



Ontario's low-wage workers deserve a raise



Since 2013, community organizations and advocates have been pressuring the provincial government to raise the minimum wage from \$10.25 to \$14 an hour in order to help lift low-income workers and their families out of poverty.

In January 2014, the Ontario government announced that it will raise the minimum wage to \$11 in June 2014 and introduce legislation that will see the minimum wage increased annually by the rate of inflation. While an important victory, \$11 still falls 16% below the poverty line, leaving many low-wage workers struggling to make ends meet. Unfortunately, the government was defeated before the legislation could be passed to index the minimum wage to inflation.

Low-wage jobs on the rise

The number of workers in minimum wage jobs has more than doubled between 2003 and 2011, representing nearly 10% of Ontario's workforce. Minimum wage jobs are no longer being performed solely by young workers in small businesses. Increasingly, it is women, workers over 25 years of age, workers of colour and new immigrants who are making up a greater share of the minimum wage workforce. Further, nearly half of all minimum wage workers in Ontario are employed in large businesses that employ 500 or more employees. These are usually large corporations that make millions of dollars in profits by paying their workers poverty-level wages.

Boosting the minimum wage to \$14 also makes good economic sense. Low-income workers, for example, are most likely to spend the money they earn on goods and services in the local community. This stimulates production and demand. It has been estimated that increasing the minimum wage to \$14 an hour would inject an extra \$5 billion into the economy and workers' pockets. A decent minimum wage also promotes healthy communities, as workers and their families would have greater access to healthy food, medicine, healthcare services and recreational activities.

Ask your candidates:

- What will your party do to ensure that low wage workers are not forced to live in poverty?
- What will your party do to curb the growing number of low-wage jobs in Ontario?
- What will you do to ensure that highly profitable corporations are paying their employees a decent wage?

Resources:

The Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage: www.raisetheminimumwage.ca

Workers' Action Centre: www.workersactioncentre.org

The Wellesley Institute: www.wellesleyinstitute.com