



# UNIONS

## THE POWER OF STANDING UNITED



2

*Union gains affect all Canadians*

3

*UA Canada: 125 years of history*

4

*A tale of two workers*

5

*The faces of healthcare in Ontario*

6

*OPSEU head critical of Liberal Party priorities*

8

*Find a rewarding career as a union boilermaker*

10

*Health, safety and unions*



# Union gains affect all Canadians

Nearly 30 per cent of all Canadian workers belong to a union: miners, tradespeople, nurses, retail workers, government staff, teachers, police officers, journalists and professional athletes, among many others. That's about four million Canadians. Yet union gains over the years affect all of us.

The union movement, for instance, was crucial to the rise of the middle class in Canada. With their ability to negotiate wage increases and raise the standard of living for their members, unions move employers into a more equitable distribution of wealth.

Unions push for decent pension plans, for pay equity, for 40-hour work weeks and overtime pay, for health and safety provisions, for health-care coverage, for unemployment insurance — gains from which all employees, union and non-union, ultimately benefit.

"It was not so long ago that we won the battle for paid maternity leave," says Sid Ryan, president of the Ontario Federation of Labour. "A lot of people don't know that the postal workers actually won that fight federally, and then it became the law of the land."

A recent study released by the Canadian Labour Congress ("Union Advantage 2014") pointed out some other tangible benefits of union membership: Unionized workers in Canada earn on average \$5.17 per hour more than non-union members. Women in particular earn more when they are unionized (\$6.89 more per hour), as do workers between the ages of 14 and 24, who earn an average of \$3.16 more an hour.

This has a trickle-down effect throughout the economy: better-paid workers have more disposable income, which not only stimulates the economy but, on a smaller scale, helps support smaller local businesses.

That, in turn, has even farther-reaching implications and benefits every member of a community. According to the CLC



SHUTTERSTOCK

report, almost \$574 million more every week makes its way into local economies across Canada through the union-negoti-

ated wages for working women alone.

"We fight for a better distribution of wealth and income and try to move

people from the working class to the middle class," says Ryan. "We create a more equal society."

## Fighting for fairness

In mid-April, tens of thousands of workers across Canada and the United States walked off the job to protest low wages. Called the Fight for \$15, the demonstrations were meant to put pressure on governments to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for low-paid workers in such industries as fast food, retail and home care.

The cause has been rapidly picking up speed over the past few years, shared by labour and community organizations, and it's central to the Ontario Federation of Labour's focus for 2015.

"In Ontario, we're looking at a multitude of issues," explains OFL president Sid

Ryan. "The overarching strategy is the whole question of poverty. It's the issue of the day."

That means pressing for an increase in the minimum wage (\$11.25 per hour in Ontario, starting October 1). But \$11 an hour is still 36 per cent below the poverty line, Ryan notes — far too little to cover a post-secondary education, for instance, or to help people pull themselves out of poverty. A raise to \$15 an hour would push people 10 to 12 per cent above the line.

In February, the OFL presented a submission to the Ontario government's budget committee, demanding measures that would address poverty and inequality

from different angles, including improvements to child care and social security and access to affordable housing and education.

In addition, the OFL and other unions are pressing for change at the end of people's working lives. "A lot of seniors are retiring into poverty," says Ryan. "Sixty-five percent of Canadians don't have a pension plan and many don't have savings."

Currently, the Canada Pension Plan covers 25 per cent of pensionable earnings; in Ontario, the average retiree receives \$6,800 annually from CPP. The OFL and others are pushing for an increase to 50 per cent, which Ryan says would bring retirees back above the poverty line. Minimum wage and pension plans are not something most union members need to worry about, says Ryan. But both elements

feed into the OFL's poverty strategy.

"If the trade-union movement is to grow and have real relevance, we have to champion these types of issues," he says. "It's what unions do. We're not called the organized movement for nothing."

**FIGHT  
FOR \$15**



# UA CANADA: 125 YEARS OF HISTORY



CONTRIBUTED

In August, the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada (UA) will be celebrating its 125th anniversary. First proposed by a Boston plumber in 1889, the multi-craft union has grown to represent over 300,000 men and women, including 55,000 members in Canada, and has become one of the most respected building trades unions in North America.

But with that growth has come a few growing pains. "If we went back 25 years ago, we probably controlled 80 per cent of the work in this country," explains John Telford, the United Association's Canadian director. Ten years ago that number had dropped to 35 per cent. "We took our eye off the ball and we catered to massive projects — nuclear power plants, big Oil Sands jobs and the refinery industry in Sarnia — we kind of forgot about our schools and hospitals and the work we do every day." In the meantime, he says, nonunion workers moved into the jobs.

