

# Labour Pains, Capital Gains: The Paradox of Low-Wage, No-Wage Work



**March 26th, 2015 7-9pm, Ryerson University, POD358, 350 Victoria St – Alternate Routes Keynote Address and Phyllis Clarke Memorial Lecture:**

- **Stephanie Luce**, City University Of New York, “Lifting Up Low-Wage Work: Global Perspectives”

**March 27, 2015 – Labour Pains, Capital Gains Conference, Ryerson University, Centre for Labour Management Relations, 55 Dundas St. West. (Ted Rogers School of Management)**

**Registration: 8:30-9:00**

**Room: Outside TRSM TRS 1-148**

**Panel 1: Economic Restructuring and the Politics of Low-Paid and Unwaged Work (9:00-10:15)**

**Room: Outside TRSM TRS 1-148**

- **Stephen McBride**, McMaster University, **Jacob Muirhead**, McMaster University, “Challenging the Low Wage Economy: Living and Other Wages”
- **Bryan Evans**, Ryerson University, “The Living Wage Movement in Canada: Community-based Responses to the expansion of Low Waged Work”
- **Charity-Ann Hannan**, Ryerson University, **Harald Bauder**, Ryerson University, **John Shields**, Ryerson University, “Towards a Living Wage For All: Illegalised Migrant Workers in Canada and the Role of NGOs in Advocating for their Protection”

**Break: 10:15-10:30**

**Panel 2A: Workplace Precarity, Marginalization and Resistance (10:30-12:00)**

**Room: TRSM TRS 1-148**

- **Michael Mindzak**, Western University, “The Work of Un(der)employed Teachers in Ontario”
- **Keren Gottfried**, Ryerson University, **Diane Dyson**, WoodGreen Community Services, **Haweiya Egeh**, Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership, **Sandra Guerra**, Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership, **John Shields**, Ryerson University, “Surviving at the Margins: Shadow Work, Marginalization and Immigrant Resilience in Toronto”
- **Naomi Alisa Calnitsky**, Carleton University, “Sourcing ‘Offshore’: The New Face of Canadian Migrant Labour”
- **Doreen Fumia**, Ryerson University, **Grace-Edward Galabuzi**, Ryerson University, “Alliances with Non-Governmental Organizations, Community Researchers and Social Movements”

**Panel 2B: Labour Law, Equity Initiatives and the Digital Self (10:30-12:00)**

**Room: TRSM TRS 3-129**

- **Patricia McDermott**, York University, “Labour Law and the Supreme Court of Canada...Lately”
- **Matthew Flisfeder**, Ryerson University, “The Digital Reputation Economy: Social Media and the Branding of the Self”
- **Nicole Cohen**, University of Toronto, **Greig de Peuter**, Wilfrid Laurier University, “Interns Talk Back: Narratives of Unpaid Internships”
- **John Rae**, Ontario Public Service Employees Union Disability Rights Caucus, “Bringing Disabled and Injured Workers into the Canadian Mainstream”

**LUNCH: 12:00-1:00**

**Panel 3A: Workplace Democracy and Struggles for Social Justice (1:00-2:30)**

**Room: TRSM TRS 1-148**

- **Tanner Mirlees**, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Reality TV’s Low to No-Wage Workforce
- **Travis Reitsma**, University of Windsor, “Working for Change: Reconceptualizing Panhandling as a Form of Labour”
- **Leslie Nichols**, Ryerson University, “How Do Women in Toronto and Halifax Navigate the Precarity of Unemployment”
- **Jordan House**, York University, “Low Paid and Prison Made: CORCAN and Canadian Prison Labour”

**Panel 3B: Panel Presentation - Unpaid Internships in Ontario: Public Policy, Law Reform, and Organizing Strategies (1:00-2:30)**

**Room: TRSM TRS 3-129**

**Description:** Over the past few years unpaid internships have emerged as one of the hottest (and controversial) issues for a new generation of workers. The issue of unpaid internships is multifaceted with dimensions including the feminization of the labour market, intergenerational equity in firms, regulatory responses to unpaid labour, and how society manages the school to labour market transition of youths. There has been quite a bit of activism internationally around unpaid internships, but the Canadian dimensions of this issue remain relatively unexplored and only in the last year has there been the beginning of nascent interns rights movement domestically. This panel will serve to highlight the growing organizing efforts by youths against the growing prevalence of internships and what strategies are being utilized to contest this form of employment. The panelists are drawn from different organizations to highlight the emerging opposition to the exploitation of the unpaid labour of youths in Canada's labour markets and to give both an academic and "on the ground" perspectives.

