


The **Advocate**
██████████ at the table

Bargaining for OPSEU members
 at the Ontario Property Assessment Corporation



Bargaining at critical point

If you want a decent contract, you will have to help us build the pressure we need to achieve it. And if management does not realize how serious we are, we could be looking at an April strike vote.

Read the issues carefully, and you will be as disappointed as we are.

In the three days of bargaining before the conciliator joined us, we gave OPAC five bargaining positions.

They didn't respond to ANY of them.

They gave the message that bargaining was pretty well finished. They might tweak their offer a little bit, but they think the job is done.

We don't think so!

Quick facts:

- Conciliation continues March 29 to 31
- A decent contract by April 1 is still possible – if OPAC gets your message.
- OPAC thinks you will buy their current offer (and maybe a bit of moose pasture to go with it).

- This bulletin spells out all the key issues in bargaining. Please read it carefully. We have also produced a summary of the major differences to date (there are many more take-aways). If you want the detailed positions of both parties, you can find them on the OPSEU website – www.opseu.org

The issues in bargaining

Until now, we have not reported on the specific progress of talks. We wanted to keep flexible so we could reach an agreement that we could be proud to present to you. Now you have to know what is being discussed, and why it is important.

You must be prepared to support your bargaining team (and your bargaining demands) with action. That action could mean wearing buttons, lunch-time protests, up to and including a strike vote.

If you are not serious about getting a good contract, you can sit back and relax. Maybe management will tweak a couple of things in its offer. Certainly it will tweak all its employees. *If you want something better, then help us work for change.*

Wages

- **No increase for 1999.** You would get a lump-sum payment for last year, but it would not be added to base pay rates. It's a one-time only cheque. Inflation isn't one-time only.
- **No pay increase at all in this contract for Neighborhood Functional Assessors (NFAs/PA3s).** Again, a lump sum payment, but no increase in rates. This would undo the "5.8 adjustment" we won in the Ontario Public Service (OPS) through 600 grievances.
- Everyone else would get 1.5 and 2% increases (see the summary sheet).
- **Two-tier wages for NFAs/PA3s.** Only current staff would get the lump sum just mentioned. New hires would not get any lump sums.
- Remember – Bob says this is a great place to work.

Pensions

When we moved from the OPS, OPAC moved us out of the OPSEU Pension Trust (OPT) and into OMERS without consulting us.

What does this mean? Simply a lower retirement income. Your pension from the OPT will not reflect pay increases during your employment at OPAC. Your OMERS pension will reflect your pay increases, but not your length of service in the OPS. You lose both ways.

You are being cheated of your earned retirement income, and OPAC won't even discuss it at the bargaining table. We should be able to work something out, because the change saved OPAC \$5 million a year!

OPAC – a great place to retire from.

Job security

At present, we get six months notice of layoff. Officially, it only applies to full-time staff who moved over from the OPS, but giving them notice means that everyone else hears about it too. OPAC wants to reduce the notice period to the minimum from the Employment Standards Act. You could be out on your ear with two to eight weeks notice, depending on how long you have been with OPAC.

What a great place to work!

Contract staff

Speaking of no job security...many of our "temporary employees" would have been rolled into permanent jobs if we had not been divested. We

managed to keep the right to move into full-time positions after two years on contract. Now, as many staff approach two years with OPAC, they want to remove that right! Four years isn't enough to be permanent at OPAC, they want no rules on how long or how many temporary employees they have. If you are on contract, you could spend your entire career on infinite probation.

Is this a great place to work, or what?

But the use of massive amounts of temporary staff affect us all...the employer does not allow for temporary workers when renting space or buying equipment. Good staff will tend to move on, when they get the chance. And temporary staff live in fear of firing and often do tasks they should not do.

Seniority

OPAC is attacking the whole idea of seniority – the fundamental underpinning for any real job security. They want to do this for promotions, layoffs and more.

Premium pay (overtime)

- No premium pay for Saturdays.
- No overtime until you have worked more than 44 hours in a week for most people. (Clerical and drafting staff would get overtime after 36¼ hours.)
- Travel time is not "work time." We would get paid straight time for travel time, but it would not count toward reaching the 36¼ or 44 hours required to start collecting overtime.

Other take-aways

OPAC has a number of other ways to make work life worse. Do they think this is TOO great a place to work?

In no particular order, this is a list of *some of the other take-aways*:

- No agreement that employees should have access to compressed week or flex-time arrangements.
- We have a guarantee that they will pay relocation expenses if we are promoted or reassigned. OPAC wants to take that away.
- We have an education allowance if we are laid off. OPAC wants to take it away.
- If we are laid off, we can retain our benefits for 18 months by paying our share. OPAC wants to take this away.
- It is not a condition of employment to have a vehicle. OPAC wants to take that away.
- We have a right to employee input in any review of our benefits. OPAC wants to take that away. We showed OPAC how to save over \$250,000 in benefits, but they would not take it!

We're not talking take-aways

When you elected us to negotiate a first contract for you with OPAC, you didn't ask us to get you less than you have now. You told us that the OPS contract was the starting point, and you wanted gains and improvements.

We have taken that direction to heart, and we have been working to achieve that goal.

Do you feel you have it too good at OPAC?

This is – remember – an employer who lists one of its five values as: We make OPAC a great place to work.

The Ministry of Finance, for all its faults, *never proclaimed itself a great place to work*. But in many ways it has OPAC beat hands down.

Living the values

This is the list of OPAC's values lifted from its promotional material:

As an organization and as individuals:

- We keep our promises.
- We are professional.
- We are responsive and resourceful.
- We lead.
- We make OPAC a great place to work.

Great words. OPAC can put them into practice when we return to conciliation. They can show leadership and resourcefulness. They can negotiate a fair and decent settlement. They can be responsive to our needs and concerns.

We need to hear from you

We have a long way to go when we return to conciliation March 29. We want movement, not tweaks. You can help. In fact, without your support, we will not get a decent settlement.

What does that mean? It means we will be calling on you – all of

you – to show your support for the bargaining team. This may mean wearing buttons, or a coordinated effort to wear clothing of a given colour on a specific day. It may mean signing petitions, or writing letters to the board of directors.

Your bargaining team will let you know what will be most helpful.

Team members will be visiting most offices to answer questions and get your input. We'll let you know when we'll be in your area.

With your support, we will all win.

We have bargaining power:

1. This is a reassessment year and it will be tough to do that job with a disruption.
2. The voters list must be prepared for the fall election. Without a willing workforce, that job could crash.
3. OPAC is trying to sell itself to municipalities and to their own Board. We know that they are proving to be lousy managers...we are willing to put that in the media and to mail reports to every municipal councillor.

We know how to make OPAC a great place to work! It's time they listened to the workers!

If you have any further questions, please get in touch with your office contact.

Keep in touch!

Got a question? Ask your local contact.:

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