In an effort to turn that around, UA Canada put a massive market recovery program together 15 years ago, and since then membership has increased by about 13,000. Turning things around also meant losing a small percentage of members — between 80 and 100 people across the country — who had been causing problems on job sites as well as by providing drug and alcohol rehabilita-

tion to those members who required it. "We probably saved 150 to 200 people that way," says Telford.

The union has also changed its approach to the concerns of its industry partners, moving to a place where both sides now sit down and listen to each other. They're modernizing their collective agreements to reflect not only the changing times but also the different needs of members around the country.

At the same time, the UA has always and still boasts the most extensive training programs in the industry. All members are either registered tradespeople or registered apprentices in plumbing, steamfitting, refrigeration or sprinkler mechanics. Beyond that, there are upgrading opportunities as well as specialized training and courses available in other fields.

"Training is core to everything we do," says James Hogarth, business manager of the Ontario Pipe Trades Council and former business manager of UA Local 46. In North America, every year, the UA spends \$250 million on training. "Every penny of that is members' money," adds Telford.

For his part, Hogarth concedes that the UA hadn't been moving with the times. But after looking at the industry as a whole, figuring out where the union fits in now and where they want it to be in 10 years, he says: "The message is getting out there: the UA is the place to be."

## Looking into the future of the UA

### *Union is growing to handle all the work*

After a determined push to sign more members and to gain back market share they had lost to nonunion workers, the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada (UA) has grown big enough again to take on anything that comes its way.

"We have enough people now," says John Telford, the United Association's Canadian director. "We'll keep growing and handle all the work."

And there is plenty of work to be handled. In British Columbia, for example, to feed any one of several proposed liquefied natural gas plants alone would require the building of five gas plants and the laying of pipelines from the Alberta border to near Kitimat. Work in Saskatchewan has been going strong for the past few years — UA Local 179 has grown to 1,700 members from 1,100 during that time and recently surpassed five million man hours — and Telford

says it will continue to be as busy over the next 10 years as in Alberta. "We just cut a brand-new deal in Alberta and tied our rate increases to the price of oil," he says. "If oil goes up, we'll do well."

In addition, there are three big projects ahead in Ontario, with work at Darlington, Bruce and Pickering nuclear power plants. The union also recently made an agreement for work on the last section of the 4,600-km Energy East pipeline project, pending approval. There are also plans for UA to build two ships on the east coast and then another three or four out west — something, Telford notes, that has not been done in Canada for a quarter of a century.

Two areas of huge growth have been in maintenance and sprinklers. "Irving Oil has 180 of my men and women there every day just doing plant maintenance," Telford says. "It's one thing to build an \$8-billion plant, but that project will produce one million man hours of maintenance a year." On a smaller scale, HVAC (heating, ventilation, air conditioning) is also big for the UA, as every unit that's installed will require some kind of maintenance.

Sprinklers are a big growth area for the



CONTRIBUTED

UA as well, particularly since they became mandatory, in May, 2013 in every building of four storeys or more. "It's really impacted our industry," Telford says. "It's growing leaps and bounds for us. In Ontario, we're probably over 80 per cent market share for sprinklers."

What Telford would really like to see in the future is an increase in the amount of Canadian fabrication of materials. And UA Canada is still looking for an additional in-

crease in membership — which is currently around 55,000 — of as much as 10,000 over the next few years.

"We're not without our problems," says Telford. "We compete every day with the nonunion." But he is proud of the fact that the locals have taken their jobs seriously and are willing to move within the collective agreements. "We're not expecting anybody to drop their wages," he adds. "It's about productivity."





Precarious workers in industries like food service often have little protection in the workplace. SHUTTERSTOCK

# A TALE OF TWO WORKERS

## James

James has worked in the cafeteria of 89 Chestnut, a hotel-turned-student residence run by the University of Toronto, for the past eight years.

The 56-year-old father works five evenings a week between September and the end of April, setting up for meals, clearing tables and washing dishes. Most employees are let go for the slower summer months to collect Unemployment Insurance, but because of his relative seniority, James gets two or three days a week of work.

