President’s Recommendations

Canadian Council – Halifax – August 2023

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# Recommendation 1: Building an Economy that Leaves No Worker Behind

Working people are struggling. From the health care and affordability crises to industrial transitions, workers are facing threats to their work and their income security. Some politicians and policy makers would like us to believe that workers need to accept worse outcomes in order to save the economy. Rather than be intimidated by these threats or accepting the rhetoric, Unifor members have shown resilience and a resolve to fight for what all workers in Canada deserve – an economy that delivers good, family supporting jobs, income security, comprehensive health care and continuous gains in standards of living.

A thriving economy with skilled workers, good jobs and shared prosperity doesn’t happen by accident. The current industrial renaissance driving the transition to electric vehicles and batteries is the result of strategic, forward thinking and government investment towards fulfilling an economic vision. This leadership must be replicated across our economy – in health care and education, in forestry, energy, transportation and mass transit, media and telecommunications, and in the broader manufacturing and services sectors.

Governments need to be ambitious. They must increase investment and set standards that tie public investment to social and sustainable development objectives.

As Unifor National President, I recommend that Unifor:

* Call on governments at all levels to create industrial strategies in both goods and services producing sectors to attract local investments, grow good, union jobs and set social and sustainable development goals. Unifor will inform this work by continuously renewing and promoting the union’s sector strategies, in conjunction with Industry Councils,
* Challenge governments at all levels to take responsibility for the staffing crisis in the broader public sector and develop comprehensive strategies to improve working conditions and service standards,
* Design and advocate for robust, economy wide Labour Adjustment Support Programs, including community based, union-run unemployed worker help centers, that deliver a constellation of job transition supports for workers affected by job displacement, as a feature of the union’s ongoing just and sustainable transition work,
* Urge governments to adopt strong, enforceable conditions to ensure public investment in private enterprise and public programs is used to benefit the Canadian economy, support workers’ rights and sustain good, union jobs,
* Pursue campaigns intended to leverage government procurement to grow the footprint of Canadian-made products and services, including trains, busses, railcars and telecommunications services, among others. This will create jobs in Canada, ensuring public money is maximizing local economic value instead of simply focusing on lowest cost, and
* Continue to challenge Canada’s affordability crisis, and its root causes, by directly addressing corporate profiteering, the financialization of the housing market, the lack of affordable housing, rising interest rates, and ensuring workers’ wages are protected in bouts of high inflation. Unifor’s collective bargaining program must intersect with these objectives.

# Recommendation 2 - Supporting 2SLGBTQIA+ Workers

Canada, a country known for diversity and acceptance, has seen renewed attacks on members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Despite a certain amount of progress, discrimination, mental health challenges, healthcare disparities, bullying, and homelessness persist for 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.

Fortunately, there is much that local unions can do, through the power of collective action and solidarity, to increase the support and protections of Unifor 2SLGBTQIA+ members.

Conducting equity audits of collective agreements and membership is an exercise that provides valuable insights on how to create inclusive workplaces. This includes identifying disparities, amending agreements to ensure an equitable treatment, engaging 2SLGBTQIA+ members, promoting diversity initiatives, advocating for social justice, and fostering stronger allyship. Prioritizing diversity and inclusion sets a powerful example for an equitable society.

Protecting healthcare access for queer and trans individuals is crucial for their well-being. It addresses historical discrimination, safeguards against service delisting, supports mental health and fosters a healthy and inclusive work environment. Including such protection aligns with our union's core values of equality and social justice, promoting the health of LGBTQIA+ members and creating an inclusive workplace.

Inspired by the Unifor Women's Advocate and Racial Justice Advocate positions, this recommendation addresses challenges faced by 2SLGBTQIA+ members and suggests the exploration of a new advocate position. The Advocate would provide vital support and ensure voices of the 2SLGBTQIA+ membership are heard. Responsibilities include promoting inclusivity, collaborating with leadership on anti-discrimination action plans, and fostering external partnerships.

The 2SLGBTQIA+ Advocate should receive the necessary time and resources to enable effective advocacy. This role showcases our commitment to an inclusive workplace, empowering all employees. I urge bargaining committees to consider adopting this position to advance diversity, equality, and member rights.

Unions have traditionally tackled issues facing certain communities through multiple fronts, including through issue-based campaigns and through securing gains in collective bargaining. In the face of increased attacks on 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, I am calling on Unifor Local Unions to step up their activity to support the community and ensure safe, welcoming and proud workplaces for everyone.

