

ONTARIO IS TAKING A BIG STEP BACK BY FREEZING MINIMUM WAGE

It's amazing what a government that styles itself as being "for the people" can accomplish in a few short months to make life just a bit more miserable for so many people struggling to make it in this province.

In August the Ford government cut a planned 3 per cent increase in social assistance payments in half and scrapped the basic income pilot project launched by the Liberals.

As it turns out, that was just the warm-up.

Now, with what it calls the Ontario Open for Business Act, the government has made it clear that the "people" it speaks for do not include those at the bottom of the heap who have been struggling for a share of the province's growing prosperity.

The government says the new law will "create good-paying jobs with benefits." In reality, it will do just the opposite by clawing back planned wage increases, rights and protections contained in the former Liberal government's Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, passed late last year.

That certainly isn't good for employees, and as many economists have argued it isn't good for the economy as a whole either.

Some of the changes come as no surprise. Labour Minister Laurie Scott, for example, had already made it clear that the minimum wage would not rise from \$14 an hour to \$15 in January, as it was set to do under the Liberals' legislation.

But the new law goes a bit further than just cancelling the scheduled increase, which will deprive a person on minimum wage of about \$2,000 a year. It actually freezes the provincial minimum wage at \$14 until October 2020, instead of planning for it to rise with inflation. Starting in 2020, the wage will start to increase gradually, but it isn't expected to reach \$15 until January 2024 - a full five years after the current plan.

That leaves tens of thousands of low-wage workers further behind. And it ignores numerous studies that suggest providing workers with a decent wage puts more money into the economy, which in the long term benefits everyone.

Further, the new legislation also repeals the equal pay for equal work regulations, which required that casual and part-time workers doing the same work as full-time employees receive the same hourly wage. That will encourage employers to hire more people as temporary help and reduce the incentive to hire full-time.

The Ford government is justifying all this on the grounds that it's necessary to cut "red tape that is driving jobs and investment out of our province."

Falling unemployment and an influx of jobs into the GTA put the lie to that. This is not about creating jobs or being "for the people." It's about putting the boots to those at the bottom and it goes in exactly the wrong direction.

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FREE CLINICS ON ASTRONOMY DURING NOV. 16 'SCOPE CLINIC'

KNOWLEDGEABLE CLUB MEMBERS WILL ALSO ANSWER CELESTIAL QUESTIONS, WRITES MARIO CARR



MARIO CARR Column

If you're curious or new to the hobby of astronomy, you'll want to attend the Hamilton Amateur Astronomers Scope Clinic on Friday, Nov. 16.

Doors open at 6 p.m. at the Hamilton Spectator, 44 Frid St. for this free, family-friendly event where everyone is welcome. A half-dozen mini-workshops to help you get started in astronomy begin at 7 p.m.

Knowledgeable club members will also have their telescopes and gear set up to answer your celestial questions. You'll learn where to start, the

type of gear you should buy and more importantly avoid.

If you're already an amateur astronomer, this is a great opportunity to take the hobby to the next level. An optional non-perishable food donation for the Hamilton Food Share program will also be collected and appreciated. While you're there, don't forget to purchase the 2019 Hamilton Amateur Astronomers calendar.

All photographs are taken by club members and profits go to the club. The calendar will also be available at the club's Nov. 9 meeting at the Spectator building, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. There is free admission, door prizes and everybody is welcome. Longtime member John Gauvreau will present an educational

and entertaining discussion called "25 Cents Worth of Astronomy."

Here are November stargazing events listed in the 2018 calendar.

NOV. 9: Thin crescent Moon above Mercury low in the evening sky.

NOV. 11: Crescent Moon close to Saturn at sunset.

NOV. 15: First-quarter Moon is close to Mars in the evening sky.

NOV. 17: The Leonid Meteor Shower peaks.

For more information, see the Hamilton Amateur Astronomers website (amateurastronomy.org) or call 905-627-4323. The club offers a basic astronomy course for members.

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