Currently, James's union is in the middle of bargaining for a new contract. He doesn't have too many complaints, though he hopes the company will cover orthopedic shoes. "They are very, very important for us," he says. He makes \$17.94 an hour; his salary was frozen for a couple of years, after which he got a small increase in exchange for giving up some benefits. James and any of his family members can attend the university for free if they wish. "Many of us are doing this type of kitchen work, but it's good for our kids."

## Anna

Anna has worked full-time as a cook in a cafeteria on the same campus of the University of Toronto for almost 15 years.

She works through the summer and makes \$14.55 an hour. When the day is done, the 56-year-old mother is required to take her uniform home and wash it herself. Neither she nor her family members get a break on tuition at the university. Anna works for a subcontractor hired by

the university, not for the university itself. When a new company won the contract to run the cafeteria, Anna and her coworkers had to fight to keep their jobs.

"The hotels have successorship rights but because we're contract workers we do not have those rights," she says. "If a new contractor comes in, they don't have to keep us. That's what we're worried about." Not only is there no real job security, her friends who work directly for the university have better benefits and higher hourly wages. "We're looking for the same thing too," she says.

## Two workers, same workplace, different story

When, as Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne has promised, the Ontario Labour Relations Act is revisited for the first time in 20 years, unions will be pressing for more protection for precarious workers like Anna.

Many of them are in contracted positions that are typically underpaid with few benefits and little job security. When a new subcontractor is hired, all workers are fired and they have to fight to get their jobs back — leaving essentially no possibility of improving their situations.

"There is an entire class of second-class citizens who enjoy fewer rights than everyone else," says David Sanders, organizing director at UNITE HERE, which represents workers in hospitality, airports, laundry and food service, among other industries. "People are falling through the cracks and unable to support themselves and their

families." An overwhelming number of these workers have immigrated to Canada, get trapped in these types of jobs and fall further and further behind.

"The Liberal government is committed to modernizing the Ontario labour rela-

tions regime," adds Sanders. "We particularly want to focus on precarious workers to make sure the labour law system doesn't have cracks that people fall through. We believe that successorship for contract services is important to fill those cracks."

## LABOUR LAW REFORM WISH LIST

In February, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne ordered a review of both the Ontario Labour Relations Act and the Employment Standards Act with the objective of modernizing them, in particular with respect to workers in precarious employment — a segment of the population that has grown by 50 per cent over the last 18 years.

Among unions' wish list for labour law reform:

### Card check certification

To unions it's the gold standard and a key focus for statutory change. When a clear majority of workers — the definition of majority varies from province to province — has signed a card to join a union, the union is certified.

Card checks had been the method used to form a union since the 1950s in Ontario until the Mike Harris government brought in the mandatory secret ballot for certification in 1995.

Unions feel the ballot approach gives an employer enough warning and time to discourage workers from voting to certify.

### Successor rights

For decades Ontario law protected unionized employees from losing their collective bargaining rights when the business for which they worked was sold or transferred. During the 1990s, the law was extended to the contract services sector. But a subsequent change to the OLRA did away with the protection for contract workers, forcing them to fight to retain their jobs if the contractor changes. Unions want those successor rights extended to vulnerable contract workers once again.

### Reinstatement during an organizing campaign

Unions say workers, particularly those in precarious positions, are vulnerable to being terminated or having their hours changed during a certification drive. When that happens to a worker who is known to support unionization, it can discourage other employees from pursuing certification. Unions want the OLRA to allow for any workers who have been treated unfairly to be reinstated in their jobs until their complaints have been heard.



**Carmen Barnwell** TIM FRASER**Michael Johnson** TIM FRASER**Ellen Bekoe** TIM FRASER

# The faces of healthcare in Ontario

## Carmen

It's 11:00 p.m. and her shift just started, but Carmen Barnwell, a Personal Support Worker (PSW), knows it's not the time you put in, but the care you give. Like the other 55,000 SEIU Healthcare members, Barnwell is the heart of healthcare.

SEIU Healthcare, Canada's healthcare union, has been standing up for healthcare workers since 1944, but today sees itself as a union for the 21st century. Adding to its repertoire of standard union servicing, such as collective bargaining and other labour relations activities, innovative, out-of-the-box political activism, policy work, education, advocacy and public awareness are now part of the tool box.

Barnwell is a VON Peel homecare PSW, meaning she works in clients' homes to assist individuals with physical disabilities, mental impairments and other health care needs, with their daily activities and providing bedside care. Although she loves the work and feels it is important to help her clients live as independently as possible, it is not an easy career choice. The job is physically, mentally and emotionally demanding and, generally speaking, not very lucrative financially.

