

Build rank-and-file committees to prepare a political general strike against Ontario's Doug Ford!

By the Socialist Equality Party (Canada)
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The working class is on a collision course with Ontario's Progressive Conservative government and its rightwing populist premier, the Trump wannabe Doug Ford. At the behest of big business, the Conservatives are mounting an all-out assault on worker rights and public services, cosseting the police, stoking hostility to refugees, and preparing to criminalize working-class opposition, including threatened teacher strikes this fall.

Determined to beat back this class-war offensive, growing numbers of workers and youth have joined demonstrations and other protests. Many of these have been organized on social media, independent of the unions and the rest of the political establishment. The critical question is to provide this burgeoning militant sentiment with a socialist political perspective: one that orients the working class to the preparation of a political general strike to bring down the Ford government, as a crucial first step in developing a mass political movement for workers' power.

In pursuing such a strategy, working people and youth must understand two essential points about the character of their struggle:

1. In opposing Ford's social counter-revolution, they are challenging the agenda not just of an especially malevolent and rapacious multi-millionaire businessman, but of the entire capitalist class. Since the 2008 global economic crisis, ruling elites around the world have shifted ever further to the right in a relentless drive to make workers pay for the breakdown of capitalism. This has included relentless austerity, so as to ensure that the profits of the corporate elite continue to swell, and vast increases in military budgets and foreign aggression. As in the 1930s, the imperialist powers, Canada included, are embroiled in a frantic struggle for markets, resources, and strategic advantage that threatens to climax in world war.

2. The opposition to Ford's big business rampage is part of a global working-class upsurge against ever-deepening economic insecurity and social inequality. From the teachers' strikes in the US and the rebellion of the Matamoros workers in Mexico's maquiladora zone, to France's Yellow Vest movement, and the mass protests against Algeria and Sudan's

dictatorial regimes, working people are striving to assert their class interests. Invariably the impetus for these struggles has come from outside the trade union apparatuses and establishment "left" parties. And they have developed only in so far as the opposition to these pro-capitalist organizations—which for decades have imposed austerity, concessions and job cuts—has become ever more organizationally and politically explicit.

The fight against Ford can be successful only if workers break free of the political control of the trade unions and NDP, and strive to unite their struggles with those of workers across Canada, in the United States, and internationally in a global working-class counter-offensive against capitalist austerity and war.

A sharp and urgent warning must be made about the role being played by the trade unions. They are determined to sabotage the working-class opposition to Ford, just as they torpedoed the mass movement against Mike Harris and his Thatcherite Common Sense Revolution two decades ago.

For most of Ford's first year in office, the unions played possum. If in late March they finally bestirred themselves to launch an ostensible anti-Ford campaign under the "Power of Many" banner, it was because they were alarmed that workers and young people had begun to organize their own independent protest actions.

The Ontario Federation of Labour's "Power of Many" is a cynical fraud. It is aimed at straitjacketing working-class opposition within futile protest actions limited to pressuring Ford and his PCs "to listen to the people." That the unions are adamantly opposed to mobilizing the working class to bring down the Ford government is underscored by the clock atop the OFL website that counts down to the very second how long Ontarians must wait till they can elect a "progressive" government in June 2022, i.e. a right-wing, capitalist government headed by the Liberals or NDP.

The unions' phony opposition to Ford goes hand in hand with their support for the re-election of the federal Liberal government of Justin Trudeau. Through groups like Engage Canada the unions are reprising the role they played during the

2015 election, when they falsely promoted Trudeau as a “progressive” alternative to Stephen Harper’s Tories.

In the intervening four years, Trudeau has moved to hike military spending by over 70 percent, expanded Canada’s role in US military-strategic offensives around the world, maintained austerity for working people and ultra-low taxes for the corporate elite, and illegalized the 2018 postal workers’ strike. Yet the unions have eagerly expanded their collaboration with the Liberals, establishing a closer partnership with Trudeau than any federal government in decades.

Unifor President Jerry Dias served as a semi-official adviser to Trudeau and Canadian big business during the North American Free Trade Agreement talks. Then, in response to GM’s shuttering of five plants across North America, he opposed all job action, while mounting a reactionary “save Canadian jobs” campaign that pitted workers against each other and incited racist animosity toward Mexican workers. When Trump imposed tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum products, the United Steelworkers joined the Trudeau government in advocating a common North American anti-China trade war policy, emphasizing that Canadian steel and aluminum are vital to the making of US warplanes and tanks.

Workers in Ontario can take forward their struggle against Ford only by forming their own action committees in workplaces, schools, and neighbourhoods entirely independent of, and in political opposition, to the corporatist unions and all the parties of the bourgeoisie. These committees must unite and coordinate the opposition to Ford, organize protests and strikes against its gamut of anti-working-class measures—from the rollback of the minimum wage and gutting of student aid to the assault on public education—and lay the groundwork for a political general strike to bring down the Ford government.

The development of such a movement will inevitably pose the question of *which class rules*: Will socio-economic life continue to be subordinated to the profit imperative of big business, resulting in social regression, imperialist violence and the growing threat of war, or will the social needs of working people prevail?

Consequently, from the get-go, the most class-conscious workers and youth must fight for the anti-Ford movement and the rank-and-file committees to become the spearhead of a cross-Canada working-class upsurge aimed at bringing to power a workers’ government committed to socialist policies, and developing an international offensive against capitalism.

Ford and the Canadian ruling elite have already demonstrated that they will respond to growing social opposition with state repression. Governments of all stripes have systematically criminalized strikes, while erecting in the name of the phony “war on terror” the infrastructure for a police state.

The ruling class’ turn to authoritarian methods of rule serves to further underline the criminal political role being played by

pseudo-left groups like Fightback and Socialist Action. They mouth militant-sounding phrases about fighting Ford, while systematically opposing any challenge to the political authority of the unions and NDP. No matter that for decades these organizations have suppressed the class struggle, imposed austerity, and policed the anti-strike laws. Moreover, the record of the unions the world over during the past three decades has demonstrated that these nationalist, pro-capitalist organizations will *not* respond to pressure from below by shifting left. Rather, they will close ranks even more resolutely with the bourgeoisie to politically contain and derail working-class opposition.

The pseudo-left groups are among the foremost promoters of race, gender and other forms of identity politics, whereby privileged layers seek to advance their career ambitions and social position within the framework of capitalism. Led by and orientated to upper middle-class layers, the pseudo-left is terrified that the anti-Ford struggle could escape the unions’ control and assume an explicitly anti-capitalist and socialist-internationalist character.

But this is precisely what the working class requires. To defeat the global capitalist assault on the social rights of the working class, defend democratic rights, and oppose war, workers in Ontario and across Canada must take their place in the global working-class counter-offensive and fight to impart it with a socialist direction.

It is for this perspective that the Socialist Equality Party, its co-thinkers in the International Committee of the Fourth International, and its daily organ, the *World Socialist Web Site*,

fight. We urge all workers and young people who recognize the urgent need for the working class to be armed with a socialist political perspective to become readers of the WSWS, enter into discussion with the SEP, and join the fight to build it.

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