**Panelists:** **Josh Mandryk**, Students Against Unpaid Internship Scams; **Ella Henry**, University of Toronto; **Andrew Langille**, Labour Lawyer; **Claire Seabornis**, Canadian Intern Association

**Break: 2:30-2:45**

**Panel 4: Alternate Routes Keynote Roundtable: From Minimum Wage to a Fair Wage (2:45-4:15)**

**Room: TRSM TRS 1-148**

**Description:** This round table brings together some of the leading North American activists and scholars concerned with the situation of minimum/low wage work. It is widely known that current minimum wage legislation is grossly inadequate in raising low wage workers income out of poverty. It is from this context that a cross-national campaign has emerged to demand a living/fair wage standard be enacted and enforced. This grassroots struggle has gained considerable traction with some notable successes. However, the fight for wage fairness is a difficult one and progress has been uneven. Our panelist will provide an assessment of struggle outlining its importance and future possibilities.

**Panelists:** **Stephanie Luce**, City University of New York; **Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Ontario**; **Others TBA**

**Reception: 6pm at The Imperial Pub, 54 Dundas St E, Toronto, ON**

**M5B 1C7, (416) 977-4667**

## Abstracts:

**Bryan Evans**, Ryerson University, “The Living Wage Movement in Canada: Community-based Responses to the expansion of Low Waged Work”

**Abstract:** Unlike the case of the US living wage movement (see Stephanie Luce, Michael Reich, Ken Jacobs, Miranda Dietz, Robert Pollin etc.), there is no comprehensive overview documenting the origins, experiences, objectives and challenges of the Canadian living wage movement. A number of important issues require examination including what has inspired the living wage movement in Canada and does this differ from that in the US, UK, New Zealand; who makes up the Canadian living wage movement in terms of which social actors are involved, how do local campaigns compare/contrast and why, what is the experience of the Canadian living wage movement in building coalitions, what strategic and ideological perspectives and practices characterize the movement, and how can we assess the state of the Canadian living wage movement in 2015 and situate this movement in the context of other living wage movements in the US, UK and NZ.

**Charity-Ann Hannan**, Ryerson University, **Harald Bauder**, Ryerson University, **John Shields**, Ryerson University, “Towards a Living Wage For All: Illegalized Migrant Workers in Canada and the Role of NGOs in Advocating for their Protection”

**Abstract:** In response to the labour market arrangements that are causing widespread income polarization among workers, and problems associated with the “minimum wage”, activists and NGOs have become interested in the idea of replacing “minimum wage” policies with “living wage policies”. Advocates for groups of workers including women, racialized minorities, and immigrants, who are over-represented in minimum wage occupations have been active in these efforts. Much less is known about who is advocating for illegalized migrants however and the challenges they address in advocating for illegalized migrants, despite increasing numbers, and the incredibly unjust conditions they work in. Illegalized migrants have been a part of the Canadian state since the country’s first Immigration Act in 1869. While earnings data for illegalized migrants in Canada is unavailable, American studies indicate that the practice of exploiting illegalized migrants based on their status is a new phenomenon that emerged in the past 30 years. Evidence for similar findings in Ontario is largely anecdotal at this time, although research has found that Canadian employers use immigrants “illegal” status to funnel them into low quality jobs. Specifically, studies have found the “category “illegal alien” to be a profoundly useful and profitable one (for employers) that effectively serves to create and sustain a legally vulnerable – and hence, relatively tractable and thus ‘cheap’- reserve of labour”. While benefiting owners of capital however, the exploitation of illegalized migrants has consequences for illegalized migrants themselves, and society in general. This project therefore aims to explore the challenges that NGOs and activists face to addressing the living wage for illegalized migrants, and the possible directions that can be taken to ensure a livable wage for illegalized migrants.

