

# *Striking Back*



*OPSEU Hospital Professionals  
fight for a new contract:  
2002-2003*



## *Congratulations!*

*In 2003, OPSEU Hospital Professionals participated in one of the most courageous actions in the history of this Union, and of the labour movement in Ontario.*

*In the face of threats of legal action, discipline and other forms of intimidation you made an incredible statement about shortages, poor pay and intolerable working conditions in the hospital professions. You raised your profile during a tough round of bargaining with an employer and an Ontario Hospital Association determined to cut costs on your backs. You stood on picket lines in below zero temperatures from one end of the province to the other. And you did all of this without endangering patient care. You should be incredibly proud of what you accomplished.*

*You generated incredible stories of dedication from one end of the province to the other. You made everyone in OPSEU proud!*

*We have compiled some of the great stories and photographs from the mobilizing campaign that led up to the Hospital Emergency Day of Action which took place Feb. 13, 2003. Enjoy!*

*In solidarity,*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leah Lind". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.



# Contents

Preparing to bargain	4
Bargaining begins	9
Mobilizing	15
Hospital Emergency Day of Action	18
Around the regions	23
Success	37

The front cover photo is courtesy of Michael Lea, The Whig Standard, Kingston. Thanks also to our OPSEU members and staff for their photographs and submissions.

# Preparing to bargain

OPSEU represents 12,000 hospital professionals in about 100 hospitals across Ontario. Traditionally, many hospitals bargain on issues such as wages in a central process with the Ontario Hospital Association, which represents the employers. Once a central contract is agreed, local issues negotiations can take place at the various hospitals. Central bargaining has been around at least as long as OPSEU.

In 2001, members were getting ready for a new round of central bargaining. This round was critical. The members had been working under increasingly difficult circumstances. Staff shortages and skyrocketing workload responsibilities were taking a toll. New forms of privatization and ongoing restructuring loomed. These issues, combined with the need for a stronger collective agreement, was the context in which the Hospital Professionals Division (HPD) members were approaching this round.

The members elected a team that included:

Aimee Axler, Local 444 Chair: Aimee has been president of her local since 1991 and a member of the Central Bargaining Team for the last three rounds. She's a Senior Technologist in the Microbiology Lab at Kingston General Hospital (KGH).



**The OPSEU HPD central bargaining team:**  
Aimee Axler, Leslie Sanders, Jim O'Leary,  
David Hancock, Yves Shank, Patty Rout, Robby  
Hersh

Yves Shank, Local 659 Vice-chair: Yves has been a member of his local executive since 1991. He is also Alternate Trustee for the HOOPP plan. Yves is a Medical Laboratory Technologist in the department of Haematology-Blood Bank at Sudbury Regional Hospital.

David Hancock, Local 571: David has been an active OPSEU member since 1982. He works as a Medical Laboratory Technologist in the Blood Bank at the University Health Network in Toronto.

Robby Hersh, Local 583: Robby has been President of her local since 1996. She works as a Speech-Language Pathologist at Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care in Toronto.

James O'Leary, Local 106: Jim, now retired, was president of his local from 1987-2002 and was a steward for six years before that. He served on the HPD Executive for nine years, and was on two previous central teams. He was a Medical Laboratory Technologist at London Health Sciences Centre.

Patty Rout, Local 348: Patty, a member of OPSEU for 26 years, has served on the executive of her local and was in her second term as OPSEU-HPD Chair. She is active in her Labour Council and the Ontario Health Coalition. Patty is a Medical Laboratory Technologist in the Histopathology department at Lakeridge Health Corporation in Oshawa.

Leslie Sanders, Local 348: Leslie has been President of her local since 1994. She is a Medical Laboratory Technologist at Lakeridge Health in Oshawa.

### **Pre-Bargaining Conference and Demand Setting**

In previous rounds, the provincial demand setting process had been a bit chaotic. So this time, the HPD Executive wanted to try something different. They asked OPSEU to research industry standards in preparation for the first-ever HPD Pre-Bargaining Conference in June 2001. With this and other research data, delegates reviewed the recommendations from the HPD Executive on priority areas. These recommendations were then circulated to locals for their local demand setting that fall.

