
EQUITY BARGAINING IN THE NEW ECONOMY

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When thinking about equity bargaining in the new economy we need to think about both collective bargaining and political bargaining strategies. The gains of the union movement have been built on pursuing both of these strategies.

In greater Toronto, out of the 2.3 million paid work force, over 1 million workers earn less than the official poverty level. The vast majority of those workers are women and workers of colour. If we are going to talk about bargaining for equity, we need to address how to build power to bargain gains for these workers and how to transform ourselves to build power.

The Labour Council is launching a major initiative - a framework for dozens of campaigns called *A Million Reasons*, because there are a million workers in this city below the poverty line and therefore a million reasons to raise wages, to improve labour law, and to improve standards and social programs.

In this framework we see four pieces crucial to building trade union power in today's economy:

1. Protect good jobs in the public sector and private sector. That means that every union needs to get involved in supporting each other's struggles.
2. Bargain to raise standards sector by sector by establishing common bargaining. For example, we need to bargain standards for the hotel industry in the city, not just bargain with each hotel separately.
3. Mass organizing, especially with workers of colour. We need to forge ties and be involved in the community organizing that is going on in local, ethnic communities, asking them to tell us how to best support their struggles.
4. Use our power to protect and strengthen the social wage - all of those programs people think of as government programs. We need to reclaim these as the programs we fought for and won politically - including workers' compensation, health care, public education, child care, etc. The social wage is crucial, especially for low-wage workers of colour to achieve equity.