

# WORKING WOMEN, WORKING POOR

Prabha Khosla  
for the Women and  
Work Research Group



## **Acknowledgements**

The Women and Work Research Group was the advisory group for the research. Its members include: Jenny Ahn, Unifor; Carolyn Egan, United Steelworkers; Helen Kennedy, CUPE Local 79; Yolanda McLean, CUPE Local 4400; and Winnie Ng, CAW Sam Gindin Chair in Social Justice and Democracy, Ryerson University. The primary researcher and author was Prabha Khosla.

We want to thank the Labour Temple and the Toronto and York Region Labour Council for providing the funding for this project, Unifor for the printing, CUPE Local 4400 for funding the design, and the United Steelworkers for the use of their facilities and the coordination of their women members who have lost jobs over the past years.

We are very grateful to the many women who gave their time for the focus discussion groups and who agreed to be interviewed as key informants. They are the heart and soul of this research. We hope their lives, experiences and recommendations as working women in the Greater Toronto Area will lead to improvements in the working lives of the diverse women of the GTA.

### **The women who made this research possible**

Aledeli Albán Reyna, Alex Thomson, Alicia Garriques, Anastasia Luz Adora, Andria Babbington, Anne Brunelle, Angela Wright, Barbara Janaczek, Carmen Barnwell, Catarina Luis, Chris Nilima Rahim, Christina Meynell, Deanne Smith, Deqa Abdurahman, Elizabeth Gordon, Ewa Maria Bekus-Pitrulli, Jennifer Owatan, Juith Austin, Justine Lilley, Laura Thompson, Leah Thi, Lilowtee Deonarine, Lorriane Cindy Krysac, Lucia Pisco, Lula Alj, Josie Sanita, Judith Rathan, Julie McGitchie, Maggie Seng, Maria Cruz, Martha Mengistu, Maureen O'Reilly, Nancy Reid, Nicole Frances, Nora Loreto, Pam Sanichar, Rose, Roselee Washington, Sailaja Krishnamurti, Sara Ahmed, Seng Sayanawong, Tapasi Panja, Thelma Hipplewith and Tiffany Nembhard.

The vast majority of the women chose to use their real names. A few of the women did not want to use their real names due to possible repercussions at their jobs. They provided the pseudonyms we used in this Report.

### **The women's unions**

CUPW Canadian Union of Postal Workers  
CUPE Canadian Union of Public Employees  
ETFO Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario  
IBEW International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and Women in Trades  
IWomen Workers (live-in care givers)  
ONA Ontario Nurses Association  
OPSEU Ontario Public Sector Employees Union  
SEIU Healthcare Service Employees International Union  
TPLWU Toronto Public Library Workers Union (CUPE Local 4948)  
Unifor  
UNITE HERE Local 75  
USW United Steelworkers

Cover photograph: Andrew Miller, SEIU Healthcare  
Layout & design: NOMAD Design

March 2014  
skcop343

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# Executive Summary

This publication is the result of a participatory research project, motivated by the need to focus attention on the lives of the diverse working women in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Today the GTA is becoming a low-wage economy, with extensive loss of good unionized jobs and growing poverty which is increasingly feminized, racialized and includes high numbers of newer immigrants. The objective of the research was to highlight the lives of the working — i.e. waged women in the GTA in their own voices.

The research objectives were to: i) Make visible the lived experiences of diverse women workers who have been affected by job losses; ii) Explore what is happening with women workers in unions; and iii) Explore the impact of the loss of union jobs on women workers as a result of the last recession.

Forty-four women participated in the research. Twenty-seven in three focus discussion groups and 17 in key informant interviews. The focus discussion groups and interviews were conducted between May 2013 and January 2014. The women belonged to a wide range of occupations, professions, workplaces, unions and they were also unemployed.

## Research Findings

**A common thread running through the interviews of women participating in this study** has been the sense that women have lost considerable ground in the workforce and that it is now a matter of trying to cope with precarious jobs and a precarious future. This sense of being ‘squeezed’ was shared across all sectors and age groups but particularly acute at the two ends of the age spectrum.

**Older women workers expressed great frustration and despair, feeling squeezed out** of a labour market that no longer values their skills, their maturity and workplace experiences. They felt they were now easily replaced and ‘disposable’. They also saw a domino effect where they lost both a long tenure job and their union representation, a double-jeopardy for them and their families.

**Due to the growth of precarious jobs as employment, it is increasingly difficult to classify** women by their occupation or even the sector they work in. Widespread restructuring and cutbacks have forced women to seek work in totally different sectors and job classifications shifting for example, from full-time work as a machine operator to a part-time job in food processing. A precarious labour market is de-skilling women.

**Younger women on the other hand expressed a palpable frustration with being stuck** in a vicious, perpetual cycle of short-term contract and temporary jobs, despite the years they had invested in securing an education and degrees. They felt squeezed out of the labour market before they even had a chance to get in.

**The inter-generational squeeze was highlighted in the experiences of these women** when they worked with temp agencies and in part-time and non-union jobs.

**While these current realities may be grim, many of the women who were interviewed** continued to put forth ideas about changes they want to see so that women have more stability and dignity at work and in their lives more generally.

**The recommendations from the research are grouped in three categories** — reclaiming the union advantage, protecting workers’ rights in precarious employment, and improving social infrastructures and supports for women workers and their families.

## **Recommendations from the research**

### **Reclaiming the union advantage**

- All levels of government must recognize that unions play a vital role in advancing women's equality and economic independence. Barriers must be removed to organizing women through pro-active legislative changes and new forms of organizing and bargaining collectively in the workplace.
- The automatic certification process should be extended to workers in all sectors, including female-predominated sectors, and no longer be restricted to workers in the construction and building industries. A card check process will greatly assist women to organize and join a union without fear of reprisals.
- A policy review of the Ontario Labour Relations Act should be conducted with a mandate to provide more legislative support for women workers in non-traditional workplace settings and non-standard employment. The review should take into account current labour market restructuring with special consideration of the legislative framework needed to facilitate sectorial organizing and bargaining.
- Labour unions need to dedicate substantive resources to strengthen organizing women, youth, racialized workers, and indigenous workers, especially those in precarious work. The Community Chapter model being pursued by Unifor, the pre-organizing partnership between USW and live-in caregivers; and the organizing model of fast food workers in the United States illustrate the possibilities of innovative organizing.
- Unions should also be encouraged to utilize the experiences and knowledge of former union activists as organizers and maintain their meaningful participation and ties with their home unions.
- Unions need to engage the diversity of women workers more actively in their organizations and ensure that the equity agenda remains as part of the union's bargaining and mobilizing priorities. They must also support the advancement of more women, particularly racialized women, in leadership.

### **Protecting the rights of women workers in precarious employment**

- A permanent Temporary Agency Unit should be established with the Employment Standards Branch to strengthen the protection of temporary agency workers. Such a Unit with dedicated staff and resources will be able to initiate investigations, monitor and conduct proper enforcement of employment standards.
- Employment Standards should take measures to narrow the wage disparities among workers in precarious work arrangement doing similar work. There should be an equal pay provision on an hourly basis for workers performing comparable work duties, regardless of their full-time, part-time or temporary status.
- Labour and community need to continue the campaign for a \$14/hr minimum wage in Ontario. It will bring a significant improvement to the lives of women workers who make up the majority of low wage workers.
- The growing homecare sector is the new job ghetto for women workers, in particular racialized and immigrant women. There is a strong need for government, employers and unions to develop a sectoral strategy and standard to end some of the exploitation and enable some stability in the employment for the escalating number of PSWs in this sector. The recommendations put forth by SEIU listed in Section 5.6 if implemented, will first and foremost, improve the quality of care for seniors and other service users.

- There is an urgent need for government, labour and employers to develop a proactive strategy to ensure women workers can transition from temp work arrangements to permanent status within the same workplace. The current practices which can be arbitrary and discriminatory, have effectively kept women in job ghettos with low pay and unsure job prospects. A more equitable access to secure employment can be an issue that the Women's Directorate, Citizenship and the Ontario Human Rights Commission can jointly work on.
- A two or multiple tiered wage system is being forced on workers in both the public and private sectors. Unions should continue to resist this effort that penalizes younger workers or recent hires and create a divided workforce and solidarity.
- Pay equity remains a significant issue for women. Unions and communities need to continue to be vigilant to ensure that all women are paid a fair wage.

#### **Strengthening social infrastructure**

- Community and Labour should renew the call for a national publicly funded childcare system that is affordable, universal and accessible to working women. Both Federal and Ontario governments should consider the feasibility and adaptability of the Quebec model for implementation in Ontario.
- Public services such as accessible and affordable transit, health care, library services, and community and recreation centres are critical support services that keep women workers juggling between work and family responsibilities with some reprieve and grace. In essence, public services in the community are women's services. Unions and broader community partners must continue to resist the privatization of public services, contracting out and the reduction of staff which leads to the reduction of services that women depend on.

# Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This publication is the result of a participatory research project motivated by the need to focus attention on the lives of the diverse working women in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Today the GTA is becoming a low-wage economy, with extensive loss of good unionized jobs and growing poverty which is increasingly feminized, racialized and includes high numbers of newer immigrants. The objective of the research was to highlight the lives of the working — i.e. waged women in the GTA in their own voices. Women's lives as waged workers are quite different than those of men workers due to their multiple responsibilities in the home and in their communities.

Specifically, the participatory research objectives were to: i) Make visible the lived experiences of diverse women workers who have been affected by job losses; ii) Explore what is happening with women workers in unions; and iii) Explore the impact of the loss of union jobs on women workers as a result of the last recession.

The women who participated in the research were from a wide range of unions, occupations, professions and workplaces. They were also unemployed and precariously employed. Women belonged to unions, used to belong to unions until they got laid-off, and some did not belong to unions at all. The majority of the younger women interviewed were students and also working part-time. The research was conducted between May 2013 and January 2014. The final Section, 'How we did the research' explains the research methods and process.

The information below describes the women we spoke with.

### THE WOMEN WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE RESEARCH

The total number of women involved in the research

**44**

The number of women who participated in Focus Discussion Groups (FDGs)

**27**

Women interviewed as Key Informants

**17**

### TABLE 1 WOMEN IN THE RESEARCH

**26 (59%)** Racialized (Canadian born) & Immigrant

**18 (41%)** Non-racialized (Canadian born) & immigrant

**39 (88.63%)** Union (including women laid-off from union jobs)

**5 (11.36%)** Non-union

**11 (25%)** Public Sector

**30 (68.18%)** Private Sector

**2 (4.54%)** Broader Public Sector

It is difficult to give the precise numbers of women for each sector of the economy due to the involvement of a significant number of women in part-time and precarious work. This means that a woman could be working in both the public and private sector and in more than one occupational category simultaneously. For example, she could be working as a unionized Personal Support Worker (PSW) in a hospital; thus, in the public sector, and also be working part-time in a hotel in the private sector. Or, she could have two part-time union jobs in two totally different public sector services.

That said, we can confirm that women who participated in the research worked in manufacturing, hotels, restaurants, retirement homes, people's own homes, in a hospital, a college, a university, for the City of Toronto, a public school, public library, in telecommunications, the Ontario government and the broader public sector. A few of them were students in post-secondary institutions and also working part-time.

The research project was a small project to focus on the reality of women's lives as waged workers in the GTA. It is by no means comprehensive of all sectors of the economy nor was that its intention. It is hoped that this research will encourage others to engage in further investigations into the lives of diverse women of the GTA and explore further the links between unionization, economic and social development, equality for women and social justice. The research project also hoped to highlight the need for more dis-aggregated data collection and analysis not only on the basis of gender, but on the intersection<sup>1</sup> of gender with race, ethnicity, age, class, ability, aboriginality, sexual orientation and gender identity, language, religion and location.

