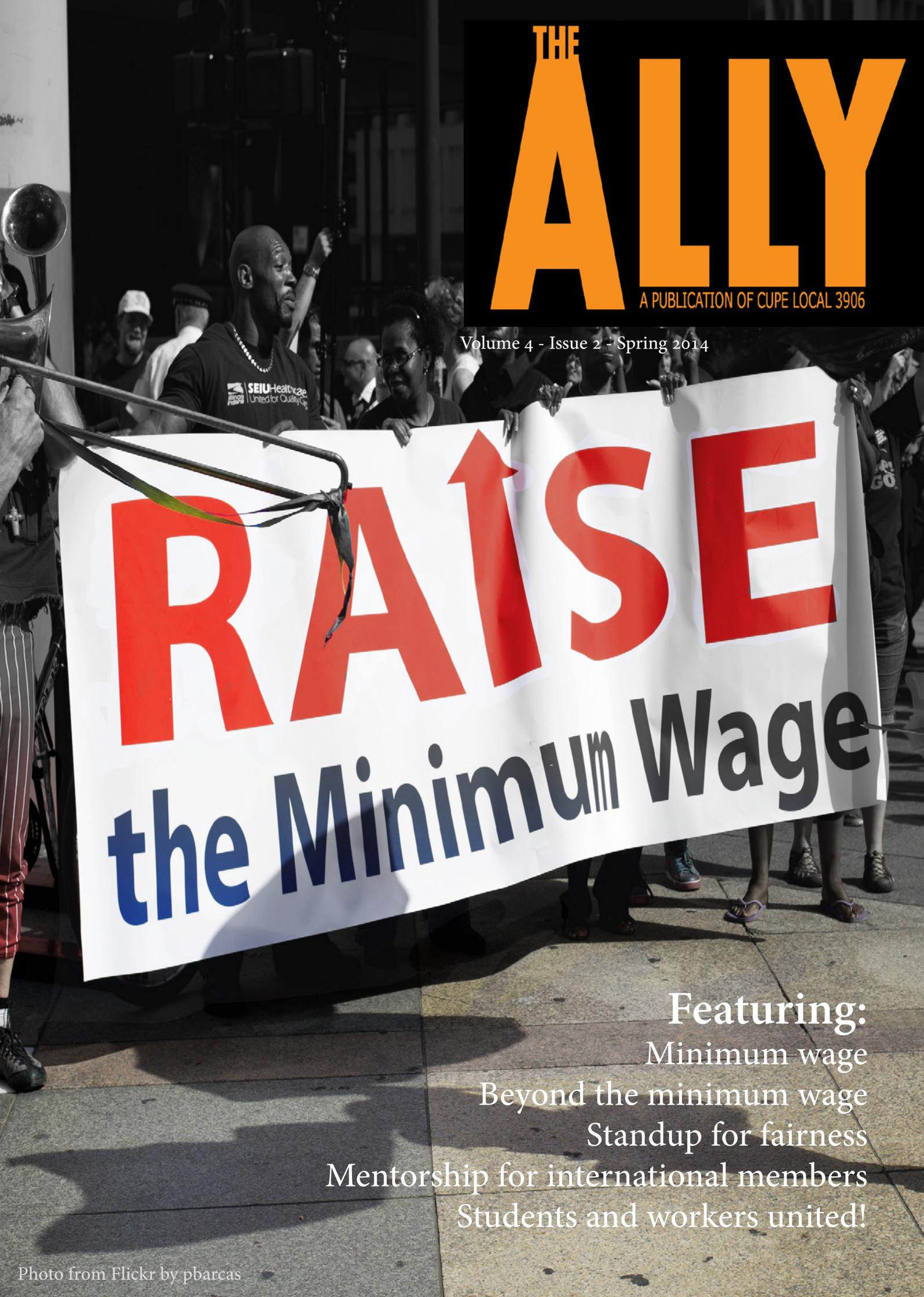


THE ALLY

A PUBLICATION OF CUPE LOCAL 3906

Volume 4 - Issue 2 - Spring 2014



RAISE
the Minimum Wage

Featuring:

Minimum wage

Beyond the minimum wage

Standup for fairness

Mentorship for international members

Students and workers united!

