



The government has announced a wage freeze.

What does the wage freeze mean for jobs and public services?

What are we doing to fight back?

BARGAINING IN AN ERA OF WAGE RESTRAINT

252 BLOOR ST. WEST
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Re-thinking Strategies for the Public Sector

SATURDAY JUNE 19, 3:30-6:30

In March 2010, the McGuinty government announced the “**Public Sector Restraint to Protect Public Services Act**”. The legislation will freeze wages for 1 million non-union workers for two years.

Why did the government introduce this legislation and who is affected?

The government says that they are protecting public services by freezing wages for public sector workers. The legislation does not apply to unionized workers. But the government’s budget provides no funding for wages, benefits and pension benefit increases. The message is clear. The government expects public sector workers to accept roll-backs.

I’m a unionized public sector worker. How will this affect me?

The government has instructed all of our employers who receive over 1 million in provincial funding to negotiate collective agreements that do not include “net compensation increases”. This means that the government expects us to freeze our wages, benefits, vacation benefits, extended health and dental benefits and pension contributions.

This is a government that represents the interests of the economic elite.

If the government were serious about protecting public services, it would not have slashed taxes – including corporate taxes and individual tax rebates - in the recently announced budget. When governments cut taxes, they cut back the very source of funding that makes our public health care, education, social services, municipal services, etc., just that: public.

This is not a government that is concerned with protecting public services.

The recent Ontario provincial budget cut the \$200 million Special Diet benefits program (benefits to support the cost of food and supplement inadequate social assistance and Ontario Disability Support Program benefits). The 1% increase to the Disability Support Program and Ontario Works (social assistance) program is below the 2% cost of inflation. The budget provided for less funding per student to Universities, and the story goes on.

How is the “wage freeze” affecting our unions at the bargaining table?

So far, our unions have told us that the wage freeze won’t apply to workers who belong to a union. But at many of the bargaining tables since the budget announcement, our employers have been insisting -- and will undoubtedly continue to insist -- that there is no money to fund wages, benefits and pensions.

We can fight back. We do not have to agree to freeze our wages and benefits. We need to build a strong movement. When the government attacks public sector workers and public services, we are all under attack – people who work in the public sector and the working-class majority who rely on public services in so many aspects of our lives.

The government is using the economic crisis to discipline workers.

This means that the government is using the very real economic problems facing Ontario to slash wages, benefits and other gains that we have made over the years and to shrink public services. This is all part of the neoliberal agenda to sell off public services to the private sector and serve the market instead of the people.

McGuinty's strategy is to keep us divided and fragmented.

Instead of legislating a wage freeze across the board for all workers, a move that would surely meet resistance, the government has cut transfer funding to compensation increases, forcing us to fight out the battle one by one with our provincially funded employers. When we are split apart and fragmented in our workplaces, unions and communities, we are weak and not able to lead a strong resistance. When we join together, across workplaces, unions and communities, we are stronger.

Union jobs raise the standards for all workers. Given that the wage-freeze legislation applies only to the non-unionized, now is the time to extend unionization to all workers, not back down and run for cover.

The economic crisis should not be solved on the backs of workers, poor people and welfare recipients.

There is no doubt that we are in the midst of an economic crisis and that the government is running a deficit. But let's think back to how this crisis started in the first place and how employers and governments have used the crisis to threaten workers.

The crisis is being used to put downward pressure on public sector workers and roll back wages and benefits.

In the auto sector, employers told us our wages and benefits weren't allowing them to be competitive on the global market. If the auto makers couldn't be competitive, they told us, our jobs would be at risk. We accepted concessions, but many of us still got laid off. Others are working the same job under poorer working conditions. Now the same logic is being applied to the public sector.

Now is the time when people most rely on public services.

At a time when it should be investing in the public sector to expand public services and jobs, the government is shrinking public services and using the crisis to attack workers and our unions.

We should be joining together in solidarity with private sector workers facing layoffs, low-income and non-unionized workers, public service recipients and people trying to make ends meet with inadequate social assistance benefits. We all need good jobs and public services.

What are we going to do to build a collective fight-back?

In 1995, when the Harris government attacked workers, unions and welfare recipients, Ontario unions called 11 "Days of Action" – 11 days of political strikes against the Ontario government.

Now is not the time to retreat or retrench in our separate unions.

We must build a community-labour coalition that defends the working-class as a whole, including public sector workers, private sector workers, unemployed workers and people on social assistance. We must unite to defend public services under attack.

Join us on June 19 to start getting organized.

Can we organize a series of coordinated actions in our workplaces in solidarity with the people who need public sector services? How should we respond to McGuinty's legislation in our approach to the bargaining table?

The June 19th forum has been organized by the Toronto Workers' Assembly.

Who we are: Last year, over 200 trade unionists, anti-poverty, social justice and community activists came together to form a new political organization. The Toronto Workers' Assembly is dedicated to building a coordinated, effective movement to oppose neoliberalism and to work for social and economic justice in our communities.