## 1.2 Women, work and unions

Feminist activists and academics point to the 1970s and the 1980s as a time when women began organizing to win equality in the Canadian labour movement. This was the period following the entry of thousands of women into public sector jobs in the late 1960s and early 1970s as well as the growth of the 'second wave' of feminism. As a large number of women entered the labour force, they also joined unions. Women's issues such as equal pay, child care, violence and harassment against women and reproductive choice entered the world of collective bargaining and collective agreements and women began taking positions in trade union leadership (Briskin, et al., 2013, 30).

In 1980, 50,000 federal clerks took to the streets to demand fair wages — one of the largest strike actions ever launched in Canada. Three quarters of the participants were women. This strike helped build women leaders and pushed women's issues to the top of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC's) agenda as well as that of other unions.<sup>2</sup> Issues of fair wages, protection from violence, discrimination and sexual harassment and access to child care are still key issues for women across the labour market.

Over these same decades, immigrant and racialized women and men entered the labour force in greater numbers. Civil society movements such as for women's rights, LGBTI rights, against racism, for the rights of peoples with disabilities, in support of the struggles of First Nations, migrant workers, students and younger workers — pushed the understanding of rights and equality to a more nuanced analysis of the intersectionality of identities and associations. This brought new influences into the labour movement to expand the rights agenda in negotiations in work places and in the broader society.

With the shift to neo-liberal policies and the recession of the 1980s, the Canadian economy experienced radical transformations with the loss of thousands of jobs in traditional sectors such as manufacturing, construction, mining and forestry. Economic setbacks and restructuring by governments and the private sector resulted in a decline in the number of full-time jobs and an increase in part-time work. By 1994, 23% of all jobs were part-time and rates for women remained relatively constant at 69%, although some men moved into part-time jobs. Between 1976 and 1994, the percentage of involuntary part-time work tripled from 12% to 36%. Thirty-four percent of part-time women workers wanted full-time work in 1994. This also meant that many people were forced to hold more than one job to earn a living. In 1994, more women, especially young women, held multiple jobs than men.<sup>3</sup> The economy expanded in the services sectors such as financial, retail, and hospitality and increased low-wage precarious work where workers experience severe exploitation.





In the financial meltdown of 2007-2008 or what is also called the recession of 2008, as with previous recessions, thousands of working women and men lost their jobs and livelihoods. Those working in the manufacturing sector in the GTA and Ontario experienced the greatest loss of employment. According to Hennessy and Stanford (2013) the manufacturing sector has been shrinking rapidly since 2004, when it employed over 1.1 million workers... by 2012 approximately 800,000 workers were still employed in this sector. Following the recession of 2008, more than 200,000 working women and men lost their manufacturing jobs in the GTA and Ontario (p.12). Many of the jobs that were lost were good jobs with full-time steady work and benefits. Most of these good jobs were union jobs.

Many women worked and still continue to work in the manufacturing sector. During this round of manufacturing job losses many women lost jobs they had for 20-30 years. The consequence of the loss of work has been devastating for the women themselves personally as well as for their families.

Many jobs were also lost in the hospitality sector, and a growing number due to downsizing and contracting out and privatization of public services. Simultaneously, there has been a growth in 'agencies' — companies that contract workers for insecure and low-waged precarious work. The growth of precarious work is occurring in all sectors of the economy — in manufacturing, retail and food services, hospitality, health, education, and government services.

There is little doubt that precarious work is replacing 'standard employment relationships'

or SERs. Or, in other word, a secure permanent job at 40 hrs/week with benefits. According to the recent PEPSO (2013) study, the number of people in the GTA who describe their jobs as temporary has increased by 40% in the four years from 2007 to 2011. Additionally, according to the same study, in 2011 only half of the employed people in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area between the ages of 25 to 65 were in 'standard employment relationships' or SERs and another 9% were in permanent part-time employment (p.16).

There is clearly a link between the recession, the loss of good jobs and the loss of union density in the GTA and Ontario. These three trends are also linked to the austerity agenda.

Austerity measures implemented by municipal, provincial and federal governments refer to policies to reduce government spending and increase taxes on the premise that this will balance the budget. Austerity measures also include privatization, out-sourcing, cuts in services, maximization of profits and attacks against workers and unions. Reducing government spending means cut-backs to public sector services such as in health, education, child care, transportation, etc. provided by governments. Reducing public services also means layoffs of employees in the public sector many of whom are women. The cuts in services such as child care, recreational programmes, extended health, libraries, etc. increase women's domestic burdens.

Governments can stimulate the economy by creating jobs for the provision of better education and health care facilities and services, expand public infrastructure such as for public transportation, affordable and accessible childcare, affordable housing, better quality retirement homes and services for the elderly, environmental protection and the upgrading of infrastructure such as for water, sewerage and solid waste management in the Toronto Area and across the province. Such employment options need to intentionally hire both women and men, racialized women and men and young women and men as per their composition in the local populations.

Women have always faced numerous discriminations in the labour force and continue to be paid less than men for equal work. This difference in wages is referred to as the gender wage gap. It is usually measured by assessing full-time, full year wages. According to Statistics Canada data, the gender wage gap in Ontario is 28%. This means that for every \$1.00 earned by a male worker, a female worker earns 72 cents.<sup>4</sup>

Research from the Wellesley Institute indicates that in Ontario more women than men are likely to be working for the minimum wage and many of them are likely to be racialized and immigrant. From the total number of workers in Ontario who are minimum wage earners, 16.3% of them are racialized women, 11.3% are the total number of women, 8.7% are racialized men and 7.4% are the total number of men. Women who are recent immigrants are working for minimum wage at almost 3 times the rate of the total population (Block, 2013, p.4).

Furthermore, according to the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), 57% of the working-age population is immigrant and the proportion of the working poor in the CMA who were immigrants was 73% (Stapleton et al, 2012, p11).<sup>5</sup> This data establishes a strong link between one's immigrant status and poverty.

Women are the ones primarily, though not exclusively, responsible for and do the majority of the work of the 'care economy'. The care economy includes both paid and unpaid care activities. The unpaid care economy includes raising children, preparing food, cleaning, washing, looking after family members and relatives, and sustaining family and community networks. Thousands of women in the GTA not only work in the care economy, they also work in the production and waged economy. They often do more than one job. Unfortunately, despite how much work women do whether working in the home and/or outside the home, women and their families continue to live as the working poor. Clearly, single mother households fare a lot worse than dual income households.

## Our Findings

### WORK REALITIES

#### 2.1 The harsh impact of the loss of unionized jobs

The job losses in the recession of 2008 were predominantly in manufacturing and then in construction, transportation, warehousing, and primary industries (CLC, 2009, 3, 17, 18). Unemployment in the Toronto region increased on average by 2.6% in the first year (Ibid, p.19). While more men than women lost jobs in this last recession, there were many women who also lost jobs in manufacturing and related industries and services and with devastating consequences. Not much attention was paid to the hundreds of diverse women who lost manufacturing jobs compared to the focus on men who lost manufacturing jobs. Amongst other things, this research documents the experience of women who lost manufacturing and service sector jobs in recent years.

Our research indicates that many women considered 'older', i.e. in their late 40s to early 60s who lost jobs in manufacturing and the hospitality sector are not able to get work due to age discrimination. They are skilled in their trades and professions and have a long history of work in each of their sectors and sometimes they worked in two jobs in the same sector. For many immigrant women, racialized and non-racialized, their jobs in manufacturing, the hospitality and public sectors were their first jobs when they came to Canada about 20-30 years ago. They all thought they would retire from these jobs and never thought they would be laid-off. Their ages at the time of layoffs were between the mid-40s to the late 50s.

The difficulty of 'older' immigrant and often racialized immigrant women in securing stable and secure employment once they lose 'permanent' jobs is also verified by the recently published research about the case of the workers from Progressive Moulded Products (PMP). See Ng et al. (2013). The 2,400 workers at PMP — an auto parts manufacturer, were locked out in the summer of 2008.

We had the opportunity to speak with women from the United Steelworkers (USW), a union which saw many workers lose jobs and many manufacturing plants close in the recent recession. In their powerful testimonies below, the women speak of their devastation at the loss of long-term employment, the stress and depression they went through and their shock at not being able to find other work.

#### CATARINA LUIS, USW, LAID-OFF & UNEMPLOYED

"I worked for NRI industries. We made rubber car parts. I started in 1991, and we were all laid off in 2007. We were told by management that the company was having difficulty making profits, because they were competing with China that made cheaper parts. Even though we made quality parts, at the time car manufacturers were having hard time, especially the manufacturers that we supplied the most. Under these circumstances, they preferred to buy the parts cheaper. About 600 people worked at the plant. Not everyone was laid off. The company filed for bankruptcy. Apparently the bankruptcy happened to scale down the company. Then they got rid of workers. They went down to 100 or 200 people. All the people with high seniorities are those that stayed. Others were laid off. We didn't get any severance package because of bankruptcy. They are managing to pay the other 100-200 workers, because bankruptcy was a manoeuver to get rid of staff without a severance package. They closed the plant. The company changed the name and re-hired the 100-200 people. Same building. Same work. I was making \$11/hr in the beginning, and when I left in 2007 it was about \$12/hr.



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MACLENNAN

These days it's very hard to get a job and keep one. The one thing that I have noticed is that employers are trying to overpower the unions by discriminating against mature, experience workers by giving preference to students and young people because they have limited hours and they don't mind to have limited hours. My plans are to find a job. I am over 50. My children are grown up so I basically have to support myself. I have been looking for work everywhere. Just recently I filled out an application for Value Village. Before, you could walk into the store; they would give you an application. Now you have to go online and it takes you so long. They ask so many questions. They are making it so difficult. Especially with this Conservative government we have now, I noticed that the employers have more power. Now they can do whatever they feel like. Before, experience and maturity was an asset. Now it almost works against you."

#### **LUCIA PISCO, USW, LAID-OFF & UNEMPLOYED**

"I have lived in Canada for 24 years. I worked at Distinctive Designs for 11 years. The factory closed in 2010. I cut the material for furniture making, for leather, for teraline. Four factories altogether, I worked in one, it closed, then I worked in another for one year, and then it happened again. The last factory I worked in for three years. I worked in three of the factories in total. Same company, same work. I made \$11.25/hour. About 100 workers in total. Different workers got different pay. I did heavy work, but paid very little. I was the only one on the line. But I liked it. Before that when I came to Canada in 1989, I assembled doors. The factory closed for good and I cannot get another job."

While many jobs were lost in manufacturing, women also lost jobs in other sectors either due to closure, relocation of businesses or contracting out. Women who came to Canada expecting better treatment of workers expressed shock at how they were treated as workers in this country.

Pam Sanichar was a machine operator in a unionized manufacturing plant — Stackpole — for over 25 years. The plant closed and more than 500 women and men lost their jobs. She has never recovered from the loss of that job and even though it is now 7 years since she lost that job, she has not been able to get another full-time secure job. The depression, ill-health and loss of identity that she speaks of is common to many women in her situation.

### **The devastation of job loss and the lack of work**

#### **PAM SANICHAR, USW, LAID-OFF & PRECARIOUS WORKER**

I used to work at Stackpole in Toronto. I was a machine operator for 25 years. I enjoyed it. We had Steelworkers as our union. We had 500 employees. Gradually they started to lay us off. We went down to 175 workers. In 2006 there was a plant closure. All of us were laid off. Since 2006, I'm out of work. It was devastating. I thought I would retire there.

