

# National President's Recommendations

Canadian Council 2018



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# Defending Democracy in Canada's Labour Movement: Fixing the Canadian Labour Congress

After repeated attempts to resolve a lingering dispute that is about preserving the integrity of our movement and the democracy of unions in Canada, Unifor's National Executive Board made the difficult decision to disaffiliate from the Canadian Labour Congress.

A fundamental principle of union democracy is that workers will elect the union of their choice and have the right to change unions without fear of intimidation or reprisal. Unfortunately, and in far too many cases, workers in Canada are denied this right by their own union. The right to change unions is allowed in every jurisdiction across Canada, and aims to safeguard the terms and conditions collectively bargained by workers with their employer. Unfortunately, when union members are denied due process to change unions under Article 4 of the Canadian Labour Congress Constitution, many make the difficult and unfortunate decision to simply decertify without any of their rights secured.

The Canadian Labour Congress must hold its affiliates accountable for this malpractice, to rebuild workers' faith and trust in unions, and to see the broader labour movement as a beacon of hope for a safe, fair and just world.

In making its decision to disaffiliate, the Board exercised its constitutional authority as established in Article 19 (2) of the Unifor Constitution. Since making this decision, our union has continued its dialogue with the Congress in an attempt to settle this dispute in a way that is fair and meaningful to affected workers. A resolution must include a commitment to a Canadian Labour Congress constitutional review, chaired by an independent authority with the intent of clarifying the interpretation of Articles 4, 25 and 26. It must also include a commitment by all affiliates to fully adhere to and comply with Article 4, with significant penalties for those found in violation.

I hope that Unifor's disaffiliation is short-lived. I also hope that this dispute results in lasting and positive change that strengthens the Canadian labour movement for generations to come.

*I recommend that:*

- Unifor's Canadian Council affirm the January 16, 2018 decision of the National Executive Board to disaffiliate from the Canadian Labour Congress, as per Article 19 (2) of the Unifor Constitution; and
- Unifor officers continue to seek a fair and meaningful resolution to this dispute with the Canadian Labour Congress and its affiliates.

# Federal Election 2019

At its founding, Unifor identified political activism as a key pillar in advancing the collective interests of working people. Over the past five years, our union has shown repeatedly that the political engagement of workers can fundamentally reshape and improve society. We have shown that activism can drive our agenda for fairness, equality, inclusivity and raise our standard of living and that a progressive political agenda can help us achieve stronger gains at the bargaining table. Most importantly, our activism has shown that the collective power of workers is a critical counterbalance to the interests of corporations and the wealthy few.

Our political work happens every day and everywhere – from town councils and community boards to Parliament Hill. This work must continue over the coming year as we approach the next federal election. In 2015, Unifor played a key role in the federal election, ensuring that nearly a decade of conservative attacks on unions in Canada officially ended. We mobilized on an unprecedented scale, and won. As a result, we have been able to influence progressive social policies that aim to help working people, including on pay equity, progressive trade policy, pension reform, pharmacare, labour standards, climate protection, the preservation of local news and culture, and more. This work must continue beyond 2019, and that means we must elect a government that supports working people and progressive values.

*I recommend that Unifor:*

- Immediately develop a comprehensive member-to-member engagement strategy for the 2019 federal election, in collaboration with the Canadian Council Political Action Committee, and present this plan to the November meeting of the National Executive Board. This plan shall include research, communication and education components;
- Hold events in conjunction with upcoming Regional and Quebec councils to outline and implement our election strategy;
- Coordinate national efforts with our activists and leadership in Quebec, and their specific plans and strategies to elect progressive candidates;
- Outline a clear list of priority demands and work to secure commitments on key policy issues from all political parties, with the aim of electing a progressive federal government that advances Unifor's organizational goals, respects trade union rights, and the goals of working people; and
- Make a concerted effort to speak with all Unifor members across Canada and treat these interactions as opportunities to further build and strengthen our union.

# Building a Stronger, More Active and Community-Rooted Union

The formation of Unifor in 2013 was an opportunity to reflect on the state of Canada's labour movement: our historic strengths and our challenges. The birth of our new union was a moment of change and revitalization – a moment to seek new paths of activism, to redefine workers struggles in the 21st century.

