

TORONTO & YORK REGION LABOUR COUNCIL GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2026
STATEMENT
Defending Workers Everywhere

Last year, the Toronto & York Region Labour Council warned that Donald Trump's tariffs were not simply a dispute over border taxes. They were a form of economic pressure aimed at working people and at Canada's ability to make its own economic, social and political choices. The United States has now imposed tariffs of up to 50 per cent on \$27.6 billion in Canadian goods. Canada was right to walk away from a bad deal rather than trade away jobs, industries and sovereignty for temporary calm.

Trump's trade war is putting workers in steel, auto, manufacturing and other exposed industries at risk. The damage can become permanent if a temporary tariff shock closes plants, breaks supply chains and pushes investment elsewhere. Workers outside unionized workplaces are being hit too, often with fewer protections.

Labour has to be vocal about defending these jobs and industries. Governments must protect workers through stronger Employment Insurance, Work-Sharing, other wage and income supports, and real labour-adjustment programs, including training and skills development for workers who are displaced. Adjustment, however, cannot become an excuse to give up on good jobs that can and should be kept here through meaningful industrial policy.

At the same time, this cannot become a simple Canada-versus-America story. Steelworkers and other union members in the United States have opposed Trump's tariffs because they know workers on both sides of the border are losing jobs and living with the uncertainty this trade war has created. Workers in Mexico are caught in the same vulnerable trade system.

Meanwhile, billionaires and large corporations are far better positioned to protect themselves, shift production or profit from instability than the people who depend on a paycheck. Our response needs a class analysis and an internationalist politics: that means we defend workers here, we defend workers internationally, and we refuse the kind of nationalism that turns working people against one another.

The trade war is unfolding alongside a rise in racism, scapegoating and political hate. Economic insecurity is fertile ground for political and economic elites who want workers blaming migrants, refugees, racialized communities, or one another, instead of asking who holds the power and who benefits. Labour must not allow legitimate anger at Trump's attacks to harden into an ill-defined anti-Americanism, or allow appeals to Canadian sovereignty to become cover for the same politics of division and austerity at home.

Mark Carney and Doug Ford's opposition to Trump should not let them be mistaken for labour's political allies. Canada was right to reject an unacceptable U.S. deal, but that does not erase public-sector cuts, attacks on collective bargaining, deregulation, privatization or efforts to lower labour and environmental standards in the name of 'competitiveness'. We warned in 2025 that the trade war could be used as a shock doctrine tactic: exploiting economic shocks, and the fear and overwhelm that comes with them, to quietly implement austerity or otherwise present it as unavoidable. We should judge every government response by a simple test: does it protect workers and strengthen our capacity to make democratic choices, or does it shift more wealth and power upward?

Canada's vulnerability did not begin with Trump. For decades, governments and corporations built an economy deeply dependent on one external market, with too much raw and semi-processed material shipped out and too many decisions about investment and production made elsewhere. Returning to the old normal is not an option. We need more value-added production here, stronger domestic supply chains, public investment, strategic industries that cannot simply be abandoned by multinational corporations, and an economy able to meet more of its own needs.

There are many policy levers that our governments can exercise to defend workers: public procurement can support Canadian-made goods, union jobs and community benefits; public investment in housing, transit, clean energy, rail, ports and other infrastructure can meet urgent social needs while creating reliable demand for Canadian materials and labour; public ownership in strategic sectors can ensure that essential productive capacity, investment decisions and good jobs are not completely subject to the caprice of a private market dominated by multinational corporations; a wealth tax and other progressive taxation measures can help ensure those with the greatest ability to pay carry more of the cost.

Individual choices to buy Canadian can help, but organized local purchasing power matters even more. The City of Toronto, York Region municipalities, school boards, hospitals, unions and other public institutions can use procurement, infrastructure spending and employment-land policies to support local and Canadian production. Municipal procurement is not a substitute for federal trade policy, but it is a decision we can influence now that strengthens workers locally. At the federal level, our government should be prepared to use targeted countermeasures and export leverage where they strengthen our bargaining position, while designing them carefully enough that workers here are not collateral damage.

Real economic sovereignty for Canada also requires a Green New Deal. Replacing U.S. dependence with an alternative “rip it and ship it” approach leaves our economic vulnerability intact while deepening the climate crisis. We need domestic manufacturing, processing and clean-energy capacity that creates good union jobs and gives workers and communities a real stake in transition.

The Labour Council resolves to:

1. Reaffirm our 2025 worker-first trade-war principles: supporting Canada in refusing any agreement that sacrifices workers, strategic industries or democratic policy space for short-term tariff relief; calling for substantially stronger EI, Work-Sharing, income supports and labour-adjustment programs for affected workers.
2. Call on all levels of government to pursue a worker-centred industrial strategy using Made-in-Canada public procurement, public infrastructure and housing investment, domestic value-added production, protection of employment lands, enforceable job conditions on corporate assistance, and an expanded role for public ownership in strategic sectors to secure productive capacity, good jobs and democratic control over investment.
3. Support strategic Canadian countermeasures and the use of economic leverage—including targeted export measures where appropriate—while insisting that retaliation be designed around its actual impact on workers, communities and Canadian productive capacity.
4. Reject any attempt to use the trade war to justify or distract from austerity, privatization, attacks on collective bargaining, weaker labour or environmental standards, anti-Indigenous measures, or scapegoating of migrants and marginalized communities.
5. Strengthen solidarity with workers and unions in the United States, Mexico and beyond who are also harmed by this trade war, and oppose chauvinist responses to it that confuse workers with the governments and corporations exercising power over them.
6. Call on all levels of government to pursue a Green New Deal and fair taxation: ensuring workers do not pay for a crisis that they did not create.
7. Convene a Heads of Unions roundtable after Labour Day to map how the trade war is affecting workers across sectors in Toronto and York Region, identify gaps in worker protection and adjustment supports, support affiliate campaigns defending Canadian jobs, and develop coordinated labour action for the months ahead.

Workers did not start this trade war: we should not be asked to pay for it, and we should not settle for returning to the economic arrangements that made us so vulnerable to it in the first place. We must defend workers everywhere and build the democratic power workers need to better decide what we produce, who owns it, and who benefits.