You should see the men and women. All the workers were in tears. We had two months to leave. It was very tough. I loved my job. I had no problem with anyone. I was laid off at 50 years old. I don't want to think of it, but I was stressed for months. I lost weight; I used to cry every day when my husband went to work. We used to leave home together in the morning. My husband works in Toronto.

They said don't stress, you'll get sick. For the time being, I couldn't get EI. They gave us a severance package. So in 2008 I started EI. I got EI for 36 weeks. And I started looking for job. I applied to agencies, I was with about six agencies and nothing happened. They call you, you work for one week or two weeks and then your assignment is finished.

The agency pays you \$10.50/hr and up. I know one company making \$20/hr and I was making \$10. But I took it because I needed the work. One day I was making my lunch and the agency called and said don't go to work. So I dropped everything.

For over one year now, I have had shoulder pain, tendinitis. I did contract work from 2008-2012. I worked with some companies — two companies, and I was bullied. It was so stressful. Through agencies, I was a machine operator, I worked the line. I did quality control. All the jobs were in manufacturing. You are working your butt off, and the other employees are just looking at you. I was just doing my job. I worked in a meat processing plant. I was bullied by full-timers. It was unionized and I came from the agency. When I was bullied I couldn't say anything because I was a temp. I was so stressed from the bullying. When there was a break, I went to the washroom and just broke down. The ladies came in and asked what happened. I wanted to quit but they said you can't. You need the work and you need to finish 1000 hrs to get \$20/hr. And I was getting the hours through the agency. After 6 weeks, the agency said don't go to work, my assignment was finished. So you're making \$14.50 and now the assignment is finished. Since then, I didn't go back and also because of trouble with my shoulder.

I am hoping to get something once I'm better. I don't want to retire yet. I used to make \$20/hr and then all this happened.

### **TAPASI PANJA, UNITE HERE, RESTAURANT WORKER**

“I left my dream job and came to Canada with high hopes for a better tomorrow. For three months I looked for a job as a teacher and I couldn’t one. I wanted to support my daughter with her studies, so I joined the food industry. And I did very well there, everything was fine. I saved money. I am supporting myself and my daughter. My husband was working but I wanted to be independent. I wanted to prove that I could do it. Then I was laid off from the restaurant. It was difficult to pay the bills and university fees for my daughter after the restaurant closure. My daughter graduated at 20. I’m planning to go back to school but the university fees... so I’m looking for work. I’m 47; I don’t know where to start. Should I go back to food industry, or school? I’m just giving my resumes to many places. I get interviews but nothing has happened after nine months.”

### **LULA ALJ, UNITE HERE, RESTAURANT WORKER**

“I worked at Richtree restaurant in the Eaton’s Centre for six and a half years. Everything was okay; we were working so hard as a team. Finally they said we’re going to renovate and we’re going to move to a new place. But that didn’t happen. It was very shocking. They closed down; they pay 3 months wages, and then severance payment. Life is not easy. When I worked at Richtree I was so happy. I have no husband. I take care of my children, my two boys. With benefits and the union it was okay. And then it was just a nightmare. It is not easy when you have a family.

They re-opened and I don’t know why they don’t hire us. This is Canada. They say it’s a democracy, right? We have the right to fight for our job. To get a job is not easy. We are looking for work. I don’t know how this happens here. Where are our human rights? Where are labour rights? I know the union is fighting so hard for us; I just want to know we will fight to the end and get our jobs back.”

Richtree restaurant workers are members of UNITE HERE Local 75. In January 2013 about 40 employees were let go and given severance pay. The workers did not realize that Richtree management was planning to renovate and re-open the same business a few meters from the previous location. In September 2013 the restaurant re-opened with non-union staff. The members and the union protested the unfair dismissal of workers and the loss of their jobs. In early January 2014 the Ontario Labour Relations Board issued a decision confirming that their union, UNITE HERE Local 75, continues to have bargaining rights at their workplace. Local 75 is continuing to fight for the reinstatement of the original workers.

### **MARIA CRUZ, USW, LAID-OFF HOTEL WORKER, PRECARIOUS WORKER**

“I miss the security of a union job where I know I am going to get x amount of money on a regular basis. I could plan a vacation, because I knew when I was getting vacation time with pay. Now I cannot even plan a lunch with friends. If I am with friends and I get a call, I have to go right away.

I was lucky I got this part-time casual cleaning job at the hospital. Someone told me they were hiring there. There are no benefits like I used to have before, and there is no vacation pay. I have to take this medication that costs \$100/month and I have pay for that myself. I went to get my teeth cleaned and it cost me \$300. There is no workers’ compensation coverage. The pension that I had from my work at Sutton Place, the union transferred that to my RRSP and I will get that when I am 65.

I hope to have more work so that I can qualify for a pension. I am hoping that next month they will call me and make me permanent part-time and I will get more

hours so that I can qualify for a pension. But, I don't think I will get there. I don't think I will ever become permanent full-time. I have another 10 years of work ahead of me and there are a lot of people ahead of me at the hospital. Maybe when I am 80 or maybe when I am dead! I don't have a chance."

As full-time secure work disappears, women have no option but to join the thousands of other women and men in precarious work. This has led to the impoverishment of hundreds of women and men in the GTA.

## 2.2 From full-time to precarious work

The GTA is now becoming a low-wage economy with the growing dominance of precarious work as the norm. Noack and Vosko (n.d), characterize precarious jobs as having high levels of uncertainty, low-income, a lack of control over the labour process, and limited access to regulatory protections (p.3).

The PEPSO study (2013) which examined poverty, employment precarity and household well-being in the Hamilton and Greater Toronto Area, concluded that over the last 20 years precarious forms of employment had increased by nearly 50% (p.5). That full-time secure, i.e. 40hrs/week employment is difficult to get and the only options are precarious work has been the experience of many women in the research.

According to the Toronto Workers' Action Centre (WAC), a worker-based organization committed to improving the lives and working conditions of people in low-wage and unstable employment, "More people are finding themselves in part-time, contract work, often juggling two or three jobs. Workers are facing greater difficulty planning daily lives and supporting families. Many jobs today fail to provide adequate incomes, supplemental health benefits, sick pay or pensions. Work is not a pathway out of poverty for all too many workers" (WAC et al., 2012).

Women still need to work even if they are 'older'. The responsibility of providing for the family, paying rent or a mortgage does not end even if their employment does. Women's lives become more stressful, precarious and difficult as the only work they can get is through temp agencies. They have now joined the ranks of the thousands of workers who cannot get a secure 40hr/week job. They are now workers who are casual, part-time, casual part-time, temporary part-time, or on call. Unemployment and precarious work makes the women's loss of good unionized jobs all the more painful. The research also highlights that work has become precarious in almost all sectors and professions of the economy.

### **ROSELEE WASHINGTON, USW, LAID-OFF & PRECARIOUSLY EMPLOYED**

"I got called to go for an interview after a long time of no work. There was a supervisor on the floor. I don't know if the supervisor had to be in the interview but he was. And he said to the boss, 'she's too old!'

The boss said she's qualified for the job, because look at her resume, and I'm looking for qualified people for the job. The boss said, 'You have to do a working interview.' I think it lasted 2.5 hours. The boss said, 'Ok, we'll call you.' Later that day, the boss called me. He said, 'You're hired. You have the job. Can you start working blah blah.' I said, 'Yes, yes.' But the supervisor didn't like it because I was too old. The supervisor would make comments. After about a month, one Friday evening, the supervisor said to me 'I'm sorry that I have to tell you, that we do not need you anymore.' I liked that job. It paid \$12/hr. But I didn't care. I liked the job, I needed a job. I have three boys at home. I had so many bills to pay. I have hydro, gas... I said, 'I was just getting used to this job and I really liked it.' Yeah, I told him, 'I'm straightforward. He said, 'I know but I'm sorry.'

When I went to the front desk, I said to the secretary can you make sure I get my papers. Because remember I was unemployed. I went off EI and I took the job. I needed to know that I could go back to EI. When I was filling out EI, a young lady asked me ‘Where were you working?’ She said ‘ohhhhh, we get a lot of people from there.’ So what I discovered is that he (Active America) uses people when he has a lot of work and when the work is going down they drop them and many of them end up on EI.”

**JUDITH RATHAN, USW, LAID-OFF HOTEL WORKER**

“I worked at Sutton Place Hotel for 21 years as a switchboard operator. Last year June, the hotel closed. It was turned into condominium, so we had no choice but to leave. I also worked another job at the same time at another hotel, sometimes I had three jobs. If I have the energy, I will do it [work]. I worked at the Westin by the airport at the same time as Sutton Place. I also worked at the Bond Place hotel.”

Women trained as librarians and teachers have almost no chance of ever getting a full-time job in their professions. Cut-backs to the public sector have made many jobs part-time which often also means no or limited benefits even with a union. It also means that all the graduates in these sectors might not be successful in obtaining full-time work.

**MAUREEN O'REILLY, TPLWU, LIBRARIAN & UNION PRESIDENT**

“Seventy-five percent of the library workers are women. About 50% of the library workers in Toronto are part-time. Many of them began working in the library when they were young and worked as Pages — the people who stack the shelves. Over the years they have gone to university, graduated, and become librarians, but they still cannot get full-time work. Now they have families and it is difficult to support them on part-time hours. Many of the different library jobs classifications are being made part-time and precarious and there are also cut-backs in services. There are many more librarians graduating and they cannot get full-time jobs and neither can the ones already in the library system.”

**CHRISTINA MEYNELL, ETFO, OCCASIONAL TEACHER**

“Ten years ago when I graduated with my teaching degree, most of the people in my class got jobs. Today it is near impossible to get work as a teacher. The universities keep graduating teachers but there is no work. The list of occasional teachers of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) was closed 10 years ago. Teachers are now volunteering at schools in the hope that they will eventually get into a teaching position. Contract teachers have been laid off. The vast majority of the people who cannot get work or are losing contract work are women.”

Another difficult reality for many women as they graduate with higher and higher education is that their chances of becoming full-time faculty at universities and colleges are low. For thousands of women with PhDs, the only work available is ‘sessional’ or part-time with much lower salaries. However, it seems more women than men are likely to be in this pool of precarious and poor profs.

**CHRIS NILIMA RAHIM, OPSEU, SESSIONAL INSTRUCTOR**

“I am a sessional [part-time] faculty at George Brown College in the Assaulted Women’s and Councillor Advocate Programme. Right now my pay scale is about \$100/hour, but at the end of the day you put together all the hours it takes to teach this course, I am making about \$5/hour. It sounds like a lot of money, but it is not. It is ridiculous! There are at least three categories of part-time faculty at George Brown with different pay scales and hours of teaching. I have been teaching here



for seven years. We have four full-time faculty and about 15-20 of us part-time. It is near impossible to become full-time faculty.

We are temporary workers. There are no guarantees and you can be taken off the schedule anytime.

Right now I have four other jobs. It is the only way I can survive.”

**SAILAJA KRISHNAMURTI, FACULTY ASSOCIATION, YORK UNIVERSITY**

“I have been teaching as a part-time sessional instructor since 2006. I taught at York University, University of Toronto (U of T) St. George campus and Mississauga campus, and Wilfred Laurier in Kitchener-Waterloo until 2012. Then in 2012 I taught full-time at U of T for 1 year and now I am starting two years full-time at York which will take me to 2015. Then it is not clear what will happen. All the teaching before was part-time. It’s a really tough job market. One has to be at the right place at the right time.