To accomplish these goals, Unifor undertook an ambitious project to strengthen its local unions –the building blocks of any successful union. The Local Union Task Force helped identify important tools and strategies to promote activism, inclusivity and transparency. Despite Unifor's current disaffiliation from the Canadian Labour Congress, our leadership and activists continue to play a vital role defending the rights of workers in communities and within the broader progressive labour movement. Unifor is founded on the principles of democracy, solidarity, militancy, unity and equality – and we strive, each day, to build our union in this mould.

Today, we must recommit to build bridges of solidarity with our movement allies, our community partners and between our local unions, like never before.

*I recommend that Unifor:*

- Allocate additional resources to mobilize union members, activists and allies encouraging greater participation in Unifor-led campaigns as well as other community-building initiatives; and
- Through its local unions, continue the work of implementing the recommendations of the Local Union Task Force and utilizing the various resources developed from it to forge closer working relationships between locals, to build broader community partnerships and to fulfil Unifor's vision for strong, progressive social unionism.

# Developing a Unifor Policy on Climate Change and Just Transition

The threat that climate change poses to the natural environment and our collective well-being is undeniable. The quest for unending economic growth and unregulated profits often puts the goals of our industrial economy at odds with the protection of the earth. All of us have a role to play in reversing the damaging impacts of climate change, and mitigate those impacts that are already irreversible.

At the 2017 Canadian Council, I recommended the union lobby federal officials on needed just transition supports for workers, and participate in other labour movement related activities. That work is done, but more work is needed.

Debates on federal and provincial policies, programs and other recommended climate solutions has intensified over the past twelve months. Many of these debates intersect directly with the health and welfare of Unifor members, as well as our communities and workplaces. As a union that represents workers in nearly all sectors of the economy, Unifor's voice is critical in this broader climate conversation.

*I recommend that Unifor:*

- Develop a climate and just transition policy that outlines, in clear terms, the union's policy framework and public positioning. This policy must be informed by Unifor members, especially those most directly impacted by climate change policies, such as those working in the energy and resource sectors, in vehicle manufacturing as well as transportation; and
- Ensure this policy aids and informs a comprehensive political action strategy, to ensure existing and future climate change mitigation measures support sustainable communities and the well-being of workers; and
- Establish a strategic plan of policy monitoring and intervention through a reinvigorated Unifor Energy, Economy and Environment (E3) working group. This should include annual meetings of national, local and industry leadership to review recent developments and coordinate responses; and
- Continue to open lines of communication on climate and just transition within the union as well as with relevant community allies and environmental organizations.

# Federal Pay Equity

The percentage of Canadian women entering the workforce has increased radically over the last 30 years. This ranks among one of the most dramatic social changes of the last century. And yet, the work done by women has continued to be undervalued and underpaid. Unifor has been active in pushing governments and employers to do their part to close the gender wage gap. One tool to do this is effective pay equity legislation.

The federal government will be introducing pro-active pay equity legislation this fall. This will bring a welcomed onus on employers to show that their pay structure does not discriminate based on gender. This will affect our workplaces both in the federal sector and in those who act as federal contractors. Unions will be involved in ensuring that both wages and other benefits are evaluated in a gender-neutral way.

It is a myth that when you have a collective agreement you have pay equity by default. This simply is not true. Even with a collective agreement, there can be conscious or unconscious bias that leads to female-dominated classifications being paid less for work of equal value.

Under this upcoming legislation, employers will be required to take action and will be required to involve the union. Unifor leadership must be prepared and trained to take on the tasks required to realize equity.

*I recommend that Unifor:*

- Urge the federal government to pass its promised federal workplace pay equity legislation and ensure that it contains the key elements outlined in the 2016 Parliamentary Standing Committee report entitled “It’s Time to Act”; and
- Outline a clear approach that advances Unifor’s commitment to gender equality and establish a nationally-coordinated plan, involving regional and sector councils, for implementation of pay equity including bargaining effective joint processes and committees; and
- Develop education and research materials for local unions in the federal sector, or for those bargaining units that are federal contractors.

