

Local 568 supports campaign to defend jobs & collective agreements and fix EI

OPSEU is joining the rest of the labour movement to say “No Way” to the growing campaign to make working people pay for the economic crisis. And Local 568 is part of the action!

The current attack on working people takes different forms. In the private sector, governments and corporations are ganging up to force unions and their members to accept cuts to pay, benefits, pensions and jobs.

In the public sector, workers are being told to tighten their belts and prepare for more cuts to services and jobs. There is even talk of opening up public sector collective agreements and forcing workers to take pay cuts or unpaid days off. And it's just a matter of time until the attack on pensions that started in the private sector comes to the public sector, too.

For workers who don't have a union, the economic crisis means fewer jobs, worse jobs, higher unemployment and more part-time, casual and low-wage work. Meanwhile, past cuts to Employment Insurance (EI) mean only 42% of unemployed workers in Canada qualify for benefits at a time when they need them most.

There's a big problem with this picture. Working people didn't cause the crisis. Cutting jobs, wages, benefits and public services will only weaken the economy and hurt our communities. And the more other workers are forced to accept cutbacks, the more likely it is that our own employers will start demanding concessions, too.

“No Way, We Wont' Pay”

That's why more than 1,600 representatives from unions across Toronto came together at a special “steward's assembly” in early May, organized by the Labour Council of Toronto and York Regions.

At the meeting, stewards talked about the economic crisis and the attack on working people. They decided to launch a campaign to stop the layoffs and cutbacks, defend our collective agreements and our unions, and fight for decent jobs for all working people.

To kick start the campaign, unions – including OPSEU and our Local 568 – agreed to take 3 simple steps:

- 1) Make sure every member receives a copy of the Labour Council's “Solidarity Checklist”, to help us resist the pressure to blame ourselves or other workers for a crisis we didn't create.
- 2) Ask every member to sign the Labour Council's Petition to Fix Employment Insurance Now
- 3) Encourage every member to attend a Mass Rally in Toronto on Saturday June 13th to demand “Good Jobs for All”, fix EI, protect our pensions and put people first.

You can help – here's how:

- Read the [Solidarity Checklist](#). If you haven't received a copy yet or want more information, talk to your steward or go to www.labourcouncil.ca.
- Sign the [Petition to Fix EI](#). If you haven't signed yet, talk to your steward.
- Come to the [Rally on June 13](#).

“Good Jobs for All” Rally and March

Fix Employment Insurance • Protect our pensions • Defend our contracts

Saturday, June 13th, 1 p.m.

**Toronto - Metro Hall
55 John St @ King St. West**

**Bring your family & friends
and make some noise!**



Organized by the Canadian Labour Congress, the Toronto & York Region Labour Council and the Good Jobs for All Coalition

Fix Employment Insurance now!

Employment insurance was set up to keep working people who lose their jobs off welfare and out of poverty. That's why every employee has to pay into EI. But over the last 20 years, cutbacks have made it harder to qualify for EI, reduced benefits and reduced the number of weeks you can collect. That's a problem at the best of times, but in a recession, it's a recipe for disaster.

Why EI is broken

Here are a few facts about Employment Insurance today:

- Under the current rules, only 42% of unemployed workers qualify for EI – and only 32% in Ontario. In the recession of 1981-82, 80% of workers qualified.
- It is harder to qualify depending on where you live. In Toronto, you need 630 hours of work in the past year to qualify, compared to 420 hours in other parts of the country.
- The number of weeks of benefits also varies based on region – and on the number of hours you worked – and can be as low as 14 weeks.
- The rules make it harder for Ontario workers to qualify – and virtually impossible for those who work in part-time, casual or contract jobs.
- EI pays only 55% of insurable earnings to a maximum of \$447/week. This is down 25% in real terms from 1996. And it's simply not enough to live on while you look for work that is harder and harder to find.

How to make EI work for working people

OPSEU, Labour Council and the Canadian Labour Congress are calling for changes to fix EI. The rules need to be the same for all workers. People who lose their jobs through no fault of their own should be able to qualify. Here are the changes we need to make it happen:

- Allow all workers with 360 hours of work to qualify no matter where you live
- Increase benefits to 60% of normal insurable earnings.
- Eliminate the 2-week waiting period and deductions for severance pay.
- Provide 50 weeks of benefits in all regions
- Provide extended benefits in areas of high unemployment or for workers enrolled in a training program

You can help fix EI

It's time to restore fairness for the working people. Fixing EI will help preserve families and communities and stimulate the economy.

Want to help? Sign the petition. Then come to the rally on June 13. See page 1 for more details.

Want more info? Go to www.labourcouncil.ca.

Need help? Who ya gonna call?

Have a problem at work? Don't worry – there IS something you can do about it. When issues with the employer come up, your collective agreement gives every member a way to get the problem dealt with.

Your OPSEU steward, that's who

That's where your OPSEU shop stewards come in. Your steward is your "go to" person if you have a workplace problem or think your rights as an employee may have been violated.

If the problem is covered by the collective agreement or legislation, your steward can help you raise the issue with management. That includes filing a grievance, if necessary, and representing you during the grievance process. Your steward can also help decide if the problem can be addressed through the Labour-Management Committee, the Health and Safety Committee or other kinds of workplace action.

Union representation – It's your right!

You also have the right to have a steward present if you are being disciplined, if you are asked to attend a meeting that could lead to discipline, or if you need help with a workplace accommodation or other issue.

If you aren't sure whether you should have a steward present, check with one of them before you meet with your manager.

And if your manager tells you that you have the right to bring a union representative along, don't be shy about asking a steward to join you. That way you can be sure that your rights are protected.

Here is a list of your Local 568 stewards at the Ontario Pension Board and OPTrust.

OPB Stewards: Tania Batushin, Pam Blair, Placido Minieque, Jude Periera, Frances Wu, Stephanie Young.

OPTrust Stewards: Sonia Baistrocchi, Leigh Brain, Cheri Hearty, Sean Homaie, Patricia Johnson, Myles Magner, Henry Nanes, Richard Nelson, Joseph Rampersad, Jerry Sullivan, Curtis Wright.