Barnwell has been a PSW for the last 20 years and made this her second career after working in accounting because she is a "people" person and wanted to do something that was more fulfilling. "It's a rewarding vocation. Giving back to the community, contributing to my future; I'm paying it forward — it's a legacy for my children and grandchildren as well as for when I need it in

the future," she says.

It makes sense that this need to help others and serve the greater good would have led her to the union. "I voted for fairness, respect and a united voice. As most homecare PSWs work in isolation and most of us travel from client home to home, we don't have the opportunity to speak to each other or our employer about issues we face," she says.

Last year, SEIU Healthcare championed a wage increase for Ontario's PSWs that will be rolled out in three phases until 2016. What did this wage improvement mean to Barnwell and others like her? "It was a victory for us all. Without a living wage, we work at a loss when you consider we have to pay for a vehicle to get to clients' homes and pay other expenses out of pocket. You go into debt or need to have multiple jobs. Ultimately, clients get less service because of tired PSWs.

"PSW jobs are always in demand but young people don't want to stay in this profession because of the wages. Without more money, they will move onto higher paying professions," she adds.

Looking forward and with an aging population explosion, Barnwell hopes to see more money earmarked for healthcare and the people who are at the heart of it.

## Michael

Michael Johnson has worked at Mount Sinai Hospital for almost 15 years as a Support Service Transporter. Previously part-time, Johnson recently went full-time and was also elected a steward for his unit.

"I got involved because as a part-timer, it was important to me to be the voice of other part-timers who may not have been comfortable bringing their concerns to management. Stewards just have to try their best to be the voice of reason. If you don't have representation, you are lost," Johnson says. "If you are interested in making a difference, there are many channels within the union."

"When I participate in one of SEIU Healthcare's events like the annual picnic or the Labour Day Parade, I feel proud to be part of one big unit with a common goal."

## Ellen

Generating member engagement is a challenging task for any union, but not in the case of Ellen Bekoe, Registered Practical Nurse (RPN) from Parkview Nursing Centre Hamilton.

In fact, just try to keep this millennial go-getter away from the action. She's been involved in numerous political campaigns and elections, community and workplace events, conferences and conventions and has sat on several union committees.

"People think the union does nothing for them and just takes their dues, so I wanted to find out for myself and that's when I got involved," Bekoe says. "I found out the union does all kinds of other things for its members in addition to helping us get better benefits and wages. I was able to get my professional liability insurance for free through the union and since volunteering on the Obama campaign in 2012, I've discovered that the union's political activism and stand

**"I FOUND OUT THE UNION DOES ALL KINDS OF OTHER THINGS FOR ITS MEMBERS IN ADDITION TO HELPING US GET BETTER BENEFITS AND WAGES"**

— Ellen Bekoe

for social justice helps shape the modern workplace."

As an RPN, Bekoe derives great satisfaction from her work. Inspired by her mother-in-law, a nurse from Ghana, she was touched by her experiences with her patients. "Some days she would come home saddened by the death of a patient and other days she'd come home so excited because of the progress of her patients," she said. "Nursing is a good, caring profession and I wanted to be part of that."

This is frequently the sentiment people in healthcare express; a need to help and show compassion for others. But for Bekoe, that feeling doesn't end there — it is her desire to make the world a better place that inspires so much of her union activities. "It makes me a better person and I am able to share what I learn with my co-workers. My voice has power and although once very shy, I'm not afraid to speak up and share my knowledge."

SEIU Healthcare members are an intrinsic piece of the healthcare system and our need for them is ever-increasing. Together, we are with you every step of the way.



# OPSEU head critical of Liberal Party priorities

Ontario's largest public sector union says the provincial government is not putting its priorities on the wellbeing of the citizens who elected it.

"Instead, its priorities are focused on the wellbeing of the wealthy few who funded that election," said Warren (Smokey) Thomas, president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union.

"The Liberal government is moving as fast as it can to take money out of public services and transfer it to profits for bankers, corporate lawyers, construction firms and others.

"The provincial auditor general reports that Ontario paid way too much — \$8 billion too much — for 74 public private partnerships."

Thomas said Ontario certainly needs to build infrastructure, but not by "looting the public purse."

The government would have saved \$8 billion by managing those 74 projects itself, rather than having private corporations administer the construction, financing, legal services, engineering services and project management services, he said.

"In our own lives, when we find we have paid way too much for something, we say we have been ripped off. And when we have been ripped off, we change the way we do things.

