

PRECARIOUS WORK IN THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION  
**CALGARY REGIONAL REPORT**  
September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016 – The Memorial Public Library

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## **What you said on youth un(der)employment**

- Alberta needs better youth employment at all levels. High school students really benefit from having job experience before post-secondary education.
- Students are balancing a lot of things, such as multiple jobs just to get by.
- Students often get exploited in the workforce and they need protection in their employment. MLA Connelly has a story about getting all his hours cut as a student at a major Canadian retailer because he asked for fair pay. This is not a unique story.
- Attendees were glad that the NDP government brought back the Summer Temporary Employment Program (STEP), but more is needed.
- Attendees called for employment support for students all year long, not just in the summer.
- Attendees suggested incentivizing employers to hire a recent graduate and provide in-job training to counter the trend that employers are providing less and less training.
- Jobs being created for students are low pay, low quality, and have little relevance for what career students are preparing for.
- Youth who aren't able to go to school don't have access to the employment programs such as SKIP and STEP. We need to catch them from falling through the cracks.
- **Proposed solutions:**
  - **Create incentives for employers to provide local training opportunities and co-op placements for all fields of study.**
  - **Create and invest in jobs and skills programs specifically tailored to unemployed youth who are not able to attend school.**
  - **Strengthen labour laws to help protect workers from exploitation, including low wages.**

## **What you said about unpaid internships**

- Students are encouraged to volunteer and work unpaid labour but that doesn't help them meet basic financial needs. This pressure can affect the entire family that either support the student or require support from the student.

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- Since many internships are unpaid, they are inaccessible to less wealthy students that need paid employment to meet basic needs.
- Working unpaid internships for “job experience” means that students are likely to have to take on a second job in addition to school and their internship. With all that considered, students still may not be able to meet their basic financial needs.
- Paid student employment is so important, because it allows youth to get skills training while paying off debt.
- The federal government should be playing a role in protecting students from unpaid internships.
- **Proposed solutions:**
  - **Eliminate all federally regulated unpaid internships that are not related to course credit for post-secondary institutions.**
  - **Provide a dedicated federal transfer to the provinces to ensure that universities are able to provide students with paid internships, with the eventual goal of banning unpaid internships in all its forms.**

### What you said about education

- The narrative from previous generations that post-secondary education will guarantee employment is no longer true. This affects every student, including “safe” degrees like engineering.
- Paying for tuition and basic needs is very difficult for students. The average debt for a student in Calgary is \$23 000.
- Graduates from Canadian universities are finding it to be difficult to establish a career, so they are often going back to school. They have to live precariously even longer, as students.
- Alberta has seen a 10% increase in students who are applying for Student Financial Aid.
- Cost of housing is critical for students in Calgary; the residences at U of C were filled beyond capacity and overflowed into second year housing.
- **Proposed solutions:**
  - **Canadian students need more financial aid.**
  - **Eliminate the barrier of tuitions fees by working collaboratively with provinces.**
  - **Offer non-repayable grants instead of student loans.**

## What you said about mental health

- Precarity creates barriers for people looking to exercise their rights. People are hesitant to stand up for their rights, even when they know them, because they are happy to have a job despite the fact that it may only provide survival wages. Staying in a situation like this can result in mental health challenges.
- The unstable nature of contract and short-term work can exacerbate mental health challenges for an individual.
- **Proposed solutions:**
  - **Increase access to mental health professionals.**
  - **Integrate mental health coverage into our current healthcare system.**

## What you said about unionization

- Existing legislation makes it difficult to organize a union - there are a lot of barriers and risks for workers.
- Unions have been facing concessions from employers for some time now. When in negotiations, benefits are getting whittled down or lost entirely and pensions are being eroded. Unions are also being pressured into two-tier contracts that hurt the job security and wages of young workers.
- If workers do not have knowledge of their rights, exploitation is really easy, especially through intimidation. Many youth hear lines from their employer such as, "if you don't take this shift, then will you have one tomorrow?"
- Many workers in Alberta are not fighting for their rights and benefits because they feel lucky to have found any kind of employment at all.
- **Proposed solutions:**
  - **Establish a minimum standard of education labour rights in primary and secondary schools.**
  - **Need progressive and effective reforms to modernize Canada's labour laws to accommodate for the precarious work realities that workers are facing today.**
  - **Institute automatic certification to make it easier to join a union and reduce opportunities for intimidation from employers.**

