

Break the Silence

Protect Temporary Workers

All workers deserve fair wages, job security and workplaces free from discrimination and harassment. Together, workers are speaking out to protect, defend and improve their rights as racialized workers.

In the past decade, work has shifted to precarious and contract jobs. Temporary agencies and part-time temp work has grown rapidly in Ontario. These agencies not only benefit from, but also drive predatory employment practices that target immigrants and women of colour like those in the East Danforth Community Chapter (EDCC).

The EDCC is part of Unifor, Canada's largest union in the private sector, and represents South Asian women working in temporary staffing agencies in Toronto. Members of the EDCC and the South Asian Women's Rights Organisation (SAWRO) recorded these stories to tell their lived experience and why labour reform and stronger employment standards are urgently needed in Ontario.



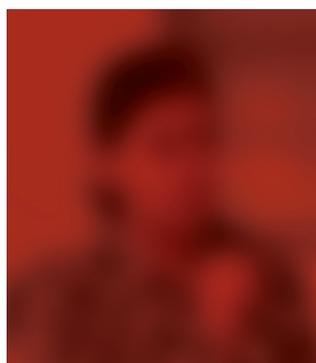
As an agency worker, I was paid less than minimum wage, \$10 an hour. On top of this, I was not even paid for the full hours I worked or given any holiday pay. I faced harassment at work.

Other workers called me racist names and said I was slow and lazy. It was hard, but I chose not to complain because I really needed the income. After being made permanent, my wage was only increased to \$10.20 per hour.



I was injured at work and then fired. While working at a linen pressing company, I fell in between two machines and hit my head. I was unconscious for more than a minute. Instead of being given

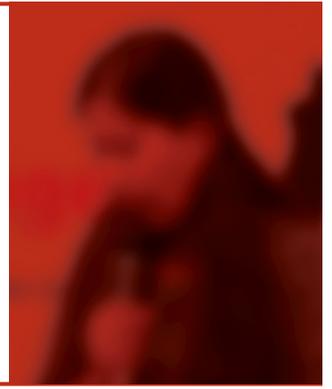
medical assistance, I was taken to the office, made to sign unidentified papers and then sent home. The next day I was very sick. I saw my doctor who identified the issue of a head injury and gave me a Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) form. I didn't submit the form because my employer offered me a permanent position if I kept the injury a secret. After two months, I was suddenly fired and because I had waited so long WSIB did not respond to my case. Now I live with the lasting effects of this injury and have lost my income.



I have been settled in Canada for the last 10 years. Eventually, I found on-call work in a manufacturing plant. Despite not being trained and having to carry a heavy work load, I was

grateful to have the opportunity for paid work. Shifts were scheduled unpredictably. One day, I was told to arrive at work within an hour! I had to refuse because there was no way to find child care on short notice. But soon after, I stopped being called for shifts.

In Bangladesh I worked as an accountant for 10 years with my Masters degree. Here, I could not find work in my field. It took many months to find a job through an agency, as a temp worker at a cosmetics manufacturing company. At this job, I was given a different-coloured uniform from my coworkers, to identify me as a temp worker. I was targeted with racist name-calling and harassment from fellow employees. I asked my supervisor to do something to stop this bullying. I asked twice, but it was like talking to a brick wall. Soon after, I was removed from the regular schedule and punished with unpredictable and infrequent shifts.



Workplaces in Ontario are changing, but here's how work can change for the better.

Unifor is proposing sweeping changes to Ontario labour laws to better reflect reality, prevent more precarious, low-paying part-time jobs, and to make the process of forming a union more fair.

The Employment Standards Act (ESA) provides the minimum standards, rights and responsibilities of employees and employers in Ontario. The experiences of EDCC members reveal the facts that the ESA, and the Ontario Government, are failing to protect those most affected, precarious workers and women who are racialized and immigrant workers.

Unifor believes that everyone deserves access to a good job and a \$15 living wage. The union also believe that with the right regulations and business practices every job can be a good job.

How you can help!

Join the Fight for \$15 and Fairness campaign. Through collective action we can win an end to racial discrimination and poverty wages.

Visit 15andfairness.org

Express your voice and tell the story of precarious workers to your MPP and the Ontario Government. Now is the time to act. Call your MPP and the Minister of Labour to demand labour reform to protect and respect temporary workers.

Six ways the Ontario Government can help precarious workers

- 1. Modernize employment standards** to reflect today's increasingly precarious workforce.
- 2. Bring greater fairness** to the ability and right of workers to form a union and speak with a collective voice.
- 3. Make employers jointly and severally liable** with temporary employment agencies for any ESA violations of workers, with no ceiling and an increased limit on filing claims (5 years).
- 4. Require that all temporary employees are paid the same wages and benefits** as permanent employees performing comparable work and that there be a \$15 minimum living wage.
- 5. When an employer is found to have broken the ESA**, like through withholding vacation or sick pay, **the employer should be subject to a firm-wide investigation** to see if the issue is widespread.
- 6. Remove the requirement that a worker must first contact their employer** to voluntarily remedy the ESA violation before being allowed to submit the complaint to the Ministry of Labour.



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For more info visit: unifor.org/workplacechanges