"P3s have ripped off Ontario taxpayers to the tune of \$8 billion.

So why hasn't the government stopped?"

Thomas says it comes down to "a cozy little web of Liberal insiders, Bay Street bankers and big construction company owners who are working together. The builders have been key party fundraisers; the lawyers have been campaign chairs; and they have all made generous donations to the Liberals.

"These power brokers are doing all they can to make sure the Liberals dance to their tune. It's working for them, but it is an unmitigated disaster for the rest of us," he said.

"The plan to privatize Hydro One is going to hurt everyone, except the people who buy into it.

"The argument that it will 'broaden the



**Warren (Smokey) Thomas**

CONTRIBUTED



**Bay Street in Toronto.** SHUTTERSTOCK

ownership' is completely false," he said. "The current ownership is the population of Ontario. Privatizing will narrow the ownership to wealthy shareholders who want personal profits. They will win. We will lose."

Selling a portion of Hydro One will also move it out of the accounting transparency required of crown corporations, so we will never know how much we are losing, he said.

"It doesn't even make economic sense. The projects they build won't bring in money to

replace the lost Hydro revenues; worse, they will wear out and need replacement.

"In hard economic times, it doesn't make sense to give up a reliable revenue stream. You wouldn't boot out a tenant to pay the mortgage."

The Liberals have lost \$9.6 billion to corporate income tax cuts since 2010 — more than they'll ever get back from selling Hydro One, he said.

"Restoring corporate tax rates to 2010 levels

would raise over \$9 billion in four years, so the province could fund public services and transit and maintain full ownership of Hydro One.

"Instead, the Wynne government is trying to raise the money from the hard-working people who work in the public sector, Thomas said.

"Meanwhile, the bankers are laughing all the way to — oh right! That's where they work!"

## Facts to consider

- The \$8 billion the government over-spent on 74 Public Private Partnership (P3) contracts has ripped off the equivalent of \$600 for every man, woman and child in Ontario.
- Geoff Smith is the former chief fundraiser for the Ontario Liberals and president and CEO of EllisDon (Company slogan: "We build on great relationships"). EllisDon (top

corporate donor) and its subsidiaries gave \$388,063 to the Ontario Liberals from 2004 to 2014, and built and financed 22 P3 contracts to the tune of \$7 billion.

- Tim Murphy, co-chair of Premier Kathleen Wynne's winning election campaign, practices law with the Bay Street firm of McMillan LLP, where he specializes in public private

partnerships. He also teaches the P3 law at the University of Toronto.

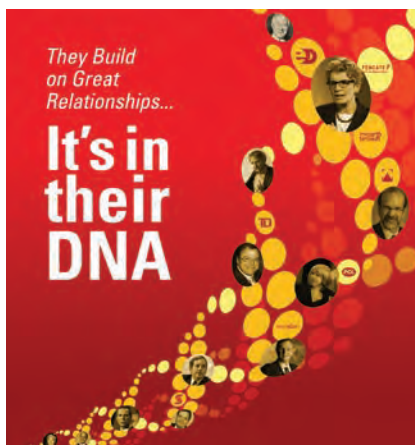
- Ed Clark, former president and CEO of TD Bank Group, heads a group advising Wynne on dealing with government assets. It recommended privatizing Hydro One and introducing beer sales to grocery stores. TD gave the Liberals \$31,375 from 2010 to 2014.
- Bert Clark, Ed's son, is president of Infrastructure Ontario and sits on the board of the Canadian Council for Public Private Partnerships. He served four years as managing director at Scotiabank's global banking and

markets desk. Scotiabank gave the Liberals \$37,925 from 2010 to 2014 and was involved in six P3 contracts valued at \$4.2 billion.

- In a province with widespread crumbling infrastructure, the bulk of the Liberals' infrastructure spending is going to Brampton (Mayor Linda Jeffrey a former Liberal cabinet minister); Mississauga (Mayor Bonnie Crombie a former Liberal MP); Vaughan (Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua a former Liberal MP); Markham (Mayor Frank Scarpitti a former Liberal MP) and Oakville (Mayor Rob Burton a former Liberal MP).



# Proudly promoting *our members* Proudly defending *Ontario*



OPSEU has written a booklet documenting the close personal, financial and political links between Ontario Liberal Party leaders, fundraisers, advisors and the people who benefit greatly from privatization.

