

UNIFOR IN MOTION

Canadian Council

SEPTEMBER 13-15 VANCOUVER, BC

Politics for workers:
Unifor's political project



UNIFOR
theUnion | lesyndicat

Politics for workers

Unifor's political project

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Why politics matter | 1 |
| 2. A workers' view of politics | 2 |
| 3. Global politics since the Great Recession | 4 |
| 4. Politics in Canada | 8 |
| 5. Unifor's political project | 15 |
| 6. Unifor's policy on political relationships and elections | 21 |
| 7. A membership process to build our political project | 23 |



UNIFOR
theUnion | lesyndicat

1. Why politics matter

Why should unions be involved in politics? Don't we have enough to do just coping with collective bargaining and workplace problems?

Unions don't exist in a vacuum. Our strength and ability to represent our members is affected by the broader climate around us, including:

- **Trade union freedoms:** the right of unions to exist, to organize without harassment, to strike, to bargain freely over the issues that affect us.
- **Legislated standards and social programs** which can reinforce collective bargaining goals: Medicare, health and safety legislation, working time standards, public pensions, workplace closure and bankruptcy rules, employment insurance, minimum wages, pay equity, non-discrimination and human rights law.
- **Economic policy** which affects our potential gains and potential power. A strong economy lays the base for more wealth to share. Full employment gives us the confidence and power to challenge employers, while high levels of unemployment undermine us. Free trade and investor rights agreements threaten our jobs, while fair and managed trade can bring shared prosperity. Fair taxation is necessary to fund social programs, while tax cuts very often undermine social conditions.

Our lives also obviously extend beyond the workplace. We are citizens and members of communities, and so we care about the livability of our cities, our environment and a sustainable future, the schools our children attend, health care for our families, the parks and public facilities available for sports and entertainment, and prospects for today's youth.

And we care about social equality within our communities and within our country: about discrimination, the lives of the aged, about poverty and homelessness. All of this is "politics."

But why can't we be involved in all these issues simply as individuals? Why is *union* politics necessary?

The political power of the individual worker, when casting one vote, does not match the political power of the stockholders who own the companies that employ us. Those with control over the productive wealth in our economy not only influence election campaigns with the money they have, but also influence elected politicians and day-to-day government decisions with their ability to scale back operations, move jobs and investments elsewhere, import more and export less, or close down workplaces.

To balance the political power that employers have, workers must go beyond trying to act only as individual citizens and move towards acting collectively. Unions are a fundamental base for such collective political action.

We should be proud, not defensive, about expanding the union's role in politics and raising expectations for enhanced rights and living standards. The involvement of unions beyond collective bargaining is fundamental to a democratic society. Unions provide a base for challenging society's

domination by the few and putting forward other priorities and alternative policies. The most important workplace lesson that we learned over the years was that, individually, the worker is in no position to challenge management. Collective action is absolutely fundamental to defend our interests and achieve our goals. The same lesson is true politically.

The most important workplace lesson that we learned over the years was that, individually, the worker is in no position to challenge management. Collective action is absolutely fundamental to defend our interests and achieve our goals. The same lesson is true politically.

Unifor was created to succeed in ways that our predecessor organizations and Canadian labour could not in recent history. We made an assessment that Canadian labour needed a new approach to union democracy, organizing, mobilizing, bargaining - and to politics.

At its creation, Unifor committed itself to a bold political action program, including education, mobilization and action in the streets when the interests of our membership and the labour movement were at stake.

This commitment is rooted in the experience of Canadian and global labour, and the conclusions of our members across Canada and Quebec and in each of our more than 20 sectors who have learned that politics determines economic outcomes, just as economic power determines political outcomes.

We have learned that the security and justice that we seek for our members cannot be achieved at the bargaining table alone or through negotiations and compromise with decision makers. The race to the bottom economy and the never ending threat to our jobs and security are systemic and structural. Our members are victims of a system that is anti-worker, anti-union and undemocratic.

This document begins a discussion and process in Unifor about politics and a new approach to building the political influence of our union and working people. In short, there is a great need for a new politics that advances the interests of workers, but there are no easy answers for a “worker politics” that will accomplish this.

We describe this process as Unifor’s “political project” because it has both immediate and short term goals. Our Project cannot be described simply by the goal of electing a particular government or by ideological pronouncements about a future society. Unifor’s political project is a process of active and ongoing engagement in politics, and continuing discussion with our members to draw conclusions and to define concretely the political and social conditions that will fulfill our long range goals of a new advanced democracy where the interests of workers and the majority of citizens come first.

2. A workers' view of politics

For a working person, politics is a reflection of their social and economic conditions. From our democratic rights to the taxes we pay, the health care and education we have, and the jobs we have or lose - politics plays a central role in most of the outcomes that affect our quality of life.

This is true in good times, and especially in bad times: trade deals that result in the offshoring of Canadian jobs; health care budget cuts that result in hospital layoffs. The oil industry is flying high, but so is the Canadian dollar and your manufacturing or forest company can no longer sell its products. If your workplace is closed and your pension is underfunded, does the money that is left in the company go to your underfunded pension or to the banks? For workers, these are just some of the reasons why we need a new politics that puts workers' interests first.

At the highest level, politics determine social and economic outcomes affecting millions of people. That is what happened only a few short years ago when bankers and politicians further deregulated the financial system to facilitate greed by the few, resulting in the 2008 financial earthquake that shook the capitalist world. A year later, almost the entire world had been hit by the Great Recession of 2009-2010. Incalculable wealth was lost, unemployment reached post war highs, and trillions was spent to bail out failed financial institutions.

Thousands of Unifor members fell victim to the Great Recession, losing jobs, pensions and savings. They were among 59 million workers who lost jobs in 2009, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). In the industrialized countries, unemployment doubled, while in the developing world an estimated 200 million people were forced into extreme poverty.

The social impacts of the crisis, as is normally the case in a capitalist recession, were disproportionately felt by equity seeking groups. However this recession had a signature note by its impact on young workers. In 2009 the OECD estimated youth unemployment rates of 22.8% in France, 25.4% in Italy, 37.4% in Spain, 25% in Sweden, 18.9% in UK and 17.6% in USA.