Letter From the President

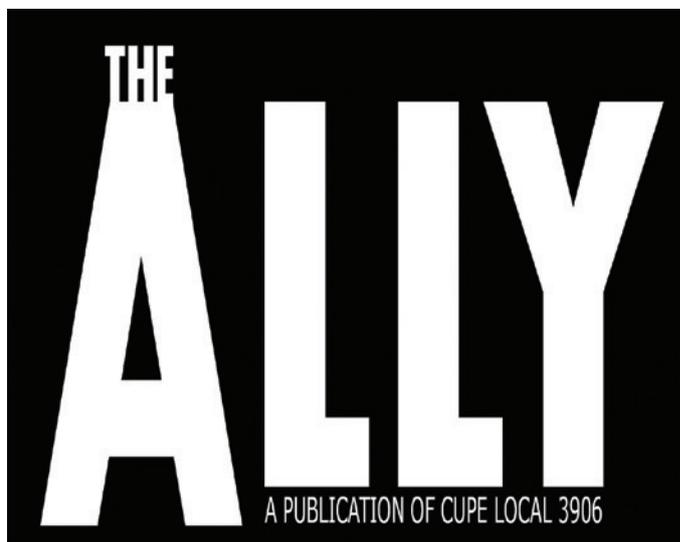
Hello Members,

Welcome to this issue of the Ally! This is my first issue of the Ally as President and I am proud that it is dealing with such a pertinent topic. I have been President for the last three months and I am pleased to report that the transition has been smooth and that I am very much enjoying meeting members and learning more about the collective agreements, benefits and other union resources to better represent and serve members' needs. While we have a break from bargaining we have been working hard to ensure that the employer's actions are consistent with the collective agreements to guarantee a high standard of equality for our members. We have also focused much attention on the changing pay system at McMaster to try and make sure that our members are not negatively impacted by this transformation. We will continue to make this a priority as these changes unfold.

This issue of the Ally is committed to the important campaign to raise the minimum wage in Ontario. There have been dramatic increases in the costs of living and working wages have not mirrored these changes in any way. Tuition is a poignant example of a cost that continues to exponentially increase which is something that all of our members can relate to. There is no acceptable reason for people to be living in poverty, changing the minimum wage so that people do not need to work unreasonably long hours or string several jobs together and yet still remain under the poverty line is an important step in the right direction. Kathleen Wynne, the Premier of Ontario, has agreed to increase the minimum wage but her proposition remains far below the \$14 an hour increase that the campaign advocates. The \$14 an hour increase is not an arbitrary number but one that was carefully calculated to get working people out of poverty and hopefully continued awareness about the issue and pressure on political leaders will make this happen.

Please enjoy the important articles included in this issue. Good luck to all as the semester wraps up and we look forward to seeing you at our next GMM. Please continue to read our e-mails in order to stay well-informed about upcoming events and different union resources that our members should be taking advantage of.

Best Wishes,
Rebecca



Volume 4 - Issue 2 - Spring 2014

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Shailesh Patel

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minimum WAGE



Photo from Guardian Liberty Voice by Mike Hogan

Submitted to
Ontario's Minimum Wage Review Panel

Toronto, September 6, 2013

Minimum wages are not just an anti-poverty measure (although they have positive impacts on incomes among lower-wage workers and their families). They have a broader importance in regulating labour market outcomes and supporting wage determination and income distribution across the labour market.

Minimum wages play a structural and even cultural role in lifting wages throughout the labour market. Wages in many occupations are traditionally set with some reference to the prevailing minimum: that is, workers are paid an increment over and above the statutory minimum (to recognize their productivity, elicit retention, and meet other goals). Higher minimum wages thus have a “trickle-up” impact on wages in a larger segment of the labour market, reaching well beyond those workers who work for the minimum.

Minimum wages also help to influence broad social expectations among workers and employers alike regarding what is “decent” or “expected” in wage determination and income distribution. Again, this impact is experienced at many levels (not just among very low-wage workers). In so doing, they help to influence the overall distribution of income in the labour market.

Historically, more interventionist labour market measures (including minimum wages) were

associated with a more egalitarian factor distribution of income between labour and capital (Brennan, 2012). The reverse has occurred as labour market regulations have been weakened in recent decades – and as a result Canada has experienced a dramatic shift in income distribution away from workers and in favour of employers.

Some have argued that since some minimum wage workers are young people living with their families (and hence may not experience poverty despite their low wages), minimum wages. We reject this argument for several reasons. Any worker's relationship with their employer should not depend on their family status: whether you live with someone else who earns a higher income should not undermine your ability to attain fair compensation for your own efforts in the labour market. Many workers employed at or near the minimum wage do live on their own, and many have dependents. Challenging economic conditions have in fact led many young workers to stay at home longer with their parents; this trend carries lasting negative consequences for them and their families, and should hardly be celebrated. And as we have noted, minimum wages carry a broader economic significance (in affecting the whole macroeconomic distribution of income), and should not be understood solely or primarily as an anti-poverty measure.