**Doreen Fumia**, Ryerson University, **Grace-Edward Galabuzi**, Ryerson University, “Alliances with Non-Governmental Organizations, Community Researchers and Social Movements”

**Abstract:** Precarious employment in Canada has been the focus of a number of recent reports by institutions, organizations and community agencies. This paper will focus on an ongoing project that brings together a group of academic and community researchers who, in the first phase of the research, engaged in a photovoice study to examine how those precariously employed confront economic insecurity in particular neighbourhoods in Southern Ontario. The study highlights some commonplace issues, such as growing weaknesses in the livelihood base, unstable community life, heightened number of violent social interactions, health impacts and the lack of nutritious food. As one community researcher said: When someone doesn’t eat

well, they can be sparked easily. Doesn't matter what you say or do, people need food. It also highlights some less often expressed concerns, such as the need to focus on systemic structures that cause employment precarity. We discuss both the method of choice for the study as well as some of the recommendations based on the personal experiences narrated through photographed images. Finally, this presentation will discuss work underway in the second phase of the research that includes interviews with community members, service providers and small business owners in the select neighbourhoods. This phase brings together key actors in the neighbourhoods on the issue of precarious employment as a way to think about possibilities for a collective employer, employee and community service system response to economic and income precarity.

**John Rae**, OPSEU Disability Rights Caucus, "Bringing Disabled and Injured Workers into the Canadian Mainstream"

**Abstract:** Disabled and injured persons are among the most unemployed, under-employed and impoverished segments of Canadian society, and changes in the nature of work are further exacerbating this situation. Today, more and more Canadians are expected to pursue several different careers during their working life. Since statistics tell us that disabled and injured workers take on average more time to find any job, this new trend will only create new barriers instead of removing some existing barriers to our equal employment. This paper will examine the position of disabled and injured workers within Canadian society, examine some of the changes which have taken place over the past two decades in how work is organized, discuss some of the barriers that prevent our equal employment, and suggest some actions that could be taken to improve our situation.

**Jordan House**, York University, "Low Paid and Prison Made: CORCAN and Canadian Prison Labour"

**Abstract:** Prisoner labour is some of the lowest paid work legally allowed in the country. Despite this fact, prisoners are typically not the first group to come to mind in discussions of low wage workers. Moreover, like many other workers in Canada, prisoners are facing public sector austerity, with recent cuts to already meager wages. Prisoners are, and have been, some of the most overlooked and exploited workers in Canadian society. This paper will provide a brief overview the history of Canadian prison labour, before turning to an analysis of the country's contemporary prison labour regime. Federal prison industry in Canada is overseen by CORCAN, a Crown Special Operating Agency, incorporated in 1992 with a mandate to "aid in the safe reintegration of offenders into Canadian society by providing employment and employability skills training to offenders." It does this by seeking government, non-profit, and private sector contracts. Federal prisoners, as CORCAN employees, work a variety of manufacturing, textile, construction, and service jobs. This paper will argue that prison labour is unfree in the most literal sense - despite remuneration, the workforce is captive by definition. This paper will explore CORCAN's origins and operations in Canada, paying particular attention to CORCAN's 'partnerships' with private enterprise and non-profit organizations, as well as CORCAN's position in the Correctional Service of Canada's economic strategy.

**Josh Mandryk**, Students Against Unpaid Internship Scams; **Ella Henry**, University of Toronto; **Andrew Langille**, Labour Lawyer; **Claire Seabornis**, Canadian Intern Association (See Panel 3B description)

**Keren Gottfried**, Ryerson University, **Diane Dyson**, WoodGreen Community Services, **Haweiya Egeh**, Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership, **Sandra Guerra**, Toronto South Local Immigration

Partnership, **John Shields**, Ryerson University, “Surviving at the Margins: Shadow Work, Marginalization and Immigrant Resilience in Toronto”

**Abstract:** Using original data from a 2012 survey of Bangladeshi, Chinese and Somali immigrants from an east end Toronto community this paper examines the struggle that many newcomers encounter in their effort to find sustaining employment and to socially establish themselves in Canadian society. Our survey findings vividly show that immigrants, and in particular racialized ones, face considerable obstacles in securing their well-being. While numerous dimensions of their employment experience is touch upon, in this paper emphasis is placed on their involvement with the ‘informal labour market’ and more generally the ‘informal economy’ which has become an important source for many newcomers’ survival. The use of shadow work points to the resilience of immigrant populations in the face of a challenging and often hostile labour market. However, it also highlights newcomers’ encounters with low wage employment and exploitative labour practices. Men and women engagement with shadow work displays patterns of both continuity and discontinuity. Hence, a gendered analysis is employed to uncover this important component of newcomers’ work experience.

