

STRUGGLE CHANGES EVERYTHING

a publication of common cause - fall 2011

FREE

AUSTERITY MURKERS CLASSWAR

Fighting for the right to strike

MICK SWEETMAN

This past year has witnessed a renewed assault on unionized workers that should be seen for what it is: a coordinated attack on the right of workers to collectively bargain with their employers.

One of the opening salvos in this new wave of class warfare occurred immediately after the far-right ideologue Rob Ford was elected Mayor of Toronto on a platform of "stopping the gravy train"—none-too-subtle code words for attacking public sector workers and the services they provide.

One of the Ford administration's first acts in office was to pass a motion at City Council asking the Ontario government to declare the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC)—whose workers had gone on strike

earlier in the summer—an "essential service". The Liberal government of Ontario was only too happy to pass this anti-union legislation. For the first time in Canadian history, public transportation workers were legally banned from using their main source of leverage: they can no longer strike. In the future, TTC contracts will automatically go into binding arbitration.

This should not be seen as an incident isolated to TTC workers, but rather as a clear attack on the right to strike itself. Seeing as the usual pattern for arbitrated contracts often produces higher wages and more benefits than those received through a negotiated contract process, the attack on workers' right to strike isn't about saving "taxpayers' money"—despite what far-right politicians claim. Rather, it is about imposing control on the working class as a whole and forcing us into a totally subservient position to the

bosses.

Legislation that strips workers of our right to strike is designed to attack the fundamental weapon we have—the power to withdraw our labour. It is designed to take control out of our hands as rank and file union members and place it solely in the hands of professional union negotiators and government arbitrators.

In May 2011, Steven Harper's Conservative Party won a majority government at the federal level and the political terrain shifted further to the right. When 3,800 Air Canada customer sales and service workers went on a legal strike in June, the government threatened them with back-to-work legislation a mere thirteen hours later.

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Dead on Arrival:

A Critical Assessment of the Days of Action Against Harris, 1995-1998

GERARD LEFEBVRET

In 1995, Mike Harris was elected Premier of Ontario, bringing an end to Bob Rae's five year NDP government. The province was ailing under a deep recession, which had seen many manufacturing and public service jobs threatened by what the governing NDP had referred to as "a new economic reality". The 1980's had seen Reagan in the US and Thatcher in the UK slash social spending as an ideological response to a slow economy; these measures, and the electoral successes they yielded, provided a cue to conservatives around the world.

Once in office, Harris wasted no time in implementing a similar agenda, euphemistically called the Common Sense Revolution (CSR). Mere days after being inaugurated, Harris announced reviews on public housing spending, with the goal "of getting [government] out of the housing business." Weeks later, social assistance was slashed by 21.6%, new non-profit childcare spaces were frozen and payments to social services agencies were cut – effective the upcoming fall. The speed and scope of these cuts, the first of many, took most in the labour movement by surprise.

Outside the labour bureaucracy, anti-poverty groups – led by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) – daycare workers, students and LGBTQ activists had already begun mobilizing against Harris. The summer of 1995 was characterized by small-scale protests and



demonstrations against the Harris agenda – protests that were largely ignored by organized labour and the broader left. It was these small-scale acts of resistance to the austerity plans of the provincial Tories that put in motion the events that led, eventually, to the Days of Action (DoA).

A demonstration was called for September 27, 1995 – the day the legislature reconvened from summer recess. Labour leaders, including ranking members of OPSEU, CUPE and the United Steelworkers, refused to endorse it. However, the enormous success of

this protest – organized by a coalition of community groups under the banner "Embarrass Harris" – pressured the union leadership into action: between 7,000 and 10,000 people crowded the lawn at Queen's Park, including large numbers of rank-and-file workers who had simply walked off the job that afternoon. Labour could no longer ignore the drive to fight Harris. In November 1995, the OFL called for a demonstration outside the Tory convention – a protest sparked, in part,

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about
common
cause
anarchist
organization

Common Cause is an Ontario wide anarchist organization with members and branches active in several cities across the province. Our goal is to build a strong voice for anarchism within community and labour struggles. We believe that the anarchist principles of self organization, direct democracy and direct action are the tools needed to defeat the attacks and obstacles facing our class and provide building blocks for creating a new society. To find out more about us please get in touch:

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Faced with this hard-line approach, the union leadership recommended their members accept a contract that claimed some wins, such as the return of paid meal breaks, but deferred the primary issue of the strike—pension plans for new workers—to arbitration.

At the same time, workers at Canada Post—members of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)—were engaged in a series of rotating strikes over similar issues: a two-tiered system for new hires' wages, benefits and pensions. Health and safety was another big issue, as Canada Post's new, supposedly "modern" sorting and delivery system had been accompanied by a huge increase in workers' injuries.

After the Toronto and Montreal CUPW locals staged a simultaneous one-day strike, Canada Post's management retaliated by locking out its workers across the country. Refusing to seriously negotiate, management created a crisis in the hope that the federal government would legislate the workers back to work.

The Conservative government was more than happy to oblige, quickly drafting some of the most repressively worded anti-union legislation that workers in this country have ever seen. Wages were frozen below the management's previous offer, and a government-appointed arbitrator was instructed to choose between the CUPW and Canada Post offers in their entirety—as if there was ever a chance that they would choose the union's offer. The arbitration process used the contracts of private courier companies for comparison, consistently stressing the need for "flexibility" in the workforce—ie. temporary workers and lower wages. It also focused on the need to ensure "the sustainability of the [Canada Post] pension plan" by "taking into account the solvency ratio"—which, translated into English, means attacking the defined benefits plan that union members currently have.

The back-to-work legislation also imposed huge daily fines of \$1,000 for members, \$50,000 for officers, and \$100,000 for the union if the legislation was defied and workers remained on strike. These fines were calculated to bankrupt individual workers and compel union officers to enforce the legislation on the rank and file. The option of going to jail in defiance of the legislation, as former CUPW president Jean-Claude Parrot famously did when CUPW defied similar legislation during a strike in 1978, was not an option under the new law. Harper wanted to make sure that this time there would be no new working-class heroes to rally around.