All the while, trillions of taxpayer dollars were spent to prevent the collapse of financial institutions while Wall Street bankers continued to receive billions of dollars in bonuses, sparking public outrage.

In Canada, the financial crisis and the recession were less severe than in some countries — but they were still profound. In spite of \$150 billion given to Canadian banks during the financial crisis, a record number of Canadian firms could not renegotiate loans and were forced into bankruptcy protection. Even companies that remained profitable stopped investing, prompting former Bank of Canada Governor Mark Carney to admonish them for hoarding “dead money.”

Politics plays a central role in most of the outcomes that affect our quality of life.

Working class people – and the broad “middle class” – were hit hard by the crisis. By 2012, the middle 60% of Canadians had seen their share of national wealth decline while only the top 20% saw their relative wealth increase. For average working Canadians, this meant frozen or declining real incomes and increasing debt. Between 2008 and 2013, average household debt rose from 148% of after tax income to a new high of 166%. In 2009, 900,000 Canadians were forced into poverty, including 160,000 children and in Ontario, Alberta and B.C. social assistance caseloads increased by more than 20%. By 2010, after the worst of the recession, poverty rates for lone parent single families, recent immigrants, off-reserve aboriginal persons and disabled persons remained higher than in 2007.

The most important factor determining economic outcomes for Canadians has been the loss of good jobs and the growing precariousness of new jobs. Canada lost over 450,000 full time jobs since October 2008. Our official unemployment rate increased dramatically to over 8% and unemployment and at over 7% in June 2014 remains at historical highs, and substantially more than the 6.1 percent official rate in 2008 prior to the recession. Young Canadians remain left behind with an official unemployment rate of 13.6% in May 2014 – substantially higher than before the Harper Conservatives took office in 2007.

However, these numbers mask deeper changes in Canada's labour market and the decline in the percentage of Canadians who are actually employed. The "real unemployment rate" which includes workers who have stopped looking for work or who are involuntarily working part-time remained over 12% at the end of 2013. If the employment rate in June 2014 had been the same as in June 2008, nearly 640,000 more Canadians would have jobs in 2014.

These dismal economic results of a failed system are not only the result of politics, but also drive new political outcomes globally, and in Canada.

For workers in the United States, the outcomes were worse. Between 2007 and 2010 the wealth of middle income Americans fell 40%, with all wealth accumulation going only to the highest income group. The crisis hit the bottom 25% hardest of all. Before 2007, average wealth of this group was a negative \$2,300 – by 2010 it had become a negative \$12,800 – six times worse.

In Europe, a double dip recession ended only in late 2013, but with 27 million Europeans still unemployed and some countries like Greece and Spain continuing to have unemployment rates above 20 percent and youth unemployment at 50 percent or higher.

These dismal economic results of a failed system are not only the result of politics, but also drive new political outcomes globally and in Canada.

3. Global politics since the Great Recession

A perverse result of the financial crisis and recession is that the bankers, investors and political parties responsible for the crisis became its main beneficiaries. To have better political outcomes for workers we need to understand why Conservatives have been able to exploit the crisis they created, and why social democracy and the left did not form governments that would reform the global financial system and reverse rising inequality.

But the main trend in global political results since 2008 has been the opposite - setbacks and losses for traditionally pro-labour parties and an increase in the power of Conservative, right wing and extreme right wing parties. Some examples to note in this regard are:

- 2010 UK election victory of the Conservative - Liberal Democratic coalition ending 13 years of Labour Party government. The Labour Party saw its vote drop to its lowest level since 1918.

-
- 2010 Swedish election in which the “Alliance” coalition of conservative parties defeated the “Red Green” coalition of Social Democrats, Greens and the Left Party. This marked the second consecutive loss for the former ruling Social Democratic Party, which received its lowest popular vote since 1921.
 - 2013 defeat of the Australian Labour Party by the Liberal National Coalition of right wing parties.
 - 2013 Japanese election win for the right wing Liberal Democratic Party and a major defeat for the centre-left Democratic Party that had been the largest single party. The Japanese Communist Party became Japan’s third party in Parliament, ahead of the DP.
 - 2014 India General election won by the Conservative BJP Party which won 52% of seats, but with only 31% of the popular vote. The result was the worst ever for the centrist Congress Party, and the Left Front, which had been strong in the states of Bengal and Kerala, saw its votes also decline and was reduced to only 11 seats.
 - 2014 EU elections in which the social democrats lost many seats and extreme right wing parties made major gains in many countries, notably UK, France, Hungary and Holland.

Of course, these generally poor results for centrist, social democratic and left parties are only part of the complex global political trends. Looking at other key events such as the Arab Spring, political developments France, USA, and South Africa, and protests movements of this era, reveal a general weakness of political forces representing labour.

The Arab Spring

In 2010 – 2011 dramatic popular revolutions known as the “Arab Spring” changed regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, and offering immense optimism for people everywhere of the possibility for social change and democracy. While the promise of democracy in the Arab world has largely been betrayed and suppressed, giving way to an ongoing civil war in Syria and a new military regime in Egypt, there are nevertheless some important results for worker rights.

In Egypt, there have been some limited advances in trade union recognition and rights, including the recognition of two independent trade union federations. However, Egyptian labour law remains profoundly anti-worker with no minimum wages or protection of the right to organize, and independent unions have no legal rights to collect dues.

Tunisia, in contrast, adopted a democratic constitution in 2014 and the central trade union federation, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) has played an important role in organizing social dialogue, especially after the political assassinations of left and democratic Members of Parliament in 2012 and 2013. On the economic front, however, Tunisia is following a neo-Liberal model and attempting to attract capital through privatization and low wages.

The United States and France

Two countries that held presidential elections in 2012 seemed to go against the global trend by re-electing Barak Obama in the United States and by the election of Socialist Francois Hollande as President of France.

But in neither case has there been a shift away from corporate globalization and neo-Liberal policies.

In the United States the election of America's first black President has also resulted in the unprecedented growth of the "Tea Party" - a libertarian right wing movement - and a deep division among Americans. It is the right wing extremism of the Tea Party Republicans that has dominated US politics since 2012, rather than the policies and program of the Democratic President.