There are many racialized women in temporary part-time teaching jobs. Young white men still seem to sail through from PhD to tenure track positions. For young racialized men it is still easier than for racialized women to get full-time employment.”

Women in the GTA today are increasingly under-valued and under-paid. Not only are diverse women with PhDs being relegated to unemployment and low-wages but women in so-called traditional but critically important women’s work in the care economy are also being under-valued and under-paid. They are the growing workforce of personal support workers (PSWs).

### **2.3 The working poor in the care economy: homecare and healthcare**

Personal support workers (PSWs) in the GTA are predominantly women, immigrants and increasingly racialized. They are also working at the minimum wage or just above. They are extremely under-paid, do a range of complex care work which is increasing in complexity, and are supporting and raising families on these low wages. Many of them are single mothers. Along with women in the knowledge, manufacturing, retail, fast food and hospitality sector, they are the working poor of the Toronto region. This is also a sector with high turnover, due to the less than ideal working conditions, low wages, few or no benefits and a higher rate of injury and workplace violence (CUPE and OCHU, 2012, p.12).

The research indicates that homecare and extended health care is a growing area of work for diverse women. The work is both full-time and part-time.

Yet women who want to work more hours cannot get them thereby creating more insecurity and poverty in the lives of women. Many PSWs now have to do more work in less time and many of them work in 2 to 3 places because they do not get enough hours in one place.

Between 2006 and 2036, the percentage of seniors in Canada will grow from 16.1% (1.6 million) to 23.6% (4.2 million).<sup>6</sup> In Ontario, the population of seniors is expected to double by 2031. By 2036, nearly one in four people in Ontario will be a senior.<sup>7</sup>



PHOTOGRAPH: NOMAD DESIGN



Women working as personal support workers (PSWs) in the homes of clients, or retirement and extended care facilities all pointed to the many cutbacks in the quality of care and services provided to the elderly, the sick and those with disabilities compared to 30 years ago. The cuts range from less time for each individual visit to the client to the extra charges for each activity. There is a complex division of tasks and activities that are chargeable in the wide range of facilities that offer long-term and retirement care as well as home care support for daily living. For example,

**ELIZABETH GORDON, SEIU, PSW**

“...if previously the client was getting 2 baths a week and if you want a 3rd you have to pay for it.”

**NICOLE FRANCIS, USW, RETIREMENT HOME WORKER**

“If you need assistance to walk to the dining room, then you have to pay for it.”

**CARMEN BARNWELL, SEIU, PSW**

“In places where we have ‘cluster care’ as in long-term facilities where quite a number of clients live together and one needs to get them organized for meals; for example, it sometimes takes a lot more time and patience than the time allocated. If an elder person is not ready to get up and get dressed in the morning you have to make time for that.”

Despite the unpredictable work schedule and stress, many PSWs love their work and the caring relationship they have established with the seniors.

**CARMEN BARNWELL, SEIU, PSW**

“We love the work we do. Because the rewarding part of it is that when you give care and the recipient of that care gives you instant gratification of that smile; you see them reach out and touch you, or kiss you, or they thank-you because you acknowledge them as a person. You look into their eyes and recognize who they are and you can actually see the light come on in their eyes... They see that you see them. That goes deep... oh, look at me; I am getting all emotional talking about this.”

**ELIZABETH GORDON, SEIU, PSW**

“Now I have to do more work in the same amount of time. Each senior now gets less time. I have one senior woman who only gets 1 hour a week. I keep saying she needs more, but no one is listening to me. This means that she only gets one bath a week. She needs more. At least 3 baths a week. Not even nursing homes give baths daily. In our union we are fighting for the right of seniors to 3 baths a week. Try and get the government to pay for that! Try and get the Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) to pay for that!

One client of mine would see me twice a week; on Tuesdays for 1 hour and on Fridays for 2 hours. Bathing both times, and on Friday I would also do her laundry. CCAC has changed that so now I only get 45 minutes to bath her. So, I have to rush this lady who is 86 years old. It is terrible to rush her at her age. And now another lady comes in to clean. I feel in essence they are paying more. They have separated the work and narrowed down the work and the time allocated for it.”

**NICOLE FRANCIS, USW, RETIREMENT HOME WORKER**

“I have worked here in this retirement home for over 20 years. I work in the dietary department. Overall we have less workers now compared to before. They are trying to say that this facility is for independent living and is not a retirement home. For example, they used to have 3 ladies that worked in the morning and an extra person would come and give baths, but they have cut that down, so now there are only 2 ladies in the morning and they have to do the work of the other 2 ladies and now they are doing more work in less time.

They have also changed the shifts so many people have lost hours and have become mostly part-time. People have bills to pay so now they are looking outside for other work. So when someone calls in sick, there is no one available to take their shift.”

**CARMEN BARNWELL, SEIU, PSW**

“We have many more people with dementia, schizophrenia and Alzheimers than say 20 years ago. So there is an increase in violence from some clients. They don't understand why they have to do something and sometimes they don't want to be 'rushed'. These situations are especially difficult when you are working alone in someone's house. There is a need for constant training and upgrading to deal with such complications and the complications of medications. A PSW today is no longer a nurse's aide; she does a whole host of complex healthcare tasks.”

The insights and recommendations from PSWs are critical for improving the quality of care for the seniors of the GTA. Unions provide an important avenue for women's collective voices to inform policy, regulations and enforcement in health care. SEIU, a union of PSWs and other health care workers has been lobbying the provincial government on key issues impacting the workers and this sector of healthcare.

## SECTION 3

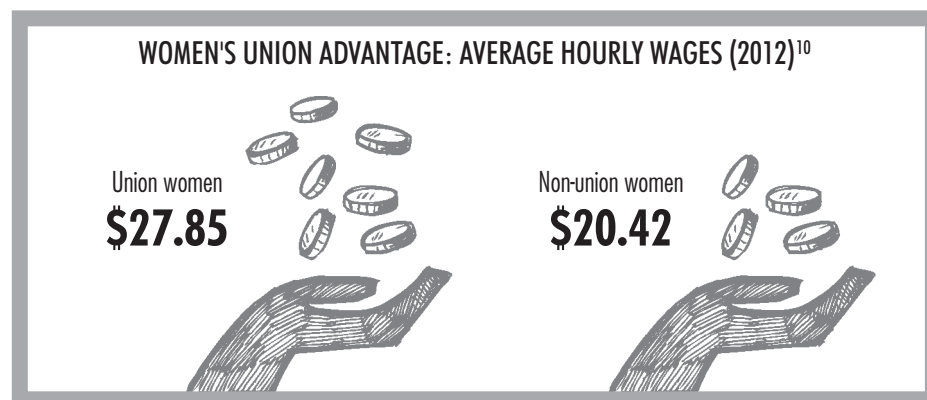
# What unions mean to women

## 3.1 The union advantage for women

According to Pradeep Kumar (2003), “Trade unions, throughout their history, have fought for equality for women and other disadvantaged groups through both the legislative and collective bargaining processes.” In Ontario there were 830,500 women covered by a union collective agreement in 2012 — 29% of all women workers in the province.

Over the years, Statistics Canada Labour Force Surveys have consistently shown that unionized women have much higher earnings than those of non-union women workers.

- In Ontario, the average unionized woman earned \$27.85 an hour in 2012. The average non-union woman worker earned only \$20.42. That’s a \$7.43 difference.
- These unionized women can spend an additional \$217.6 million on goods and services for their families each week.<sup>8</sup> That’s good news for our local economy.
- In Ontario, unionized women averaged \$964.78 weekly in 2012 while non-union women averaged only \$702.76. The large \$262.02 pay gap is the result of higher hourly rates for union women as well as the fact that unionized part-timers have access to more hours in their weekly schedule (18.4 hours on average) compared to non-union part-timers (16.7 hours).
- Union women are also much closer to achieving pay equity. In Ontario unionized women averaged 85% of union men’s weekly earnings in 2012. The wage gap is much bigger for non-union women who earned only 74% of non-union men’s weekly earnings. Unions led the fight for equal pay laws at both the federal and provincial level and generally keep careful watch over their implementation in the workplace.<sup>9</sup>



It’s not just a question of wages. In 1975 the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) won equal pension benefits for women in the federal public sector. In 1981 the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) struck for 42 days to win paid maternity leave for its women members. This was taken up by other unions, and spread across the country. Adoption leave, paternity leave and parental leave were routinely negotiated with employers. This helps to provide the economic resources necessary for women to care for their children.

In a union workplace there is a process in place for workers to have representation to express concerns without reprisals and to collectively bargain with the employer for a fair and equitable work environment.

Victims of harassment are represented by their union. They have a place to turn

to and have their concerns addressed in a fair manner. In 1990 PSAC won a ground breaking re-definition of “spouse” to include same sex relationships in its agreement with the Yukon government. Others followed.

In Canada the great majority of union workers receive at least three weeks of vacation, and 70% get four weeks or more after longer service, helping to balance work and family life. Workers in a union workplace are approximately 30% more likely to receive health benefits which generally cover family members as well.

There is clearly a union advantage for women. Historically, women have been silenced, disempowered and have been more vulnerable than men in precarious work environments. The collective voice and protection of unions therefore means more to women than men. Women in the research were unequivocal about the union advantage for them and their families. Below women speak to the many ways that unions make a positive difference in their lives.

**SARA AHMED, CUPE, RECREATION WORKER**

“The union provides protection, a sense of security. I feel that my voice matters and I like the fact that there is a fair process for employees.”

**LILOWTEE DEONARINE, USW, HOTEL WORKER**

“In a non-union workplace you can expect anything when you go in to work. You can expect to not have a shift; you can expect not going back, that kind of stuff. But, with the union you know when you enter the hotel, your job is assigned to you and you know they cannot abuse you because you have the rights and someone to protect you there, which is your union.”

**NICOLE FRANCIS, USW, RETIREMENT HOME WORKERS**

“A union is important for having a grievance procedure and to be able to file a grievance and to have the support for negotiations. It is also important to have benefits such as dental, medications and a pension plan.

Unions are there to protect the rights of workers, someone to have a voice for you. Especially when you look at what Hudak is saying. He is trying to take over the rights of workers. Conditions in nursing homes are getting worse and the majority of the workers in the homes are minorities.”

Women also expressed gratitude for the courses they have been able to take to improve their skills and capabilities. The courses benefited them personally and professionally. A living wage, health benefits and pensions help women to look after their families.

**CHRISTINA MEYNELL, TTFO, OCCASIONAL TEACHER**

“I took an all women workshop organized by the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO). It was led by women and they were great — articulate, grounded, interesting and active trade unionists. I learnt a lot from that weekend course. They helped me cover childcare. I have two sons. I would not have been able to attend without that support. With support from my union’s leadership I plan to get involved in the union.

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) pays half our health plan. This was negotiated by the union. This is key. We have a pension that was also negotiated. The union has to ensure these things stay in place.”

**BARBARA JANACZEK, USW, MANUFACTURING**

“My English was not good when I started. I went with my husband to apply for the job. After a year and a half I got a call to come to work at this factory. I have now been there 17 years. I am very happy. Through this job, the union sent me to

school to improve my English, because many people — 80% are immigrants. I joined many other courses. Afterwards I became a steward. I have already been in negotiations five times.

For me the union is very important. When I started to work for this company I know this job is secure, of course not 100%... but if economy is good you have job, benefits, you know how to calculate the money for the week. I started to buy the condominium because I know how to calculate. If you don't have something like this it's very very hard. Especially for the women.