Despite this, there were rank and file efforts to challenge the legislation. As soon as the back-to-work legislation was announced, postal workers and supporters in Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, and Ottawa responded by occupying the offices of Tory MPs in protest.

In Edmonton, a mass meeting of over 700 postal workers called by the shop-floor mobilization committee saw a motion pass calling on the national leadership of CUPW to pressure the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) to call a nation-wide general strike. This motion also passed at the General Membership Meeting of the Vancouver local the next night and was distributed on the picket lines by supporters in Toronto.

In the end the union leadership recommended that members comply with the legislation and go back to work.

This is the context that we workers and labour activists currently find ourselves in—an international crisis in capitalism that attacks public sector workers and services around the globe in the name of "austerity", while trillions of dollars are wiped out in a single day on the stock markets; a significant political shift to the far-right, ushering in conservative governments that will use the most draconian legislation possible to attack unions and workers; a union culture that has neglected rank and file organizing on the shop floor and grown dependent on professional union negotiators; and a capitalist class that no longer feels it has to respect the unions and instead has declared open class warfare on them.

So, the real question is: what are we as workers and labour activists to do?

The standard response of the union leadership—electing the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) to power—is a joke; the NDP have themselves passed back-to-work legislation while in power in various provinces, including Ontario. The grandstanding of the federal NDP opposition in Parliament during the debate on the Canada Post legislation was just that. Any government will attack workers' rights and order them back to work when they are in charge of the regulation and

administration of the state for the capitalist class.

And if electing social-democratic parties to power is pointless, then what hope do we have for efforts to lobby or convince conservative governments for fair treatment? The clear answer to that question is "none at all".

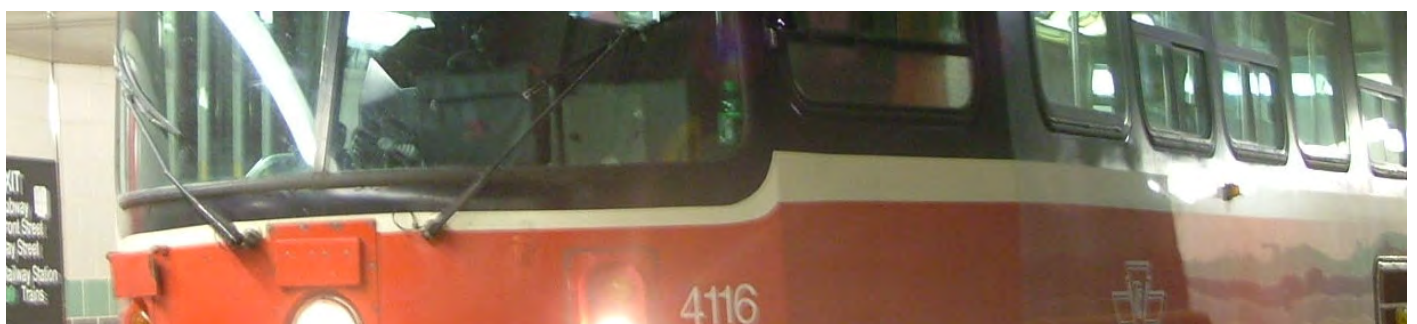
Given the unions' reliance on a professional leadership and professional negotiators, these bodies appear to have become experts in negotiating deals on behalf of their members. The problem is that the capitalist class no longer cares to make deals, and has instead adopted a strategy of locking out workers and then calling in the government to order them back to work.

If workers want to survive these attacks, we need to re-learn how to organize and fight on the shop floors and build strong rank and file networks of union and community activists that span different workplaces and sectors. Without a militant base, there is little hope that a general strike would be anything more than "a good show"—as former Ontario Premier Mike Harris referred to the tens of thousands of workers that marched past the Tory convention during the Toronto "days of action" in the mid-1990s.

If there are examples to study and lessons to learn, they come from initiatives like the work-floor mobilization committee in the Edmonton CUPW local.

This unofficial committee spent years organizing on the work-floors of Canada Post, running organizing and stewards trainings and fighting the bosses (and winning) in work-floor "wars" between union members and management over forced overtime. It should be no surprise that when the lockout occurred, the postal workers in Edmonton were among the most organized, educated, and militant workers in the country. Already, the postal depots in Edmonton are the site of renewed resistance against management—who are again trying to impose forced overtime on the workers.

Another promising development can be seen in the solidarity that has been building between Air Canada workers at Pearson Airport and postal workers from the major Gateway letter-sorting plant in Mississauga. During their recent strikes, workers from both workplaces organized "flying squads" of workers to bolster the other's lines, in addition to maintaining their own. These workers understood that they were facing a common enemy in the collusion of the federal government and capitalist class. Importantly, there are current efforts underway to strengthen these ties and expand them to other unions and workers in the area.



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Cops and Condominiums: Poverty and Gentrification in Toronto's Downtown Eastside



ALEX BALCH

According to the Toronto Star, I live in the worst neighbourhood in the city.

This past April, in an innocuously titled article “Dundas-Sherbourne poised for a surprising rebirth”, The Star’s Robyn Doolittle pointed out that Toronto’s downtown eastside “consistently tops every major Toronto police crime indicator list” — routinely beating the more notorious neighbourhoods of Jane and Finch, Rogers and Keele and Weston and Lawrence.

In the article Doolittle rightly — albeit disingenuously — attributes the area’s high levels of criminality to its heavy concentration of poverty:

Bordered by Carlton St. to the north, Parliament St. to the east, Queen St. to the south and Jarvis St. to the west — an area less than one square kilometre in size — this tiny quadrant of the city harbours three of the city’s largest homeless shelters, 32 legal rooming houses and 14 suspected illegal ones, more than a dozen abandoned lots and buildings, and one of the largest clusters of social housing in the city.

So what solution did the Star’s Urban Affairs correspondent offer up to remedy this crime-ridden ‘quadrant’? New public housing units? Increased social investment? Community policing initiatives?