For organized labour, the election of Obama has not resulted in any federal labour law reform, and during Obama's presidency, a coordinated attack on labour rights took place at the state level, most notably in the northern industrial states of Wisconsin, and Michigan. Michigan, the cradle of US industrial unionism, became a "right to work" state.

In France, Hollande was elected on a platform of challenging income inequality and taxing the rich. Neither has taken place and instead the French government has cut public spending by over 50 billion Euros and cut taxes on business. As The Economist magazine said in Jan 2014: "BLINK and you will have missed it. France's Socialist president, François Hollande, who was elected in 2012 to bring an end to austerity and to tax the rich, has turned into a liberal. Or at least a social-liberal."

South Africa

South Africa has struggled with emotional and turbulent politics with the death of Nelson Mandela in 2013 and a national election in 2014 which re-elected the African National Congress, but with just 62 percent of the vote - its lowest since liberation.

South Africa has been a beacon for progressives everywhere since the end of apartheid and the election of the ANC government. But in recent years there have been troubling news from South Africa as the government implemented neo-Liberal policies to attract investment, including privatization of water. These economic policies have also put government policy at odds with trade unionists, culminating in the 2013 "Marikana" shooting of 34 striking mineworkers by police.

In 2013, one of South Africa's largest unions, the National Union of Metalworkers, took the bold step of refusing to endorse the ANC in the election. NUMSA has organized a massive strike against the government over social and economic policy and has also called for a political process to establish a new, socialist party independent of the ANC and the South African Communist Party.

Latin and Central America

Perhaps the one part of the world resistant to right wing politics and neo liberal economics is Latin America and Central America. In this part of the world the last decade has seen the election of popular, left governments with strong labour support.

Governments with a democratic, pro-labour agenda have been elected in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador. These new governments have also provided an opening to Cuba, which remains the longest lasting “socialist” country, still resistant to US domination in spite of the economic blockade it has endured for almost half a century.

There are many factors in the success of left and worker movements in Latin America, and Unifor in 2014 sent a delegation to Brazil to discuss the experience of their “political project” based around the Workers Party.

Some of the factors often noted for the success of the Latin American left include:

- The transformation of guerilla and other protest movements into political parties not associated with corruption and political establishments.
- Decades of grass roots political education and campaigning.
- Effective and far reaching policies of economic reforms and redistribution of wealth.
- Strong critiques of unfair trade policies and the global financial system.

Social movements and protest

Although in most of the world the expected shift to the left in politics did not result from the 2008 financial crisis and 2009 recession, there was a major rise in protest movements that mobilized millions of people.

The number of protest movements was unprecedented, some perhaps being the largest in history.

From the Arab Spring to the Occupy movement, the Spanish “Indignados” and the Brazilian Landless movement, the past decade has been a period of rising outrage and discontent, and some of the largest protests in world history.

The Institute for Policy Dialogue and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Germany) has reviewed this turbulent era of protest and recorded major protest movements in the following categories:

- Economic Justice and Anti-Austerity: 488 protests
- Failure of Political Representation and Political Systems: 376 protests
- Global Justice: 311 protests were against the IMF and other International Financial Institutions (IFIs), for environmental justice and the global commons, and against imperialism, free trade and the G20.
- Rights of People: 302 protests on ethnic/indigenous/racial rights/LGBT and women’s rights

Not only was the number of protest movements unprecedented, but so too were the numbers of people with more than 30 of these events having over a million participants, and some perhaps being the largest protests in history.

In Canada, we must also note the importance of the “Maple Spring” and “Carré Rouge” Quebec student strike in 2012, and the “Idle No More” movement which gave voice to the frustrations of Canada’s indigenous peoples in 2013.

It was these movements which more than any political party, or election, that focused on the real issues of inequality, democracy and an emboldened set of attacks against working people.

4. Politics in Canada

The state of democracy and worker politics in Canada unfortunately has been in the same general decline as in the US and around the world.

In the context of rising inequality it is not surprising that Canadians have become increasingly disaffected from politics. This has been seen dramatically in the decline in voter turnouts from 75% in the 1988 “free trade” election to 61% in the most recent federal election. Canada now ranks 110th on a list of 152 countries in voter turnout. These negative trends have been exacerbated by new Conservative tactics imported from the US, including the robo-call voter suppression tactics in 2010, and the amendments to Canada’s Elections Act in 2014.

The drop in voter turnout has been paralleled by a slide in confidence in the institutions of parliament, with fewer and fewer people saying they had a high degree of trust in governments, and more saying that government wastes taxpayers’ money.

An important contributing factor to this alienation is Canada’s electoral system which allows for majority rule by parties with minority support. Indeed since 2005 Stephen Harper has been Canada’s Prime Minister, although never achieving even 40% support of Canadians.

Harper’s often extreme right wing political agenda is in fact not supported by the vast majority of Canadians who continue to have progressive opinions and values. Recent research into values found that Canadians support:

- Larger, robust government providing more services, rather than smaller government (74%)
- Government action to address poverty (73%)
- Higher taxes to support health care, pensions and social programs (60%)
- Trade union rights (56%)

Canadians also agree that:

- Income inequality is a significant problem that negatively affects Canada. (83%)
- The best way to deal with crime in society is to tackle issues of poverty, racism and addiction. (63%)
- Canada’s foreign policy should be based on peacekeeping, mediation and being a global leader on the environment. (79%)

The clear political character of cuts to spending and services is seen in this partial list of the federal institutions and services that have been fully defunded or seen significant defunding affecting quality of services, since 2011:

- National Council of Welfare
- Law Commission of Canada
- 2005 Federal/Provincial National Childcare Program
- Privacy Commissioner
- Information Commissioner
- Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner
- Public Sector Integrity Commissioner
- Parliamentary Budget Officer
- Auditor General
- Global Environmental Monitoring System
- Experimental Lakes Area
- Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences
- Polar Environment Atmospheric Research Laboratory
- Polar Continental Shelf Program
- Institute of Ocean Sciences
- Climate Change Adaptation Research Group
- Laboratory for the Analysis of Natural and Commercial Environmental Toxins
- NEPTUNE Ocean Observatory
- Study of Beluga Whales and Health in the Arctic
- Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council grants program
- Canada Centre for Inland Waters
- Centre for Offshore Oil, Gas and Energy Research
- Veterans Affairs offices across the country
- Canadian Council on Learning
- Canadian Wheat Board
- Health Canada Library
- Health Council of Canada
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research
- Federal/Provincial Health Accord
- Military Police Complaints Commission
- Federal Youth Employment Program
- Law Reform Commission of Canada
- Court Challenges Program
- Status of Women Canada
- Canadian Food Inspection Agency
- Canadian Council of Social Development
- Center for Equality Rights in Accommodation
- Canadian Volunteerism Initiative
- Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency
- CBC

In addition, many civil society organizations that present critiques or alternatives to Harper's brand of conservatism have been fully or partially defunded:

- Canadian Conference of the Arts
- Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network
- National Association of Women and the Law
- National Network on Environments and Women's Health
- Canadian Women's Health Network
- Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women
- Women's Legal Education and Action Fund
- Canadian Childcare Advocacy Association of Canada
- Canadian Childcare Federation
- MATCH International
- KAIROS
- Canada Without Poverty
- Rights and Democracy
- Alternatives
- National Aboriginal Health Organization
- Aboriginal Language Institute
- Native Women's Association of Canada
- Assembly of First Nations
- First Nations Child and Family Caring Society
- Canadian Environmental Network
- Canadian Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy
- Climate Action Network
- Canadian Council for International Cooperation
- Development and Peace

Regardless of Canadian values and opinion, the Harper government has changed Canada in many fundamental ways in a very short period of time. These changes range from foreign policy to environmental policy to criminal law, to labour law, to the size of government which in 2015 will be the smallest proportion of GDP in over 50 years. At the core of the withdrawal of the federal government is the decision to end the Canada Health Accord in 2014, projected to shortchange Canada's Medicare system by over \$16 billion in the next five years.

Harper's open hostility to union rights has been part of a wider initiative to silence all progressive organizations by attacking their finances. Church groups and NGOs that criticize the government have lost federal funding for their programs. Environmental NGOs have also been attacked with new restrictions on their charitable status and audits ordered by the Conservative government. At the same time, the Harper government has rolled back environmental assessment and other legislation in Canada by decades. The Conservatives have also changed Canada's labour market in fundamental ways, pushing towards a low wage economy by its changes to EI rules, increasing the pensionable age for OAS to 67, and the massive expansion and abuse of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program.

But no part of civil society has been attacked by the Harper conservatives more than the trade union movement. The Harper government has in a few short years fundamentally overturned decades of labour law standards and democratic process in Canada

The Conservative government introduced back-to-work legislation five times within a 10-month period:

- CP Rail – May 2012
- Air Canada flight attendants — September 2011
- Canada Post – June 2011
- Air Canada customer-service, sales – June 2011
- Air Canada pilots, machinists, ground crew – March 2011

The government then proceeded to take the entirely unprecedented step of changing fundamental labour law by private members' bill without any consultative process involving employers and labour. First Bill 377 would have interfered in the financial affairs of trade unions and went so far as to violate lawyer-client confidentiality by forcing unions to publish legal expenses along with all other expenditures over \$5000. This legislation was ultimately blocked by Senate amendments.

Then Bill 525 changed the rights of unions to organize by eliminating "card check" provisions that had been part of the Canada Labour Code since its inception in the 1940's. This legislation was passed in a modified form after the removal of extreme provisions to count nonvoters in certification and decertification as voting against the union.

The Harper government also defunded Canada's "Sector Council" program where employers and unions cooperated on developing labour market and training programs in many industries. In a highly symbolic decision, against the trade union movement, the government broke decades of practice and

ignored the nomination of the Canadian Labour Congress in the appointment of a “worker advocate” for the Employment Insurance program.

Canada’s federal political map has changed greatly over the past two decades. From a staid, national three party system dominated by the Liberal Party, Canada became a regionalized five party system with the emergence of the Bloc Quebecois and the Reform Party in Western Canada.

Without doubt the most important change in Canadian politics was brought about by Stephen Harper with the merger of the Reform Party and the Progressive Conservatives and the subsequent building of a deeply ideological, strongly organized national Conservative movement.

The Conservatives today have no equal by financial or organizational measures, to the point where their national data base can divide political constituencies into targeted campaigns based on issues, religion or ideology, ethnicity, age or almost any relevant characteristic or demographic. Conservative political discipline and this massive organizational capacity have allowed Harper to effectively use wedge politics to form pluralities and majorities in parliament for almost a decade without majority public support.

Conservative political discipline and this massive organizational capacity have allowed Harper to effectively use wedge politics to form pluralities and majorities in parliament for almost a decade without majority public support.

For many decades, the NDP was weak federally with its main base in provincial politics. That changed in 2010 with the Jack Layton breakthrough that vaulted the party to the status of Official Opposition, driven by voters in Quebec which chose the NPD as their leading federal party. The ascension of the NDP to Official Opposition occurred in the context of two sudden, unexpected historical collapses: the federal Liberal Party which could not escape the image of corruption and entitlement that brought down the former Liberal government of Paul Martin and the abandonment of the Bloc Quebecois by Quebecers to the NPD.

Without doubt this major development changes the political outlook for Canadian labour and for the first time poses a real possibility to elect a social democratic federal government in Canada. While this could present an historic opportunity to advance the cause of working people on a national level, there are deeply blunted expectations of what an NDP victory could mean for labour.

In most provinces and federally, the NDP has taken steps in recent years to weaken their organic ties to the trade union movement as it has endeavoured to present itself as a more centrist Democratic Party. The party has carefully removed from its statutes and policies almost all references to socialism, public ownership, and redistribution of wealth. Like social democratic parties in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, the NDP has accommodated its policies to global capitalism, free trade, deregulation of labour markets, tax cuts and a smaller role for government. The net result and political problem for social democracy is the consequent inability to present a real alternative from other centrist Democratic Parties.