My husband lost his job twice. Me, I have the cheque every week, just in case, if I'm sick my son and husband we have benefits and this is very very important."

**ALEX THOMSON, USW, UNIVERSITY WORKER**

"I still have a job at the university because of my union. I have a distinct memory before being unionized and going to a family dinner and saying we don't have sick leave policy in my workplace. Everyone laughed and said to walk into HR [Human Resources] and demand to see the sick leave policy.

Someone in my department got cancer. After she had been in treatment for a while my supervisor told her she would only be paid for the hours she worked. She couldn't fight for the hours, do her job and do treatment. So she went to HR and asked, "How much would I get if I retire tomorrow?" The HR person never bothered to ask her how old she was. The information she gave her was incorrect. The woman retired and she didn't get the pension she was supposed to get. Now we have a sick leave policy."

Women in the work force have challenged their unions to address the issues of sexual and racial harassment on the job. As explained below, the union came through for these hotel workers.

**ANDRIA BABBINGTON, UNITE HERE, ORGANIZER**

"In a way, I look at the union as job security. Working in a hotel, you get guests from everywhere. Good ones and bad ones. Going through sexual harassment was a daily thing. Watching my co-workers go through that... and they would say they have to survive, they have family members to look after so they just tough it up and learn to live with it.

For me, for a number of years, I went to work knowing I can't afford to quit. And when you go to work knowing you're going to get one of those awful people behind you...

It was really important for me to break that silence. It took me a long time to trust what the union said. Eventually, the union called on all the general managers from that hotel and told them something was wrong... because the hotel saying the guest is always nice/right. And if the guest complains about you not being nice they will get a food basket. So the Union brought them out in the media, and said this is what your workers are going through. They were exposed and then they were saying they need to work with the Union to look at safety measures.

Sitting down and figuring out how to work together to address this was it for me. I understood what the union can do. This helped me because then I was able to step out of that darkness and tell other workers you don't have to face it."

By successfully bargaining for the rights of their members, unions in Canada have raised the standard of living of all Canadians. Unions have fought and won the right for decent living wages, maternity/parental leave, safety on the job and benefits. Union gains

in workplaces have benefited many Canadians even if they themselves were not in unionized workplaces.

**JULIE MCGITCHIE, UNIFOR, AUTOWORKER**

“Unions care. They try and bring everybody up. By bringing everybody up the economy does good, people do good, women do good.”

**ANNE BRUNELLE, OPSEU, EMPLOYMENT COUNSELLOR**

“I keep thinking back to CUPW fighting for maternity leave. That was the main issue in that strike in 1982 and today we have great maternity leave. A full year. In the United States most workers are lucky if they get five months! Even unionized workers.

The other thing that I feel is important is that now harassment is considered an issue that is part of your health and safety on the job. It is now in the health and safety act. Unions have pushed for that.”

**ELIZABETH GORDON, SEIU, PSW**

“Without unions we have less chance of getting anything. Imagine that the vast majority of the PSWs are on the cusp of poverty without a union. They don’t have what we have as unionized PSWs. A lot of our members are single mothers; imagine if they did not have dental care for themselves and their families. Yes, I have to say, even with a union, some PSWs are living close to the poverty line.”

While there are still insufficient numbers of women in many of the trades, unions have made efforts to open doors for women to enter male dominated professions. This is an on-going issue of equality of opportunity and respect for women workers on the job. Changes made so far have been important for the women in these trades; but unions can do a lot more to enable women in the trades.

**DEANNE SMITH, UNIFOR, TECHNICIAN**

“The union has been absolutely important for me. When I started at Bell, the union helped a lot of women to get into Bell, which has been a male dominated company and industry. Women were just beginning to come in as technicians as opposed to clerical workers and operators. They did not want women climbing poles, driving vans or working inside and doing the wires, etc. I have seen the change over the years, if it were not for the union a woman of colour like me would not have got into this work. There were not even that many men of colour at that time. It was only when the question of diversity was raised that some of us began to get work as technicians.”

**CINDY KRYSAC, IBEW, APPRENTICE ELECTRICIAN**

“I think in the construction industry, the electrical trade, it’s a lot harder for women outside the union sector. When you get sent out they don’t send out your name, height, gender and then you walk in and you’re like ‘middle aged lady’ and that’s when it all changes. I’m pulling my weight. We’re less than 1% women in that trade. They’ll challenge you.

The union stands by us. On the job site the guys will stand behind you. There is all kinds of dissent within the Brotherhood itself. One company I was with didn’t like women a lot. They shifted me around and found a good spot for me. I couldn’t have done it without the union.”

Unions have brought many positive changes in the lives of women workers and society at large; however, work in the home still mostly done by women. This is an area that needs a greater focus for change so as to reduce women’s domestic burdens. This is a challenge

that unions can take on and champion — the challenge of getting men in unions and society at large to take responsibility for domestic work so they can lessen the work load of their partners.

### **3.2 The undermining of workers' rights and union gains**

Unions and unionized workers have been under attack from governments and employers for a number of years. There has been an on-going erosion of union density and the loss of rights and benefits as workers. The austerity agenda of outsourcing, privatization, and importation of temporary foreign workers is yet another excuse to undermine workers and unions. There is rarely any mention of the large profits that companies are making or of the thousands and millions of dollars paid to CEOs. Cutbacks are at the cost of the lives of the working women and men in the GTA. This is also leading to a rise in income inequality.

The women who belong to unions and have been working in the same job or with the same employer over a number of years are very aware of the changes that have happened in their sectors and in the companies they work for. They have seen an erosion of the gains they made through collective bargaining.

Unionized women have experienced cut-backs in their benefits, cut-backs in the hours of the full-time workers with the corresponding growth of a two-tier wage in the work force. Some unions have been pressured by management to hire new workers at a lower wage than the workers who have been their longer. This management strategy causes divisions in the workplace and undermines unions and their ability to defend the rights of all workers, including the younger women and men being hired at much lower wages than previously.

Many women cannot find full-time work in their professions and have to content with a number of part-time jobs to make ends meet. In the educational or knowledge sector this has become the new norm as full-time teaching jobs are near impossible to get.

Privatization of public services is reducing public services, compromising their quality and further reducing the options of secure jobs with fair wages. For some workers, a cut in hours has meant a corresponding increase in work.

#### **LILOWTEE DEONARINE, USW, HOTEL WORKER**

“When we were hired in the company we had full coverage and benefits. This includes dental, medical, chiropractor, massages, eye glasses, and pension. The union pays for the pension. The current owner took off the pension, so I don't know. Two years ago the owner [new management] stopped the contract and was only giving us our wages and 25% of benefits for drugs; nothing else. No meals, nothing. Before we used to get meals, now we don't.”

#### **ALEX THOMSON, USW, UNIVERSITY STAFF**

“Our pension contributions have gone up. To a large extent this is due to the financial crisis, along with pressure from the government to increase the worker's share of the pension and I think that is supported by this false idea out there that government workers have gold plated pensions.”

#### **JULIE MCGITCHIE, UNIFOR, AUTO WORKER**

“In the auto industry in the last five years things started changing with the financial crash. A lot of people had to re-apply, go back to school or find another trade. I did that too for a while. Ever since then, companies are trying to get a “two-tiered system”. What does that mean anyways? People are being divided by being brought to work in the same place, but with different pay. The first group came in at \$10/hour less and the next at \$15/hour less and that makes it a terrible environment. And the companies really took advantage of job insecurity.





It's amazing how fast people want to bring you down. It's not like we're trying to say everybody meet in the middle and the middle is safe. People just tend to want to bring you down and think they're safe. I don't get it. And new hires come in and want to work beside me for so much less. It's a terrible environment.

The CAW (Canadian Auto Workers, now Unifor) is very strong and they have a lot of protection and benefits even when you're off. They'll always take care of you and laid-off workers. But when the company starts hiring again, it's like 'Let's bring them in for this much cheaper and that much longer.' I mean, when we got hired in the early 80s it was like probation, a buck an hour less and then you're all even again. There was no let's wait two, three, four, five years. Now its let's wait 10 years and bring you in way down. So it's a bad situation — everyone thinks when you get into the auto industry you're a good job that everybody wants. What's wrong with \$25 an hour? What's wrong with \$20 hours? Of course everyone will say \$25 is better than \$20. But is \$20 is good as \$30? And look at what bosses are making and what CEOs are making and look at their profits.”

Privatization, contracting out and cutbacks by governments means not only the loss of good jobs, but also the loss of quality services.

#### **SARA AHMED, CUPE, RECREATION WORKER**

“There have been many changes in community recreation in the city of Toronto over the last couple of years. One of the things that has been very difficult is that they move key staff without consulting us. The other problem is that many of the professional people who used to teach recreation courses here such as weights training, fitness training, visual arts programmes and others have left, because the City is not willing to pay them professional wages anymore. They reduced their wages by \$5-10/hour. Many of these people have been teaching these courses for 7-10 years. These have been many cuts in recreation services. I guess you could call it the 'grave



train'. And now they are being replaced by students, who do not have the same experience or qualifications. For example, the students are called weight room attendants. They make \$10.25 to \$12/hour. So who suffers but the community? And it brings down the quality of recreation services that we offer. And in some courses we have less people now. And it is not good for the students either as there is no one to mentor them and build their skills.

Even the security guard who used to be full-time is now part-time. This makes the Centre more vulnerable and us as staff too. It is a question of the safety of the community and us. Now they want us staff to also do security. I feel that the positions of staff and security should not be mixed.”

**LAURA THOMPSON, OPSEU, REGULATORY COLLEGE STAFF**

“Generally, I think privatization has caused a lot of uncertainty when it comes to jobs in the Ontario Public Service and government jobs in general which reflects the lack of stable jobs in general.

The government talks about creating jobs. Then they cut jobs. How are they going to create jobs by cutting jobs? These are the services people depend on.

I am not sure people realize that the reason they are not getting good public services is because there are no people to do the work. When I was in the government a large part of what I did was taking inbound phone calls from clients. One day when we were having high call volume a frustrated caller told me ‘I have been waiting for 20 minutes. Why is it taking so long? Are you the only person there?’ and at that point I literally was.

We are being told to do more with less. But, how can we do that? With less we can only do less.

I feel the government does not have a long-term vision. How can we keep making more and more cuts? What will be the impact of the cuts after three years? After 10 years? How is this going to impact on us?”

## What keeps women going...

### 4.1 Hard realities

Women work for wages outside the home, do much of the work of managing households and raising families in the care economy, and often they are the ones who sustain communities by keeping in touch and supporting other community members and initiatives.

One of the reasons that women's work in the home has not been accorded the value it deserves is that it is invisible to mainstream economics. There is no monetary value attached to it and it is not counted as a contributor to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product). However, as all women who do this work know, women's work in the care economy is fundamental to any economy. Feminist economists have long argued that the unpaid nature of women's care roles ensures the reproduction and sustenance of the labour force. This subsidizes the cost of production of goods under capitalism (Folbre, N. as cited in Khosla, P, 2012, p.19).

Women working full and part-time outside the home are overworked and exhausted trying to sustain themselves and their families. There is little accountability by society to women's multiple responsibilities. Being a single mother, or a mother with a disability, or a mother with a child who has a disability makes life even more difficult. Accessible and affordable public services such as child care (beyond the day care), parks, recreation and social services, housing, transit, car pools, collective housing, kitchens, child minding, and services for children with disabilities, special needs and elders, etc. will greatly reduce women's domestic burdens. With a growing aging population, many women are the 'sandwich generation'. They care for increasingly dependent parents or relatives as well as young children.