Minimum Wage Benchmarks

Minimum wages in Ontario have been frozen for three-and-a-half years at \$10.25 per hour. Minimum wages had been increased in several stages prior to March 2010; it has been frozen ever since. During the subsequent period, consumer prices in Ontario have increased by over 7 percent (measured by Statistics Canada's all-items CPI for Ontario). The resulting decline in real incomes for low-wage workers in Ontario (those working at the statutory minimum, but also those whose wages are determined with reference to the minimum) is very unfair, and has undermined household finances and consumer spending in the province.

In real terms, minimum wages in Ontario are about as high today as they were in the mid-1970s, and higher than in some previous periods (notably during the long 9-year freeze in minimum wages that was the result of former Ontario government policies between 1995 and 2004). However, important to measure the real level of minimum wages not solely in relation to some historical benchmark, but also in reference to overall labour market outcomes. The broad indirect impact of minimum wages described above on income distribution, must be understood in reference to the overall level of wages and

productivity demonstrated in the labour market. Relative to average wages, and relative to average hourly productivity, minimum wages in Ontario are significantly lower today than they were even in the 1970s (when minimum wages could be said to exert their greatest influence). Internationally, too, while Ontario's (and Canada's) minimum wages are in the middle of the pack of industrial economies, they are low relative to average wages and hourly productivity (Battle, 2011). In this regard, the real economic power of minimum wages has clearly been eroded in Ontario since the 1970s – even inflation-adjusted minimum wages seem to be as high now as they were then. Relative to minimum standards of living for Ontario families, it is also clear that minimum wages are too low. Even working full-time year-round, the existing minimum wage would leave a single worker in Ontario (with no dependents) well below low-income cut-off for a single resident (the low-income cut-off is a measure of relative poverty). Even the proposal to raise the Ontario minimum wage to \$14 per hour (which we support) would barely lift a single worker (once again, working full-time year-round) past that poverty line. However, the problem

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is much worse than that, due to the preponderance of precarious, parttime, and seasonal working arrangements in our labour market. For example, Lewchuk et al. (2013) found that close to half of all workers in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area experience some dimension of precarity in their employment patterns, including irregular and inadequate hours of work. For precarious workers, therefore, even a \$14 per hour minimum wage would leave them facing continued poverty and insecurity.

Moreover, we must also consider the fact that workers must reproduce themselves and their families. The concept of a “living wage” takes into account the expenses associated with a family's normal activity, and the requirements of full participation in economic and social life (Brennan, 2012). Studies in Ontario have indicated that the living wage benchmark for a family of four (with two year-round breadwinners and two children) is in the range of \$18 per hour (see, for example, Mackenzie and Stanford, 2008) – far higher than the existing minimum wage. In this context, it is clear that the existing minimum wage in Ontario is highly inadequate to allow working people the opportunity to provide for themselves and their dependents at a secure, socially acceptable standard. Increasing the statutory minimum to \$14

would begin to address employer-specific policies, lifting wages to what could this inadequacy. Even that training and placement genuinely be considered a would need to be combined initiatives, and other “living wage.” with other measures (including policy tools) aimed at

Minimum Wages and Employment

There is a vast economic literature regarding the impact of minimum wage laws on employment, which we will not attempt to summarize here. Many different theoretical and empirical approaches have been utilized in this research, and there has been no clear consensus in the scholarly findings. Some studies find that higher minimum wages have small negative impacts on employment (in particular segments of the labour market); others find that higher minimum wages have no impact, or potentially even a small positive impact, on employment levels. Several recent papers have reviewed the vast literature on the employment effects of minimum wages, and concluded that the relationship between minimum wages and employment is very weak, especially in conditions of macroeconomic stagnation and weak spending power (see, for example, Bunker et al., 2012; Hall and Cooper, 2012; and Schmitt, 2013).

