

No matter what you think of Metro Days of Action organizers' tactics, when you get this kind of direct involvement, it's exciting. That is exciting!"

Toronto Star Columnist and CYRR Commentator Christie Blatchford on the CYRR "Face For All", the morning of Friday, October 13

## Introduction

The difficult task of accurately assessing what was accomplished by the October 22-27 Metro Days of Action can be made simpler, by taking a closer look at the analysis above - as provided by one of our more prominent critics on the right.

The sentiments expressed above by Christie Blatchford, one of the mavericks of the right-wing media, truly sum up what we were able to achieve with the Metro Days of Action. It is a testament to that success that even the Christie Blatchfords of the world were able to figure it out.

The following report is prepared from the viewpoint of an MDA staffer who had the privilege of working full-time on the Metro Days of Action. It is based on three aspects of MDA - communications, public relations and media. It is a report on the thoughts and analysis resulting from the campaign work and on the ground activities of three of the five days of action (London, Hamilton and Metro Toronto).

# Metro Days of Action Communications Report

## Measuring the success of MDA

The October 22-27 Metro Days of Action were an unprecedented success in three important ways:

- MDA demonstrated the power of the people to mobilize and fight the Harris government on its own terms.
- MDA dramatically altered public opinion on the issue of the environment in a short period of time (see attached Angus Reid polling report).
- MDA proved conclusively that the labour community, partnership model is the most effective tool at our disposal.

## Unprecedented media coverage

One of the stated goals of the GFL Days of Action has been to prompt public debate about the policies of the Harris government, and the direction the province is headed in. Judging from the unprecedented volume of print and electronic media generated in the weeks leading up to the Metro Days of Action, even our critics are forced to admit that MDA sparked a level of debate not witnessed here in Metro Toronto for many, many years.

Attached you will find a collection of articles from the print media, which because of their volume has had to be restricted to the three Toronto dailies (Sun, Star and Globe) and for the four or five-day period around October 25 & 26. When one looks to the two-month period leading up to the days of

"No matter what you think of the Metro Days of Action organizers' tactics, when you get this kind of street level democracy it's exciting. This is exciting!"

**Toronto Sun Columnist and CFRB Commentator Christie Blatchford on the CFRB "Free For All", the morning of Friday, October 25**

## **Introduction**

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The following report is prepared from the viewpoint of an MDA staffer who had the privilege of working full-time on the campaign from the outset. While focused primarily on three aspects of MDA - communications, public opinion and media relations - it also contains some thoughts and analysis resulting from my campaign work and on the ground involvement in three of the five days of action (London, Hamilton and Metro Toronto).

## **Measuring the success of MDA**

The October 22-27 Metro Days of Action were an unprecedented success in three important ways:

- MDA demonstrated labour and the community's ability and capacity to mobilize and fight the Harris government on a *massive* scale
- MDA dramatically altered public opinion on the Harris agenda in a short period of time (see attached Angus Reid polling figures)
- MDA proved conclusively that the labour/community partnership model is the most effective tool at our disposal

## **Unprecedented media coverage**

One of the stated goals of the OFL Days of Action has been to prompt public debate about the policies of the Harris government, and the direction the province is headed in. Judging from the unprecedented volume of print and electronic media generated in the weeks leading up to the Metro Days of Action, even our critics are forced to admit that MDA sparked a level of debate not witnessed here in Metro Toronto for many, many years.

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action and multiplies this coverage to account for all Ontario dailies, it is not exaggerating to say that MDA generated literally hundreds of pages of print coverage here in Ontario.

There is one other startling statistic which puts the scope and volume of MDA media coverage into perspective. It comes from a request made to *Bowden's*, a media monitoring service, following MDA. For a one-week period - Saturday, October 19 through to Saturday, October 26 - on GTA and surrounding area TV stations only, there were a **total of 565 MDA TV news items** lasting 60-seconds or longer.

According to our contact at Bowden's, that is significantly more TV news hits than even a federal election generates.

### **MDA communications highlights**

While there are far too many to mention in this brief report, the following is an abridged list of MDA communications highlights:

- ◆ Aside from arranging interviews for the MDA Co-Chairs with virtually every network and major news outlet in the province, communications staff also lined up coverage with the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, radio stations in New York state and Michigan, the *Reuters News Agency* and more.
- ◆ On Friday, October 25, virtually the entire *Magazine* portion of CBC TV's *The National* was given over to coverage and analysis of MDA. CBC Senior Correspondent Brian Stewart's premise for the 40-minute feature was that "MDA had changed the nature of political protest in Canada".
- ◆ Major inroads were made into the ethnic and community press here in Metro. All MDA news releases, press kits, etc. were sent to every ethnic news outlet in Metro (some 45 in total). The MDA Co-Chairs actually went and visited publications like *Courriere Canadienne*, *Share* and others.
- ◆ The Italian TV network *Telelatino*, aired a one-hour debate on MDA which featured two italian-speaking MDA campaign workers.
- ◆ The 50 or so community newspapers (weeklies) here in Metro were also part of a concerted effort by communications and community outreach staff to get our message out beyond the mainstream media.
- ◆ TVO's *Studio 2* aired a two-hour special on Thursday, October 24, based on a camera crew following both MDA Co-Chairs around for about three weeks.
- ◆ CBC Local TV aired a 10-minute mini-documentary on the 6:00 news October 25, as seen through the eyes of Community Co-Chair Margaret Hancock.