Needless to say, many of the women who took part in the research are mothers with younger or older children still under their care. They continue to juggle their jobs, with looking after their children and other family responsibilities. Mothers rise against all odds to provide for their children so that they will have a better life with more options and opportunities than they themselves had.

#### **ALICIA GARRIQUES, NON-UNION, LINE COOK**

"It's difficult sometimes, taking care of the baby, working to pay the bills and time, I'm totally tired sometimes. Last week I was working at home after work and I felt like I'm out, like I'm about to faint or something. I have a partner, but I do most of the work with the baby."

#### **CHRISTINA MEYNELL, ETFO, OCCASIONAL TEACHER**

"I have 2 boys and I am a single mom. I decided to continue working as an occasional teacher. This way I have more time but less pay. I get to spend some time with my kids."

#### **ROSELEE WASHINGTON, USW, LAID-OFF AND PRECARIOUS WORKER**

"I have three boys; they are 16, 19, and 22. They were very small when the plant shut down. It was shocking, nerve-wrecking. How will this work after just buying a house? My husband was not making much money; I'm the only one making decent wages. Trying to figure out what I'm going to do, how I'm going to do it. I decided to come down to the Steelworkers; I used to come to the programs to learn how to find another job. I would take any job, as long as they pay me. But I didn't find anything. Now I sometimes get some work via agencies."

JOSIE SANITA, CUPE & CUPW

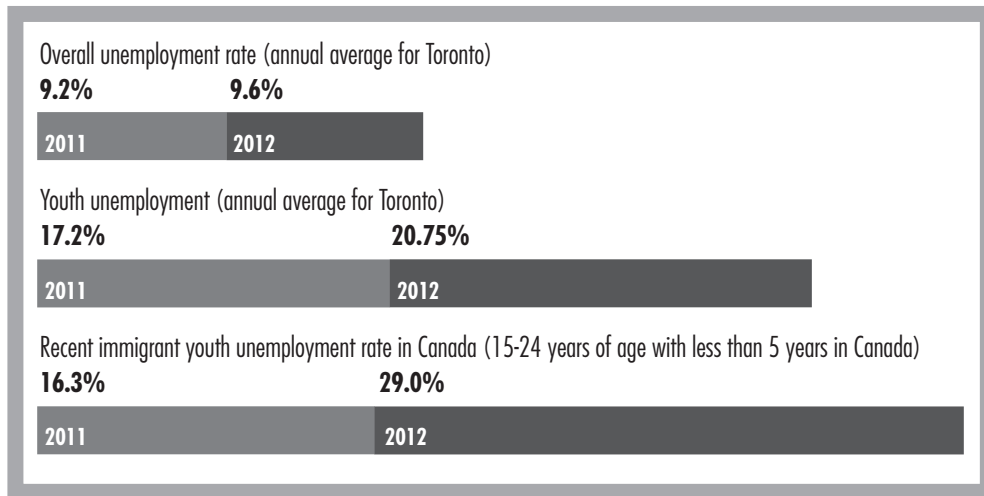
“I am currently working part-time in 2 different unionized jobs. I cannot get full-time work in either one of them. I have a son I am raising on my own. He is now 19 and I need to pay for his education so I will keep doing this shift work until I can get full-time work. I have always worked to support him. I will continue to do so. I want a good life for him. I am active in the union and I won't give that up either.”

In the next section, younger women, many of whom are still completing post-secondary education speak about their expectations of the labour market.

#### 4.2 The next generation

In the recent economic crisis, young women and men have faced the greatest loss of employment opportunities and continue to face increasing uncertainty about their ability to transition to the labour market. In 2009, the first year after the financial crash, the provincial youth unemployment rate for 15-24 year-olds skyrocketed from 11.1 per cent to over 18 per cent.<sup>11</sup> Older children frequently remain dependent on their parents and many parents continue to work instead of retiring. This situation is especially difficult for single mothers who continue to stretch their income and working hours.

TABLE 2: ADULT AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT TRENDS IN TORONTO AND CANADA



SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM VITAL SIGNS (2013, P.84)

According to the data above, Toronto experienced a steep growth in youth unemployment from 17.2% in 2011 to 20.75% in 2012. Data for young women and men who are recent immigrants to Toronto was not available, but the data for Canada for this same demographic indicates that newer and young immigrant women and men saw their unemployment rise from 16.3% in 2011 to 29.0% in 2012. Unfortunately, it is not possible to identify the specific numbers of young women and young men in the data above as it was not disaggregated by sex.

According to a recent study on Global Employment Trends for Youth (2010) by the International Labour Organization (ILO), “Numerous studies show how entering labour markets during recession can leave permanent scars on the generation of youth affected and recently, fears have been expressed regarding a possible crisis legacy of a “lost generation” made up of young people who detach themselves from the labour market altogether.” Clearly, there are severe consequences to the economy and society if an entire generation of young women and men continue to remain unemployed and disengaged.



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MACCERMAN

In this research we spoke with young women between the ages of 20-30. The young women were full-time students, studying and working part-time and full-time. Their comments below reflect their apprehension of the new reality of high unemployment amongst young people.

**DEQA ABDURAHMAN, UNIVERSITY STUDENT**

“I know that it is difficult to find a job, cause I have some friends who graduated last year, they were hoping to find jobs in the field, and they’re still struggling and they’re still unemployed and they’re still sitting at home, looking online and stuff. It is really hard finding a job in your degree. And it is true, sometimes an undergraduate degree isn’t enough, they want you to have a Master’s degree or years of experience in a professional field or something before. I just feel it is very difficult to find a job in my field, or my friend’s field. We are all kinda doing the same thing. They’re struggling, that’s why I’m kinda worried when I graduate what am I going to do?”

**ALDELI ALBÁN REYNA, NON-UNION, BROADER PUBLIC SECTOR**

“I went to U of T for Women and Gender Studies and languages. I was working like three jobs at the same time, and it just was not good. I was working full-time and taking a fourth year course, it was pretty hard to do. Luckily, I got a good grade in it. It was really hard for me to find a job in my field. I didn’t get it until after 2 years of graduation. And in that time I was working to pay the bills, I was working as a receptionist somewhere and doing other stuff on the side.”

**LEAH THI, COLLEGE STUDENT & PART-TIME SERVICE SECTOR WORKER**

“I agree that it so hard to find a job, because in my opinion there are unqualified people who are working in positions. Not because they are qualified, but because they know someone within the company. It makes it harder for people who go to school and try and find their career jobs in their field. And it’s hard because they want the experience. But where am I going to start when you demand all this experience right, then there’s

no jobs in your field because it's taken by someone who is less qualified than you. It's just direct contact with someone in the company ya know.

They say 90% of students who graduate from college find a job in the first 6 months. That's a statistic. It doesn't necessarily mean they find a job within their field. We find a job. But it doesn't relate to our field. So I think that's the issue that many of us are going to be going through."

### **4.3 Hopes and aspirations**

In the following section we put together the hopes and aspirations of the women we interviewed — younger and older, students, workers, full-time and precarious. Mothers worry about how difficult it is for them to get work and wonder how their daughters and sons will get jobs today and in the future. With the difficulties of not being able to get sufficient work and living wages, they continue to hope for a better life for their children. The younger women we spoke with also wonder about the same things. Will they get work and living wages when they graduate from university?

Almost all of the women who had lost unionized jobs in manufacturing wanted their jobs back.

They wished for similar full-time permanent secure jobs with protections and benefits. They enjoyed their jobs and had long established relations with management and co-workers which they miss. The loss of livelihood and dignity experienced due to unemployment has taken a heavy toll on their emotional and physical health and their economic well-being.

Women who have unionized jobs, cannot imagine how they would survive without their unions and cannot imagine working in a non-unionized work pace.

The younger women who don't have jobs or who are working part-time while they finish college or university hope they can find jobs in their chosen areas of study. There is a growing scepticism that they will not find work without connections. They all believe that the only way to get a job is through contacts.

#### **JUSTINE LILLEY, UNIFOR, UNEMPLOYED**

"That is the scary part. Each generation prior to this was doing better. After the war and in the 1970s and the 1980s, there were choices of jobs and you could hop around. Even with an education it does not mean anything at all unless you have a connection, or if you are extremely talented. For the average person it looks bleak. There needs to be some adjustment on the planet.

I have two daughters. I worry for them. I see a lot of my friends who also cannot get work in their field of study. A friend of mine has a Master's but cannot find a job."

#### **ANDRIA BABBINGTON, UNITE HERE, ORGANIZER**

"I dream about an ideal society of equality for my children where my children will not have to face discrimination due to the colour of their skin."

#### **MAGGIE SENG, COLLEGE STUDENT & PART-TIME SERVICE SECTOR WORKER**

"My goal is to finish this program at Humber College. So I'd like to get a job preferably doing something on set, with a production team."

#### **MARTHA MENGISTU, CUPE, RECREATION WORKER**

"Right now I am a recreational worker at the city where I work 35-40 hours a week, but I am considered part-time. This means I do not get any benefits unless I pay extra money. I am 27 and I have a five year old daughter and I have to think about her and things like dental costs. I completed high school and have been working since I graduated. I love my work with the kids; but, hope to go to school so I can be a social worker."



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MACCEMAN

**ROSE, NON-UNION, STORE MANAGER**

“My goals are centred on fitness, predominantly Yoga. So, my goal is to open up my own studio, which is why I was excited to get this job as a manger. Now I can learn how to run a business. This would be very helpful. Previously I worked in that kind of industry at a related retail outlet.”

**TIFFANY NEMBARD, ONA, NURSE**

“I recently got a new position. I was working with cancer patients before. Then I did a three month course with George Brown to work in the ICU (Intensive Care Unit). I recently started working in ICU; for 3 months now. My plan is to stay there for two years or so, and then when I am comfortable with the work and population of patients that I get, then I’ll go back to school maybe part-time and do a Nurse Practitioner program. I would like to work in cardiology.”

**ALEX THOMSON, USW, UNIVERSITY STAFF**

“I would like to see us [workers] gain strength and get a more equitable society. I don’t want to be in a situation as I get older that I don’t have the power to fight back and strike.”

**ANGELA WRIGHT, CUPE, MUNICIPAL WORKER**

“Well, I’m thinking I want to get involved in making certain our union membership becomes more active. Perhaps showing up and helping certain municipal politicians get elected. I hope to get through the next 10 years before I retire in relative good shape physically.”

## Changing lives, claiming power

The working lives of the diverse women of the GTA have become a lot more difficult than they were a few decades ago. Unemployment is high for women — young and old. Precarious low-wage work dominates Toronto's economy leading to an increase in poverty for the many residents of the Toronto Region.

Still, women have not lost hope and are continuing to organize. The library workers in Toronto are a great example of women workers fighting back to challenge the austerity orthodoxy. A short case study about the library workers is included below. Also included here are case studies from the fast food workers organizing in the US, the need to increase the minimum wage in Ontario to \$14/hour, the new initiative of Community Chapters of Unifor, the Migrante and USW experience of organizing live-in care-givers and homeworkers and SEIU's campaign about PSWs and health care.

### 5.1 The Toronto Public Library Workers Union (TPLWU) CUPE Local 4948

The 2012 11-day strike by Toronto Public Library (TPL) workers was a unique strike by the library workers against the austerity agenda of the city and provincial governments, against privatization and cut-backs of libraries and the public services they provide and for defending the rights of its part-time workers. Over half of the TPL staff, three quarters of whom are women, are part-time and few qualify for benefits (Smith, 2012, p. 35).

