to-work.' Its purpose is to destroy labour unions and the freedom to collective bargaining.”

– Martin Luther King Jr., 1961



In the United States, 24 of 50 states have introduced right-to-work laws since 1947. The results have been predictable: lower wages, weaker health and safety laws, and fewer benefits. “Right-to-work” states advertise these facts in the hopes of attracting businesses. However, there is no clear evidence that attacking unions makes for a better business environment. South Carolina, for example, has a higher rate of unemployment than the national average, despite having been a right-to-work state for decades. When workers have lower wages and more precarious jobs, and income inequality rises, the economy is actually weakened.

Change the conversation

In the last election, Ontarians rejected Tim Hudak’s openly antagonistic attitude toward

organized labour. However, the basic sentiments underlying his proposals are still popular, and the union movement will continue to face challenges, including essential services legislation and right-to-work proposals.

Collective bargaining and union representation are basic human rights. Furthermore, the evidence shows that higher rates of unionization raise incomes, standards of living, and democratic participation. As more people face income and social inequality, lower wages, precarious employment and unsafe work environments, the necessity of unions becomes all the more evident. It is up to all of us to engage our fellow citizens and get out the message that unions work.



Standing United

Union Advantage

Canada

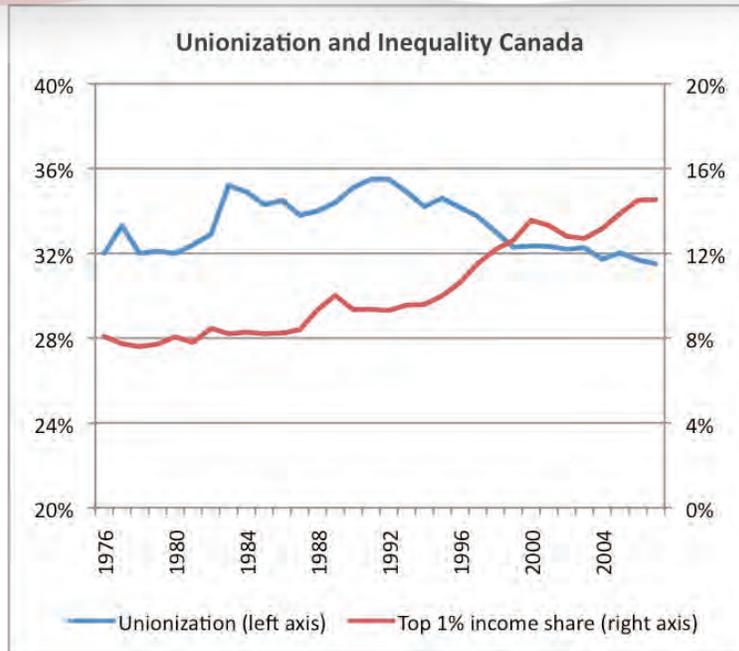
Average non-union hourly wage \$ 22.54
 Average union hourly wage \$ 27.71
 Advantage \$ 5.17/hour

\$ 823.3 million/week for the Canadian economy

Ontario

Average non-union hourly wage \$ 22.80
 Average union hourly wage \$ 29.22
 Advantage \$ 6.42/hour

\$ 366.2 million/week for the Ontario economy



Source: Toby Sanger, CUPE

Right-to-work States

- \$ 2,671 less spent per pupil on education than in free bargaining states
- 51% more workplace fatalities than in free bargaining states
- 21% more people have no health benefits than in free bargaining states
- \$ 1,500 lower average salary than in free bargaining states

REALITY CHECK

The realities about unions

REALITY

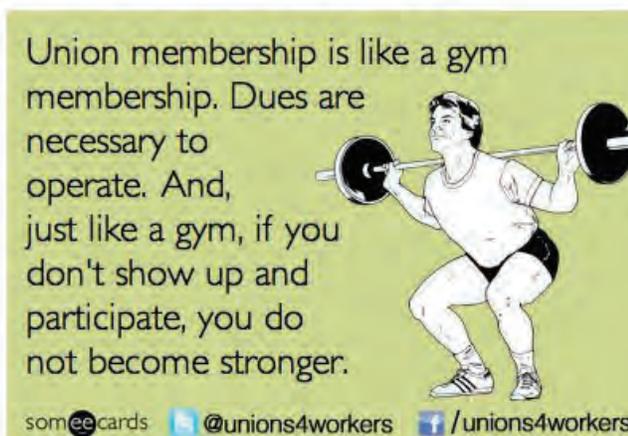
1. Unions benefit more than their members.

- A number of workplace benefits that were initially won by unions are now enjoyed by many Canadians. Examples include health and safety standards, weekends, paid vacations, and parental leave.
- Even right-leaning organizations such as the World Bank have shown that high levels of unionization lead to greater income equality, lower unemployment and inflation, higher productivity, and more rapid adjustments to economic shocks.