Condos.

Rather than an honest look at the very real problems faced by the area’s residents, the article was instead an unapologetic fluff

piece for gentrification. The downtown eastside, with its cheap property rates, old Victorian houses and close proximity to the city core, has long been slated for redevelopment. Real estate developers view the neighbourhood — nestled between a constantly expanding Ryerson University to the west and north and the increasingly gentrified neighbourhoods of Regent Park and Cabbagetown to the east — as an untapped resource and prospective cash-cow. The only thing standing in their way is all the unsightly poor people.

According to the capitalist logic of the cheerleaders of gentrification, the only way of solving this dilemma is by transforming the area into a “mixed income neighbourhood”: a magic act produced through frenzied condominium development and the influx of private investment (think Starbucks) that these new tenants inevitably attract.

Gentrification is intimately connected to the capitalist conceptualization of progress. Often crouched in euphemistic terms such as “urban renewal” or “revitalization”, it is at its core simply an investment; a re-commodification of urban space into new mass-produced zones of consumption.

This is the strategy at play on the corner of Dundas and Jarvis, where a massive 46-story development has been proposed by Pace Condominiums. A billboard at the construction site advertising the condos as the “best deal in downtown Toronto” provides an insight into the type of young, urban professional that the owners are seeking to draw into the area. The units, starting “in the mid 300’s”, are expected to be available by 2015. According to the developers, over 80% have already been pre-sold.

Alongside changes to the neighbourhood’s urban geography, this type of “progress” brings rising property values and evictions, which push out poorer and otherwise marginalized residents, and ultimately leads to an inevitable clash between new tenants and the area’s established

population. Pioneering yuppies may be content to ignore the existence of a large homeless shelter on their block in exchange for relatively cheap rent, but as social demographics shift, pressure on the shelter and its residents inevitably builds. Newly constituted merchant/tenant associations and emboldened real estate speculators often use anti-poor sentiment and fear of crime as an excuse to lobby city councillors to freeze construction of new public housing units, and for the closure of drop-ins, health clinics and other services depended on by more precarious members of the community.

Police maintain a near constant presence on the block. Swarms of bicycle cops patrol the area, hassling members of the local homeless population. According to one long-term resident, the Toronto Police Service routinely sends rookie cops onto the street to get them used to wielding their new-found impunity. Police officers often handcuff residents while conducting illegal searches — a blatant violation of search and seizure rights that would cause legitimate outrage in more affluent neighbourhoods. The street is home to a high concentration of racialized residents, who also face frequent racial profiling.

These new tenants are also much quicker to call in the police to “deal” with issues of trespassing, loitering, vagrancy, graffiti, drug use and prostitution. This inevitably translates into increased police harassment and abuse of poor people — already a serious issue in the downtown eastside.

On George Street, located just south of Allan Gardens, police brutality is daily reality. This is particularly true of the strip running between Dundas and Gerrard, a single city block home to two homeless shelters — including Seaton House, one of the city’s largest —, several abandoned and decaying old houses, a poorly maintained TCHC apartment building and a smattering of private residences.

Crime is certainly a problem on George Street. Heated arguments between street-active residents often break out into fights; high levels of substance abuse and addiction mean that break-ins and theft are commonplace; violence against women is a major problem. But heavy-handed policing, combined with a strategy of confinement — homeless people sleeping in Allan Gardens, or panhandling in the surrounding area are often ruffed up and told to “stay on George Street” — does little to resolve these problems. It simply makes them worse.

So how can these issues be addressed? Is the area doomed to choose between corporate gentrification and perpetual decline?

“There’s nothing wrong with making the neighbourhood a more attractive place to live,” says Gaetan Heroux, a member of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) who has been organizing in the community for decades. “The question you have to ask yourself is for whom?”

“The neighbourhood has a long, long history of providing housing and services for poor working people — including a large population of unemployed that have historically been coming to the area since the 1830s. So it’s a neighbourhood that has a long history of poor people living there, and working there.

“And what we’ve seen is cuts to housing and services that have been going on for decades now. As a result of these cuts, people’s living conditions have deteriorated and there’s serious, serious overcrowding in places like Seaton House. A large section of the rooming houses that have existed for single men and single women in the area have disappeared.”

If you ask local community organizers and service providers, they will tell you that what this area desperately needs is more affordable housing, and harm reduction services to help people with substance dependencies and mental health issues. Unfortunately, this type of investment runs counter to the aims of those who would prefer to see the area blanketed in condos. So, in the absence of private investment, where will this money come from?

“It’s going to come from us,” says Heroux. “we as a society have a responsibility to make sure that we have housing... that we have income support that will protect people in cases of crisis or economic depressions. We have to have services, like daycare, schools, healthcare. All of those things were fought for, and many people believe that it’s the state’s responsibility to take care of all that. But the only way for the state to take care of that is to make sure that some of the wealthiest people in this society pay their share. Right now they’re not paying their share.”

Fighting to win

Steel City Solidarity & Solidarity Networks

PETER MARIN

It is late morning in Hamilton and an unusual scene is unfolding in a quiet residential neighbourhood. I am with a group of 25 or so people, and we are gathered outside a house. We are from Steel City Solidarity, a solidarity network run out of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) local 3906—a union representing teaching assistants and other precarious academic workers at McMaster University. We are here with Dorian, who is owed hundreds of dollars in unpaid wages and unreturned deposits.

Some ten feet away is his landlord, sitting inside a black Mercedes with its engine on and windows rolled up. We wait outside his house to present our written demands. A few times we approach his car to attempt to hand him our letter. Each time we get close, he drives off a short distance. The letter lists a set of grievances and gives the landlord a week to address them in full, or else face further action (a “do not rent here” campaign... though we do not tell him this at the time).

Finally he rolls down his window and accepts our letter. As he reads the letter several times over, three police cars roll up. Neighbours and other tenants are now in the street. It is becoming quite a spectacle.