**Leslie Nichols**, Ryerson University, “How Do Women in Toronto and Halifax Navigate the Precarity of Unemployment”

**Abstract:** Over the past few years, there has been an increase in the numbers of workers who are not in standard employment relations, but rather in contract, part-time, or in otherwise precarious employment (Joshi, 2002). A result of the widespread changes in the economy, work has become more unstable and precarious. Furthermore, the neo-liberal policy paradigm changed the belief that we should support the worker through full time stable employment, to an idea that labour can be utilized whenever and however required and dictated by the economy’s needs. The detrimental effects of neo-liberal market policies are well known. Further explorations are needed on the differential impacts on women with intersectional identities, particularly in an era of increasing employment precarity. Based on a qualitative study of unemployed women’s lived experiences in Toronto and Halifax, this study explored the issues surrounding unemployment including financial impacts, job searching, retraining and health impacts of unemployment and employment precarity. The results were analyzed using intersectional and grounded theory. This study concluded with two key results related to the impact of precarity in the labour market were: (1) neo-liberal erosion of the welfare state is manifested in the lack of supports for workers; and (2) the health of the female participants was negatively affected, whether they were precariously employed or unemployed.

**Matthew Flisfeder**, Ryerson University, “The Digital Reputation Economy: Social Media and the Branding of the Self”

**Abstract:** This paper begins by addressing the conception of the neoliberal subject outlined by Michel Foucault in his lectures on biopolitics. Focusing on neoliberal conceptions of “rational choice” and the investment in one’s “human capital,” Foucault argued that the neoliberal subject becomes an “entrepreneur of the self.” While remaining critical of Foucault’s engagement with the category of the neoliberal *subject*, I apply the concept of the “entrepreneurial self” to users’ engagements with social media. In the context of increased precarity, part-time, and contract labour, I argue that workers, out of necessity, must find a way to self-brand. The latter is operationalized by our engagements with social media. On the one hand, sites such as LinkedIn are much more overt as platforms for work-related networking. However, on the other hand, I claim that the ethic of “reputation management” has spilled into the spaces of various other social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, while critiquing the neoliberal concept of “human capital,” and *investing* in one’s “human capital,” I take up Marxist categories of critical political economy, such as alienation, reification, commodity fetishism, the reproduction of labour-power, absolute and relative surplus value, etc., in order to

argue that self branding through social media can be seen, instead, as a mechanism for increasing the length of unpaid labour time, and for a new triple division of the working day, no longer just between work and leisure time (i.e., the time for the reproduction of labour power); now we must also add the time necessary for the promotion of the self.

**Michael Mindzak**, Western University, “The Work of Un(der)employed Teachers in Ontario”

**Abstract:** Unemployed and underemployed teachers in Ontario appear to face increasingly precarious positions in their work and lives. For over a decade now, Ontario has witnessed a profound growth in the number of certified teachers in the province. As a result, many teachers increasingly find themselves unable to secure (both temporary and permanent) employment within the profession. With the surplus number of teachers expected to continue, along with declining student enrolments and decreased government spending—un(der)employment appears to be an issue which will not be remedied anytime soon. In this qualitative study, involving semi-structured interviews with 20 unemployed and underemployed teachers, I explore the working-lives of such teachers as they attempt to access work and secure permanent positions inside of public schools in Ontario. Results indicate that un(der)employed teachers face growing precarity, uncertainty, insecurity, and alienation from their work and careers as educators. In addition, there has been rising expectation that such teachers contribute their unpaid labour to public schools in order to improve their employment opportunities. Such “volunteerism” is further unpacked in relation to the notion of work-for labour, intergenerational equity and concerns for labour organizations. Finally, teacher un(der)employment must not be viewed in a vacuum, but in relation to the broader world of work and the challenges facing a growing number of workers today. In conclusion, I discuss the issue of unpaid labour inside of schools for education-workers, and the need to simultaneously reassert both the working conditions of teachers and the learning conditions of students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such a conceptualization involves the collective resistance of educators at all levels, ensuring education remains at the very core of critical democratic citizenship.