REALITY

2. Unions are still relevant and needed.

- The *Globe and Mail* argued that unions were no longer useful in... 1886.
- Unions are needed today more than ever.
- Unions offer a counterbalance to management rights.
- The decline in union membership and stagnant wages for lower and middle classes are related.
- Unionized workers make on average \$5/hour more than non-unionized workers.



- In contrast to the neo-liberal agenda promoted by many corporate and political leaders, unions provide a political voice on behalf of citizens who value responsible citizenship, fair working conditions, and strong public services.
- Countries with strong unions also have healthy economies.

REALITY

3. Public sector unions have not run amok and their perks are not draining the public purse.

- According to Ontario's Auditor General, in 2012 the province wrote off \$1.4 billion in uncollected corporate taxes.
- Research shows that Canada's top notch public services, which are operated by highly qualified and dedicated professionals, continue to provide excellent value for taxpayer dollars.

REALITY

4. We can afford public sector pensions.

- Defined benefit pensions are better managed and have lower administrative fees.
- As much as 80 cents of every pension dollar comes from investments, NOT taxpayers' pockets; this money then flows back into the economy in the form of consumer spending.
- Defined benefit plan recipients in Ontario contribute \$6 billion annually through income, sales and property taxes.



REALITY

5. “Right-to-work laws” would not be good for the economy.

- Studies of the relationship between “right-to-work” laws and employment performance are inconclusive at best.
- By spending their wages on goods and services, unionized workers bring an extra \$793 million into the Canadian economy each year. In some places, like Oklahoma, manufacturing employment has declined by as much as one third since the introduction of “right-to-work” laws.
- American “right-to-work” states have higher poverty rates, fewer people with health insurance, more workplace fatalities and lower wages.
- Poverty comes with a heavy cost: family assistance to low-paid American fast food workers costs \$7 billion per year; the Ontario Association of Food Banks estimates that poverty costs the province at least \$10 billion per year in remedial costs, intergenerational costs, and lost productivity.

REALITY

6. Giving workers the choice to pay union dues is not fair.

- It’s not fair for some workers to reap the benefits of collective bargaining but not pay for the costs.

- It is akin to offering people a “free ride.”
- Unions have a legal obligation to protect all employees. The payment of dues provides unions with the resources required to carry out their work.
- Workers already have a choice in choosing the occupations and workplaces in which they seek employment.

REALITY

7. Unions are accountable and transparent.

- Unions are democratic. They hold annual meetings and provide all members the opportunity to elect local representatives
- Union members comprise audit and finance committees, which review financial statements and give advice to leadership. All union members are entitled to view these audited financial documents.



- A federal task force found that, contrary to the popular stereotype of out-of-control union bosses, “Canadian trade unions exhibit a high level of internal democracy and genuinely represent the interests and wishes of their membership.”

REALITY

8. Public sector salaries and wage increases are not higher than those in the private sector.

- When comparing similar occupations, there is no evidence of a significant pay premium for the public sector.
- Public sector workers are generally older and more educated, and they work in occupations that demand higher rates of pay in the marketplace.
- Where the pay premium is most significant is for lower-paid workers, who are often paid poverty wages in the private sector.
- There is a much smaller wage gap for women in the public sector than in the private sector, which points to one of the major benefits of unionization.

REALITY

9. Unions do not scare away jobs.

- North Carolina has the lowest rate of unionization in the United States and an above-average unemployment rate of nine per cent.
- Keeping good jobs is one of the main priorities of labour unions.
- The purpose of the Rand formula is to promote stability and labour peace.

REALITY

10. Elected officers of unions are accountable to their members for how union dues are spent.

- Dues are spent wisely and for the benefit of every member.
- Every OECTA expenditure is duly moved, seconded and voted on by the provincial executive, which is elected every year at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- Audited financial statements are presented at the AGM. Union members can see and have input on where their dues are spent.
- Working to better the world is central to our Christ-centered mandate.
- We don’t live and work in a vacuum. There is a responsibility to advocate for the social, physical and economic well-being of every child we teach.
- OECTA has a long and proud history of supporting various causes and organizations which work to advance the common good. They include anti-poverty groups like Campaign 2000, and social justice groups like KAIROS, the Coalition for Better Child Care, the James Bartleman Project for libraries in northern reserves, and Habitat for Humanity, to name just a few.



REALITY CHECK

The realities about taxation & public spending

REALITY

1. Our tax dollars are necessary to build and maintain a civilized society.

- Taxes fund a vast array of public services on which our society and economy depend.
- Clean drinking water, safe food, and universal health care keep citizens well.
- Public transportation enables people to live their lives while reducing pollution.
- Parks and other public spaces give citizens space to meet, play, and exercise.
- World-class education prepares students to participate in the economy and solve complex world issues.
- As former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes pointed out almost a century ago, “taxes are what we pay for civilized society.”

