

## Changing Workplace Review

My name is Deirdre Pike. I'm a Senior Social Planner with the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton and in that role I sit on the Operations Committee for the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. It is on behalf of the Roundtable for Poverty Reduction that I am officially here today. However, my role as a social planner and the lead researcher on a case study in Hamilton for the Precarious Employment Project of Southern Ontario has certainly influenced my remarks.

I want to take just a brief moment to thank you for the opportunity to share some of our responses to the questions in your Changing Workplaces Review. The questions provide space to consider what the Worker's Action Centre says is, "a time to bring balance to labour market regulation and provide ways to rebuild our employment practices to support decent wages and working conditions."

I am sure you are familiar with the Worker's Action Centre report, "Still Working on the Edge: Building Decent Jobs from the Group Up," which we believe provides some very solid recommendations for the Special Advisors to consider.

In framing the Changing Workplaces Review, we appreciate that the Special Advisors want to ground these conversations in values and ask for input as to what those values should be. Grounding the review in the principle of decency will help to ensure, as was stated in the 2006 review of the Federal Labour Code, "no worker should receive a wage that is insufficient to live on; be deprived of the payment of wages or benefits to which they are entitled; be subject to coercion, discrimination, indignity or unwarranted danger in the workplace; or be required to work so many hours that she or he is effectively denied a personal or civic life."

Sadly, the current reality for workers in Ontario is just that. Instead of being grounded in decency, the Ontario labour market has become a tainted ground filled with increasing precarity including contract work, no benefits, a proliferation of temp work, one person with multiple part-time jobs, jobs that are far from home, with unsafe conditions and often low income, though precarity can be present in middle and higher income jobs as well.

The changing nature of work in our society requires new policies and practices to respond to that change. For example, protection for temporary agency workers is needed. I have come across far too many temp workers who are sitting next to a person doing the identical job for 3X the salary and the benefit of a union backed position. This should not happen if decency is the grounding for improving the system. We should allow client companies to hire workers directly within the first 6 months. Limiting the number of temp workers a company can have at one time to 20% of its workforce would assist in addressing this changing nature of work.

Reviewing the Employment Standards Act and ensuring there is protection for part-time, casual and temp workers is an essential step in your work. We concur with the Workers' Action Centre on the following recommendations:

- There should be no differential treatment in pay, benefits and working conditions for workers who are doing the same work but are classified differently such as part-time, contract, temporary or casual.

- More Employment Standards Officers could assist in ending the increasing violations of overtime and hours of work standards that cut across many industries. Too often workers are called in for a shift of minimal hours with no guarantee for further hours of work in the week either.
- To improve the predictability of hours, all workers should receive a written contract on the first day of employment setting out terms and conditions, including expected hours of work.
- Too many decent jobs have been replaced by low-wage work. The service sector and other low wage sectors provide jobs that keep people living below the poverty line. Ontario should have a minimum wage that brings workers above the poverty line and that wage should be \$15 an hour this year.

If minimum is kept where it is, there will continue to be inequity in our province where too many workers cannot participate fully in the life of their community because they are left behind. The benefits to employers of paying a better wage to their workers includes better morale and retention which leads to lower costs for staff training. Paying workers at this level a better wage means more money in the local economy. These workers are not using their extra dollars to invest in off shore oil or take a trip to another country. They will simply have enough money ensure they can both put food on the table and heat their homes.

Another area of concern for us is the lack of sick time availability for Ontario workers. When Public Health tells us to stay home when sick, that is not possible for hundreds of thousands of workers who have no access to paid sick leave and so sick leave is not a viable option. At least 145 countries provide paid sick days. We recommend that all employees should accrue one hour of paid sick time for every 35 hours worked.

Finally, changes must be made to better protect migrant workers under the Employment Standards Act. I would refer again to the Workers' Action Centre report, *Still Working on the Edge*, for recommendations calling for a proactive system of employer registration and other policy changes that would assist in this area.

Thank you very much for providing this opportunity. A written copy of my remarks and references has been emailed to you.