Some economists, following a traditional neoclassical theoretical approach, assume that left to its own devices, the labour market will automatically settle at a position of full employment (defined as a situation where every willing worker can find work). Fluctuations in the wage rate will motivate changes in labour demand and supply until the two are equal. In a general equilibrium context, this partial equilibrium in the labour market is held to be consistent with complementary outcomes in other factor and product markets, achieving a general equilibrium that is efficient and socially optimal, and utilizes all available factor resources. For several reasons, we reject this analysis of how the labour market (and indeed the whole economy) functions – and hence we do not accept the conclusion that minimum wages, by lifting wages above this supposed market-clearing equilibrium, necessarily reduce employment and create unemployment. (Ivanova, 2011, provides a complete critique of the standard neoclassical model of minimum wages.) Employment cannot be explained in a partial equilibrium labour

market context. To the contrary, the demand for labour is a derived demand that depends fundamentally on the expectations of employers regarding how much output they will be able to sell. Demand constraints typically limit the level of output and hence employment in the overall economy. In this understanding, the impact of minimum wages (and wages more generally) on employment needs to take into account the state of demand conditions (which are the dominant determinant of employment levels), and the impact of wages on aggregate demand. Wages have complex and often contradictory impacts on demand, reflecting their dual character: wages are both a cost of production (for employers) and the most important source of purchasing power (for households).

Higher wages may discourage investment and employment – especially if investment is very sensitive to profitability, and production (such as in the export sector) is very sensitive to cost competitiveness. At the same time, higher wages may encourage more output and employment through the resulting increment to consumer spending. The net impact of these contrasting effects can vary over time. Economists have identified “profit-led” and “wage-led” regimes, depending on whether the former or the latter effects predominate.

Ontario, Canada, and much of the world economy have experienced especially painful and chronic shortfalls in aggregate demand in the last half-decade, as the lasting result of the 2008 global financial crisis and resulting worldwide recession. The sluggishness of the resulting recovery reflects the continuing negative impact of financial uncertainty and balance sheet issues on spending by consumers, businesses, and governments alike. In this context, most economists agree that consumer spending is an especially important source of demand and growth. Indeed, both theoretical and empirical evidence suggest that it is in recessionary conditions that wage-led dynamics are likely to be strongest. Lavoie and

Stockhammer (2012) provide comparative evidence suggesting that wage-led mechanisms are indeed very strong in the OECD countries in the present economic conjuncture. The positive impact of minimum wages (and wages in general) on consumer spending is amplified by the fact that households can use the extra income to strengthen their balance sheets and repair debt burdens, hence leveraging additional spending capacity over and above the extra income that is generated by higher wages (Aaronson et al., 2012). There is a vast economic literature regarding the impact of minimum wage laws on employment, which we will not attempt to summarize here. Many different theoretical and empirical approaches have been utilized in this research, and there has been no clear consensus in the scholarly findings. Some studies find that higher minimum wages have small negative impacts on employment (in particular segments of the labour market); others find that higher minimum wages have no impact, or potentially even a small positive impact, on employment levels. Several recent papers have reviewed the vast literature on the employment effects of minimum wages, and concluded that the relationship between minimum wages and employment is very weak, especially in conditions of macroeconomic stagnation and weak spending power (see, for example, Bunker et al., 2012; Hall and Cooper, 2012; and Schmitt, 2013).

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indeed very strong in the OECD countries in the present economic conjuncture. The positive impact of minimum wages (and wages in general) on consumer spending is amplified by the fact that households can use the extra income to strengthen their balance sheets and repair debt burdens, hence leveraging additional spending capacity over and above the extra income that is generated by higher wages (Aaronson et al., 2012). The fact that business investment spending in the Ontario and Canadian economies has been notably insensitive to strong profitability levels (leading to the perverse phenomenon of private companies accumulating excess hoards of liquid assets, or so-called “dead money”) also reinforces the conclusion that wage-led linkages are likely to predominate in today’s economy. Higher profit margins in Canada (at historically high levels) have not translated strongly into new business capital spending (Stanford, 2011), and hence any reduction in profit margins resulting from higher minimum wages cannot be credibly predicted to result in any notable reduction in capital spending.

In our judgment, therefore, higher minimum wages in Ontario will have no discernible negative impact on employment in Ontario, and may very well have a net positive effect (once the direct and indirect impacts of stronger family incomes on aggregate demand are experienced). We accept that higher minimum wages help to effect a shift in the broad economic distribution of income from capital to labour (and in this light it is not surprising that business groups generally oppose minimum wages). However, there are some offsetting effects which should be taken into account in considering the net impact on business. There are also benefits of higher minimum wages for business, including:

- Better recruitment and retention outcomes.
- A correlation between higher minimum wages and higher realized productivity.
- Stronger consumer spending power which supports stronger demand conditions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Unifor supports the proposal to increase the minimum wage in Ontario to \$14 per hour.