While the NDP has defended labour rights and worked with labour to oppose Harper's attacks in Canada's parliament, Unifor has had differences with the NDP over electoral strategies. Unifor cautioned against provoking elections federally and in Ontario and warned against the consequences of electing the Harper Conservatives and the Hudak Conservatives in Ontario. However the NDP chose instead to risk the interests of labour in a partisan competition with Liberals over incremental gains. This disagreement will continue with the NDP, or any party, if the worst outcome for labour is accepted as the better outcome for the party. In Ontario, Unifor also had significant differences with the provincial NDP on social and economic priorities, including the Liberal budget which was supported by Unifor and a majority of unions in Ontario but defeated by the NDP.

In another example of the volatility of Canadian politics, the Liberal Party of Canada now just three years after a crushing defeat appears poised for a comeback based on the personality and family brand of Justin Trudeau. The character of a resurgent Liberal Party remains very unclear. The Party has adopted a number of progressive policy resolutions on subjects like national child care and a national transit strategy, but the party has also gone out of its way to show it is pro-business on issues of taxes, oil pipelines, deregulation and foreign ownership of telecommunications. It is very uncertain that a Liberal government would restore many, if any, of the changes to Canada during the Harper regime. The Liberal Party also places its partisan interests first, and until now has rejected cooperation to ensure that the Harper government is put out of office.

Canada will enter the 2015 election year with a five party system, including also a much weakened Bloc Quebecois and a fledgling Green Party that has now elected its leader to Parliament and a member of the BC provincial legislature. While the Green Party has in the past advanced some

Canadian labour's chief political objective is to defeat the Harper government.

policies with free market and libertarian features, today's federal Green Party has a progressive, democratic platform and is generally supportive of the labour movement and its social and environmental policies.

It is understandable that Canadian labour's chief political objective is to defeat the Harper government, because it is clear that this government's intention is to weaken trade union institutions in

Canada in every possible way. This is only one of the fundamental ways that Harper intends to fulfill his famous pledge made in 2006: "You won't recognize Canada when I'm through with it."

This is the broad landscape that Unifor and Canadian labour work within as we prepare for the next federal election and develop a longer range political framework and policy. It is evident that global and Canadian politics are constantly changing, with two poles that frame our tactics. On the one hand, we are confronted by powerful right wing, corporate forces that have the goal of weakening and destroying trade union rights. On the other, labour movements globally and in Canada continue to have important relationships with social democratic and left political parties, but these relationships are under stress and the clear trend for social democracy is to move away from its labour based political roots. We recognize that this tension is not new, and will continue into the future.

Provincial politics

Provincial politics across Canada, with some exceptions, have not generally seen the extremes of the federal Conservative Party. But in a clear majority of provinces – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland – provincial governments have followed neo-Liberal economic policies and have acted to interfere in free collective bargaining and weaken trade union rights.

Manitoba, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island have not introduced anti-labour legislation in recent years.

In Quebec, politics has been particularly dynamic in recent years as Quebecers have explored new political paths towards protecting and enhancing their national rights and progressive national values. For most of the past three decades, the Quebec labour movement has been generally supportive of the Parti Québécois and Bloc Québécois and has identified itself as part of Quebec's sovereignist movement.

However Quebec labour's relationship with the BQ and PQ has also undergone changes and tensions and in the recent provincial and federal elections have proposed strategic voting and endorsed candidates on a riding by riding basis according to an assessment of support for the FTQ platforms.

Some expressions of these changes has been the establishment and growth of Quebec Solidaire to the left of the PQ, the controversial decision by the PQ in the last provincial election to recruit the anti-labour billionaire owner of Quebecor, Pierre Karl Pelideau, as a leading candidate, and the federal breakthrough of the NPD, which came largely at the expense of the Bloc Québécois and which has realigned this dimension of Quebec politics.

Quebec labour has responded to these changing political dynamics by reasserting the independent political path of labour and setting goals of defeating the Harper government in the next federal election, while mobilizing to defend labour's interests after the regaining of power by the Quebec Liberal Party in the 2014 provincial election.

This picture could be very different if the extreme right wing provincial Conservatives had formed government in the 2014 Ontario provincial election. The Conservatives had campaigned for two years on bringing a form of "right to work" legislation to Ontario that would have banned the Rand Formula that underpins union security in Canada. "Right to Work" was dropped at the last minute from their election platform, but the Conservatives hostility to union rights was maintained and they campaigned in the election on a pledge to eliminate 100,000 public sector jobs.

The threat of the Conservative agenda motivated a large mobilization by Unifor and the Ontario labour movement, and the Conservative agenda was decisively rejected by voters. The Ontario Liberal government was elected on a progressive platform for stimulus spending, including a new provincial pension plan to complement the Canada Pension Plan, and respect for labour rights.

Municipal and local politics

Municipal and city governments have been more resistant to neo-Liberal conservative politics than at provincial and federal levels. In 2014, centrist mayors are elected in the majority of Canadian municipalities, including Vancouver, Burnaby, Edmonton, Calgary, Hamilton, Halifax, Fredericton, St. John's, among others.

The notable exception is Toronto which has endured three years of the Rob Ford's right wing populism. However, the Ford phenomena is not reflective of Toronto politics overall which has strong progressive forces and continues to implement progressive social policies.

Canada's shifting political landscape

The variations that Canadians see in provincial affairs are indicative of the rapidly shifting nature of Canadian politics that defy generalizations.

Canadian politics is highly regional. In BC, for example, the governing Liberal Party has no organic connection to the Federal Liberal Party and is in fact a pro-business coalition that grew out of the former Social Credit Party. The current Liberal government of Kathleen Wynne contrasts strongly with the BC, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Liberals (as well as with the former Ontario Liberals of the McGuinty era) on social and economic policy, and it is widely accepted that in the recent provincial election Wynne ran to the left of the Ontario NDP.

The Conservative Party in Newfoundland, especially during the tenure of former Premier Danny Williams, was more progressive than the opposition Liberals and it boasted among the provinces' most progressive labour legislation, although the current government has recently overturned key labour rights on organizing. Last year, Newfoundland reformed student loans to effectively provide universal access to post-secondary education.

In Saskatchewan the ruling Saskatchewan Party is the former Conservative Party, refounded after the scandals of the former Devine Conservative provincial government. The Saskatchewan Party and the Opposition Alberta Wildrose Party, together with the Harper Conservatives, are today the chief expressions of social conservatism in Canada.

