



a publication of common cause // [www.linchpin.ca](http://www.linchpin.ca)

nov 2012

## Anti-Choice MP to Speak in London

By: Brentington AuntieFascist

On Tuesday, November 13th Western Lifeline, an anti-choice group based at Western University (UWO), will host a talk with Conservative MP Stephen Woodworth. Woodworth is infamous for his hardline, anti-choice views on abortion.

In April, Woodworth introduced Motion 312 in Ottawa- a motion that would create a committee to look into medical research to determine when a fetus becomes a human. The motion has faced ongoing opposition from various activist groups and organizations. Even Conservative Leader Stephen Harper has not supported the bill. This opposition did nothing to sway Woodworth. Rather than pulling the motion from the floor, it went on to a second debate on September 21st, before being defeated on September 26th. Although the bill was defeated, access to abortion in Canada remains under constant threat. A politician who today is against the motion on the basis of staying in office, may quickly change their tune if they are likely to lose an upcoming election anyways.

Motion 312 would not make abortion illegal by itself. What this motion entails is a review of the Criminal Code's subsection 223(1), which states that a fetus becomes a human at birth. It would create non-binding recommendations to suggest changes to the criminal code. Of the 13 member committee which would be formed, the motion called for 8 of them to be from the Conservative Party, 4 from the NDP, and 1 from the Liberal Party - all of whom would be handpicked by another committee dominated by the Conservative Party. This would allow the members of the committee to pick specific doctors and reports to propagate to the press and the public their anti-choice views.

This is not the first attempt by the Conservative Party to push for criminal code changes to abortion. A bill was introduced in 2008, which if passed, sought to criminalize some abortions with up to 25 years in prison. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that many high profile members of the party voted to support Bill 312. There was a large outburst of anger when the Minister of the Status of Women, Rona Ambrose, voted in favor of this bill. Some pro-choice groups have started campaigns to have Ambrose removed from this position.

Woodworth's visit to London will be met with resistance. There are already groups in the city organizing a petition and letter campaign in the hopes that UWO will change the format of the event to a panel discussion to provide a counter perspective to his anti-choice message. If the petition and letter campaign fail, plans are in development to hold demonstrations the day of the event, both on and off the campus, to allow everybody who believes that the reproductive choices of an individual should never be "mandated" by others.

## Remembering Ashley Smith

By: Shannon Balla & Ian Stumpf of the 'We Remember Ashley Smith' campaign



October 19th marked the 5th anniversary of the death of Ashley Smith. She died at age 19 in a segregation cell at the Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener. In the days leading up to her death, despite being on 'suicide watch', Ashley's request for transfer to a psychiatric facility was denied, as was access to her family, lawyer or advocates. On the day she died, Ashley tied a ligature around her neck and, while staff watched from outside her cell, asphyxiated to death.

Ashley spent most of her teenage life behind bars- first in youth detention facilities, and later in federal institutions. This experience was defined by segregation and brutal treatment, including forced injections, frequent physical restraints and repeated exposure to tasers. Without appropriate mental health care and exposed to conditions amounting to torture, Ashley turned to self-harming and 'acting out' behaviours, including choking herself. These actions have since been recognized as desperate attempts for human interaction. Studies have demonstrated the severe, damaging effects of prolonged segregation on human beings, and recently Canada's correctional investigator reported that cases of serious self-injury by federal inmates has nearly tripled in the last five years - almost one-third of them in segregation units. Women are disproportionately represented in these cases.

A provincial coroner's inquest was launched in Ontario in 2011, but was adjourned due to legal challenges and logistical obstacles. A new inquest is now underway, with formal hearings to begin in 2013. Again, federal correctional authorities, and now doctors tasked with Ashley's therapeutic-care, are filing motions to seal key evidence from the inquiry. The motion to seal the video evidence, called a "state cover-up" by the Smith's family lawyer, was struck down on October 24th.

The narrative of Ashley Smith is that of a deeply troubled, dangerous and mentally ill young woman. But, that picture is entirely defined by an institutional lens. Those who knew her best, including her mother Coralee Smith, share a very different image of Ashley - precocious, rambunctious, and someone who cared deeply for others. We need to redefine the narrative. Ashley was not only the desperate girl who died on the floor of a prison cell, while guards watched. She was also a young woman who actively resisted the dehumanizing realities of prison, a person with humour, with compassion, and with a deep sense of justice.

Ashley Smith's death in Grand Valley five years ago makes absolutely clear the inherent violence of these institutions, and demands a response from those of us who live in the community where she died. Remembering her helps us to re-focus our work in ways that recognize the interconnectedness of our struggles. Remembering her makes it impossible to render abstract the hundreds of women who continue to suffer within the prison walls at Grand Valley.

One of the most obvious and profound ways that institutions affect our lives is in their ability to contain, control and even 'disappear' us from our larger communities. They can make us invisible to the rest of the world, put us in cages or in locked wards, and strip us of our connections to all the things that remind us of our shared humanity. Remembering is a refusal to allow the system to make her disappear, as they tried to do so clearly while she was alive. Remembering Ashley Smith means working against the dehumanizing and brutalizing structures of prisons, but just as importantly, it also means refusing to allow the systems that took her life to define it as well.



# We are not Alone:

## Defending Welfare Benefits in the Age of Austerity

By: Delbert Francis

OCAP and CUPE Ontario have started a campaign to save the community start-up benefit (CSUMB). Their strategy is to encourage as many people as possible to apply for the benefit while it is still available in order to flood the welfare administration. In Toronto a walk-in clinic where more than 50 people were assisted in applying for the benefit was held on October 17th. They and their supporters, then marched to the head welfare administration office where people put in their applications together.