Scenes such as this one are becoming increasingly common in North American cities with active anarchist communities. Steel City Solidarity, and more recently the London, Ontario-based Forest City Solidarity, are the latest groups to spring up in southern Ontario. Common Cause members are organizers with both groups.

Much of this organizing is inspired by the very successful and well-promoted Seattle Solidarity Network, a loose affiliate of the revolutionary union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). SeaSol, as it is known, has been active and winning victories against bosses, landlords and developers since 2007.

Solidarity networks are successful because they require relatively few resources to set up: 2-3 core organizers, a phone tree with 15-20 people who will come out to actions (such as picketing a business or visiting a landlord’s home) and new cases—which are generated by putting up posters around town. These conditions exist in pretty much any city in North America, and so solidarity networks have spread quickly, much like other anarchist projects such as Food Not Bombs and CopWatch—both similar in that they succeed by making the most of the few resources available to small anarchist groups and communities.

Besides the ease with which they are established, solidarity networks meet a real need faced by our class; in every city there are workers and tenants owed unpaid wages and unreturned or bogus rent deposits. There is therefore no shortage of cases for solidarity networks to find and take on.

Solidarity networks are attractive to anarchists looking to start up mass, working class-based organizations in which to put our ideas and practices to use. Faced with a choice between a labour movement that remains a sleeping giant or working with corporate and/or State-funded community NGOs, solidarity networks offer a promising new option; they allow our movement to practice direct action and direct democracy

within budding mass organizations—organizing bodies that attract and depend on the active involvement of those outside the traditional anarchist/activist milieu.

Building a solidarity network is not without its challenges. For one, many of us are not used to organizing outside of radical activist groups. While these groups have prepared us well for some of the tasks required by the solidarity network—such as organizing a successful demonstration—for other tasks—such as working one-on-one to empower a tenant or worker who is often frightened at the thought of taking collective action, or has no experience

of it—our activism has not prepared us as well. It is a strength of the solidarity network that it allows anarchists to develop such organizing skills.

Another issue stems from the fact that even small anarchist and activist communities can often be fractured, making it a challenge to consistently count on a base of 15-20 or more people to be part of a sustained campaign. Fortunately, because solidarity networks start off by taking on “small time” bosses and landlords—oppressors that are “our size”—small victories are quick to come by. And nothing attracts people like winning, and the promise of more victories to come.

With the police present, the landlord finds the courage to get out of his car. Once he sees that there is nothing the police can do to make us go away he tries to negotiate with us. He offers Dorian about half of the money that is owed, pleading with him to “just get



STEELSOL GROUP SHOT FOLLOWING VICTORY OVER WAGE THEIF

these people off my street” —a sign that he is clearly shaken by our presence. We walk away to consider the offer, all of us huddled around Dorian. The three police officers, a dozen or so neighbours and several of Dorian’s fellow tenants look on.

After some discussion and with our encouragement Dorian sticks to his demands. A cheer goes up as he delivers the news to his landlord. Seeing this, the landlord quickly agrees to our demands in full, again requesting he “just get these people off my street”. Ten minutes later he returns from the bank and hands Dorian the full amount in cash.

Moments later we are taking a “victory picture” across the street from the landlord’s home, all of us visibly moved by what we just accomplished—none more so than Dorian himself.

boss stealing your wages?

We Can Help!

If you are experiencing wage theft, contact us and join us in getting your wages paid! We do not ask for anything but your willingness to stand up and fight back!

steel city solidarity .com

Living with Disabilities in Austere Times

KELLY WHITE

People living with disabilities know that their experiences of interdependence, of society and its power relationships, could not be less important to politicians. Instead, their lives and experiences are commonly reduced to essentialized biomedical limitations. The disabled and their allies know that the experience of disability can best be described as a process enacted through social relations; that every service society provides us with is the result of a fight—a refusal to accept less. All around the world we see that in this current phase of capitalism, in which deficits are being used as an opportunity to slash social services, the only ‘solutions’ being advocated come in the form of individual escape and increasingly strident calls for externally imposed discipline. Austerity is proving to be a time where the relations of power reveal themselves.

In Toronto, Rob Ford is introducing his own policies of austerity – preparing to

lower spending by gutting public services. Ford pays lip-service to the needs of people with disabilities, for example by declaring Community Living Day and publicly affirming “the ability and rights of adults and children with an intellectual disability to participate and live in their communities,” yet less than a year later is preparing to cut the very services that make this possible: libraries, accessible transit, and community centres, to name a few. People with disabilities, like all marginalized people in this city, rely on public services – not as luxuries, but as lifelines to safe access to a self-determined life within their communities. To suggest cutting these programs and/or contracting them out to the private sector based on the feedback of a corporate consulting firm, rather than on consultations with service-users themselves, is an insult. Indeed, these types of international cost-cutting ‘austerity’ measures, unsurprisingly, are having a disproportionate effect on the disabled.

In the UK, people with disabilities took up the fight against austerity back in May, when they joined together in an unprecedented march of thousands. Proposed austerity measures there will make independence and everyday life impossible for many – with the government demanding 3.5 million people with disabilities sacrifice over £9.2 billion in critical support by 2015. Government officials claim that these cuts will result in more disabled people moving back into the workplace, and are framing the cuts as a way of catching people who are “cheating the system.” This rhetoric is similar to Toronto, where during a recent mayoral debate, Ford suggested financial incentives would encourage companies to hire workers with disabilities. The policies that this type of thinking inspires, combined with welfare and ODSP rates that keep people with disabilities impoverished and hungry, will ensure nothing but the continuation of a cycle of precarious work – the hallmark of a system that is not designed to promote inclusion.

People with disabilities increasingly understand that they will be among the ones charged with paying for Ford’s self-created “deficit” in the city of Toronto. One thing seems clear: people with disabilities and their allies in this city need to prepare to join the fight against austerity – the fight against Ford and his agenda.



CHANGE-A-COMING!



This October, the Canadian right is trying for a hat-trick in Ontario. With Harper's new majority government and Rob Ford sitting comfortable in Toronto City Hall, only the provincial legislature stands between conservatives and total political power. With all levels of government under conservative control, Ontarians can expect to have the austerity agenda developed at the Toronto G20 implemented with little regard for dissident views.