We do not believe that this increase would, on its own, have any measurable negative impact on employment in Ontario. In fact, empirical evidence indicates very little connection at all between minimum wage levels and employment outcomes, and in current weak macroeconomic circumstances the net effect on employment is likely to be positive.

However, at the same time as minimum wages rise (and other policy tools are utilized to lift labour incomes), Ontario also needs a shift in the general stance of macroeconomic policy (in Ontario and elsewhere in Canada) to a more expansionary footing: using tools such as expansionary fiscal policy, public sector infrastructure spending, and strategies to boost private sector capital investment and exports. Those are the key factors that will determine whether employment strengthens in Ontario, not any changes in the minimum wage.

A more regular and transparent system should be developed to evaluate and adjust minimum wages as a normal feature of labour market policy (instead of adjusting the minimum wage in an ad-hoc and necessarily politicized fashion).

Over time, the minimum wage should rise to reflect rising consumer prices, the growth of labour productivity, and the growth of average incomes.

We support higher minimum wages as part of a broader labour market strategy, including statutory regulations, employment policies within particular firms or agencies, training and placement services, and other measures to lift wages in Ontario toward a “living wage” level consistent with the ability of workers and their families to enjoy greater security and full participation in economic and social life.

- Writers:
Jim Stanford, Economist
Jordan Brennan, Economist



Facts on Minimum-wage Work in the Post-2008 Economy

That the employment environment has changed for all workers since the global economic crisis of 2008 is a truism; if one listens to the news, parliamentary debates or any other medium of public discourse, it may seem that tracking changes in unemployment rates and trade deficits has now become a bit of a national pastime. However, national information bodies such as Statistics Canada are much less prolific with data on minimum-wage work. Because results of Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey on minimum-wage statistics are only produced several years after data is collected, we are now beginning to see how the post-2008 economy has affected minimum-wage work.

Of all the provinces, Ontario had the largest increase of minimum-wage workers as a percentage of the overall workforce between 2000 and 2009, making it the province with the second highest percentage of workers making minimum wage (8.1%) - second only to Newfoundland and Labrador (9.3%). For those contemplating how comparative rates between provinces might affect that statistic, Ontario's 2009 general minimum wage of \$9.50 an hour was far from the highest minimum wage rate amongst the provinces, and even its current rate of \$10.25 per hour in 2014 puts Ontario square in the middle in comparison to the other provinces and territories.

As has long been the case, minimum-wage workers are not equally represented across demographics. A pan-Canadian statistical study of employed workers, it was found that women were almost twice likely to be in a minimum-wage job (7.2% compared to 4.3 for men). In terms of industries, 92% of minimum-wage work was in the service sector, particularly in accommodation, food and trade. Agricultural work represented a significant component as well, with 14.3% of all agricultural workers earning minimum-wage. In industries with a high number of unionized workers (i.e. manufacturing, construction, education) the percentage of minimum-wage workers was the lowest at between 1 and 3% of workers in that industry.

Because of the increase in part-time jobs as a total percentage of jobs, another issue is how the growth in minimum-wage workers is coinciding with this trend. The 2009 survey found that minimum-wage workers were six times more likely to be employed in a part-time job; this means that the calculation of $\$10.25 \times 40$ to determine weekly pay before taxes is increasingly elusive as workers may be asked to rely on an unpredictable number of part-time hours to make ends meet. This is a problem that transcends the issue of per-hour remuneration, but it is edifying in terms of considering the hardship associated with many peoples' experiences as workers in the post-2008 job market.

With more workers working minimum-wage jobs and with the opportunity to work fewer hours than before, it is time to consider whether we need to adjust to the "new normal" and meet the skyrocketing prices for housing and energy with a higher minimum wage.

Marguerite Marlin

Not in the Syllabus: Graduate Student Mental Health



**Is your
classroom the
new home of
playground
bullies?**

Fill out the survey:
www.NotInTheSyllabus.ca

CUPE **OUWCC**
Ontario University Workers Coordinating Committee

PSAC
Ontario

cfsfcée Canadian Federation
of Students-Ontario

Have you ever witnessed or experienced belittling or degrading behaviour at your institution? Verbal abuse? Yelling? Intimidation? Homophobic, racist, sexist or xenophobic remarks? Have you ever felt anxious or fearful to encounter a particular professor, staff member or colleague? Have you ever witnessed any of these things happen to a colleague or fellow student?

As a first step to addressing graduate student bullying and harassment, the Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario, in collaboration with the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the Ontario University Workers Coordinating Committee of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, have launched Not in the Syllabus, a graduate student mental health campaign.