REALITY

2. Tax rates are too low.

- Tax rates in Canada and Ontario – particularly those that apply to corporations and high-income earners – have been significantly reduced since the 1970s.
- Among G7 and OECD jurisdictions, Ontario’s top personal rates are roughly average.
- Canada’s business tax rates are now among the lowest in the world, and Ontario’s are among the lowest of any province.
- The main sources of income for many high-income earners – such as investment returns and capital gains – are taxed even more lightly than wages and salaries.

REALITY

3. Tax cuts are not good for the economy.

- The argument that taxes must be lower is based on ideology. The neo-liberal theory of “trickle-down economics” says that putting more money in the hands of businesses and individuals increases investment and spending, leading to greater economic growth and more jobs. The evidence shows otherwise.
- While they have been able to keep more of their profits and give their executives increasingly obscene salaries and bonuses, businesses in Ontario have actually decreased their investments in machinery and equipment.
- Meanwhile, the loss in revenues that has resulted from these cuts has constrained the ability of governments to invest in citizens and public services. For example, the 28 per cent cut to Ontario’s corporate income tax rate implemented in 2010 costs the government \$2.4 billion annually, which is equal to \$500 per month for every child growing up in poverty in this province.
- Government spending has enormous power to fuel an economy. However, due to its lack of revenues and limited spending, Ontario’s government is actually making a negative contribution to GDP growth.

REALITY

4. Rich citizens do not pay their fair share.

- A key element of a smart, well-functioning tax system is equity: tax rates are based on ability to pay and they increase with the amount of income.

- Inequality has many consequences for society, including poor health, lower economic growth, and higher rates of social marginalization and crime. It is in high-income citizens' best interests to share the wealth.
- Income taxes and government transfers (such as social assistance, unemployment insurance, old age security, and child benefits) play an important role in reducing inequality.

REALITY

5. It is not only low-income people who depend on public spending.

- Low-income citizens gain the most direct benefits from public spending. However, successful individuals and businesses rely on crucial indirect benefits, as their wealth depends on a stable business environment and a well-prepared workforce.
- A functioning economy requires roads and bridges to move goods; police and courts to enforce laws; and education and health care to make sure that workers have the knowledge and ability to perform their jobs. None of these things would be possible without adequate levels of taxation and government revenue.

REALITY

6. Public services are a good bargain.

- Based on data from Statistics Canada, researchers found that in 2007 Canadians received an average of \$17,000 in benefits from the public services funded by tax dollars, which is roughly equivalent to the yearly earnings of an individual working full-time at minimum wage.
- Two-thirds of Canadian households gained the benefit of services worth more than 50 per cent of their household income.
- 41 per cent of the distribution of benefits from public services goes to families with children.

In addition to funding our exceptional education system, tax dollars pay for a range of other services which ensure that our students arrive at school healthy and ready to learn.

"Once you witness an injustice, you are no longer an observer but a participant." ~ June Callwood



REALITY CHECK

The realities about Catholic education

REALITY

1. Eliminating the Catholic system will not save money.

- Opponents of Catholic education argue that getting rid of the system would save \$1.2 billion per year, but they have never produced any credible evidence to support this claim.
- Education is funded on a per-pupil basis. School boards receive their funding based on student enrollment.
- There could be some meagre savings if the amalgamation results in fewer schools, and positions that are not connected to student enrollment are eliminated. This could include the school secretary and custodian. OECTA opposes the loss of well-paying union jobs.
- To save any money, there must be fewer students. Fewer students in the public systems means there are more students in private schools. OECTA opposes the growth of private-school enrollment.
- History shows that amalgamation actually costs money. More than \$20 million was spent simply to establish a bureaucracy to oversee the 1998 Mike Harris school board amalgamations. Ministry of Education funding documents reveal that the cost of phasing in the newly created mega-boards was \$853 million.
- Any possible savings through job losses are offset by the growth in bureaucracy when mergers occur.
- Bigger is not necessarily better. If it were, the largest school boards in the province would be the most efficient. We all know that this is not the case. In fact, the school boards that have been under government supervision are among the largest.

- Public and Catholic school boards already work together to achieve economies of scale in such areas as purchasing and energy management. Consortia exists so that maximum efficiency with transportation dollars is achieved. Students from different systems ride the same buses; these often perform double or triple runs to reduce transportation costs.
- If we want to save money in education, there are more appropriate ways to find savings. For example, we could significantly reduce the amount of funding spent on unnecessary bureaucracy and standardized testing regimes at both the Ministry and board level.

