



# THE HARPER RECORD

Edited by Teresa Healy



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# Lost Jobs

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*Erosion of a caring culture*

Eileen Corbet

WHEN YOU SAY you're born and bred in Oshawa, Ontario, people tend to look at you in amused disbelief, since it seems everyone who calls Oshawa home is invariably from somewhere else. I'm one of the ones seen as an oddity, having been here all of my 52 years.

Although it has long been known as “the City That Moto-Vates Canada,” there has been a slight smoothing of my city's blue-collar exterior over the past 20 years or so, largely due to the influence of Torontonians looking for a cheaper, safer place to raise their families. The “factory” jobs and the people who toiled at them are still here, but our city council has undergone a radical shift in personnel and attitude. We became “Oshawa, Prepare to Be Amazed” (sounding more like a De Beers diamond commercial). A huge debt load was taken on for really gorgeous, sparkly new recreational facilities and the highly controversial General Motors Centre in the beleaguered downtown core. Our elected officials hadn't noticed that the Auto Pact was murdered in 2001.

I do admit I didn't realize what the WTO decision entailed at the time, even though I'm an employee of Canadian Auto Workers Local 222. Hired in 1994 because I knew computers, had a newspaper background and could type 100 wpm, my work largely involved producing the Local's monthly newsletter for its 23,000 members, active and retired, getting newfangled things like email and the Internet installed in

our Union Hall. Single with two kids, I was trying to learn to balance a household budget now that I was making good money. A right-wing *carte blanche* shift to a global economy wasn't something that worried me.

Seven years later, I've rocketed past worry to agonizing in abject terror about what the future holds for my children, their friends and many peers, now beautiful young adults full of intelligence and potential. They confess to me the prospect of holding two or more jobs at once seems inevitable; I can tell they long for their own financial independence and despair they'll ever achieve it. Even if they score a "good" job, it will be on contract with no benefits.

Essentially self-employed, they face the fact their own families (if they're brave enough to have children) won't benefit from the dental, vision and health care I receive through my employer. They know they must rent with no hope of ever buying a home. If they have the opportunity to live in a house, it's usually from a parent who still has to charge them rent because their own financial future is unstable. Even after graduating college, they work full-time at Canadian Tire to put a roof over their head and food in their tummies, yet they need to sling beer part-time at Shoeless Joe's so they can pay their car insurance.

With the job losses, people are getting mean, petty, and desperate. Thefts at the gas station where my daughter works are an everyday occurrence, not just drive-offs from the pumps but the taking of anything that isn't tied down, even in the middle of the day. People wait until an employee's back is turned, literally, and off they go. Counterfeit money is the currency of the day.

The stories I hear from many depressed men and women coming from my city's shrinking and disappearing workplaces are the same. Honest individuals are afraid of a world where it's more lucrative to be sneaky, and if you don't have enough money for what you want, steal it. There's no pride in working at a coffee shop where the owners jet off to the Caribbean regularly and leave an 18-year-old in charge, with no extra pay for all the additional responsibility.

Stealing a person's livelihood is an absolutely despicable form of disrespect. This is what Canada's manufacturing job loss all comes down to, for me. Beginning in 2002, I watched manufacturing job loss start as

a trickle: 12 jobs here, 28 jobs there, another 120, a few hundred more, an entire company or two goes out of business, then a complete shift's worth of 1,200 people, and now we learn that in 2009 a source of great pride, our GM Truck Plant, will no longer be available as sources of income for fine individuals anyone would enjoy having as friends.

In June I saw one of those quicky TV news headlines, "Study shows Canadian manufacturing saved if jobs outsourced overseas," and had to uncover whatever ridiculous rationale was behind this. According to the Canadian Press, manufacturing executives and the TD Bank see another 250,000 jobs in Ontario leaving the province in the coming year. They're actually optimistic the sector will be healthy by the time all this "restructuring" is done. Who's worried about the health of the displaced employees, their families, and the communities they live in?

It's obvious the federal Conservatives aren't worried, but, with General Motors' callous closure of the award-winning truck plant, we will lose an additional 2,600 jobs. With spin-off employment, that's 19,500 individuals minimum who are going to suffer thanks to a bloated Canadian dollar, the lack of fair foreign trade, and inexplicable gasoline prices. What good is "restructuring" if we end up with jobs that will never pay more than \$12 an hour? All I can see is a government that is insensitive to laid off workers and families who worry that they can't pay their mortgage or send their kids to university.

My 20-somethings are far more politically aware than the 50-somethings who are losing their jobs. They are my hope for the future.