With the defeat of the Nova Scotia NDP government in 2013, Manitoba remains Canada's sole NDP government – and its future will be put to a major challenge in the 2015 provincial election. Like the most Canadian politics, the NDP has a distinct regional character and its closeness to the labour movement varies from province to province.

Unifor was created to meet these challenges and to make a difference in worker politics, as in other dimensions of union life. To accomplish this, we need a long range framework and short and medium term policies and strategies. Together, these principles, goals, policies and strategies make up Unifor's "political project."

5. Unifor's political project

While Unifor's political project is long term, its beginning rests on clear foundations from the New Union Project and our founding documents:

From Unifor's founding convention Vision Document:

"Politics" is not just something that happens during an election. And "political action" means much, much more than simply casting a ballot every few years. Our political goals as a union will include:

- Formulating and articulating demands on broader economic, social, and environmental issues that affect our members and all working people.
- Organizing and mobilizing our members and other Canadians into active campaigns in support of those demands.
- Lobbying and pressuring political leaders and representatives at all levels in support of those goals and demands.
- Participating in election campaigns to raise our issues, and to support candidates who agree with them.

Our overall mission is to build Unifor as an active, effective, and universal workers' movement: defending the interests of our members, and all working people, in the workplace and in society. An important part of this mission will be making sure our progressive voice is heard loudly in our communities, and in social and political debates at all levels of society. This will be an important priority for leaders and activists throughout our union.

Unifor and electoral politics

The Harper Conservative majority government was elected in 2011 with less than 40% support from Canadian voters. In the summer of 2013, Conservative support is measured at 30% or less. But in spite of the fact that the majority of Canadians have never embraced the right wing agenda of Stephen Harper, the Conservatives continue changing Canada in fundamental ways... The Harper government is the most aggressive, neoliberal, anti-labour government in Canada's postwar history. If it wins a renewed mandate in the next election, despite the harm it has caused Canadians and its recent scandals, working Canadians will surely pay a long-term price. Unifor commits to educating and mobilizing our members; building partnerships and coalitions with other forces; exposing the damage that Harper government policies are doing to Canadians; building public support for progressive alternatives to Harper policies; and doing everything else we can to prevent another Conservative victory in the next election.

As we approach the next federal election, Unifor will develop a political strategy in the interests of our members to contribute to the defeat of the Harper government and its replacement by a progressive government with a more pro-worker agenda. This will include the discussion and adoption of policies to guide our relationships with the NDP and other parties, and to define our political role in Quebec. This process will include extensive consultation with local leaders and activists, and debates and votes at appropriate future meetings of the Canadian Council and other union bodies.

Unifor issue campaigns

Politics is something that happens all around us, every day – not just during elections. A social union is one that knows the well-being of its members, their families, and communities cannot be assured solely at the collective bargaining table. Our union has a responsibility to be a credible, consistent voice for working people on all the broader issues and debates that affect them. There is no shortage of important issues and challenges facing working people in Canada. And Unifor aims to be a presence in all those debates and struggles. However, we must pick our battles and focus our resources to be as effective as possible.

From Unifor's Constitution:

Article 2, Paragraph 10 – Statement of Principles

“Our goal is transformative. To reassert common interest over private interest. Our goal is to change our workplaces and our world. Our vision is compelling. It is to fundamentally change the economy, with equality and social justice, restore and strengthen our democracy and achieve an environmentally sustainable future. This is the basis of social unionism – a strong and progressive union culture and a commitment to work in common cause with other progressives in Canada and around the world.”

Article 3 – Objectives

- “To fight for good jobs in our communities and throughout the economy.
- To provide support to those in need.
- To build our union’s presence in the community and encourage our members to be involved in all aspects of community life.
- To work in common cause with other progressives to promote social justice and environmental sustainability at a community level.
- To work on labour based campaigns with other affiliates of Labour Councils.
- To safeguard, protect and extend freedom, civil liberties, democracy and democratic trade unionism.
- To be broadly active at the municipal, provincial and federal levels and to mount issue based campaigns.
- To resist corporate globalization and provide alternatives to job destroying trade deals and policies.
- To work to end war and contribute to world peace.”

Here are the top priorities for our issue campaigns in the coming years:

- Defending labour rights and the Rand Formula.
- Demanding good jobs for all, challenging the rise of precarious work.
- Campaigning for equity, fairness, and inclusion for all workers.
- Stopping the next round of free trade agreements, calling for limits on globalization.
- Working for a sustainable balance between energy, the environment, and jobs.
- Defending and improving pensions – including expanding the CPP.
- Defending public services, and public sector workers.

Connecting Unifor with communities and movements

Unifor's political strategy and its goal of economic, political and social change extends beyond electoral politics. Our philosophy of social unionism recognizes that social change requires a shift in economic and power relationships between corporate elites and their favoured politicians, on one hand, and workers and communities on the other. We know that progressive social change requires social movements working for environmental and democratic transformation.

For these reasons, Unifor's independent labour political action will connect our members to communities and to social movements. Unifor will ensure that our many strong relationships with civil society organizations and coalitions are maintained and strengthened.

At the national level, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Council of Canadians and several major NGOs have decided to form a new network of Canadian civil society in response to the Harper agenda. This network, Common Causes, will ensure that unions and community organizations are aware of each other's issues, concerns and actions. Unifor can be counted on when members of the network call for solidarity and mobilization.

In March 2014 the Unifor National Executive Board received a report from our delegation to Brazil which reflected on what had been learned by the Latin American experience. A number of recommendations were adopted which are additional starting points for our political project:

- Adopt best-practices in structured engagement with social movements through establishing specific liaisons in the local, regional and national level of the union and lead regular "social forum-style" engagements in our communities.
- Deepen our engagement at the base of citizen interaction with government through participatory budget processes at the municipal and provincial levels around basic services such as transit, housing, education and health care.
- Consider new forms of mentoring, leadership training, position rotation, term limits and succession planning across the union.
- Consider further strengthening our communications capacity and media presence.
- Elaborate a clear and consistent position on our relationship to political parties, both while in, and out, of government.
- Undertake the necessary consultation, discussion and debate in order to articulate a sustained vision and "political project" for the country that wins broad support among leadership and members.