- ◆ Toronto-area newspaper columnists wrote literally dozens of columns of detailed analysis, both favourable and critical, of the MDA.
- ◆ The days themselves resulted in several front-page news stories and front page photos.
- ◆ MDA was on the internet, with a Website and a link server which generated thousands of inquiries.
- ◆ MDA radio ads ran for two weeks on every radio station in the Metro-area. These same ads also ran on every campus radio station and (a days of action first) in 36 languages on CHIN Radio.

### Public opinion - the Angus Reid polls

The Metro Days of Action will be viewed by Canadian pollsters for years to come as an abject lesson in how public opinion can shift dramatically in a remarkably short period of time.

On October 21, both the *Toronto Sun* and *CFRB* radio trumpeted the results of an Angus Reid poll commissioned by them showing that **67% of Metro residents did not support** MDA job actions for Friday, October 25. Right-wing talk shows buzzed for the next couple of days about how this meant the vast majority of Ontarians continued to support the Harris government.

Much to their chagrin, however, those same right-wing media outlets were eating crow when a poll conducted one week later on the evening of Saturday, October 26 - following both the workplace actions and the march and rally - showed a dramatic turnaround in public opinion.

The October 26 Angus Reid poll revealed that **55% of metro residents now believed the "Harris government should reconsider some of its cuts to public services"**. Explaining the significance of this dramatic turnaround, pollster John Wright said the Harris government would be ignoring these post-MDA poll figures at its peril.

The pollster went on to say that one of the strongest conclusions from the polling data was the strength and legitimacy of the community coalition aspect of MDA. After days of action in five communities, we can now say conclusively that our message about the days not being just a labour event is finally getting through to the public.

Recent, post-MDA statements from Premier Harris have taken on a suddenly 'conciliatory' tone. One might easily speculate that the Tories have done their own polling and discovered the same thing Angus Reid did...support for the labour and community-sponsored days of action is as deep as it is wide.



## **Injunction rulings - important victories**

On the question of injunctions and our right to protest (which has been one of the cornerstones of our days of action strategy), MDA provided us with some valuable insights and important victories.

In at least three instances, both the courts and the OLRB reaffirmed people's Charter rights to freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. By upholding these important rights and issuing precedent-setting legal rulings **reaffirming the right of Canadians to protest in a peaceful manner, our shutdown strategy has actually been bolstered.**

While injunctions were granted in both the Pearson Airport and TTC rulings, they were either so narrow or so vague as to be ineffectual.

## **Strengthened coalition with teacher federations**

As in previous days of action, the teacher federations played a key role in the MDA campaign. One needs only to look to the MDA Communications staff itself to see that three of the four staffers were seconded from teacher groups; Aleda O'Connor from OECTA, Charlotte Morgan from OPSTF and Neil Walker from OSSTF. Their commitment, professionalism and experience in dealing with a demanding and increasingly right-wing Toronto media were valuable assets to the campaign, to say the least.

As a bridge-building exercise between labour and the teacher federations, MDA proved invaluable. Teacher involvement in both the Friday and Saturday events was at record levels.

## **Conclusion - the MDA residual effect**

From labour and community activists to rank and file union members and our many thousands of supporters, you may have noticed that opponents of the Harris agenda have been walking with a lot more of a spring in their step in the days following MDA. People from out of province are calling MDA campaign workers to see if they can get leftover t-shirts to wear to upcoming events in *their* province!

MDA has been like a giant shot in the arm for people who were feeling like the Common Sense Revolution was somehow unstoppable. It has given us hope and common purpose. It has shown us that by **building coalitions with the community in a non-partisan way** we can have a profound affect on how the public perceives this government.

MDA has focused public attention on the Harris cuts like never before. As a result, people will now be watching this government's every move more critically.

Not only did MDA achieve its goal of becoming the biggest anti-government protest in Canadian history, the Metro Days of Action are now being viewed by activists across the country as the 'high water mark' for events of this kind. The Saturday October 26 march and rally, with its infectious combination of music and speakers and a spectacular fall day, was by every possible measure a huge success.

By building on the success of the four previous days of action - London, Hamilton, Waterloo Region and Peterborough - the Metro Days of Action have provided Ontarians opposed to the Harris agenda with a milestone. On that milestone are engraved the words...

*"On October 25 and 26, 1996 the people of Ontario demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are ready to get reinvolved in democracy."*