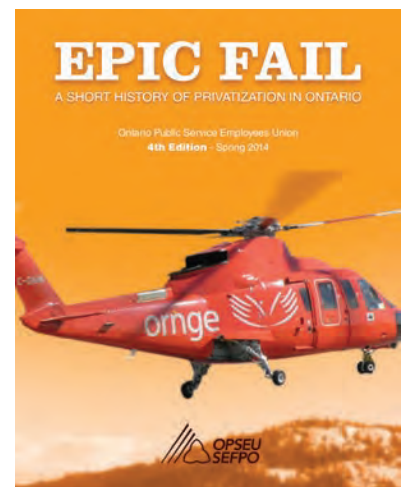
Download It's in their DNA at [bit.ly/1bDLbwD](http://bit.ly/1bDLbwD) or write us for a hard copy at:

**OPSEU** 100 Lesmill  
Toronto, ON M3B 3P8

Another OPSEU publication spells out the disastrous effect privatization has had on public services in Ontario, and the costs borne by Ontario citizens in real dollars and downgraded services.

Download Epic Fail at [opseu.org/information/epic-fail-report](http://opseu.org/information/epic-fail-report) or write us for a hard copy at:

**OPSEU** 100 Lesmill  
Toronto, ON M3B 3P8



**ONTARIO'S UNION**  
**FOR CHANGING TIMES**





RICHARD MACINTOSH

# FIND A REWARDING CAREER AS A UNION BOILERMAKER

Young people who want to write their own career ticket would do well to consider working as a union boilermaker.

“It’s a career that offers excellent compensation and rewarding work,” says Joe Maloney, the head of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers in Canada.

It’s a good time to choose a career as a boilermaker, says Maloney. The union’s workforce projections show steadily increasing demand through to 2018 and beyond for the skills that boilermakers bring to both large construction projects and industrial installations.

Boilermakers are key to the construction and maintenance of oil refineries, electricity generating facilities, natural gas processing plants, chemical plants and other large-scale industrial installations.

They assemble, move and install huge tanks and other vessels; they weld the tubes and high-pressure lines that carry liquids and gasses throughout a plant or processing facility; they install components that must work under significant stress and they maintain strategic plant facilities.

## Working union

Becoming a union boilermaker requires a four-year apprenticeship and a series of examinations that lead to what’s known as a Red Seal qualification. The Red Seal entitles a boilermaker to work across Canada, wherever there’s a facility that requires their skills.

Becoming a member of the Boilermakers union means better pay — ranging to nearly \$60 per hour before overtime



RICHARD MACINTOSH

— as well as belonging to one of the best benefit plans in the country and a solid pension plan with more than \$1 billion in assets, says Maloney.

But working union means more than just pay and benefits. It means respect on the job and a say in the way the work is done. It means working under the best health-and-safety programs and safeguards in the country. It means the chance to upgrade your skills at one of the state-of-the-art training facilities the union operates throughout Canada. And it means getting the best chances at the best work available.

“We maintain a comprehensive online system to let our members know of the best job opportunities right across Canada,” says Maloney. “There has never been a better time to enter the trade.”



RICHARD MACINTOSH

## HOW TO JOIN

Becoming a union boilermaker starts with a single phone call to the union office, or a visit to one of its websites.

Boilermakers Local 128 represents members across Ontario. John Petronski, the business manager and secretary treasurer of the local, can be reached at 905-332-0128.

Prospective members can find more information on the Boilermakers national website ([boilermaker.ca](http://boilermaker.ca)) or on the website of Local 128 ([128.boilermaker.ca](http://128.boilermaker.ca)).

Information on the Boilermakers’ benefit and pension plans is available at [boilermakersbenefits.ca](http://boilermakersbenefits.ca).





# Looking for a career? Get the Boilermaker Advantage.

Canada's Boilermakers union is looking for qualified Boilermakers and new apprentices.

When you join the Boilermakers union, you'll get top-notch pay and benefits. You'll work in an environment where safety is the number one priority. You'll be able to travel across Canada for work. You'll have rights in the workplace and your skills and professionalism will be recognized.

It's a rewarding and challenging career.

Visit [boilermaker.ca](http://boilermaker.ca) for more information on how you can make the Boilermaker Advantage work for you.



## Work union. Join the Boilermakers.

International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders,  
Blacksmiths, Forgers & Helpers

[www.boilermaker.ca](http://www.boilermaker.ca)

Joseph Maloney, International Vice-President



# HEALTH, SAFETY AND UNIONS

For unions, the health and safety of their members has always been of paramount importance. The improvements they have gained over the years in health and safety standards have benefited many Canadian workers, union and non-union alike.