Looking at a strong lead in the polls, Ontario's P.C.s released their glossy manifesto "Changebook" explaining their schemes for the province if elected. While we as anarchists hold out no particular faith for any party's electoral efforts, some aspects of this platform stood out as particularly troubling.

We will make Ontario's business tax rates competitive by reducing them to 10%.

The Dalton McGuinty government's surprise tax grabs have hit more than sales taxes, health taxes, and eco taxes. Business taxes were boosted too. In fact, this was one of Dalton McGuinty's first acts when he was elected in 2003.

It was the absolute worst time to threaten Ontario's ability to compete. We are still feeling the impact of those early tax hikes. Because businesses create the jobs our economy needs, we will reduce the basic corporate income tax rate from 11.5% to 10% by 2013. This change will help bring more, well paid, private sector jobs to Ontario.

We will bring public sector paycheques in line with private sector standards.

A Tim Hudak government will achieve a fair deal for the people who are paid by taxes and the people who pay the taxes. Public sector wages, benefits, and pensions are a significant part of government spending – the same spending that will double the debt and has produced record deficits.

Public sector compensation must reflect the ability of families to pay the bills. That ability has been pushed well past its limit. We will work with our public sector partners to develop a pay and benefits package that is fair, but that recognizes the financial hole that must address the

In recent years, arbitrators have awarded unions excessive contracts, even as Ontario has been saddled with record deficits and a struggling economy. Ontario families get stuck with the bill.

So austerity doesn't mean asking for more from businesses. It's working and poor people who will be the ones forced to pay up - through cuts to our services and attacks on our livelihoods.

Public sector wages have not simply "gotten out of step" with the private sector. Rather, higher levels of union membership have meant public sector workers have been able to win decent pay and benefits through collective bargaining. Meanwhile unorganized private sector workers have had to settle for less as manager salaries and investor profits take up more and more of the pie.

Having declared their intention to undermine public sector workers, the Changebook goes on to suggest sweeping changes to the ways union dues are administered with more oversight for the state. What they try to couch in the safe language of responsibility, a critical analysis sees as more tools for the employer/state to de-legitimize their union foe.

We will toughen our treatment of criminals.

A Tim Hudak government will require provincial prisoners to work up to 40 hours per week of manual labour. This includes picking up litter, raking leaves, cutting grass, and other tasks. These tasks will provide an extra means of giving back to society.

We support one law for everyone.

We will toughen the rules on illegal occupations. Nobody should have to show their passport to come and go from their home. The risk of damage to property and financial stability in these situations is matched only by the impact on our basic sense of fairness. We will support our frontline police officers in these difficult situations. We will expand the powers in the Trespass to Property Act to help restore faith in the fairness of how these disputes are settled.

Besides the well-publicized promise of forcing prisoners to do demeaning manual jobs (think Tory Gulags), Hudak commits to act decisively to enforce "law and order" in the case of First Nations land reclamations. Perpetuating the "two-tier justice" myth, (that native protestors supposedly get preferential treatment from agents of the state) intensified repressive action and further entrenched criminalization are how the Tories plan to deal with First Nation issues like land claims.

NO MATTER WHO IS ELECTED THIS OCTOBER, WE MUST DEFEAT THE AUSTERITY AGENDA IN THE STREETS!

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by the government's repeal of anti-scab legislation.

This was the political climate that birthed the DoA against Harris – a rotating series of strikes, work stoppages and demonstrations that took place between 1995 and 1998. In total, 11 DoA were called during this 3 year period, with hundreds of thousands of Ontarians walking off the job and paralyzing major urban centres throughout the province – including London, Hamilton, Toronto and North Bay, among others. From the perspective of the community groups now working with labour to challenge Harris, the strategy behind these days of action was simple: show that popular resistance to Harris was possible, build that resistance using the ranks of organized labour and have it culminate in a general strike to shut down the Tory agenda and bring down the government. But despite the enormous popularity of these rotating shutdowns,

the general strike to bring down Harris never occurred; how was it possible to have hundreds of thousands of people on side but still prove politically ineffectual? There are several factors to consider, with the most salient being the sluggish and overly cautious response of organized labour to the Harris government.

In the summer of 1995, when community groups and activists were staging protests, many leading members of the labour movement were preaching dialogue with the government. As the cuts intensified and it became readily apparent that dialogue would prove impossible, Labour came to realize that it needed to ally with the existing resistance to Harris – and it was this coalition that staged the DoA. But the call to build the DoA into a general strike went unheeded. Indeed, for several leaders in the labour movement, the DoA functioned more as a bargaining chip, a showcase of the potential power

of people to disrupt the economic and political workings of government. During the Hamilton DoA (Feb 1996), an OPSEU strike was called. OPSEU had been working without a contract and was facing job cuts proposed by the Harris legislature. Their strike vote, passed with two-thirds majority, became a rallying cry for unionized workers across the province and support for a general strike mounted. Indeed, in Hamilton, over 100,000 people, the largest labour mobilization in Ontario history, came out to demonstrate against Harris. But union leaders were reluctant to even discuss a general strike, much less call one. In hindsight, we can see how the two primary poles of anti-Harris action, namely organized labour's leadership and coalitions of community groups and rank-and-file workers, had radically different conceptions of what this resistance ultimately meant. For union leaders, the mobilizations were no different than traditional strike tactics

used to demonstrate capacity to disrupt and thereby open dialogue from a position of power. For the rank-and-file workers and activists involved, the end goal was to actually disrupt the government and their business allies – to force them from power. This split, between those who saw disruption as an opening to further discussion and those who saw it as a tactic in and of itself, proved to be the undermining of the DoA; labour leaders' were simply unable (or unwilling) to see these broad mobilizations as part of an intensifying class struggle. This political blindspot cost the anti-Harris movement momentum and squandered the opportunity for a province-wide general strike. Indeed, by the time Harris left power in 2001, and Ontario Finance Minister Ernie Eves took over as Premier, the austerity agenda of the provincial conservatives was well-entrenched and has been carried on by the

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On August 9 2011, Linchpin spoke with Tim Matthews, a member and spokesperson of the anti-austerity group UK Uncut.