Our campaign begins with a confidential survey, the first of its kind in the province, asking graduate students to identify and describe incidents related to bullying, harassment and mental health issues that they have either personally experienced or

witnessed at their institutions. The objectives of the survey are to document graduate student experiences with bullying and harassment and to inform and recommend the creation of graduate student specific campus mental health resources.

Your participation in the survey is greatly appreciated. The information collected will shape the rest of the campaign and has the potential to positively impact future graduate students.

Complete the survey at:
www.NotInTheSyllabus.ca

All information provided is confidential and secure.

If you're interested in knowing more about the survey or want to help promote it to your peers and colleagues, please contact outreach@cfsontario.ca.

**Unions make life better –
for everyone.**



**Stand up
for
fairness**





Beyond the Minimum Wage – Organizing Workers in a Precarious Economy

On January 25th 2014, members of Steel City Solidarity were invited to participate in a panel on the Raise the Minimum Wage Campaign at the Niagara Social Justice Forum in St. Catharines. This prompted us to think about our approach to worker solidarity, in terms of how we both share goals of this movement, but also understand ourselves to be working differently. We'd like to share some of these thoughts with you.

For those who might not know, Steel City Solidarity is a working group of CUPE 3906. Founded in 2010, we organize with precarious workers in the Hamilton community to combat wage theft. Wage theft can happen in multiple ways: from bosses simply refusing to pay wages owed, stealing tips, refusing to pay for training, or doctoring hours of work records. Increasingly, the only kind of work many people are able to access is precarious – low paying, short term, and with uneven or irregular hours. This persistent insecurity makes workers more vulnerable to wage theft and makes speaking up about it more difficult and potentially very isolating.

This is where Steel City comes in. We work as a solidarity network; a collection of folks in the community who join together and commit to support each other to deal with bosses. We run campaigns based on direct action that are worker led – that is, whoever comes to us with a case of wage theft directs their own campaign with our support and sets the goals they would like to see achieved. To date we have won all six of our cases -

getting up to \$3000 of stolen wages for one worker alone! We do this work for two reasons: one, on a very practical level we want to see the money workers are owed get back into their hands and, two, we want to build worker organizing capacities amongst folks in precarious employment so that they can take these skills to other jobs and use them to assert their rights and organize with others there.

So then, how do we see ourselves as related to campaigns like the one to Raise the Minimum Wage? Certainly we understand that anything that improves the real working conditions and lives of workers is good. And in creating our group, we learned A LOT from the Toronto Workers' Action Centre, who supports individual workers' cases, but also organizes workers via campaigns to pressure the government to improve legislation. We'd say we share similar goals, but differ in our understanding of the best way to achieve that change.

For one, we believe that any labour action must be worker centered and driven. As such, we work from the position of solidarity not service; so we aren't taking action on behalf of workers but with workers. This principle is a key difference between solidarity networks and campaigns, as is our focus on direct action. We believe that a central component of organizing workers to support any goal involves engaging them directly in accomplishing a specific set of demands that are imminently targeted towards the "absolute

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For one, we believe that any labour action must be worker centered and driven. As such, we work from the position of solidarity not service; so we aren't taking action on behalf of workers but with workers. This principle is a key difference between solidarity networks and campaigns, as is our focus on direct action. We believe that a central component of organizing workers to support any goal involves engaging them directly in accomplishing a specific set of demands that are imminently targeted towards the "absolute power" ideal that employers have of themselves. In other words, it is disempowering to participate in a campaign where all that is needed is for you to sign a petition and then hope the government acquiesces. It is similarly disempowering to participate in a labour march in which you circle downtown on a Saturday, when no employer or politician is around to actually hear your demands.

Principles of using direct and worker led actions are especially significant given that we know that while it is important to have better legislation in



Photo from Flickr

place – such as a higher minimum wage – we’ve also seen that enforcement of these gains is always lacking by the government. For example, many workers are denied their basic rights under the Employment Standards Act (either by lack of enforcement or by exemption) and so workers themselves must try to enforce these rights at work. We also know that when workers use the official systems set up to mediate conflict between workers and employers, such as the Labour Board, they rarely receive any remediation. Even when workers have filed claims, their case has been approved, and the employer is ordered to pay the worker what they are owed, many never see this money as there is no enforcement compelling employers.