From the first health and safety legislation in Canada in 1884 — the Ontario Factory Act, the first to provide inspectors to check for hazards and dangerous practices in factories — through successive legislative changes, almost all improvements have come about “with the involvement of unions or at the insistence of unions,” notes John Sprackett, chief of staff of the Power Workers Union.

Still, Sprackett adds, before the Occupational Health and Safety Act of 1979, numbers of work-related fatalities in Ontario were high and funerals for friends who had died on the job in his industry were commonplace.

The act “was largely pushed by the union movement,” he says, “but you can’t do anything alone and it couldn’t have been done without the cooperation of the government of the day.” Among other things, the legislation allowed for joint health and safety committees and an internal responsibility system that engaged workers, employers and ministry inspectors. And for the first time it provided people with the right to refuse work in situations they felt were unsafe.

After the legislation came into force, the number of fatalities in the workplace dropped dramatically, but since then improvements have been much slower. Every year, more than 300 people are killed in Ontario workplaces alone — a low estimate, Sprackett says, because of occupational diseases that are not diagnosed or recog-

***“THERE’S REASON TO BE OPTIMISTIC THAT THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE OUT THERE WORKING HARD TO IMPROVE THINGS”***

***– John Sprackett, chief of staff of the Power Workers Union***

nized until decades later. Across the country in 2012, according to the Association of Workers’ Compensations Boards of Canada, more than 950 people died in work-related accidents: 211 of them in construction alone.

Still, there have been marked improvements in the area of violence in the workplace, and there is more discussion now around the quality of safety programs and training.

“A Ministry of Labour inspector has no authority to look at a program and say it’s substandard,” says Sandro Perruzza, CEO of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers and a safety expert with 20 years experience in the field. “Unions have amplified the conversation. They’ve pushed the quality, they’ve questioned what the employers have done. They’ve had the interest of their workers at heart first and foremost, but it also adds to the value of their unions — ‘This is what we can do for you.’”

Still, as long as people are being hurt or dying on the job, there’s a long way to go. “There’s reason to be optimistic that there are a lot of people out there working hard to improve things,” says Sprackett of unions, legislators and employers. “But with 300-plus people dying every year in Ontario workplaces, there’s still a lot of work to do.”



## PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

In a ground-breaking agreement this past March, the Treasury Board and the Public Service Alliance of Canada, which represents more than 170,000 federal government employees, announced a joint task force to look at ways of improving psychological health and safety in their workplace.

At that time, Tony Clement, president of the Treasury Board, said, “I am prepared to work with all bargaining agents, as we take this step in improving how we deal with mental health challenges in our workplaces and reducing the stigma that is often attached to mental illness.”

Every week, according to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, more than half a million Canadians do not go to work because of mental health issues. Almost one-third of disability claims and 70 per cent of disability costs are related to mental illness, and about \$51 billion a year is lost because of it.

While policies are already in place that cover mental health issues, harassment issues and more, PSAC, for one, is taking a

hard look at improving communication of those issues in the workplace and ultimately pressing to adopt recommendations set out in the Commission’s National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace: identifying psychological hazards at work; controlling those that cannot be eliminated; adopting practices that support and promote psychological health and safety at work; and creating a system of review of the approach.

“We’re still in the fairly early stages of making progress but it’s a huge issue and it’s becoming of more interest to unions and employers every year as more is learned about psychological issues and mental health,” says John Sprackett, chief of staff of the Power Workers Union. “The old-style standard focus was discipline the employee for the absenteeism, and sometimes that just exacerbated the problem. Now the focus is on health and the absenteeism goes down when mental health is improved.”



# Workplace Fatalities Should be Unacceptable in Modern Society



BY DON MACKINNON  
President  
Power Workers' Union

According to the Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) statistics, every year in Ontario, 250 to 300 workers lose their lives as a result of traumatic workplace accidents and occupational illnesses. In 2013, 194,393 accident claims were filed with the Ontario WSIB.

All of those killed and injured were ordinary people working to make a living — mothers, fathers, daughters and sons. With the passage of Ontario's *Occupational Health and Safety Act (the Act)* in 1979, workplace fatalities dropped significantly over the following years. Unfortunately, since this initial decrease, the number of workers killed in the province's workplaces has remained at almost one per day.

