



opseu
and you: a powerful team

Talking Union

Nov. 4, 2005

Casino Niagara—Local 278 Security Unit

Steward election process was correct, OPSEU President says

OPSEU’s constitution has requirements for local steward elections to follow.

In our local, some members were concerned about the process of the election of stewards at the two sites. Can members at one site select the stewards from another site? Our constitution, like that of most other Canadian unions, is clear: they cannot. To ensure members’ issues in each building get the attention they deserve, stewards are chosen by and from the members at each work site. A key steward function is to report the issues in his or her work area to the union—and report the union’s response back to the members. This two-way communication network ensures accountability of elected stewards to the members at each site.

Local officers in OPSEU – your local executive - on the other hand, are elected on a Local-wide basis. You elect officers for the entire local, from the group of stewards selected by each individual workplace. That’s how the OPSEU constitution works. That’s how it works in most unions (CAW included).

Some members have raised issues of balloting and steward elections to OPSEU for verification. The president of OPSEU, Leah Casselman, has looked at the process of steward elections in your Local and has concluded it was done in

accordance with the OPSEU constitution. OPSEU has also taken an impartial look at the issue of the balloting and has decided the results stand. Beyond that, the union president can’t intervene.

We’ll be meeting Nov. 25 to elect officers. Your staff representative, Virgery Vanier, and senior OPSEU staff, will meet with the new executive to ensure an agreed process and local by-laws, so that future elections go as smoothly as possible.

Decertification attempt could land everyone in hot water

Your union, OPSEU, is all that stands between you and a boss that wants to slash your wages, strip your benefits, and erode your working conditions in all areas. There’s a history of long and difficult relations between Niagara Casino and its unionized security staff. Management would find it highly convenient if OPSEU would simply disappear.

That’s why attempts by members of the bargaining unit to push for decertification only aid one party, Casino management.

We have news for those who think OPSEU is going away – think again. OPSEU is standing by the Casino Niagara security unit.

There has been a “whisper campaign” in the workplace that another union is ready to step in and bargain on your behalf,



should you decertify from OPSEU. For those who think another union, such as the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), is ready to step in and take over, that's simply an invention. CAW may well be interested in representing Niagara Casino gaming staff. But that union has assured OPSEU they are not interested in engaging in a "raid" on our security bargaining unit.

Also, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), labour's national body, has strict rules about raiding. If another union were to attempt to sign up our members, that union would face sanctions at the national level of the labour movement. It just is not going to happen.

You'd end up with no union, no ability to bargain, no grievance procedure (your grievances vanish): in short no contract and no rights. Management could set wage rates unilaterally, slash benefits, cut vacation days, change job titles, and give their favorites the best shifts. This is not what our members need or deserve.

OPSEU and the gaming industry

The gaming industry has become notorious for trampling on the rights of its workers. Across the province, OPSEU has gained plenty of experience attempting to organize and bargain against employers desperate to wring every possible penny out of their staff.

Remember, this is an employer that was prepared to have scabs – replacement workers – come in via the back door while we negotiated the last agreement. They had people in the hotel next door so they could walk right in and avoid picket lines.

In Fort Erie, OPSEU has remain involved and continues to fight to protect the members, despite the employer's attempts to orchestrate a decertification that benefits only the employer. We want to make sure the members' grievances are heard. We continue to fight and win arbitrations for these workers. Despite the backlogs in the system and the use of questionable tactics by the employer, it is

important to note that OPSEU has not forgotten about Fort Erie's workers.

This is a reminder to all of us that we must be strong and united to face this employer. Divided, the Casino will try to pick us off one by one, set us against each other, and set us against our union.

Despite this, OPSEU's casino sector

We must stay strong and united to face this employer. United, we are strong. If we are divided, the employer will do its worst. As individuals, without our union, the casino could and would crush us.

bargaining teams have achieved the goal which the membership at each site identified as *the* single most important reason to unionize in the sector:

A legally binding contract covering basic

terms and conditions of employment (so that the ground under our feet doesn't keep shifting at the will or whim of the supervisor of the day),

A means to enforce the contract,

A grievance procedure that starts through informal discussion between supervisor and employee but ends up, if necessary, in outside binding arbitration. Let's not let these gains slip away from us.

Time to move on—together

With bargaining coming up, clearly our unit has to be looking to the future. We have to be united and clear in our demands.

Our demand setting meeting is Nov. 30. Notice to bargain can be sent as soon as Jan. 1, 2006. We need to be united going in to bargaining against this employer. Complete your surveys and return them to your executive! Let us know what you want to see in a new collective agreement and we will try to bargain for it. No collective agreement is perfect, but we need to know your priorities for this round so we can bargain with these in mind.

The collective agreement affects everyone. Please keep in mind how you think our contract can be improved.

The main focus of our executive is to re-focus our energy into demand-setting and getting a new contract for our members.

A message from OPSEU President Leah Casselman

Dear Friends:

OPSEU is a democratic union and it is run, at the local level, by volunteer leadership. The elected members of any local executive spend hours each week attending meetings, learning valuable skills at union educationals, making decisions; and are fully involved in the union's many activities. While you may not always agree with the decisions, executive members do the hard work and put in the time essential to running any union local.

We at OPSEU, and your executive, respect the right to of all members of this local to speak and be heard, to challenge all that you disagree with and to stand strong in your beliefs. We encourage all members to bring forward their valuable and sensible solutions.

Some members recently brought to my attention issues around the election of stewards. I assure you, we will continue to work with you to ensure elections are fair and constitutional, and reflect the democratic will of the membership.

In every organization, there are occasionally some members who rather than exercising their democratic right to come to meetings to bring forward valid concerns, instead look outside for their answers. To all of those we say: get involved! Make change happen in a democratic way. Do it through our union!

We know from experience that it takes hard work to organize a union, but it is all too easy to decertify. Once your union is gone, it is almost impossible to get it back. Meantime, if you decertify, all of your rights, your grievances, your contract, your ability to have power and control over your working conditions - all of this is gone too.

We all know the best way to defeat a union is to divide and conquer. A clever employer gets the union members mad at the union – not the boss. Let's direct our energy, and anger – where it belongs. Let's not let this employer divide us.

Great things grow from small beginnings. We see a bright future for this local and our union. We should all be coming forward with concerns and problems and also with solutions. With demand setting coming up, now is the time to bring forward the items you want to see in a new contract. I invite all members of this local to begin focusing on the work of the **elected** bargaining team and helping them prepare to improve on a contract.

Our union welcomes all positive, serious and constructive contributions. But we will not be distracted from the goal which is to negotiate and enforce the collective agreement in the best way possible for our members.

In solidarity,



Leah Casselman