Linchpin: For some of our readers in Canada who may not be familiar with your organization, what is UK Uncut? How does your group organize?

Tim Matthews: UK Uncut began towards the end of 2010. The Liberal-Democrat/Conservative coalition government had come to power in the UK, and they put out an announcement in their comprehensive spending review that there was going to be over £80 billion worth of cuts to the public sector, to public sector jobs and services, over the next five years. So UK Uncut was formed by a group of friends who were really frustrated and angry at the government's position, the government's story about what was going on in the country and what needed to happen to the economy... because we really didn't think they were telling the whole story. We felt they were trying to pull the wool over people's eyes by saying that we needed to really cut back... to cut spending. That we couldn't afford public services and that there was no alternative – just as we'd heard in the 80's. And also that they weren't holding those who'd caused the crisis to account (i.e. primarily the banking and financial sector) and were even looking to raise the incomes of people and corporations who, if they were properly taxed, would be able to pay for more than we were having to pay for the crisis itself. UK Uncut therefore decided to begin, with its first action, to look at corporate tax holdings. So Vodafone... which didn't deal with the government to avoid £6 billion worth of tax. So the first actions were direct actions at Vodafone's flagship store on Oxford Street. And that was in late October... and then it kind of moved from there. The main tactic, which has been really successful, has been occupying chains of high-street stores, tax avoiders and banks to draw attention to these issues.

Linchpin: How have these actions been received by the general public in the UK?

TM: Well, it has been really interesting and inspiring and exciting that they've been so warmly received and have really got a lot of positive attention from loads of different sectors of society. Lots of different people getting involved. It started off, like I said, with a group of friends who had been involved in activism before, had been involved in organizing and progressive politics. And they did that one action and then it kind of spiralled and snowballed from there. That kind of example... just showing that you can do something that isn't just about going on a march – as important as that is – but that you can actually take direct action on your high street or in your community, and you know... make a story. Make a case that we don't need these cuts and that we can target those people who are really responsible, or who really should be responsible for contributing fairly to society, if we have this idea of this big society... and people really bought into that message. They could clearly see that kind of example of people cheating their way out of paying towards resolving the crisis who make billions of pounds of profit every year from the system.. they weren't part of the big society. They weren't paying their fair wage. So people clearly saw the truth of that message, and the way that we conducted ourselves during the demonstrations – in a very inclusive, creative, fun kind of way that everyone could get involved with. So we've had lots of families involved, lots of kids, pensioners – you name it. Everyone and anyone could get involved... and that's really important.



Linchpin: Have you faced much repression from the British authorities?

TM: Yeah, I mean obviously it kind of began to ramp up after we had our first successes. And that's a testament to the effectiveness of our tactics, and their appeal. That we started to worry the powers that be... the establishment. We started to have an impact, so you gradually saw rising police numbers, rising attention and condemnation from the right-wing press and from people who were just against the idea of anyone taking action to defend themselves and their communities. Then there were instances, earlier this year, of police using heavy-handed tactics. Starting to arrest people who were just demonstrating very peacefully, just using civil disobedience tactics like sitting down in a store, or blocking the entrance. Someone at a demonstration I was near got pepper-sprayed by a policeman – who also accidentally pepper-sprayed himself. And then there were people who have been arrested for putting bits of cardboard in an automatic door, that kind of thing. It culminated at the Trade Union Congress march in March, when police arrested 145 activists connected with a UK Uncut occupation of Fortnum & Masons – a large department store in Central London. The police Chief Inspector was at the scene, actually inside the shop and told the activists there that since they were acting in a peaceful and sensible manner that they would be allowed to leave the store and be taken off into what she described as a “stable and sterile” environment. But actually, she was lying to the protestors and they were all arrested... mostly with charges of “aggravated trespass”. So this seemed to be an example of political policing, to deter people from going to our protests, because we've been effective – showing up the authorities and also showing that we could get around the police. But since then the vast majority of those people have been acquitted and there's only thirty that the police are seeking, so far, to prosecute. So we hope that they will also be acquitted over the next month.

Linchpin: I understand that there was a spokesperson for one of the police departments that essentially admitted that it was primarily an intelligence gathering exercise?

TM: Yeah, I heard that. I can't remember her name, but that was definitely one of their motivations. Most of the people they're pursuing charges against are people they think are the ringleaders. Because they were carrying flags with our logo on it... and also other materials, like flyers. They think they're the main ringleaders, so they want to hold them and you know, rinse them for evidence and so on and so forth. Which is just outrageous and stupid and ridiculous, and really fails to understand the non-hierarchical nature of our organization.

Linchpin: 2010 saw pretty massive student mobilizations against proposed tuition increases, which culminated in the massive protests dubbed “Day X”. Where has the energy from this movement gone? Is there a relationship between UK Uncut and this broader student movement?

TM: Well yeah, I do think that there's a connection. I've only just recently graduated myself. When you're in university, happily, people still have the time, the energy and the motivation to get involved in politics. Obviously that's something that the establishment is not necessarily that pleased about. That may be one of the reasons that they want to narrow people's opportunities in universities by making it so prohibitive for people to afford to go there. But yeah, I think there's a general culture of insecurity... of not knowing where you're going to go, what opportunities you'll have when you leave university. Because obviously the university numbers have increased, yet the opportunities when you come out have reduced. You get this massive promise and often very good education, and you feel that you don't have the opportunity to really use your skills or knowledge when you get out of university... and it's very frustrating. And a lot of people involved in the student movement and UK Uncut are often very well educated, very politically

conscious people who are now using their knowledge in occupations. For example, the University College of London occupation... they're using their technical skills that they've learned at school, and with each other and at universities. They're using their skills to organize now, because they've realized the way to build an alternative is not necessarily to go through the system and get a McJob, or whatever. They're using their skills in a different way... in a much more collaborative way, based on solidarity. They're also learning the mistakes of past protests and past political movements, whether it be Stop the War – which I was involved in – or some of the climate justice movements. And so you're seeing different movements coming together... but it's all obviously based on anger. Anger at the political establishment... and the need for creative energy to create a new kind of movement. And I think a lot of people share that feeling. It's a very exciting time to be involved in activism. There's a lot of opportunities out there.