According to Maureen O'Reilly the president of the library workers union, "... this was a strike for the rights of part-time workers. Part-time workers in the libraries are also precarious workers. Employment security was a big issue."

The strike was also unique because the union successfully mobilized thousands of public library users — the residents of Toronto — to support them against the cuts of the Rob Ford administration.

Libraries are free based on the Ontario Public Libraries Act in that they provide equitable services to all. Aside from the free borrowing of books, libraries provide many other services such as access to computers and the internet, help people with job searches and provide a range of programming for different generations. These are developed and provided by their specialized staff.

Another reason that the strike was successful is that the union was aware of the potential difficulties in the upcoming bargaining and prepared themselves well in advance of bargaining. Thirdly, the union was strategic in leveraging the anti-library and anti-reading stance of local politicians and Library Board members and the support from Margaret Atwood — who needs no introduction. Fourthly, they invested in new internet technology which enabled them to inform the public about the issues at hand and how to send messages against funding cuts directly to each local politician representing their ward. Strategic use of the internet was the core of their public campaign, 'What My Library Means to Me,' which enabled Torontonians to get involved in the campaign and have their say. Additionally, the public was invited to come out and talk and spend time with library workers on the picket line. This action too received tremendous response from the public as they came out to join the picket lines with their favourite books. Local authors' support for the strike further raised the profile of the library workers.

In spite of such tremendous support the libraries had to face a 5.9% cut in funding in the 2012 city budget and lost 107 staff. However, there were also some victories. As a small, woman, and part-time worker dominated union, they successfully challenged





PHOTOGRAPH: ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

the Ford administration's attempt to impose a 10% cut across all municipal services except for the police. They succeeded in establishing job security after 11 years while the rest of the city's unions have it after 15. And they proved that you can stand-up, fight back and even win in a hostile anti-worker climate of austerity, cut backs to public services and threats of privatization.

The strike was iconic in that it also embodied the many issues facing workers and specifically women workers in today's Toronto.

First, the library workers are predominantly a female workforce, and half of them are part-time. Furthermore, over the years more and more women library workers are losing secure full-time work and becoming part-time workers. Qualified librarians are increasingly finding it impossible to get full-time work. This is also a trend in other sectors such as education and health and extended care. Increasingly, more women are working part-time, making less money with limited or no benefits and adding to the growing feminization of poverty in the GTA.

Secondly, many of the library workers are precarious workers. This is increasingly the case for many workers, both women and men, in the GTA and Ontario. Precarity is also fueled by de-professionalization and de-skilling. This is the case for the library workers as well as for many women in the education, health and extended care sectors.

Thirdly, the austerity agenda of all levels of government — federal, provincial and municipal — is leading to budget cuts for critical public services. These same services are provided by women workers who are losing their jobs and these are services that many women need and rely on. The austerity agenda is not new. Since the early 1990s, the \$10.5 million provincial spending envelope for libraries in Ontario was reduced to \$4.6 million, the operating budget cut by \$800 million in cumulative cuts over 20 years, the acquisition budget reduced by \$51.6 million, with the loss of 532 library workers and cuts in service hours (O'Reilly, 2013, p.35).

Fourthly, the austerity cuts are accompanied by privatization and contracting out which

often also means the loss of good secure jobs with benefits for many workers including the library workers. Despite these radical changes to the labour force, the TPLWU went on strike and challenged the inequality being imposed on women and men workers, and they made some valuable gains.

As Maureen O'Reilly (2013) has said, "...we must pressure our associations to be more employee-centered; we must embrace, not fear, unionization; we must find and support leaders who challenge us to fight back; we must participate in the political arena; and above all, we must respect our own work and improve our own status, salaries and working conditions" (p.37).

## **5.2 A new horizon in labour organizing — US fast food workers take to the streets**

The year 2013 was an inspirational year in the organizing of low-wage retail and service workers in the US. Fast food workers from many popular fast food outlets such as McDonalds, Wendy's, Taco Bell, Subway, KFC, Dunkin Donuts, DQ, Burger King and others began organizing and took to the streets to build popular support for their demands for a living wage — The Fight for 15 Campaign — for a \$15/hour living wage.

A large majority of these workers are female and racialized women and men who have been in this precarious work for many years.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median salary for fast food workers in the US in 2010 was US\$18,130 a year — meaning that the average fast food worker in 2010 was at exactly the federal poverty line for a family of three.<sup>12</sup> The median wage comes to about US\$8.90/hour. The federal minimum wage is US\$7.25/hour. However, many workers are hired part-time and not able to get enough work to make an annual income of \$18,130. At this poverty level, most workers cannot afford basics such as rent, food, clothes and public transit let alone have a decent standard of living in the world's richest nation.

There is an enduring mis-conception about the labour force of fast food outlets, i.e. that the majority of them are young women and men living at home; and thus should not receive a living wage as they are only looking to make some extra cash. There is no logic to this argument, as if you do the same work as others; you should be paid equal wages. The reality in the US is that nearly 40 percent of fast food workers are 25 or older, more than one-quarter are raising a child and 31 percent have at least some college education.<sup>13</sup> Strike supporters say the average age is 29 and a third of them are raising children.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, since many of them do not make enough money to live on, they are also supported by public subsidies in the form of food stamps and social security.

Fast food workers as other workers have the right to a living wage, the right to not be poor, and the right to organize. After patient organizing in their communities and workplaces, the spark that ignited the fire began with a strike of about 200 fast food workers in New York in November of 2012. Pamela Waldron, who had worked at the KFC in Pennsylvania Station for eight years, complained that she earned just US\$7.75 an hour and was assigned just 20 hours a week, meaning an income of about US\$8,000 a year. She said, "I'm protesting for better pay. I have two kids under 6, and I don't earn enough to buy food for them."<sup>15</sup>

With support from their families, communities, SEIU and other community-based organizations and unions the workers spent much of 2013 organizing themselves into strikes and walk outs in most of America's major cities. By the end of August this impressive movement of low-wage and marginalized workers was joined by other labour, community and student organizations and 1-day strikes were held in over 50 cities in the US. By December 5th, workers in over 100 cities in the US went on a one day strike for respect, a living wage, control over their working conditions and benefits. They point to the gross inequality between their wages, the salaries of CEOs in this sector and the profits of the fast food companies. According to the Huffington Post, the CEO of McDonald's made US\$13.8M

in 2011<sup>16</sup> a shocking figure considering the below poverty level wages of the workers.

Workers in the fast food sector are so poor that they cannot afford basics and are subsidized by tax payers in the form of food stamps and other income subsidies. According to this same expose by the Huffington Post, McDonald's is subsidized to the sum of US\$1.8 billion a year; KFC, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell by US\$648 million; Subway by US\$236 million, etc.<sup>17</sup> This means that American tax payers are subsidizing the corporations' profits and the multi-million dollar salaries of their CEOs while the workers live at starvation levels.

While the Fight for 15 is still a young movement they have succeed in building extensive support in the country for raising the minimum wages and for justice for retail and service workers. Their first victory for US\$15/hr was won for 6,000 airport and hotel workers in SeaTac, a suburb south of Seattle, Washington. They also succeeded in winning some gains at particular retail outlets such an increase in hourly rates, better scheduling of hours, job security and respect for workers. Their organizing successes will fundamentally change the lives of some of the poorest workers in America, many of whom are single mothers.

Fast food, retail, and service workers in Canada face similar conditions to their counterparts in the US. There is much that can be learnt from the US organizing to inspire workers in Canada to organize themselves into unions for respect, a living wage, and better working hours and conditions.

### 5.3 Campaign to raise the minimum wage<sup>18</sup>

The Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage is a campaign of a coalition of community and labour organizations in Ontario. It was launched in March 2013. The Campaign maintains that thousands of workers in Ontario are struggling to just get by because many good full-time jobs are being replaced by low-wage precarious work. The minimum wage has been frozen at \$10.25 for three years. In that period, food and transit costs have soared while inflation has driven down minimum wage earnings 19% below the poverty line. A minimum wage of \$14/hour is needed to bring workers and their families above the poverty line (by 10%). The minimum wage needs to be tied to a commitment to annual cost-of living adjustments.<sup>19</sup>

The Workers Action Centre (WAC) provided leadership in coordinating this province-wide campaign. At the launch in March 2013 community groups across Ontario delivered a block of ice to the constituency offices of MPPs, driving home the message that it was time to thaw the freeze on minimum wages. Creative and highly visible actions were held on the 14th of every month thereafter, persistently raising the issue with the public and the media and building a groundswell of support from low-wage workers themselves. As one worker put it 'we didn't need to suffer in silence any more'.

The unrelenting campaign generated enough pressure that the Government appointed a task force in the summer of 2013. The appointees were to report back with recommendations within a six month period. Three days after the release of the report on January 27, 2014, Premier Wynne announced an increase in the Ontario minimum wage to \$11 an hour with annual increases tied to the inflation rate. While an increase of 75 cents an hour is an important win, activists argue that it should only be seen as a down payment on the needed improvements. An \$11 an hour minimum wage still means poverty for many workers. It is still 16% below the poverty line even with full-time hours.



PHOTOGRAPH: PRABHA KHOSLA

## 5.4 Unifor Community Chapters

Recognizing the changing nature of work and workplaces, the growth of low-wage precarious work and rights of all workers to union protections and benefits, in September 2013 Unifor launched a new initiative called Community Chapters. Community Chapters are a new form of union membership that aims to reach out to groups of workers that are generally excluded from union membership. Potential Chapter members may include workers in workplaces where organizing campaigns have not yet succeeded; workers in precarious jobs; unemployed workers; students and any other group of workers hoping to improve their economic and social conditions.

Community Chapters can be formed by women and men based on a number of options. They can be members due to geographical location, do similar work but don't have one work place or one employer, work from home, etc. Community Chapters have to agree to and abide by Unifor's founding principles and its constitution. The potential Community Chapter must submit a clear strategy demonstrating how they will use the collective power of the union to better their conditions and win victories from employers, governments, or other campaign targets. Chapter members will pay minimum dues and have the ability to opt-into health benefits. Most Community Chapters will be associated with a Unifor Local and be able to connect to the broader education and advocacy campaigns of the Union.

Two new community chapters have recently been formalized: the Unifor Canadian Freelance Union for self-employed media workers and the Unifaith Community Chapter for clergy and workers at the United Church of Canada. Many more chapters are in development.

In the case below, a freelance writer explains why a union is important to her.

### **NORA LORETO, UNIFOR CANADIAN FREELANCE UNION**

Being organized helps to give us strength compared to workers who are not organized. If someone is working as a freelance cartoonist then she/he could be charging a lot lower than us. This can undermine the work we do and the work she/he does too.

Having a union is important for women because more women are freelancing than men. More men are getting jobs in mainstream journalism even though there are more women in journalism school.

For example, I was job sharing with a man doing similar work. I got pregnant last year, and I have no benefits, except provincial coverage. And I had a complicated pregnancy... but it was clear to me that I was out of the work situation, which my male colleagues would not have to deal with.

I had a complicated pregnancy but I still had to continue looking for work, arrange for future work. I had to arrange and make travel plans while in hospital as I just launched a book, so it is difficult being precarious. If my partner did not have a full-time job, I could not have survived.

The important thing in having a union is that if we get people together then we can come up with some solutions. It might be possible to have benefits as a group even without an employer.