In comparison, Steel City Solidarity has been effective at compelling employers to pay workers what they are owed. And, when workers organize with solidarity networks and see that wins can be gained, we and they build our capacity for additional collective organizing - not just for stolen wages, but also for just working conditions and more power on the job. Through directly being involved in these actions, workers learn that it is their own abilities and capacity that make the difference, not government officials tasked with “upholding” our rights. They see that they can carry out the actions needed to address their own demands.

Such consciousness raising through action is particularly important in our current precarious economy. In their current form, traditional unions and other labour based organizing haven’t by and large focused on precarious labour, so we need a strategy that actually works for organizing folks in these circumstances. A number of unions, including CUPE, are starting to talk about precarious work more seriously, and we think that the working group model is a really good way for unions to extend this kind of work and develop legitimate linkages with these communities. In particular, we see worker led campaigns as useful for developing skills amongst workers who can’t rely on established union channels, like grievances or collective bargaining. Focusing on these skills means that as people move from job to job, a condition of precarious work that is becoming all the more common, they can take the same skills, knowledge, and confidence in asserting their rights to other workplaces in a way that challenges the exploitability and vulnerability produced by the precarious-work economy.

If you or someone you know is having their wages stolen, or for more information or to get involved, you can contact us at workersunited.cupe3906@gmail.com or visit our website steelcitysolidarity.wordpress.com.

- Caitlin Craven
- Meaghan Ross



Photo from Flickr by Maryland GovPics

Students and Workers United!

- Mike Yam [Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario]

As irresponsible governments continue to cut public funding to colleges and universities, tuition fees continue to rise, precarious academic employment becomes the norm, and the integrity of our teaching and research is threatened. Post-secondary education in Ontario is facing a crisis. Whether you're a student, a worker, or both, we are all feeling the brunt of budget cuts, fee hikes and attacks on academic freedom.

Working conditions on our campuses share common issues of post-secondary education. Rising research underfunding, restricted class sizes, poor student-supervisor bullying and harassment, health and services are only a few examples



conditions. Students and workers on that impact the accessibility and quality of tuition fees and debt, graduate and academic freedom, increasing class dynamics, mental health hazards like safety concerns and access to campus of the challenges we jointly face.

Now more than ever, students and workers must unite to defend and build a public system of post-secondary education that is of high quality and accessible to everyone – no matter where they live or how much money they have. The Canadian Federation of Students-Ontario is committed to strengthening the relationship between the student movement and the labour movement to fight for fairness, equity and justice on our campuses and in our communities.

Mentorship for International Members

- International Officer



Photo from bagandpassport.com

Arguably, cultural shock is the first challenge that faces international members when they move to a new country like Canada. With different cultural, ethnic or linguistic background, most members have difficulty mingling into social and academic structure in the university. It is commonly understood among international graduate students that it takes at least a year to get through this tough phase. Much of this has to do with the lack of information about the academic and non-academic expectations of university community. Although it is impossible to completely eradicate the challenge, we can attempt to lower the familiarization time, at least at academic level. Most of the academic queries that new members have are simple and relate to daily academic activities. However they may be shy or afraid to ask, or may not know who to approach with the questions. Various kinds of peer mentorship programs exist among undergraduate students. But there is no such set-up among international graduate students who form a major portion of the CUPE's international members.

Senior year international graduate students possess valuable experience that can guide newly arrived members to get through the tough phase quickly. We are in consultation with various mentoring committees on campus to discuss organisation of a simple, working and helpful mentoring program for our international members. On this occasion, I would like to thank the members who have already showed interest in mentoring for their respective faculties. After formally setting up the mentoring team, the details of the program will be provided to the membership.



WE ARE LUCKY PEOPLE

Photo by Lange from trancerepublic.org

We are the lucky ones. Sure we have debt, but at least we are able to attend post-secondary education. For many social citizens living in Canada, they do not have that option. Take for example Samantha, who was attending her first semester in an esthetics programme in Toronto. However after three months of successfully and happily working through her classes, she was compelled to drop out. Her single mother became ill, and could no longer work. Suddenly Samantha assumed responsibility for becoming her family's primary income source as she has two younger siblings who were in elementary school. Granted, her mother was able to receive income from Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), yet this accounted to a small portion of what was required for a family of four. Samantha originally hoped to go to school part-time, but even that was troublesome. Samantha had to obtain two jobs just to help foot the bills at home. While she did not have much difficulty obtaining work, it was the quality of work that was the problem. Her first job at McDonalds paid her \$10.25 an hour. She was getting about thirty hours a week but with that hourly wage, it wasn't enough. She had to get another job at Tim Horton's who also paid her the provincial minimum wage. Her regular schedule became a shift starting at McDonalds at 5pm until 1am, then 7am until 1pm at Tim Horton's. She barely had time for herself let alone school. Each time she received a pay cheque her excitement faded, realizing her paycheques would only get her family as far as the next pay cheque. Her hopes of

going back to school were also fading. Samantha is not a unique case here in Ontario. Although people are working more hours, they continue to live in poverty; this is nothing but shameful.