Linchpin: What role have anarchists played in some of these movements?

TM: It depends on your definition of what anarchism is, I suppose. Obviously other people in the movement would have a different perspectives. Personally, my political education has definitely been massively influenced and benefited from reading libertarian socialist or anarchist thought. But overall I think the most important influence has come from the nature of anarchist organizing... and the idea of non-hierarchical movements. The benefits of this type of organizing are massive. It allows you to organize very quickly, very fluidly... to reach inclusive decisions through consensus decision making. It allows you to include lots of different movements around the country who organize along similar lines and integrate with each other. And it's also a much more fair, inclusive and democratic way of organizing – a very principled way of organizing. People feel very empowered by it, and included in it. And I think that's very important. And also, once you've established that, you can move on to the next important thing, which is the notion of direct action that has also been very important in anarchist thought and anarchist movements. I don't think ordinary citizens understand how important anarchist thought has been in establishing some of the institutions we rely on in society today... like the National Health Service, or even other kinds of volunteerist cooperative organizations that are not run for profit, but for the benefit of society and for each other. They are run along lines that have been influenced by people who would call themselves libertarian socialists – or at least who were sympathetic to anarchism. So that's what I mean by anarchism – the very creative, cooperative, community-based type of anarchism that's really great. Not necessarily the other kind of... the media-type of anarchism. The way that anarchists are likely to be portrayed in the media... as people who throw Molotov cocktails or other things like that. I think the main history of anarchism is about collective organizing and direct action, and that kind of thing. And I think that's very important to help our movements today.

Linchpin: Over the past year much of the left in Europe has shifted its energy towards anti-austerity organizing. Has there been much communication between groups in different countries? Have any of the struggles in other countries influenced events in the UK?



UK Uncut IN ACTION



TM: We do think about this issue quite a lot, obviously, because we watch the news like everyone else. We see the struggles of people in Greece, and in Spain, and in North Africa – in Egypt and Tunisia and the Arab Spring – and also in America itself. you look at Wisconsin for example. And it's really important, because it makes you see that we share common struggles... as working people, as intellectuals, as organizers, as members of communities. And to some degree, the way that the ruling class organizes internationally, we have a common foe. So eventually we probably will have to organize internationally to defeat it. But that kind of thing has to grow organically, because obviously we have a big foe at home to deal with domestically. And you have to organize at home first before you start looking at the bigger picture. But we do have contacts. We've seen the US Uncut develop, which has been great. They've become very successful targeting GE, Bank of America and Apple – tax avoiders like that. And you've seen France Uncut, and other types of Uncut movements growing elsewhere. I went to a conference in Rome earlier this year with lots of student organizers. A group called Unicomm... they're really great. Very inspiring activists in Italy. Really very politically savvy, very politically aware and extremely well organized. They drew together people from Germany, Austria, Spain... and also Tunisia. We really like to share common stories and thinking about how we can take our struggles forward – and I think that the first thing to do is keep talking and sharing information and then thinking, you know, what can we do? How can we move this forward? There is going to be a common day of action, as far as I understand it, in Europe on October 15. I'm not sure yet how we're going to take part in that. I think it would be good if we did... I don't know if we are. But we are beginning to get talk and organize with other countries and hopefully that will develop and lead somewhere. I really hope so.

<http://www.ukuncut.org.uk/>

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current Liberal government: welfare rates were never restored, service cuts continue, unionized workers are still scapegoated... and the list goes on.

The ultimate lesson we, as anarchists, can take away from the experience of the DoA is the importance of organizing outside of existing labour/political structures. A union leadership that ignores the element of class struggle, that ignores the stated intentions of a repressive and callous government in the hopes of some illusory “dialogue” or “compromise”, can only lead us into defeat.

It is this mixed bag – the complicated mingling of cautious reformism and revolutionary aspirations – that represents the ultimate legacy of the DoA. The capacity to pull hundreds of thousands of people, from all walks of life was undoubtedly a huge success, and reminds us that small-scale organizing can produce large-scale gain. But the failure of labour leadership to fully endorse this popular rage, to help carry it to its next step, remains the most pronounced lesson from the DoA: we need workers on our side, but we (and they) don't need their reform-minded leadership, who are far too concerned with maintaining their own interests to mount an effective struggle for broader social change. Our organizing needs to reflect that reality if we are to take the lessons from the DoA to heart; militant, creative resistance to power isn't something that comes exclusively from unions anymore – and indeed, it can spur unions into action they might not otherwise take.

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Waking up to austerity

LINDSAY HART

The economic climate gets chillier by the day. Words like “recession” and “deficit” are now commonplace again. Bank of Canada Governor, Mark Carney, stated recently that the new “age of austerity” will entail years of restrained economic growth and slow recovery. This era will be characterized by deep cuts to the public sector and crucial social services, ongoing assaults on an already weakened trade union movement and a massive transfer of public wealth towards increased spending on police, prisons and other instruments of state control.

Synchronized calls for so-called “belt tightening measures” are being issued from right-wing ideologues in all levels of government. In Toronto, Rob Ford and his City Council allies claim that dramatic cuts are necessary to balance the city’s alleged \$760 million dollar deficit. But how did the city develop this deficit?

Ford did not inherit a city in financial crisis. In fact, Canada as a whole has dealt relatively well with the global recession. Canada’s debt is currently 33.7% of the GDP – far lower than that of the US or Britain. Canadian unemployment is lower than it was before 2008, when the crisis hit. In fact, Ford’s deficit is a direct result of his own policies – cutting the \$60 Vehicle Registration tax (which brought in \$64 million for the city annually), and freezing commercial property tax rates. Ford is clear about who his priority constituents are.