These founding documents and initial NEB recommendations are our starting point for a Unifor Political Project - a long range framework for a transformative politics towards social justice and equality, a society where worker's collective interests come before profit and private gain.

In the short and medium term, it means political engagement in the broad range of politics, including issue based campaigns, coalitions and working with social movements, and electoral politics at every level.

Canada's labour and social movements have the immediate goal of defeating the Harper government and returning Canada to a progressive path – but there are several strategic problems and obstacles to achieving this goal; problems that are equally important in building towards a long term political framework.

Taking stock: political capacity for labour and social movements

To be politically effective, Unifor and the labour movement must take a reality check and acknowledge some of our own weaknesses in the political capacity of the labour movement and social movements.

During the recession, and in the first years of the Harper government's attacks on union rights, the labour movement did not successfully confront the government or mobilize a broad-based fight back. As a result, many union members are not seized by the threat that a renewed mandate for the Harper Conservatives would pose.

To be politically effective, Unifor and the labour movement must take a reality check.

In short, too many union members are disengaged from politics and do not connect the different strands of politics to their vital interests as workers and citizens. For this reason, Unifor launched the "Rights at Work" campaign in 2014 to reach out to all of our

members on an individual basis to alert them to the political threat to their trade union freedoms. The defeat of the Hudak Conservatives in Ontario has taken Canada back a step from an immediate all-out assault on unions, but we would make an enormous mistake not to continue with this campaign and to continue to engage our members. Social conservatives in the Harper government and in many provincial governments will continue their attack on union rights. An informed, mobilized and organized membership is our first and last line of defense.

At the provincial and national levels, the trade union movement must be politically mobilized not just financing and supporting candidates, but by continuously campaigning and mobilizing. This will include allocation of significant resources to communications and relations campaigns, but these initiatives must always be matched by on-the-ground mobilization of union members, and when necessary the willingness to engage in protest and workplace actions.

Social movements have likewise been silenced by the Conservative's attacks on their funding, finances and charitable status. Many have been forced to effectively withdraw from political activity or any communications to their members and supporters which could be construed as partisan or directly political.

The labour-community alliances that grew out of the Canada-US free trade struggles and which became important political factors in Canada on a range of democratic, equality and worker issues

were allowed to fade over the past decade, and are now only beginning to be rebuilt. The “Making Waves” coalition that brought together union and civil society activists in Port Elgin in 2012 has launched an important national discussion about grass roots activism and unity. The “Common Causes” network launched by the Council of Canadians with the support of the Canadian Labour Congress and major NGOs has also been actively building a basis for strategic alliances and protests to block the Harper agenda and organize solidarity on key issues.

In summer 2014, on the initiative of Quebec labour and civil society, many of these forces were convened for discussions at the “People’s Social Forum” in Ottawa.

Unifor is committed to rebuild an effective labour – community network and alliance that can reach our members and their communities, provide the solidarity that many groups need to speak out with confidence, and to have a timely and direct impact on political issues that affect our members.

Community action and Unifor activism

The range of political action and community engagement by Unifor members and locals is broad. Unifor local unions and members support a wide range of community needs, from charities to hospitals, to sports leagues and food banks. Many Unifor locals also are actively engaged in local political campaigns and, usually working through Labour Councils, are active in community coalitions and electoral campaigns. Unifor members and local unions are involved in an array of environmental organizations and campaigns, human rights issues and organizations, and many other issues. A large number of Unifor members also hold leadership positions in labour, community and civil society organizations, and stand for election in local, provincial or federal elections.

This entire range of community and political activity is necessary to build a workers’ politics that is rooted in our communities and social movements. All of it contributes to Unifor’s Political Project – but to do so, all our activists must be connected and imbued with the immediate and long range goals of the union. Unifor’s political mobilization department can play a key role by organizing a large network of Unifor community, social and political activists.

In Unifor’s first year, we have launched multiple campaigns and protests, challenged bad laws, and fought tenaciously in electoral struggles. From this experience, we know that our membership overall strongly supports our union’s political direction and engagement.

However we also know that we need many more political activists with the motivation and skills to bring Unifor politics into our workplaces, communities and social movements. Unifor’s education programs can play a strong role in filling this gap.

This entire range of community and political activity is necessary to build a workers’ politics that is rooted in our communities and social movements.

Progressive electoral coalitions

Another key issue for Unifor's Political Project is the reality that progressive social change requires the involvement and commitment of more than any one party to achieve. While coalition politics is commonplace in most democracies, Canadian political culture lacks an understanding and acceptance of this important part of democratic change.

We remember that many of the important gains for working people have been brought about by broadly based campaigns supported by labour, communities and enacted by different political parties. As Ed Broadbent stated in his 2014 "Jack Layton" lecture: "Although it was the CCF and NDP that led the Canadian struggle for social and economic rights, it is important to note that other parties played a key role in their implementation. It was John Diefenbaker's Progressive Conservative Party that brought in a national hospitalization program and other progressive measures. And it was Lester Pearson's Liberals who enacted universal health care legislation and introduced the Canada Pension."

The practice of parties to reject good policies, or to avoid issues seen as advantageous to their opponents, is a negative feature of Canadian politics.

Another expression of coalition politics in Canada is the municipal tradition of "nonpartisanship" where politics reflect a community based coalition politics and in which federal parties play limited roles. An important result of this deeply rooted aspect of Canadian politics is that political forces closely connected to citizen movements and labour tend to have a stronger expression at the local level.

The alternative to coalition politics is "big tent" liberalism, whether pursued by the Liberals or the NDP, each attempting to displace the other's political base, or the result of a merger of those parties into a centrist "Democratic Party." As Blair's Labour Party and the US Democratic Party show, there is very little space in the "big tent" for worker politics or labour's priorities.

Another unfortunate result of self-interested partisanship is the triumph of the right wing which happily exploits the divisions of the centre-left. The practice of parties to reject good policies or to avoid issues seen as advantageous to their opponents is a negative feature of Canadian politics. In some cases, this partisanship has resulted in the defeat of governments when the risk of a sharp turn to the right and an assault on workers could well result.