**Naomi Alisa Calnitsky**, Carleton University, “Sourcing ‘Offshore’: The New Face of Canadian Migrant Labour”

**Abstract:** This paper reconsiders offshore farm labour programs in Canada with attention to how farm labour migrations were reshaped with the onset of the “Offshore Program” in 1966. The program, initially involving Jamaican workers, was extended to Mexico in 1974. Through a set of case studies with seasonal Mexican farm workers in Manitoba and British Columbia, I intend to shed light upon the shifting nature of the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program as it has worked to the benefit and detriment of migrant workers involved and enmeshed within the boundaries of this guest worker scheme. I place the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program in historical perspective, locating its presence within the broader parameters of temporary recruitment tactics pursued by the Canadian state in accordance with employer preferences. I also shed light on ways in which Canadian agricultural regions have recruited local workers, aboriginals, and workers from other provinces. Oral history interviews with contemporary migrants from Mexico help contextualize the complementarity of the program as it has suited economic needs of migrants, alongside the drawbacks of guest work, included limited rights and protections, health and housing considerations, and the gendered parameters of temporary migration and social ruptures caused to the nuclear families of migrants. I will use this presentation space to shed light upon field findings in conversation with temporary Mexican farm workers in Canada to reveal new insights into their Canadian working experiences as migrants vulnerable to annual and seasonal migration changes, fluctuations and recent transformations in the Canadian economy. Placing migrant voices at the center of the discussion, I reveal the diverse backgrounds and origins of workers and also place their perceptions and concerns within a critical discussion space for interpreting the offshore program.

**Nicole Cohen**, University of Toronto, **Greig de Peuter**, Wilfrid Laurier University, “Interns Talk Back: Narratives of Unpaid Internships”

**Abstract:** Is “internship” a dirty word? This question, appearing in a 2014 article in a mainstream Ontario newspaper, signals a shift in the way we talk about internships. In 2011, discussions of unpaid internships surged into public discourse. Early mainstream media coverage of internships perpetuated the myth that young people should work for free, relying on clichés such as “paying your dues” and “working for exposure” that stoked a tolerance for the unpaid positions flourishing in glamour industries such as media, entertainment, fashion, and music. Over the past two years, however, a critique of internships has surfaced on the same news pages that have arguably contributed to the normalization of unpaid work. Articles note that internships contribute to soaring student debt and record-high unemployment; that unpaid internships are replacing entry-level jobs; and that unpaid internships privilege those who can afford to work for free. Therefore, recent intern coverage does not neatly align with standard left assessments of how commercial media treat labour issues: ignored at worst, distorted at best. There is a bona fide struggle underway over meaning, signaled by politicized terms such as “wage theft” and “unpaid internship scams” seeping into the mainstream. In this paper, we argue that changing media discourse around internships is largely due to a burst of collective organizing by young people—a nascent intern labour rights movement that is gaining momentum in Canada, the UK, the United States and beyond. Based on analysis of media coverage of internships and interviews with intern labour activists, our paper reports on the escalating struggle over meaning unfolding in media coverage of internships to argue that the activism of interns themselves and their allies is the dynamic force in shifting positions on unpaid internships, and that beneath the struggle over meaning is activist organization.

**Patricia McDermott**, York University, “Labour Law and the Supreme Court of Canada...Lately”

**Abstract:** Most case law on Section 2d of the Charter, the guarantee of the fundamental right of Freedom of Association concerns the allowable parameters of the behaviour of unions and their members with regard to the primary goals of their of association, namely: forming and joining unions, striking, and engaging in collective bargaining. In this recent 5-2 decision noted above, the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) successfully challenged its provincial government’s legislation prohibiting certain government workers from striking. This ruling, along with a decision earlier this month reaffirming that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have the right to unionize, have signaled a significant shift in the Supreme Court’s jurisprudence as it relates to unions. This paper will explore this shift by examining these two cases along with another relatively recent landmark decision - *Fraser* (Dec, 2011, SCC) that concerns a challenge by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) to an Ontario statute passed by the McGuinty Liberals in 2002 - the *Agricultural Workers Protection Act (AWPA)*. Although this case focuses on the type of bargaining rights the *AWPA* offers migrant, seasonal workers, the potential ramifications of *Fraser* go far beyond the details of the decision - possibly challenging the collective bargaining under our Wager Act style regimes. By looking at these three decisions, we can assess where the Supreme Court stands today on what section 2d’s freedom of association means for unions. Has the SCC really turned a corner?