Hospital professionals all over the country had been making headlines in their struggle to catch up. At OPSEU's Broader Public Service (BPS) conference Nov 2-4 2001, Joan Jessome from the Nova Scotia Government Employees Union, and Cindy Stewart from the Health Sciences Association of British Columbia, spoke about their experiences mobilizing their members and the battles they fought with governments to win collective agreements.

The central demand setting meeting was held Dec. 1-2, 2001. Wages, the structure of the wage grid, early retirement benefits, job

security issues, premium payments, vacation and leave provisions, and contracting out were high priorities. Chair Aimee Axler had been involved in several previous rounds of negotiations but knew this round was a “make or break” affair. “The members are extremely frustrated by the lack of recognition, not only from the public but also from their employers,” she said.

To begin changing this situation, hospital professionals worked on their image. “Everyone knows, or everyone thinks they know, what doctors do and what nurses do. They are high profile. When it comes time to bargain salaries, this is an advantage. We want health science professionals to build the same public profile,” said Patty Rout, HPD Chair.

OPSEU represents more than 100 professions which bargain together. This diversity is a source of strength, but also makes it more difficult to tell the public what members do.

The lack of recognition also stemmed from the behind the scenes process members had historically relied on to achieve their goals in bargaining. Although they held strong feelings about their demands, as professionals they expected that rational argument at the table would yield results. So, round after round, the members would elect a team and go back to work and let the team do its job. Members now realize that this process had not produced the deserved recognition from the employers. They concluded they needed to be more active and visible.

### **Public, Professional and Proud**

The term “OPSEU Hospital Professionals Division” defined the group. Members came up with the slogan “Public, Professional and Proud” to summarize who they are, their relationship with the union and their delivery of a public service. This slogan was used on a button and built into all materials, including advertisements. A mobilizing committee was set up, consisting of Mary Sue Smith, Pat Collyer, Frank Pezzutto and Jan O’Leary. The committee reflected the importance of non-central units mobilizing for a contract which would ultimately affect them as well.

OPSEU surveyed 700 members and found that 19 per cent would come to a rally and 16 per cent would participate in an information picket.

In Jan. 2002, OPSEU placed ads in newspapers across Ontario. The “Your good health depends on us,” ads stressed the

professions as an essential part of the health care team. The image was a suitcase with destinations like London, Houston, and Sydney.



**OPSEU HPD newspaper ad  
January 2002**

These professionals were in a global marketplace for their skills. They were simply looking for a fair wage and respect.

**Your good health depends on us**

The ad, featuring the names of two dozen prominent professions around the border, was designed to coincide with the start of bargaining. But central negotiations with the OHA did not begin until March, as the OHA sought to impose restrictions on the examples we could use in the event of arbitration.

They didn't want us to compare with settlements

of OPSEU locals that weren't part of central bargaining. This delayed bargaining and kicked off a "campaign within a campaign."

OPSEU organized a "Fair Rules" lobby in support of the ability to compare. The Fair Rules campaign ultimately got the parties to the table, but the impasse was never completely broken. That was to have implications for both OPSEU and the employers a year later. Meanwhile, central bargaining stalled until a way out of the impasse could be found.

**Fair rules**

"It was frustrating," said Axler. "The OHA wanted to be able to gag us at arbitration. They still were not facing up to the real problem in the hospitals, the lack of ability to recruit and retain under present conditions. They were still thinking hold the line on salaries when the real problem was understaffing," she said. "Under these ground rules we were looking at the low wages continuing indefinitely. It was entirely unacceptable."

As well as lobbying their board members for Fair Rules, Hospital Professionals held rallies Jan. 30, 2002 to support the HPD central bargaining team in Downtown Toronto, East York, Peterborough, Lindsay, Chatham and other centers. OPSEU President Leah Casselman attended a rally in Thunder Bay. OPSEU also put its web site to good use. The web site [www.hospitalprofessionals.org](http://www.hospitalprofessionals.org) was established as the bargaining page.

