

PRECARIOUS WORK IN THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

WINDSOR REGIONAL REPORT

October 12th, 2016 –CUPE District Office

On myths about Millennials you said

- Attendees expressed being sick of stereotypes about Millennials; not all millennials have a basement apartment at their parents to stay in. More and more, Millennials have few benefits to draw from while they try to stay a float.
- Where Millennials are ‘boomeranging’ back into their parents’ home, it’s often because they’ve decided to return to school and can no longer afford living costs alone.
- Millennials are not frivolous. They are spending more on their pets simply because few can afford kids anymore, yet they still don’t want to be alone.
- Even for Millennials who “did everything right,” debt burdens are heavy and they’re often working for free in unpaid internships or volunteer positions to gain experience.
- People think millennials aren’t interested in collectivism and the greater good when in fact they’re scared to take a public stand because their situation is so dire.

On precarity in the public sector you said

- Precarity is seen across all sectors and is increasingly growing within the federal public service. Attendees called the federal government “one of the biggest temp offices.”
- More and more, the federal government looks unappealing to younger generations.
- Federal government workers are precarious too, especially when they are still on probation.
- Younger workers are saddled with debt and there is now a threat of not even making it into the federal government, which was traditionally thought of as a good job that would allow workers to afford debt repayment. It’s a grim situation everywhere.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Stricter enforcement of the labour code and employment standard legislation to discourage employers, like the federal government, from utilizing precarious work.**
 - **Institute programs to educate young workers in the federal public service on their labour rights.**

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On earned workplace benefits you said

- Even within unionized workplaces like the Beer Store, it's hard to take a sick day in practice. Workers are made to feel that they must be constantly available for shifts and don't want to risk a loss in seniority or good standing by taking a holiday or sick day.
- Attendees reported being scared to use vacation days. That is not an uncommon sentiment.
- While utilizing her earned vacation time, one worker was called back to work by her employer, who insisted the worker's shifts would be cut if she didn't return to work.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Modernization of Canadian labour laws.**
 - **Legislation to further enhance workplace benefits**

On workplace safety you said

- All levels of government need to work together to enforce health and safety standards, for example, require safe tools, safety gear, etc. On the ground, no one sees a purpose to bringing in good tools. Attendees expressed that in their experience it was hard to get unions to be aggressive enough about safety. Increasing workplace safety would directly decrease precarity.
- Packaging plants produce very poor working conditions in Windsor and can lead to work-related injuries. Attendees expressed the need to organize but were overwhelmed by the barriers.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Stricter enforcement of the Labour Code concerning safety at work and stricter penalties for those employers who break it.**
 - **More frequent safety checks in places of employment that have been known to be unsafe.**
 - **All levels of government need to provide employees the tools and education they need to advocate and organize around the issue of workplace safety.**

On our public services you said

- As it is now, pensions will not be enough for our children.
- Seniors are living in poverty because of the inadequate support they receive from current government programs.
- EI needs to be a tool to create stability for people who are in hardship. The program must become more accessible to more unemployed Canadians.
- Due to the continued lack of a national childcare strategy, workers are finding ways to provide informal caregiving to one another.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Freeze EI premiums.**

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- **Diversify EI training programs to accommodate those of all levels of education.**
- **Creation of a national low-cost daycare program.**
- **Significant pension reform and further increases to the guaranteed income supplement for our seniors.**

On jobs you said

- It seems like the only way to get any experience for youth is through unpaid internships. They used to be privileged but now they seem to be akin to slave labour.
- We have to think about how the environment has changed and attempt to transition to green jobs.
- There is little job mobility in precarious work, for example, people cannot make higher wages or get promotions for a number of years.
- One attendee talked about the difficulty to secure shifts and was only able to work seasonal shifts for the past 7 years.
- An employee's scheduling is at the discretion of your employer. Depending on the understanding of the employer, employees get little flexibility in balancing life and work.
- 60% of LCBO jobs are part-time.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Ban all federally-run unpaid internships.**
 - **Create a national strategy for the transition of workers in non-renewable energy jobs to renewable energy jobs.**
 - **Changes to labour law where multiple fixed-term contracts be considered continuous and employers are required to provide fair scheduling with a reasonable timeline for workers to know when they are working.**