The strategy of mass applications for welfare benefits is not without precedent. In the mid 2000's OCAP's Special Diet campaign was successful in getting millions of dollars into the pockets of poor people in Ontario. A series of clinics were organized throughout the province where thousands of people were signed up for the allowance. Now eligibility for this allowance is severely restricted.

Despite its success in providing temporary financial relief for poor people, the Special Diet campaign failed to build sustained mobilization in poor communities. Another shortcoming was that it did not link up with welfare workers. Although workers in some welfare offices may have been more sympathetic or resisted cutting people off Special Diet, there was no concerted province-wide organizing by workers.

The lessons learned from the Special Diet campaign must be applied to the current struggle. That is, the cam-



campaign to save CSUMB can win if poor people and public sector workers unite in struggle. Workers and people on social assistance must recognize their shared interests. A structure for joint decision making needs to be set up and a readiness for collective action needs to develop. Only then can we build working class power capable of defeating this cut.

Welfare workers are particularly well situated to have an impact in this struggle. They are typically under pressure from management to cut people off or at least withhold benefits. Workers may resist this pressure, not only because they generally want to be helpful to their clients but, because it is in their own interests to do so. Hardly anyone wants to be a welfare cop.

Systematically kicking people off the welfare rolls, and eliminating benefits and services is a move toward the privatisation of the welfare administration. Privatisation is what would allow the government to roll back wages, benefits and improvements to working conditions. It would turn the welfare administration into an elaborate call-centre providing even fewer services to recipients.

Workers can resist pressure from management to deny applications for CSUMB. Poor people can continue to flood the administration with applications. Workers can defend each other when they are disciplined for refusing to deny applications. The community can organize direct actions to defend those among them who are denied benefits.

To win this struggle outright will take a greater level of organization; a joint assembly of public sector workers and people on social assistance. By definition this assembly would need to be autonomous from the public sector unions to ensure people on social assistance could participate on equal footing with workers. The assembly would also need to be willing to engage in disruptive actions capable of throwing the welfare administration into crisis. A directly-democratic body committed to direct-action would have a chance of defeating the government's move to end the CSUMB in this time of austerity.

# Out of the Classroom & Into the Class Struggle

By: Devin K

With the recent resignation of Dalton McGuinty and the decision to prorogue the Ontario legislature, the future of the Ontario Liberals fight with the teachers' union may be uncertain. The Premier's decision comes amidst the ongoing dispute with elementary school teachers and Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF), which has led to the imposition of Bill 115. Cynically named the "Putting Students First Act", Bill 115 bypasses the collective bargaining process forcing a 2-year wage freeze and ban on strikes, along with a host of other concessions from the teachers' union. In the current context of austerity measures being imposed by all levels of government, Bill 115 is part of the now routine use of anti-strike legislation in both the private and public sector.

Bill 115 came under heavy criticism from a number of major unions, but teachers found their options limited in responding to the attack once it was passed on September 11th. While the OSSTF and other unions went forward with a legal approach to challenge the legislation, teachers in a number of regions across Ontario bypassed official union control, withdrew their unpaid extra-curricular work and stopped participating in select meetings.

These small-scale actions provided teachers with a means to demonstrate dissent, however without escalating tactics or shutting down classes by withdrawing their labour fully, pressure mounted on the government has been minimal. High school students, on the other hand, proved willing and capable of shutting down classes on their own. Beginning in mid-September a wave of walkouts swept the province, shutting down classes as students rallied and marched with bristol board placards against the Liberal government. These walkouts eventually involved dozens of high schools (and 1 elementary school) culminating in a protest at Queens Park on September 29th, and a city-wide walkout in Windsor on October 3rd.

Given the absence of high school student unions or formal organizing bodies, students made use of social me-



dia as the means to coordinate logistics and spread word of their walkouts. Facebook walls and Twitter feeds also provided a space for debate between students determining the political nature of the walkouts, decidedly anti-government and pro-teacher one wall-post stated: "I don't blame the teachers. I blame the government and Bill 115 for the cause of these divisions. Bill 115 is undemocratic, unconstitutional and therefore it should be revoked!".

Following the initial wave of walkouts and demonstrations the energy that had prompted students to self-organize and disrupt their classes has since receded, but their efforts are nonetheless noteworthy. High school students acted together as an autonomous force that was not bound by rigid labour laws or bureaucratic organizing methods, and were as a result able to take action outside the scope of Bill 115. If students were to go further - organize themselves into committees, stage larger scale walkouts, build toward a student strike, and combine teachers demands with their own - things could get really interesting. But for now their actions illustrate the potential of pushing struggle forward by building networks and committees in our neighbourhoods, schools, and workplaces that can defy both legislation, the standard legal limits of struggle and eventually disrupt the state's ability to enforce austerity measures generally.



## COMMON CAUSE // anarchist organization

**COMMON CAUSE** is an Ontario-wide anarchist organization with branches active in Toronto, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, and London. We publish Linchpin monthly, along with additional content online. To find out more about our work get in touch with a local branch in your area:

**Toronto:**

[commoncausetoronto@gmail.com](mailto:commoncausetoronto@gmail.com)

**Kitchener-Waterloo**

[commoncausekw@gmail.com](mailto:commoncausekw@gmail.com)

**Hamilton**

[commoncausehamilton@gmail.com](mailto:commoncausehamilton@gmail.com)

**London**

[commoncauselondon@gmail.com](mailto:commoncauselondon@gmail.com)