With the impasse on Fair Rules continuing, OPSEU held an emergency meeting of Local Presidents Feb. 23, 2002 in Toronto to develop an alternate negotiating strategy in the event central bargaining did not get back on track.

Meanwhile, the new visibility of hospital professionals in the workplace and in the community was paying off. “The hospitals and the OHA have noticed that this is a different OPSEU,” the team reported in a bulletin.

Campaigns Officer Barb Linds worked with locals in February to produce a very different kind of campaign. Many of our HPD members work closely with heart and stroke patients, and Heart and Stroke Month was an ideal way to raise the profile of the professions.

Many locals participated in Heart and Stroke awareness activities using a poster that linked OPSEU HPD members’ work to the return to good health of heart and stroke patients. The theme was: “It takes a team to rebuild your life.” Many locals and the HPD executive made generous contributions to this effort.

At the same time, locals began a variety of actions such as rallies, wearing buttons, ribbons, or holding black Tuesday or Wednesday events. It was effective and eventually led to a small crack in the OHA’s armour. For once, they did not get things entirely their own way in bargaining.



**OPSEU Heart and Stroke poster**

OPSEU and the OHA reached an agreement to resolve the process for bargaining. If we couldn't resolve all central issues and if we couldn't agree on a central arbitration process, then outstanding issues would be heard at local arbitration with full right to compare. This was a breakthrough. But it still didn't guarantee central, unrestricted arbitration.

Finally on March 25, 2002, bargaining began. At a well-attended media conference, OPSEU President Leah Casselman and HPD central bargaining chair Aimee Axler outlined what was at stake in this round of negotiations:

“Our hospital professionals are exhausted from working impossibly long hours, in difficult circumstances,” Casselman said. “As a result, people are leaving these professions, and shortages are jeopardizing patient care. Our team will be trying to address these conditions and the problem of staff shortages.”

“We know our hospital professionals are in demand across Canada and around the world,” Axler said. “We are looking to negotiate a competitive collective agreement to ensure the health and safety of our workers and the public. Members in many hospitals are overworked and face extreme pressure to work extended shifts, overtime or on-call hours.” The team was looking ahead to a tough round.

## Bargaining begins



**OPSEU HPD demonstration at the OHA  
April 5, 2002**

On April 5, 2002 a huge delegation of about 500 OPSEU members marched from the OPSEU Convention at the Sheraton Centre in Toronto to the OHA head office on Front St., with banners, flags and our own police escort. The group included HPD

members and members from all parts of OPSEU, the Executive Board, and staff, President Casselman and Sister Ethel LaValley, Secretary-Treasurer of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) who also pledged support.

In bargaining, the team was encouraged by their progress during the first week in dealing with the least contentious issues. During the second week however, they moved into more complex issues involving job security and wages, and progress slowed.

The team worked hard to show the employer what was wrong with the job security language and the wages and wage structure. “We tried to give them a taste of what it’s like to walk a mile in our shoes, and to demonstrate how respect for the work we do was the foundation of our proposals,” said Axler.

The OHA cried poor and said the hospitals might not ratify a contract with the changes we wanted. The team felt that if there was money for big raises for CEOs and other hospital administrators, there should be money for front-line staff. “The issues on the table now are some of the most important to our members – compensation issues—from wages to vacation, benefits to premium payments and related issues—why are hundreds of thousands of dollars flowing into the system for “cutting edge” medical equipment and renovations, but no additional dollars for people to run the equipment or to staff the hospital?” the members asked.

### **Subsidizing health care**

The members were creative in their mobilizing efforts. They rallied. They wrote letters to their local newspaper and to the Minister of Health, Tony Clement. They put their case to the media. Susan Wallace of Lindsay wrote that if hospitals cry poor in negotiations with OPSEU, “what we are really saying is that we expect these professionals to subsidize the costs of health care for the rest of the province.”

Negotiations were going nowhere. On key economic issues such as wages, early retirement benefits, call back, pregnancy and parental leave, the OHA was still much too low. Their central offer was much lower than what many hospitals were already paying their professionals. At last the teams went to voluntary mediation, scheduled for May 29-31, 2002. It was the last chance for bargaining to succeed.