As Unifor National President, I recommend local unions:

* Launch an equity audit of the collective agreements and membership and to work actively to identify disparities in protection and benefits for 2SLGBTQIA+ members, ensuring inclusive bargaining proposals.
* Bargain healthcare access protection in collective agreements and to safeguard rights to essential healthcare services, protecting against potential government delisting.
* Bargain a 2SLGBTQIA+ Advocate role that would allow the local to address challenges, promote equality, and create inclusive workplaces for queer and trans members.

# Recommendation 3 – Bargaining Workers’ Power

Last year, Unifor undertook to redevelop its national Collective Bargaining Program, informed by the experiences, struggles and best ideas of the local union leadership, activists, and bargaining committeepersons. This months-long, cross-country regional strategy tour centred around the idea that collective bargaining is central to building workers’ power.

Workers face extraordinary challenges in today’s economy, underpinned by chronic inequality. Goods and services have become unaffordable and out of reach for too many workers and their families. Wages and salaries are barely keeping up, despite corporate profits – in many industries – hitting record highs.

Collective bargaining remains the most effective tool at workers’ disposal to win decent work, fairness, and dignity on the job. It is a transformative exercise that puts power in the hands of working people. Over the next year, our union will continue to refine its bargaining strategies, raise awareness and build the capacities of local bargaining committees, and fight to expand bargaining coverage for more workers in Canada.

As Unifor National President, I recommend that:

* Unifor delegates endorse the union’s new, national Collective Bargaining Program – along with any agreed to amendments – as presented and debated at the first, ever Collective Bargaining Summit held this week in Halifax;
* Unifor develop additional supporting resources to support local unions, bargaining committees, and staff representatives in effectively tabling the positions outlined in the program, as appropriate, as well as monitor the program’s progress;
* That local union leadership circulate and communicate the Collective Bargaining Program to bargaining committees and its broader membership;
* The National Union advance its commitment outlined in the 2022-2025 Action Plan, to coordinate an internal Working Group, responsible for exploring the concept of “broad-based bargaining”, its application and potential to expand access to collective bargaining for workers in critical sectors of the economy.

# Recommendation 4 - Organizing New Members

Unifor’s Constitution reminds us that we formed our union at a time when corporations and bankers seemed to have limitless power, and when the vast majority of wealth was captured by a small, overprivileged elite. It was a time when hard work and good jobs were no longer enough to make ends meet.

Ten years later, hard work and good jobs continue to not be enough to make ends meet. and in some respects, the situation for the working class is more dire. Inflation, driven by corporate greed, disproportionately affects working class Canadians and members of equity-seeking communities. The consequences of climate change are multiplying in our daily lives, and a comprehensive transition plan that puts workers at the center of changes and decision-making has yet to be implemented. The global situation of working people only worsened during that span.

During the same period of unrest, Unifor demonstrated that by strategically organizing, it could make a difference in the lives of not just its members, but all Canadians. Strategic organizing not only in the traditional trade union use of the word, but by organizing internally for important rounds of negotiations or disputes, organizing in times of crisis around workplace rights that affect all working people, organizing to elevate the standards of working conditions for our members, and of course, organizing new members into our union. Through these efforts, Unifor remained true to its founding principles: when we organize, we win.

Union density is a clear indicator of better living conditions for any country’s middle class and has a direct relationship with lower poverty rates. The union model has proven to be one of the most effective ways to promote equality in modern societies.

Organizing new members must be a top priority, a core function of our day-to-day operations at all levels of our union. Together, we must promote organizing throughout the union; it must become part of all our conferences, meetings, and education programs. Every elected national and local leader, staff member, and union activist must understand that successful organizing is critical to our future.

As Unifor National President, I recommend that Unifor:

* Reaffirm its commitment to the organizing objectives set forth at our founding convention in 2013, making organizing new members a top priority.
* Use the resources allocated by the Constitution to the organizing fund to strengthen and broaden our organizing efforts through the national organizing department and dedicate resources to developing new and unique models while working with local unions to achieve positive results.
* Utilizes innovative tools and strategies for workplace and digital organizing. By modernizing our tactics and expanding our reach, we will become a dynamic organizing force that will be the clear choice for working Canadians.
* Launch an internal process including the union’s leadership, National Executive Board, staff, and local unions to develop recommendations to propel our union into the next 10 years of organizing and building worker power.