REALITY

2. The current system is fair and it works.

- Ontario is widely considered to have one of the best public education systems in the world, and Catholic schools have always been an integral part of that system.
- It would be unfair to the more than 2.4 million Catholic ratepayers (whose taxes fund the Catholic school system) to dismantle it.
- Before true full-funding in 1985, the Catholic community supplemented public funds to build and maintain the system. Those historical community investments must be recognized.
- The right to publicly funded Catholic education is a “historic compromise” that was a cornerstone of Confederation and enshrined in the *Constitution Act, 1982*.
- Maintaining the established publicly funded Catholic education system, for which there is strong public support, is in keeping with Canada’s commitment to respect minority rights.

- The Supreme Court of Canada found that the separate system in Ontario does not violate equality, anti-discrimination laws or the Charter of Rights. Students of other faiths in Catholic high schools are able to fully practice their faith traditions, as guaranteed by the Ministry of Education’s religious accommodation guidelines.
- Whether other faiths should receive public-education funding is a matter of public-policy debate.

REALITY

3. Catholic education is modern and current.

- The Catholic system aims to develop students’ character, morality, and sense of the common good, all of which are essential to address the complex problems of the 21st century.
- Catholic school graduates make great contributions to their communities and are active in a wide variety of contemporary fields, including science, public service, skilled trades, and the arts.
- OECTA offers its members rich and robust in-servicing and professional development such as its conference Building Inclusive Schools. Educating for the Common Good is our annual conference that provides members with the tools to infuse social justice into the curriculum.
- OECTA is consistently lobbying for greater income equality, poverty reduction, higher minimum wages, affordable housing, stronger health and safety measures, and an end to bullying. OECTA was a vocal supporter of Gay-Straight Alliances in our schools during the Bill 13 debate and we participated in World Pride 2014.
- OECTA’s focus has been to work for the dignity of all people and to recognize and give voice to those who are marginalized.

REALITY

4. Eliminating publicly funded Catholic education would cause massive disruption for students, teachers, support staff and communities.

- Any kind of amalgamation or merging of the current systems will affect every student and community, causing disruptions in the lives of almost all Ontario students and their families.
- It is unreasonable to think that only the 650,000 Catholic students would be affected.
- The newly created mega-school boards would have to conduct boundary and transportation reviews to determine which schools, both Catholic and public, would close.
- Students in each of the current systems would find themselves moving schools, changing teachers, and/or losing classmates and friends as school boundaries change and other schools close.
- Closing a school is always very upsetting to parents, students and to the local community. It is because closing schools is so politically challenging that it happens so rarely and takes so long. Eliminating the two existing Catholic systems won’t change that reality.
- Amalgamation does nothing to improve student learning.
- Given that publicly funded Catholic education is protected by the *Constitution Act, 1982*, eliminating the system would require a lengthy and divisive process to amend this fundamental law.
- The Catholic community will vigorously oppose the elimination of its system. This wasn’t true in Quebec and Newfoundland where support for Catholic schools had gradually declined within the respective Catholic communities. Those communities offered little or no resistance to defunding them.

- Although there are differing views within Ontario’s Catholic community, support for our publicly funded Catholic schools is extremely strong.
- Any attempt to eliminate the Catholic system will be opposed by the Catholic community, which would make it a complicated, divisive, and costly battle.

REALITY

5. **There is significant support for publicly funded Catholic education.**

- Roman Catholics comprise 31 per cent of Ontario’s population and yet, according to a recent poll, 45 per cent of Ontarians support the publicly funded Catholic education system. Other polls consistently show the percentage of Ontarians who support public funding of Catholic schools far exceeds the number of Catholics. We punch above our weight.
- Catholic schools receive high levels of parental satisfaction and community support in recognition of their academic excellence and social justice teachings.
- Non-Catholic parents often choose to send their children to Catholic schools, especially at the secondary level where open access is assured. Students in Ontario’s publicly funded Catholic schools comprise one-third (about 650,000) of the total student population in the province.

REALITY

6. **This question has been debated many times, always with the same answer.**

- The three major political parties have consistently confirmed their support for the four current systems of publicly funded schools because they know they work for the school communities they serve.
- Ontario governments have recognized the legal right of the publicly funded Catholic system to continue, *and* the merits of keeping it in place.

- Research shows that when asked how to improve Ontario’s publicly funded education system, fewer than two per cent of respondents mentioned eliminating Catholic schools.
- The 2010 ONDP Task Force on Education Funding concluded that, “The New Democrats oppose any efforts to forcibly amalgamate the school systems until it is demonstrated that there is consensus in the province...” No such consensus has been reached.



“While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few.”

– Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium, Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2013), p. 47.



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catholicteachers.ca

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