## 5.5 Live-in care givers and homeworkers — Migrante and the United Steelworkers

In 2008 Migrante, an alliance of community based organizations and the United Steelworkers (USW) launched a joint initiative to organize live-in care givers and homeworkers in the GTA. The organizing was prompted by the recognition that these women were very vulnerable. They were foreign, temporary workers and they were susceptible to exploitation and abuse as they were isolated in individual homes and did not have a common workplace or employer. They should have the same rights to be treated with dignity and respect as any other worker.

This led to the creation of the Independent Workers Association Home Workers Section (IWA) with a mandate to protect and promote the rights and welfare of live-in caregivers and home care providers. The majority of these workers came from the Philippines under the temporary Foreign Worker Program with limited rights compared to Canadian workers.

The creation of the IWA was an attempt to create a different union model based on the needs of women working in unconventional work places. By its nature it had to be different from more traditional union organizing. It was also an attempt to provide these workers with services and benefits such as access to the USW dental clinics, education, affordable legal services and health services. Because the women were in such vulnerable situations and were isolated in individual homes, it was a very slow process to build the association.

Today, the group of live-in care givers and home workers continues to organize under the banner of the Independent Women Workers Association (iWorkers). The organization provides a network for friendship, solidarity and support for migrant workers. As members of Migrante Canada, iWorkers also participate in campaigns and advocacy to improve their working conditions and shed light on the root causes of their forced migration.

## 5.6 Organizing PSWs — SEIU Health Care

SEIU has long argued for the need for a comprehensive action plan that meets the needs of an aging population, costs less than institutional care, allows people to remain independent and active in their communities, and sustains Canada's public healthcare system for the next generation. Their campaign 'Fulfill the Promise' not only argues for the well-being of personal support workers (PSWs) who are their members but for society as a whole. The campaign calls for all levels of government to fulfill the promise of homecare by:

- Cutting waiting lists for homecare
- Providing relief to family caregivers
- Guaranteeing security and peace of mind for families by ensuring that every home care health professional is trained and qualified
- Investing in the frontline of public healthcare, not the bottom line of healthcare CEOs
- Demanding transparency and accountability in the delivery of homecare services
- Ensuring fairness for frontline PSWs



PHOTOGRAPH: NOMAD DESIGN

## Changes women want . . .

### 6.1 In conclusion

**A common thread running through the interviews of women participating in this study has been the sense that women have lost considerable ground in the workforce and that it is now a matter of trying to cope with precarious jobs and a precarious future. This sense of being ‘squeezed’ was shared across all sectors and age groups but particularly acute at the two ends of the age spectrum.**

**Older women workers expressed great frustration and despair, feeling squeezed out of a labour market that no longer values their skills, their maturity and workplace experiences. They felt they were now easily replaced and ‘disposable’. They also saw a domino effect where they had lost both a long tenure job and their union representation, a double-jeopardy for them and their families.**

**Due to the growth of precarious jobs as employment, it is increasingly difficult to classify women by their occupation or even the sector they work in. Widespread restructuring and cutbacks have forced women to seek work in totally different sectors and job classifications shifting for example, from full-time work as a machine operator to a part-time job in food processing. A precarious labour market is de-skilling women.**

**Younger women on the other hand expressed a palpable frustration with being stuck in a vicious, perpetual cycle of short-term contract and temporary jobs, despite the years they had invested in securing an education and degrees. They felt squeezed out of the labour market before they even had a chance to get in.**

**The inter-generational squeeze was highlighted in the experiences of these women when they worked with temp agencies and in part-time and non-union jobs**

**While these current realities may be grim, many of the women who were interviewed continued to put forth ideas about changes they want to see so that women have more stability and dignity at work and in their lives more generally.**

**The recommendations from the research are grouped in three categories — reclaiming the union advantage, protecting workers’ rights in precarious employment, and improving social infrastructures and supports for women workers and their families.**

### 6.2 Recommendations

#### Reclaiming the union advantage

- All levels of government must recognize that unions play a vital role in advancing women’s equality and economic independence. Barriers must be removed to organizing women through pro-active legislative changes and new forms of organizing and bargaining collectively in the workplace.
- The automatic certification process should be extended to workers in all sectors, including female-predominated sectors, and no longer restricted to workers in the construction and building industries. A card check process will greatly assist women to organize and join a union without fear of reprisals,
- A policy review of the Ontario Labour Relations Act should be conducted with a mandate to provide more legislative support for women workers in non-traditional workplace settings and non-standard employment. The review should take into



PHOTOGRAPH: MICHELLE ROBIDOUX

account current labour market restructuring with special consideration of the legislative framework needed to facilitate sectorial organizing and bargaining.

- Labour unions need to dedicate substantive resources to strengthen organizing women, youth, racialized workers, and indigenous workers, especially those in precarious work. The community chapter model being pursued by Unifor, the pre-organizing partnership between USW and live-in caregivers; and the organizing model of fast food workers in the United States illustrate the possibilities of innovative organizing.
- Unions should also be encouraged to utilize the experiences and knowledge of former union activists as organizers and maintain their meaningful participation and ties with their home unions.
- Unions need to engage the diversity of women workers more actively in their organizations and ensure that the equity agenda remains as part of the union's bargaining and mobilizing priorities. They must also support the advancement of more women, particularly racialized women, in leadership roles.

### **Protecting the rights of women workers in precarious employment**

- A permanent Temporary Agency Unit should be established with the Employment Standards Branch to strengthen the protection of temporary agency workers. Such Unit with dedicated staff and resources will be able to initiate investigations, monitor and conduct proper enforcement.
- Employment Standards should take measures to narrow the wage disparities among workers in precarious work arrangement doing similar work. There should be an equal pay provision on an hourly basis for workers performing comparable work duties, regardless of their full-time, part-time or temporary status.
- Labour and community need to continue the campaign for a \$14 minimum wage in Ontario. It would be a significant improvement in the lives of women workers who make up the majority of low wage workers.

- The growing homecare sector is the new job ghetto for women workers, in particular racialized and immigrant women. There is a strong need for government, employers and unions to develop a sectoral strategy and standard to end some of the exploitation and enable some stability in the employment for the escalating number of PSWs in this sector. The recommendations put forth by SEIU listed in Section 5.6 if implemented, will first and foremost, improve the quality of care for seniors and other service users.
- There is an urgent need for government, labour and employers to develop a proactive strategy to ensure women workers can transition from temp work arrangement to permanent status within the same workplace. The current practices which can be arbitrary and discriminatory, have effectively kept women in job ghetto with low pay and insecure job prospect. A more equitable access to secure employment can be an issue that the Women's Directorate, Citizenship and the Ontario Human Rights Commission to jointly work on.
- Two or multiple tiered wage system is being forced on workers in both the public and private sectors. Unions should continue to resist this effort that penalizes younger workers and create a divided workforce and solidarity.
- Pay equity remains a significant issue for women. Unions and communities need to continue to be vigilant to ensure that all women are paid a fair wage.

#### **Strengthening social infrastructure**

- Community and Labour should renew the call for a national publicly funded childcare system that is affordable, universal and accessible to working women. Both Federal and Ontario governments should consider the feasibility and adaptability of the Quebec model for implementation in Ontario.
- Public services such as accessible and affordable transit, health care, library services, and community and recreation centres are critical support services that keep women workers juggling between work and family responsibilities with some reprieve and grace. In essence, public services in the community are women's services. Unions and broader community partners must continue to resist the privatization of public services, contracting out and the reduction of staff which leads to the reduction of services that women depend on.



## How we did the research

In keeping with the participatory nature of the inquiry, the focus of the research was to hear from diverse women, young and older, union, non-union, unemployed and students about their experiences of working and living in Toronto in the recent (2008) recession economy. The research involved three focus discussion group (FDGs); one with women in unions, one with women who have lost unionized jobs, and a third one with young women. A total of 27 women participated in the FDGs. The younger women were working full-time, were students full-time and were students who were in post-secondary institutions as well as working part-time. A couple of the students working part-time had unions but were not aware of them.

Key informant interviews were conducted with 17 women. These women were both union and non-union, in full-time employment and in precarious employment and in a wide range of sectors of the GTA's economy. Additional meetings and discussions were held with staff, organizers and elected officials from various unions. The research was conducted between May 2013 and January 2014.

An unforeseen difficulty in the research was the complication of finding women who had lost unionized jobs in the last recession and who would be willing to speak with us. There are numerous reasons for this including that fact that many unions do not or are not able to keep in contact with all the workers that have been laid off over the last five to six years. Some unions did identify women, but they were unwilling to speak with us because they were busy looking for work or had found other work and moved on. Others were too depressed and ashamed to speak with us because they had not been able to find any work since they were laid off. Some felt humiliated by the layoffs and could not cope with having to explain how radically their life had changed due to the loss of the job and the insecurity that goes with it — both emotional and financial. Many of them were now economically marginalized and could not find other full-time secure work. Quite a few of them continue to get precarious work on and off for a few weeks at a time via employment agencies.

A key objective of the research was to explore what happens to women when they lose good secure union jobs. Due to the difficulty of identifying and speaking with laid-off women workers we decided to focus on the women laid-off from one union — the United Steelworkers (USW). In the last five to six years, the USW experienced many layoffs in the manufacturing sector. Many of these employers just shut down businesses that had been in operation for decades. Many members were still in contact with the union and made use of the services provided by the union via the Job Action Centres and their other educational programmes.

A review of relevant literature was also part the research.



PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN MACLENNAN

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 An intersectional analysis is a tool for understanding multiple discriminations and how different sets of identities impact on access to rights and opportunities. This involves recognizing that women experience discrimination and violations of human rights not only on the basis of gender, but also due to other unequal power relations such as those based on race, age, ethnicity, class, status, caste, ability/disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion and a multiplicity of other factors including if they are indigenous or not.
- 2 <http://psacunion.ca/topics/womens-rights>
- 3 <http://thecanadianencyclopedia.com/en/article/women-in-the-labour-force/>
- 4 <http://www.payequity.gov.on.ca/en/about/pubs/genderwage/wagegap.php>
- 5 This data was not dis-aggregated by sex so it is not possible to state what the ratio of these percentages is for women and for men.
- 6 <http://seiuhealthcare.ca/what-we-stand-for/fulfilling-the-promise>
- 7 Adapted from: Ibid.
- 8 Canadian Labour Congress (2013) *The Union Advantage for Women in Ontario*, Ottawa
- 9 Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey: CANSIM 282-0074
- 10 Adapted from: Ibid
- 11 Toronto Star, October 1 2013. [http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/vitalsigns/2013/10/01/vital\\_signs\\_report\\_2013\\_youth\\_unemployment\\_in\\_toronto\\_high.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/vitalsigns/2013/10/01/vital_signs_report_2013_youth_unemployment_in_toronto_high.html)
- 12 <http://www.msnbc.com/the-ed-show/new-yorks-fast-food-workers-strike-why-now>
- 13 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/05/fast-food-workers-strike\\_n\\_4379295.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/05/fast-food-workers-strike_n_4379295.html)
- 14 <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/12/1/fast-food-workersplanstrikesin100citiesacrossus.html>
- 15 [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/30/nyregion/fast-food-workers-in-new-york-city-rally-for-higher-wages.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/30/nyregion/fast-food-workers-in-new-york-city-rally-for-higher-wages.html?_r=0)
- 16 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/05/fast-food-workers-strike\\_n\\_4379295.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/05/fast-food-workers-strike_n_4379295.html)
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 <http://raisetheminimumwage.ca/>
- 19 <http://raisetheminimumwage.ca/about-the-campaign/>



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