On gender-specific issues you said

- Women are "breaking their butts" to make ends meet but downsizing is on the rise and temp agencies are a revolving door, even for workers with greater levels of formal education.
- A attendee was told that she "better get educated" because she is a woman of colour and will not be able to get a job otherwise.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Mandatory anti-oppression training for employers so that they understand the struggle that women and minorities face at work.**

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On education you said

- Twenty years ago, workers could get a good job with grade 13 education. Today, higher education is essential. People have to leave their current jobs and current places of residence to seek out higher education. Attendees expressed concern that access to schooling shouldn't take people so far away from their home.
- There are too few educational programs to help workers without much formal schooling, for example, people needing to get their GED.
- Precarious work is still common even for those workers who go back to school. Higher education is no long a pathway to a secure job.
- However, young workers are still being streamed into higher education with the hope that they will have access to more and better jobs. But they are graduating with more debt than ever. Attendees asked "what are we setting you up for?"
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Eliminate tuitions fees by working collaboratively with provinces.**
 - **Create incentives for employers to provide local training opportunities and co-op placements for all fields of study.**
 - **Emphasize the importance of vocational studies while providing more financial support to vocational programs across the country.**

On global competition you said

- Global competition has become a cutthroat situation with a motto of "I'll do it cheaper/for less."
- The old GM plant is a perfect example of what happens in "free trade".
- Workers are not supposed to be praying every morning just to have a job.
- Workers who want to live in their home communities, rather than relocating for work are told "that's your choice to be precarious."
- Attendees expressed the sentiment that "It's not right and we can't allow it anymore!"
- Attendees relayed that "people say to go out west (i.e.: Alberta, Saskatchewan) because it's the promise land. It's not!" People are facing a precarious work crisis everywhere.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Reject trade deals and agreements that infringe on workers` rights.**
 - **Re-draft certain parts of NAFTA to protect workers.**
 - **Create incentives for corporations and businesses to remain local.**
 - **Create more financial support for SMEs so that they can remain open.**

On a developed culture of fear you said

- Workers are fearful to “get out there” and organize.
- Attendees reported workers being afraid of being fired if they are seen in photos taken at the Labour Day parade. Those who attend political/union events are afraid to be heard speaking publicly.
- Particularly vulnerable sectors and workers need to organize in solidarity with one another. For example, retail and service sector employees, women of colour, younger workers, etc.
- There is a strong degree of favouritism in the precarious workforce and that discourages many people.
- One attendee spoke about their place of employment where only 10 out of 500 would speak out against unfair employment.
- Millennials are afraid to take a stand and be political as they are constantly spoken down to about their concerns.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Progressive and effective reforms to modernize Canada’s labour laws.**
 - **General education on employment standards and worker’s rights for young Canadians.**
 - **Institute higher penalties for employers that breach workers’ rights or collective bargaining agreements.**

On mental health challenges you said

- Older workers are simply downloading problems onto future, younger generations.
- Sometimes workers are forced to make ends meet with 10 hours of work a week. Sometimes they are working 60 hours a week. There is no consistency or predictability. Its either a feast or a famine.
- Older Millennial workers are choosing to live at home longer because it’s cheaper and better for mental health.
- Employers need to be more innovative in their practices in efficiency and not just jump to cutting staff, especially in bad financial times.
- **Proposed solutions:**
 - **Implement a national mental health strategy that would include extending public health benefits to cover most of the costs for psychiatrists and psychologists as well as establish an educational strategy for mental health.**
 - **Encourage universities and workplaces to adopt mental health coverage benefits for their institutions.**
 - **Implement financial incentives for employers to diversify their employment practices.**
 - **Establish a national childcare program with the goal of reducing the cost of childcare and creating more regulated spaces.**

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On fighting back you said

- All Canadians need to participate in elections. The results impact all workers.
- Workers won't get anywhere unless everyone is doing their part to resist and make noise.
- We need a national conversation on these issues.
- We need to put an end to band-aid solutions.
- We need to get involved with movements like Fight for 15.