In the short term Canadian workers need a form of coalition politics that will assure the necessary cooperation to defeat of Harper in the next election under any circumstance short of an outright Conservative majority. We will also need cooperation on a legislative program to reverse a decade of neo-liberalism and to put Canada back on a progressive path.

To ensure that workers' interests are priorities for government and to reach our long range political goals, we need more than coalitions. We also need strong and clear political champions that advance our interests.

Labour knows well this problem: business parties always act directly on behalf of the class interests they represent, but not social democratic or labour parties, which in opposition are the voice of workers, once in government represent “all of the people” – leaving workers without strong advocates. Whether in opposition, coalitions or in government, Unifor members need parties and individuals who stand up unequivocally for trade union rights and for the social and economic interests of working people.

Unifor’s Political Project therefore has the long range goal of building a political force that will always stand unapologetically with labour on immediate issues and larger social changes, and at the same time engage vigorously in coalitions and compromise with other parties in the governance of the country.

Electoral reform

It is likely that electoral reform will be needed to fully resolve the problem of political plurality in a way that both gives strong representation to working class interests and results in social progress. Canadian labour has in the past been divided or equivocal on issues of electoral reform, mostly reflecting the divisions in the NDP and other parties. The political needs of our members are too urgent to wait for electoral reform, but it is also now time to begin serious work on changing the political system.

Unifor’s answer to these problems arises from the same confidence and hope that inspired the creation of our new union. The fundamental reality of politics, like all other aspects of life, is that change is permanent, and we believe that we can change our political future through our solidarity and activism.

Drawing on our founding principles and policies, we propose the following guide to our political relationships and electoral strategies:

6. Unifor policy on political relationships and elections

Unifor’s policies on political relationships and elections will be guided by these four guiding statements:

- **Principled** – Unifor’s political policies will reflect the principles in the Unifor constitution, the New Union Project documents and the founding convention documents.
- **Independent** - Unifor politics is at all times based on an independent analysis and democratic decisions in the interests of the membership and the labour movement. Unifor will develop policies, take direct action, campaign with movements and coalitions, and determine electoral tactics in each concrete political situation based on democratic debate and decisions by Unifor Councils and by accountable leadership bodies.
- **Balanced** - Independent labour political action, social movements and electoral politics are all necessary components of social change, and Unifor must have the capacity and the will to engage in all of these forms of struggle depending on the circumstances.
- **Transformational** - Unifor’s political analysis is based in an understanding of class and power relationships, including oppression based on gender, race and sexual orientation. Unifor is committed to a transformative politics to bring about fundamental social change for political, social and economic democracy and a sustainable environment.

Our political relationships:

- Unifor strives to develop relationships with multiple political parties, social justice movements, equity seeking movements, NGOs and institutions, and individuals that contribute to the advancement of our political, social and economic goals.
- Unifor recognizes the historic relationship of the Canadian labour movement with the New Democratic Party. Unifor participates in the labour movement's relationship with the NDP, based on the involvement and affiliation of Unifor members who have voluntarily joined the NDP.
- Unifor's independent relationship with the NDP is based on mutually shared goals but is shaped by our own analysis, policies and strategies which may differ from the party.
- Unifor recognizes the distinct political relationships of the union in Quebec and the decisions of the Quebec labour movement to develop political tactics for each election, including endorsements of PQ and Bloc Quebecois candidates.
- Unifor's political relationships are also internationalist and we will continue to be informed, inspired and motivated by the experiences of labour and working class political movements globally. While many of these relationships are based in global union federations (GUFs) and in the anti-globalization movement, our bilateral relationships with unions in other countries which allow for in depth exchanges of our political experiences are particularly important.

Our electoral policy:

- Unifor may make recommendations to its members regarding any election when the interests of Unifor members and the labour movement are affected.
- Any electoral recommendation shall be debated by the appropriate Unifor Council or the National Executive Board.
- Electoral recommendations for a party or individual should be specific to a particular election.
- Unifor recommendations will not "tell members who to vote for" and will clearly set out the reasons for any recommendation, and also acknowledge the democratic right of each individual to make their own political choice.
- All Unifor members will be supported and encouraged to participate in political debate within the union.
- As we develop our political relationships and electoral policies, Unifor will be guided by the ultimate reality that we can never "contract out" our politics to any other party or structure. Our political goals will only be achieved through the organized strength of the labour movement and by Unifor's own independent analysis and strategic directions.

7. A membership process to build our political project

This framework commences a long term process within Unifor that will shape our political future. But many questions remain to be determined about how Unifor will engage in political action in the short term and the character of our long-range political goals.

Unifor's political project must be based in our membership. We urge Unifor members to vigorously debate the principles and directions suggested here, and to build the project with new analysis and conclusions about the politics we engage in and the political goals we will strive for.

Over the course of the next year the following practical steps are proposed:

- 1. Membership debate and discussion at 2015 Regional and Quebec Councils of this framework document, and around these and other questions:**
 - How do we build stronger engagement among our members?
 - How should we build our union structures: Local Union UPCs, regional and national political action committees?
 - How do we strengthen our engagement with social movements?
 - How can we deepen democratic involvement in elections, electoral reform and beyond?
 - How do we build multi-party support for a progressive electoral agenda?
 - How do we strengthen our education about politics among members?
- 2. A political action plan for engagement by Local Unions, Councils, activist members and Unifor departments should be prepared each year.**
- 3. A network to connect Unifor activists in social movements, community affairs and electoral politics should be established with the goal of ensuring these activist members are informed in a timely way of Unifor political policy and strategy.**
- 4. The proposed Local Union Task Force in 2014-2015 should be utilized to discuss with Local Unions how to establish and build effective "Union in Politics" Committees and how to strengthen community activism.**
- 5. This discussion should be coordinated by the Canadian Council Executive Committee and Political Action Committee and a follow up report should be prepared for the 2015 Canadian Council.**
- 6. Further research should be undertaken through membership surveys and focus group discussions to ensure that our political directions connect strongly with members.**



unifor

theUnion | lesyndicat

www.unifor.org