Despite campaign promises to end “the gravy train” at City Hall, Ford has instead taken aim at eliminating essential public

services. After spending almost \$3 million dollars (more than \$300,000 per service report) to hire corporate consulting firm KPMG to assess priorities for municipal cuts, the city is considering eliminating services such as the Community Partnership and Investment Programs — which fund, amongst other things, AIDS prevention, the arts, and student nutrition programs. Other options currently being considered include library closures, reduced TTC bus routes, increased service fees and an end to the “Welcome Policy” — a program that allows people on social assistance free access to community centres. Shelter beds are also on the chopping block, a problem exacerbated by a proposed freeze on public housing development and the selling off of existing units. Many of these cuts will require public sector layoffs, increasing the need for the very services being eliminated.

KPMG’s recommendations provoked outrage from Toronto residents. On July 28 and 29 the city held a marathon council meeting, with Torontonians lining up to depute long into the night and early morning. MP Joe Mihevic commented that Mayor Ford had awakened “a sleeping city”; anger over planned cuts has prompted a swell in engagement in municipal politics, motivating many people to organize and advocate for the first time.

This political engagement is important and encouraging. But to defeat Ford we must grow beyond Facebook groups and City Hall deputations. We have to recognize the limits of bureaucratic measures and begin directing this frustration and anger towards building mass mobilizations. The Toronto Stop the Cuts network aims to do just that.

Toronto Stop the Cuts grew out of a pre-

existing network of activists and grassroots community organizations that had joined forces to organize the “Justice for Our Communities” day of action during last year’s Toronto G20 summit protests. Comprised of members from the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), No One is Illegal (NOII) and Jane/Finch Action Against Poverty (JFAAP) this network came together to voice their shared outrage towards the austerity agenda then being drafted by world leaders behind closed doors and a multimillion dollar security fence. After Ford’s election in October, attention shifted towards preparations to resist his anticipated cuts.

The strength of the Toronto Stop the Cuts network lies in an organizational model that stresses local organizing, popular outreach and direct action. Toronto Stop the Cuts is composed of a decentralized network of autonomous neighbourhood committees and community groups; these local bodies hold community meetings, plan actions and carry out extensive public outreach to mobilize Torontonians against Ford’s cuts. By organizing in the neighborhoods we live and work in, our network is building grassroots structures that will be prepared to defend local services in the months and years to come. Each of these groups is encouraged to make decisions that address local realities. Joint actions of the broader network are developed democratically, through the participation of people meeting in neighborhoods across the city.

On September 10, Toronto Stop the Cuts

will be holding a city-wide mass meeting open to all those concerned about Ford’s proposed cuts. At this meeting, we will develop a people’s declaration and begin to lay the groundwork for a series of creative direct actions to hold City Hall to account.

Stop the Cuts mass meeting:
When: Saturday, September 10, 12pm
Where: Dufferin Grove Park

Contact Toronto Stop the Cuts to get involved:

tostopthecuts@gmail.com

torontostopthecuts.com



Who’s streets? Our streets!

an interview with Hamilton CopWatch

Copwatch is a network of activist organizations dedicated to the observation and recording of police interactions with the public. Formed in the 90’s in Berkely it now has chapters throughout the United States and Canada. Scott, a lead organizer of the new Hamilton branch has offered to answer some questions for us before departing to Israel-Palestine on academic research.

What was the impetus behind forming this group?

The motivation behind the formation of Hamilton CopWatch is, at base level, the same drive which has given rise to CopWatch groups across this continent and beyond for over the past 20 years: a deeply felt need to construct cooperative sources of protection against police abuse. In the face of a local police force whose daily operations threaten the safety, well-being and dignity of our communities, we have been compelled out of necessity to seek out our power in numbers, as an organization dedicated to placing a greater degree of accountability upon cops in our neighbourhoods. We do this by asserting and enacting our right to observe and monitor police activities in public spaces (our first street patrols are set to move forward this year); educating ourselves and the wider community on our rights when dealing with police; and mobilizing the masses in demonstrations surrounding issues of police abuse and accountability.

How have you tried to get your message out so far?

Since our primary message is one of em-

powerment and solidarity in reaction to the disempowering and isolating effects of policing in this city, we have been working on building a presence in our community through developing connections with our neighbours so that we are better able to reflect our collectively held interests in our continued activities as an organization. One way that we have begun to engage in this dialogue has been through the hosting of CopWatch documentary screenings at various venues in the downtown area. Throughout the month of June we ran three screenings of the documentary film “CopWatch: These Streets Are Watching,” followed by discussion around the goals, means and difficulties inherent to the CopWatch model of police accountability activism. In the near future, we plan to continue our educational work through facilitating Know Your Rights workshops throughout the city. This will be a chance to open up a space for sharing vital information and insights regarding our rights when dealing with the cops so that we may all be better equipped to handle ourselves when faced with the reality of police violence and misconduct. Our street patrols will also be a chance to engage with community members in aims of spreading a wider culture of solidarity which works to challenge police impunity.

Finally, what kind of support do you need from the community and how can people get in touch with you?

There are always many ways for folks to help us out, especially now as we embark on the first



HAMILTON STANDS UP AGAINST POLICE VIOLENCE, APRIL 2011

stages of development as an organization. Any form of help that people may be able to offer will be greatly productive and appreciated at any time. One immediate concern would be funding and equipment, as we begin to prepare for our first patrols. In terms of funds, any amounts will be put into our patrol project fund and any surplus will go into our continuous operational costs and future projects. In terms of equipment, we need video cameras, SD cards, small sound recorders and tapes, an external hard drive, paper and copy supplies, and walkie-talkies. If people would like to get involved as organizers, in any capacity, they can come out

to some of our meetings and stay up to date on our mailing list. Just send us an e-mail. If any like-minded organizations are interested in working together, we’d love to hear from you, too!

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FOR THE FULL INTERVIEW
CHECK OUT linchpin.ca