On April 28th, the "National Day of Mourning", we remembered those who lost their lives as a result of work-related accidents or occupational diseases. Actions taken in the mid-1980s by the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Canadian Labour Congress were instrumental in establishing this day of remembrance. This date was chosen

because Canada's first comprehensive *Workers' Compensation Act* received Third Reading in Ontario on that day in 1914. It is now recognized in one fashion or another in more than 100 countries.

Unions like the Power Workers' Union (PWU) have worked diligently with employers in our industry over the last seven decades to establish a province-wide safety framework for the protection of the general public and workers.

PWU members work in a wide variety of locations and weather conditions across Ontario. Extreme weather often creates situations, such as those seen during the December 2013 ice storm, that are among the most potentially dangerous anywhere. Dedication to the development and implementation of safe work procedures, planning, training and experience are all essential to insulate workers from potential hazards. Today, new technologies are dramatically changing the way Ontario's electricity system operates. These changes require an unwavering commitment to the development of new work methods, procedures and training in order to achieve accident-free workplaces in the future.

Traditionally, electricity flowed from large hydroelectric, nuclear and coal generating stations along a network of transmission and distribution wires to our homes, businesses and factories. Now, reliability must be maintained while managing a two-way flow of power that can change rapidly. Large numbers of small-scale consumer-owned wind turbines, solar panels and biogas generators produce intermittent power to sell to the grid at one price, while buying the electricity they use from the grid at another.

A customer can become a generator at any time and many can be both customer and generator simultaneously. It is a constant challenge in our industry to ensure that safe work methods keep up with rapidly changing technologies.

Regardless of the industry, there are hazards present in all workplaces. Work needs to be carefully planned with a focus on safety and workers must be well trained to implement the plan. All hazards must be identified, eliminated or controlled. Anything else will result in accidents, injuries and fatalities. Special attention needs to be

---

## Ensuring workplace safety requires constant vigilance on the part of employers, unions, workers, Ministry of Labour officials and legislators.

---

placed on ensuring that new workers are supervised effectively and given adequate knowledge and understanding of workplace hazards and safe work procedures so they come home safe and sound at the end of their workday.

In Ontario, our workplace health and safety system relies on the co-operation of employers and workers through the appointment of Health and Safety Representatives and the establishment of Joint Health and Safety Committees that are required to inspect, identify and

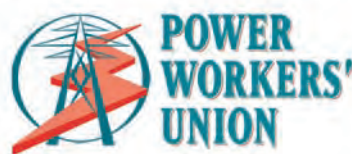
address health and safety issues in the workplace. It should be no surprise that the safest workplaces are those where employer and worker representatives genuinely cooperate to create an accident-free environment. When the parties can't agree, the Ministry of Labour can be called to assist or intervene.

The single most important legal right that a worker has to protect himself or herself in Ontario workplaces is the right to refuse to work in situations where the worker has reason to believe that they have not been adequately trained to perform a particular task safely or that the work plan, the equipment, the physical condition of the workplace or the threat of workplace violence is likely to endanger them. In the event that a health and safety related work refusal is not resolved immediately to the satisfaction of the worker, the Ministry of Labour is called to investigate and prescribe remedies to ensure that workers are safe. Workers are protected from retaliation by their employer in these instances under the *Act*.

This year in Ontario, thousands of workers will be injured and hundreds more will die from workplace accidents and industrial illnesses. All of these accidents are needless, preventable and unacceptable. Ensuring workplace safety requires constant vigilance on the part of employers, unions, workers, Ministry of Labour officials and legislators.

Regrettably, we still have a long way to go to eliminate workplace deaths and injuries. Every year at our somber Day of Mourning ceremonies, we renew our commitment to achieve those goals. We speak for the dead to protect the living.

**FROM THE PEOPLE WHO HELP KEEP THE LIGHTS ON.**





# WE ARE THE FACE OF HEALTHCARE IN ONTARIO TOGETHER WE ARE STRONGER

We've been in healthcare for over 70 years and our 55,000 sisters and brothers are here to work with you in partnership for the good of the public healthcare system. We put our patients, clients and residents first. We've seen and done it all and it is through this experience we are able to provide insights from the frontline, conduct research and collaborate with government on public policies to improve on smart healthcare delivery through our union, SEIU Healthcare.

Together, we are using our unique knowledge of the healthcare sector to build capacity for an aging population in difficult economic times.

**We're with you every step of the way.**

 SEIU Healthcare  
 @SEIUHealthCan  
SEIUHEALTHCARE.CA



CANADA'S HEALTHCARE UNION