Although Samantha is a young person, there are many older people working in minimum wage jobs that need to support their families. In fact, the average age of minimum-wage workers has risen 17 per cent in the last decade, with adults over 35 years of age now accounting for 27 per cent of Ontario's minimum-wage workers. The proposed \$14 dollar minimum wage campaign has been well received across Ontario's public yet Ontario's Premier, Kathleen Wynne, has responded by suggesting \$11. Although \$14 may seem like a large jump from \$10.25, the minimum wage has been frozen for three years and thus \$14 would account for those lost years while also bringing working people above the poverty line by 10 per cent. At \$11, working people would still be living below the poverty line. It is time to raise the minimum wage to a standard where people can live in dignity, and for people like Samantha to have the option of school. By raising the minimum wage to \$14, Samantha would only have to work one full-time job therefore freeing time for school. We need to push the provincial government to stand up for low-wage workers, and so every month on the 15th go to raisetheminimumwage.ca to check out your local action!

Catherine Anderson

The Ignorant Masses

The Social Uplifters, those eminent sifters
Of merit and poor people's needs,
Went down to the slums to regenerate bums,
And do meritorious deeds.
We washed them, we dressed them, with libraries blessed them,
We prayed with those ignorant mobs,
And the wretches were hateful and vilely ungrateful
And said what they wanted was jobs.

Our noble committee then searched through the city
To find all the fallen and lost;
We learned how they came to be living in shame,
This, mind you, at no little cost.
We swamped them with tracts and statistical facts,
But the creatures were terribly rude,
They acknowledged 'twas nice to be freed from all vice,
But said what they wanted was food.

They're just as God made them, it's useless to aid them,
The brutes do not ask for reform;
Intellectual feasts are all wasted on beasts,
Who want to be fed and kept warm.
Let them keep their allotted postions, besotted
And blind, when you bid them advance.
Those ignorant asses, the underworld masses,
Will say all they want is a chance.

Join Our Committees and Working Groups

Departmental Stewards

This is a crucial union position. Each department has at least one steward who provides a direct link between the executive and the membership. You can contact our Chief Steward at chiefsteward_tas@cupe3906.org to get more information about your department's stewards.

Executive Committee

Executive officers are elected members of the union. These are honorarium. Check the vacant executive positions if you are interested in participating in the executive committee.

Political Action Committee (PAC)

A semi-autonomous committee committed to extending solidarity to the rest of the labour and social-justice community in Hamilton and beyond.

Interested in participating in or knowing about PAC? Visit PAC's Website: <http://pac3906.wordpress.com/> or email politicalaction@cupe3906.org.

Equity Action Committee (EAC)

EAC is another semi-autonomous committee working towards Equity Seeking Groups in our union and the Hamilton area. The chair of the EAC is our Equity Officer. Please email Parathy at equity@cupe3906.org for more information.

Grievance Committee

Up to 5 members of our local in addition to the Grievance Officer, Chief Stewards, and staff, who work on issues of dispute surrounding the collective agreement. If interested, please email President at president@cupe3906.org.

Benefits Committee

Chaired by the Benefits and Advocacy Officer, Benefits Committee work to administer benefits related tasks. Please email the Benefits & Advocacy Officer at benefits@cupe3906.org for more information and joining this committee.

Communications Committee

This committee is responsible for the production and distribution of The Ally, our local's magazine. Communications committee works to get the word out about CUPE 3906. The chair of this committee is the Communications Officer. Please email the Communications Officer at communications@cupe3906.org, for more information and participating in this committee. You can send your articles/pictures/poems to be printed in The Ally.

Steel City Solidarity Working Group

Steel City is a Workers Action Centre for precarious workers in the City of Hamilton. Established as a working group of CUPE 3906, they are composed of precarious workers and labour and community activists from McMaster University and the Hamilton community. For more information, contact info@steelcitysolidarity.com

Indigenous Solidarity Working Group

The group's mandate is to educate CUPE 3906 membership and the broader Hamilton community about issues relating to matters of indigenous sovereignty and solidarity. If interested, contact Indigenous Solidarity working group at iswg3906@gmail.com