

June 2, 2009

OUR OWN STEPS: Supporting Workers in Transition

TOWARD SOCIAL, ECONOMIC & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Campaigning for Action

On June 2, 2009, members of local, provincial and national unions, labour councils, the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress Ontario Region met to discuss strategies to respond to layoffs, assist laid-off workers and build the capacity of the labour movement to respond to job loss. Participants agreed to recommend a public statement titled: ***At the Crossroads: Supporting Workers in Transition—Legislative steps toward social, economic and environmental justice.***

At the Crossroads sets out labour's legislative agenda for supporting workers in transition. However, in order to realize this agenda, labour must take its own steps to initiate a provincially and regionally coordinated campaign, with education, communication, research, and action components. Conference participants agreed to recommend the following:

1. Central labour bodies should:

- a. Implement a provincial and regional campaign strategy to realize the goals set out in ***At the Crossroads***;
- b. Initiate local, community and provincial organizing: petition drives; lobby days; days of action; and special assemblies;
- c. Encourage and lobby municipal, provincial and federal governments to endorse aspects of the ***At the Crossroads*** document, such as Employment Insurance Reform and the triple bottom line;
- d. Encourage and facilitate the launch or strengthening of local and provincial labour-community coalitions that involve labour, environmental, youth, student, cultural and other community-based organizations, along the lines of the *Good Jobs for All Coalition*;
- e. Launch their own *Labour Market Partners' Forum*;
- f. Develop a lobbying strategy and corresponding resources;
- g. Develop local and provincial media, research, education and communication strategies involving multi-lingual print, audio and visual resources.

Possible initiatives include short videos and podcasts that could be played on Youtube, downloaded onto MP3s or distributed via DVD that explain the crisis from labour's perspective and offer positive solutions (procurement, green jobs, etc) and profile the needs of diverse communities (geographic, racialized, differently-abled, etc);

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- h. Distribute the *At the Crossroads* document, to affiliates, action centres and committees;
- i. Incorporate the goals of *At the Crossroads* into current and future campaigns;
- j. Find ways to build meaningful, concrete solidarity with workers in different workplaces, across sectors and across national borders;
- k. Identify next steps in supporting workers in transition and developing future funding proposals; and
- l. Submit policy recommendations and resolutions for consideration at upcoming labour conventions.

2. Affiliates should:

- a. Implement local and provincial campaign strategies to realize the goals set out in *At the Crossroads*;
- b. Participate in and encourage local, community and provincial organizing: petition drives; days of action; special assemblies; and lobbying strategies;
- c. Encourage and facilitate the launch or strengthening of local and provincial labour-community coalitions that involve labour, environmental, youth, student, cultural and other community-based organizations, along the lines of the Good Jobs for All Coalition;
- d. Develop local and provincial media, research, education and communication strategies, and involving multi-lingual print, audio and visual resources;

Possible initiatives include short videos and podcasts that could be played on Youtube, downloaded onto MP3s or distributed via DVD that explain the crisis from labour's perspective and offer positive solutions (procurement, green jobs, etc) and profile the needs of diverse communities (geographic, racialized, differently-abled, etc);
- e. Distribute *At the Crossroads*, to members, local political action committees, adjustment committees and action centres;
- f. Incorporate the goals of the *At the Crossroads* document, into current and future campaigns;
- g. Find ways to build meaningful, concrete solidarity with workers in different workplaces, across sectors and across borders; and
- h. Submit policy recommendations and resolutions for consideration at upcoming labour conventions.

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Building Labour's Capacity

Job loss is devastating to workers—including hundreds of thousands of union members—families and communities. But the labour movement is also losing seasoned local and regional union activists.

The action centre / peer-helper model in Ontario has proven itself to be an effective model to provide much-needed support, assistance and advocacy to workers facing layoffs. But crucially, the action centre / peer-helper model is an important mechanism with which the labour movement can maintain its links with laid off members.

Union-based community action centres have the potential to connect with unrepresented workers and play a role in raising the profile of the labour movement in advocating for all workers.

Ontario is one of the few provinces that still recognizes the action centre / peer helper model. In other provinces laid-off workers have become individualized clients of government and service sector agencies where workers' ties to the labour movement are more easily severed. In this context, the action centre / peer-helper model remains vulnerable. Today, it is fair to say that support for this model within the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities is uneven.

Therefore, central labour bodies and affiliates must:

- 1. Increase support for action centres and adjustment committees staffed by properly-trained peer-helpers;**
- 2. Take the lead on developing community action centres where appropriate;**
- 3. Develop adjustment-related resources and training materials;**
- 4. Educate and train union members on adjustment and economic literacy, including:**
 - a. Promoting a labour analysis of the economy and economic literacy among workers and the community;
 - b. Developing an adjustment training manual;
 - c. Distributing and promoting the labour-government guidelines that outline the rights of unions to participate and shape the adjustment process;
 - d. Training union members on all aspects of Employment Insurance to assist laid-off workers in navigating the system;
 - e. Strengthening the role of labour councils and affiliates in engaging laid-off workers in their area; and

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- f. Working to re-establish labour's connection with the community college system, including labour's right to select representatives to sit on local college governing boards.

5. Support adjustment committees and action centres by:

- a. Promoting a labour analysis of the economy and economic literacy among workers;
- b. Distributing and promoting the labour-government guidelines that outline the rights of unions to participate and shape the adjustment process;
- c. Adapting the adjustment committee / action centre model for the public and services sectors and building trades;
- d. Developing a "best practices" protocol as a guidance tool for the development of union-based community action centres;
- e. Compiling, updating and disseminating adjustment-related resources and training materials, including best practices regarding mental health protocols;
- f. Coordinating and connecting adjustment committees and action centres to central labour bodies locally and provincially so that experiences can be shared and best practices generalized. Possible initiatives include:
 - 1) Creating a provincial website and labour-based adjustment blogs;
 - 2) Facilitating labour-based training to create effective websites with appropriate software;
 - 3) Generating email and phone contact lists;
 - 4) Publishing and distributing newsletters; and
 - 5) Organizing conferences for adjustment committees, action centres and labour adjustment advocates.