



AN ACTION AGENDA

TO BUILD LABOUR POWER IN THE 21st CENTURY

Canada's labour movement can be justifiably proud of its legacy of struggle, and its contribution to securing a decent quality of life for millions of Canadians. In key sectors of our economy, unions set the standards through collective bargaining and collective action. In the political life of this country as well, unions have played an essential role for democracy and curbing the influence of corporate greed.

But as the 21st century unfolds, it is obvious that there are new challenges placed before us. Jobs are being lost in alarming numbers through plant closures, outsourcing and the export of unprocessed raw materials. Rates of union density are dropping, while the unrelenting forces of privatization eat away at public assets and public services. The environment is under severe stress, threatening to deprive much of humankind of a secure future.

Canada's labour movement has recognized these threats, and over the years developed a solid policy framework in response. Yet we have not been able to change the direction that business is taking this country. We have the vision, but not the power, to shape the political agenda across Canada.

Our challenge, put bluntly, is how we build that power.

Power can only be realized by taking a vision that has wide support, then determining a strategy and a plan for organizing around that vision. The strategy must be based on a thorough analysis of the forces that are involved - the strength of our movement, our allies and our opponents. And it must be informed by an honest assessment of past successes and failures.



But the best strategy in the world will not succeed without organizational muscle. When we mobilize our members and bring them into effective action, we can win. However, too much of what we do today is confined to a “business as usual” approach. The real engagement of thousands of union or community activists is something we seldom achieve. So too is the commitment and focused use of resources needed to sustain winning campaigns.

Canada’s labour movement needs to have a frank and detailed discussion about what it will take to build power in the 21st century. From grass-roots organizing in the workplace and the local community, to Canada-wide efforts, to new forms of global solidarity, the challenge is before us. The upcoming CLC Convention provides the opportunity to gain a commitment from all levels of leadership of our movement to finding the solutions.

Let’s examine five key issues:

- **GLOBALIZATION**
including trade deals and integration, which threaten good jobs
- **UNIONIZATION**
by committing to organize a million workers in the next decade
- **PRIVATIZATION**
and the need to expose and oppose its various guises
- **EQUITY**
and the need for labour to fully respond to the changing workforce
- **SUSTAINABILITY**
where we can stop environmental degradation while providing decent jobs for the next generation

In each of these issues, we can point to strong individual campaigns, some of which have been quite successful. What is needed to take those experiences and turn them into country-wide efforts? Experience shows that three key elements are needed. The first is the engagement of members and allies in grass-roots mobilization in both the workplace and the community. The second is the commitment from the affiliates to provide the leadership and resources necessary to build and sustain long-term campaigns. The third is the ability to combine formal electoral political organizing with the building of popular movements.

A real debate about whether our movement is willing to commit to building power at the national level – through the CLC – is long overdue. We welcome the opportunity to participate in this vital discussion in the utmost spirit of solidarity and unity.