

## **Court Rules for Farm Unions**

The Ontario Court of Appeal has told the Ontario government to drop its ban on farm unions because it violates the Charter of Rights of Ontario's more than 100,000 agriculture workers.

In a written decision delivered on November 17, the court ruled that *Ontario's Agricultural Employees Protection Act* (AEPA), which currently denies Ontario farm workers the right to unionize, is a violation of Freedom of Association rights guaranteed under the Charter. The court has given the McGuinty government 12 months to bring farm workers under the *Ontario Labour Relations Act*, or draft new legislation respecting the rights of farm workers to unionize.

Successive Conservative and Liberal governments have previously refused to grant farm workers the right to form unions.

"This is a victory for all agriculture workers in Ontario," said Wayne Hanley, the National President of UFCW Canada. "After decades of struggle on behalf of Ontario's farm workers, UFCW Canada is glad the courts have affirmed that the most vulnerable group of workers in Ontario is entitled to full union representation. Now it's time for the McGuinty government to join the 21st Century and end this discriminatory gap in democracy as soon as possible."

Last May, the UFCW brought an appeal on behalf of three Ontario agricultural workers. In 2003, they, along with most of their more than 200 fellow workers, voted to create a UFCW Canada bargaining unit at a mushroom grow house factory farm in Kingsville, Ontario. The certificate was never issued because of the exclusion under the AEPA.

This month's ruling was reinforced by a June 2007 precedent-setting decision by the Supreme Court of Canada which ruled, "... the Section 2(d) guarantee of Freedom of Association protects the capacity of members of labour unions to engage in collective bargaining on workplace issues."

## **Liberals Fail to Address Auto Jobs**

NDP Leader, Howard Hampton, says the McGuinty government is "missing in action" as Ontario's troubled auto sector tanks.

"We are in a real crisis here. Tens of thousands of Ontarians rely on jobs in the auto sector to pay the mortgage, cover the car loan and send the kids to university. Those jobs are in peril if the McGuinty government continues to irresponsibly stall on a financial aid package that alleviates pressure due to the credit crunch," said Hampton.

"The Canadian units of the Big Three automakers have made it very clear that they desperately need government financial assistance simply to survive. They've made it clear that they need emergency credit in the form of loan guarantees, low-interest loans or commercial paper funding programs, otherwise the consequences for the economy of this province could be devastating."

Chrysler Canada Inc., Ford Motor Company of Canada Ltd., and General Motors of Canada Ltd., say they are seeking meetings with Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty to press their case. The three automakers said they support a request by the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association of Canada, which told senior levels of government a week ago that parts suppliers need emergency help.

"The McGuinty government's response is to point fingers at Ottawa and play the blame game, but that's not productive. It needs to come to the table with a financial assistance package that also includes ironclad job guarantees. That's what New Democrats want to see," said Hampton.

Hampton added that with the unemployment rate going up, jobs losses increasing and the economy plummeting, it's outrageous that the McGuinty Liberals continue to stand on the sidelines.

"Dalton McGuinty is missing in action," said Hampton.

### **Funding Cuts to Community Labs**

NDP Health Critic, France Gélinas questioned the McGuinty government's commitment to public Medicare in the wake of its decision to terminate all funding of community laboratory services to Ontario's hospitals.

"For weeks, I have asked for clarification of the Ministry's role in the closure of the community lab services and yet the Minister has repeatedly evaded my questions. Today, the Minister continued to deliver contradictory messages to Ontarians. He speaks of his government's commitment to public health care, but at the same time he is transferring a half a billion dollars to large for-profit corporations – a clear attack on our public Medicare system," said Gélinas.

Gélinas has been raising warning bells about the privatization of non-profit, community-based lab services since the announcement of the closure of the lab in Huntsville weeks ago. The Minister's decision will affect eleven communities across Ontario, including: Perth, Fergus, Orangeville, New Liskeard, Napanee, Kenora, Pembroke, Atikokan, Parry Sound, Huntsville and Bracebridge.

These community-based labs have received praise from those living in the affected communities, physicians practicing in those communities and from hospitals that house them.

Community groups have urged the McGuinty government to continue funding the labs, noting that they have enhanced productivity of equipment and staff, reduced duplication of testing, shortened turnaround times for results, secured the 24/7 obligations of the hospitals and improved cost effectiveness.

"Ontarians want high-quality health care that is public and not-for-profit," said Gélinas.

"When will the McGuinty government provide concrete assurance of its commitment to Medicare by immediately guaranteeing the adequate and ongoing funding for community laboratory services in public hospitals?" asked Gélinas.

### **The following Government Bills were debated in Committee and ordered for Third Reading:**

Bill 85, *Photo Card Act*,

Bill 97, *Increasing Access to Qualified Health Professionals for Ontario Act*;

Bill 100, *Ideas for the Future Act*;

Bill 114, *Budget Measures and Interim Appropriation Act*;

### **The following Government Bill was passed at Second Reading and sent to Committee:**

Bill 119, *Workplace Safety and Insurance Amendment Act*,

**The following Members' Bills were passed at Second Reading and sent to Committee:**

Bill 96, *Registered Retirement Savings Protection Act*, (Lib.)

Bill 102, *Seniors' Ombudsman Act*, (Lib.)

Bill 104, *Representation Amendment Act*, (Lib.)

Bill 106, *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act*, (Lib.)

Bill 109, *Taxation Amendment Act (Equipment Purchased for Persons with Disabilities)*; (PC)

Bill 110, *Auditor General Amendment Act*, (PC)

Bill 113, *Diabetes Awareness Month Act*, (Lib.)

**The following Members' Bill was lost at Second Reading:**

Bill 112, *Single-Use Bottled Water Ban Act*, (Lib.)

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