## What You Said About Jobs and Wages

- Albertans feel like having a personal connection to somebody is increasingly becoming the only way to get hired.
- Companies are able to pay Albertans less through sub-contracting. This keeps wages low despite potentially working at a single location for years. One attendee reported that this happens a lot with the oil and gas companies that use subcontracting to avoid paying out pension and EI premiums.
- The abuse of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program has put downward pressure on Canadians' wages. There is a crucial need for good, well-paying jobs but companies want cheaper and cheaper labour. Companies prefer to keep on "temporary workers" because they aren't responsible for supporting employees if they are injured. This type of action to reduce costs puts workers at risk.
- CUPW suggested that the post office wants to hire more temporary foreign workers. One CUPW member claimed that there are "temporary" workers that have been working in the post office for over 7 years.
- Even the City of Calgary hired a grounds keeping company that uses temporary foreign workers.
- Many people are working skilled, complex jobs and getting minimum wage. Canadians are not getting appropriate value for their labour.
- Many Canadians have been forced to move from salaried full-time jobs to contract work. This often means that employees are less likely to stand up for themselves and their rights since their contract can simply not be renewed. They will then be unemployed until they can find their next contract.
- Language skills can be a challenge for newcomers getting into the job.
- A lot of Albertans work jobs that are financially and socially underappreciated, such as early childhood educators or janitorial work. An example of this attitude is when a Wildrose member told an NDP MLA that she should have strived for more when she said that she had previously worked in senior care.
- **Proposed solutions:**
  - **Explore implementing a Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI).**
  - **Raise the minimum wage to \$15.00 per hour.**
  - **Employment standards should be updated to ensure that part-time and contract workers receive equal pay for work of equal value and equal access to benefits.**
  - **Scrap the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and provide permanent residency on arrival for workers who previously came to Canada through the TFWP.**

## **What you said about the personal impact of precarious work**

- Canadian parents having to support their children for longer adds a significant amount of financial pressure on families. Young adults in Canada are struggling to achieve true independence because of precarious employment.
- Older Canadians are unsure of what they will have for retirement and whether they will be able to rely on assistance from younger family members who are facing the obstacle of precarious work.
- Precarious work is affecting life at home. Attendees reported knowing of employees working overtime and sleeping at their place of employment because they have to work later than the last bus home.
- Attendees questioned whether we need to be working a 40-hour work week plus over-time. Canadians should look at how we want to structure our day and how to create a fulfilling work-life balance.
- **Proposed solutions:**
  - **Establish a National Childcare Strategy to create jobs and provide safe spaces for children to go.**
  - **Legislative changes that support a better work life balance such as shortening the work week to 32 hours, without loss of pay or benefits to workers and banning mandatory overtime.**

## **What you said about the privatization of our public services**

- Academia is becoming increasingly precarious. The PSAC is organizing teaching assistants. They found that these workers, paid by semester - if at all - are expected to work unreasonable hours and face unacceptable conditions such as running errands for their professors. This is a repercussion of chronic underfunding at both levels of government and a shift to managing universities as businesses instead of valued public services.
- **Proposed solutions:**
  - **Ensure investment is made in on the job-training in the public service; if unionized, include minimum amount of training built into local's collective agreement.**

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## **Comments from Minister of Justice, Kathleen Ganley**

- Many people in her riding have been affected by the economic downturn.
- At the turn of the century, wages were 25% higher than they were in other places in the county. However this wasn't spread evenly and has skewed prices in housing, food and affected people who were just entering the labour market.

## **Comments form MLA Michael Connolly**

- As a recent student, he asked an employer for a raise. Shortly after, his employer cut all his hours even though he was a strong seller. This is not a unique story.
- MLA Connolly heard from his constituents that people with degrees are not finding jobs, so they are going back for a Masters. After furthering their education, they are still not finding employment.
- Raising the minimum wage to 15\$ per hour is a good step forward.

## **Comments from MLA Jamie Kleinsteuber**

- When he started in the work force, his wage was 4\$ per hour over minimum wage. Then the wages were lowered and they would not get a raise, unless the minimum wage was raised. When that happened, they would get the minimum wage. There was a consistent trend to reduce wages.
- Two-tiered salaries were introduced in the workplace, where some people could have the opportunity to earn more while others' salaries were capped.
- The jobs in his workplace were complex jobs, not minimum wage jobs. People are not getting the proper value for their labour.