**Stephanie Luce**, City University of New York, “Lifting Up Low-Wage Work: Global Perspectives”

**Abstract:** Low-wages are increasingly a problem for workers in many parts of the world. In the past two years, wages have remained flat in most wealthy countries and in others, average wages are still below the levels of pre-financial crisis. What do we know about the impact of minimum wage and living wage laws?

What is the potential for these policies, and movements, to improve the lives of hundreds of millions of low-wage workers? In this talk, Luce will review the situation for low-wage workers globally and discuss the increased mobilization to raise wages through legislation, worker organizing and strikes

**Stephen McBride**, McMaster University, **Jacob Muirhead**, McMaster University, “Challenging the Low Wage Economy: Living and Other Wages”

**Abstract:** A capitalist labour market always includes a variety of differentially rewarded strata within the working class. The existence of a low wage sector therefore is nothing new, nor are efforts to resist or challenge the conditions experienced by people whose incomes typically fall far below the poverty line. In recent decades, under the rubric of neoliberalism structural and political factors in many western states have combined to expand the low wage sector in a context of increased inequality. In policy terms this is represented by intensified efforts to flexibilize the labour market and to impose conditionality (often predicated on entering or re-entering the low end of the labour market) for the receipt of social benefits. Various social and political forces have pushed for policies to address issues of low wages and the associated poverty. The paper recognizes the intersection of social and labour market policies but focuses on the latter. It opens with a brief historical overview and touches on sectoral councils in some countries, minimum wage legislation in others, and contemporary campaigns for a living wage. We then turn to the discourses/ argumentation associated with these initiatives, and those employed by opposition to them. Our goal is to understand and evaluate the arguments advanced but move beyond discourse to identify the conditions in which particular means of addressing low wages can achieve success, and conditions under which these advances atrophy and/or over time experience policy drift that erodes the gains made. In the context of living wages, we ask: what conditions would be necessary to gain and embed the concept that those who work should receive wages that prevent poverty?

**Tanner Mirlees**, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Reality TV’s Low to No-Wage Workforce

**Abstract:** Since the turn of the millennium, the reality-TV production sector has been booming and is a boon to TV networks as they compete for viewer attention, ratings and ad revenue in a period of cultural industry transformation. This paper examines why and how reality-TV production companies capitalize on non-unionized, precariously employed and low to no waged workers. The first part of this paper, “The Reality TV Industry: Media Conglomerates and Market Structure.” contextualizes the reality-TV industry with respect to the capitalist imperatives of the media conglomerates that own it and the market relations between reality-TV production, distribution and exhibition firms. The second part, “Reality TV as a Union-Buster”, shows how the TV industry’s genre classification of reality-TV as “non-scripted” programming enables production companies to thwart TV unions, ignore collective agreements and in some instances, outflank strikes. The third part, “Contestant as No-Waged Worker” critically examines how reality TV production companies exploit the labour of low to no paid contestant-participants. Overall, the paper offers a critical political-economy of the strategies reality-TV production companies employ to establish, maintain and exploit a low to no-waged workforce. This paper’s critical overview of the low to no-wage work of reality-TV and the general precariousness and degradation of work in this sector contributes to an important area of inquiry in the political-economy of communication tradition focused on labour in the creative and culture industries.

**Travis Reitsma**, University of Windsor, “Working for Change: Reconceptualizing Panhandling as a Form of Labour”

**Abstract:** When we think of “labour” we often think about workers on an assembly line, or workers typing at a keyboard behind a desk in an office, or workers wearing hardhats on a construction site. More recently we may see stay-at-home mothers as part of the labour force thanks to a reconceptualization of in-the-home work facilitated by feminist scholars and activists. Contemporary discourses around the practice of panhandling in Canada, however, do not conceptualize panhandlers as part of the labour force. Panhandling is most often portrayed as an act of laziness, greed or deviance conducted by dangerous individuals; often outsiders. Media coverage and policy debates at the municipal and provincial level reinforce these notions and sometimes attempt to formulate solutions that seek to eradicate the practice of panhandling through by-law enactments or community initiatives aimed at ushering them out of sight. This presentation will take a theoretical approach that will attempt to reconceptualise the practice of panhandling as a form of labour, while simultaneously problematizing attitudes within media and policy discourses regarding panhandlers that inform often damaging public opinion. It will be argued that panhandling is not only a form of no-wage labour, but it is one that is required for the functioning of modern neoliberal capitalism.