At noon May 29, a large group of members in lab coats from Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto made its way to the bargaining

centre at the Marriott Hotel to show visible support for bargaining. As the OHA team watched from a hotel window, members of Local 570 paraded up and down Bloor Street and carried signs about the



Local 570 members from Mount Sinai, May 29 at the bargaining centre, Marriott Hotel, Toronto

“\$100,000 Club,” the list of hundreds of hospital executives in Ontario earning more than \$100,000. Other locals also provided support: Local

348 in Durham Region greeted Health Minister Tony Clement with picket signs. At Sudbury’s Local 659, 200 members wore OPSEU lanyards; they sent 60 letters to OHA President David MacKinnon, 130 letters to team member Marion Walsh and 100 postcards to Clement. Local 575 in Scarborough held an information picket, wrote to the Chief of Medical Staff, and sent a letter about Clement’s visit to their hospital to the local paper; Local 275 in Kincardine wrote to their pathologist – and the pathologist followed this up with a letter to Clement; Local 444 (KGH) placed an article in the Kingston Whig Standard, they also participated in Bike for Stroke; Local 662 in North Bay and Sturgeon Falls held Blue Tuesdays.

### Impact

All of this mobilization made an impact, but ultimately it was not enough. Talks broke off midnight, June 1, 2002 and the team reported: “Although we made progress in some priority areas, we did not fully achieve what the members required. This, and the OHA’s insistence on an unjustifiable distribution of the money across our professions, ended the talks.”

Since OPSEU and the OHA couldn’t agree on a central arbitration process, unresolved central and local issues were set to go to arbitration on a hospital-by-hospital basis.

OPSEU applied for conciliation for our 40 participating hospitals, for both central and local issues. Strangely, the OHA applied for conciliation for only 11 hospitals: Kingston General, Peterborough Regional, Chatham-Kent, Timmins and District,

Thunder Bay Regional, University Health Network, Riverdale, Baycrest, Collingwood General and Marine, Guelph General, and Stratford General.

OPSEU proposed one meeting to do conciliation for all 40 hospitals. The OHA refused.

Throughout the long march to arbitration, OPSEU had clear, specific goals: to get a great contract and preserve the central process. To keep members in the professions and allow the employers to recruit, we needed a major wage increase. To get this, we needed to continue to raise the profile of our professions. We needed drastic action. And we needed a mandate for that action.



Local 402 members in Cornwall on the line

In the fall of 2002, OPSEU President Leah Casselman went on a tour of hospitals across Ontario, to speak to professionals about their issues. What she heard on this tour convinced her that the members were prepared for any action necessary. “The members said they were extremely angry and at the breaking point,” Casselman said.

The HPD executive met Health Minister Tony Clement Sept. 12 that year, when Clement was announcing additional training spaces at the Michener Institute. When the minister’s staff saw the group, with its OPSEU HPD stickers, they suggested a meeting. The HPD members told Clement they needed far better pay and working conditions to attract and retain the necessary staff. They explained why this round of bargaining was important. “I hope you don’t get sick,” Aimee Axler advised Clement.

### **Bad faith bargaining**

Also in the fall, OPSEU filed Labour Board charges against the OHA and individual hospitals for interfering with bargaining. The OHA, University Health Network, Timmins, Joseph Brant and Northeast Mental Health Centre were charged. The other hospitals in central bargaining were named as interested parties.

The bad faith charges against the OHA were filed because the OHA insisted the union give up its rights under the Hospital Labour Disputes Arbitration Act (HLDA). Under HLDA, we have the right to present all relevant information to an arbitrator.



**Demonstration in Chatham-Kent**

The other charges against the four individual hospitals and the OHA covered both bad faith bargaining and unfair labour practices. Over the summer, our locals reported that their hospitals were trying to bargain central issues with them. The OHA and hospitals had tried

to get their offer out to our local bargaining teams. The University Health Network even went so far as to e-mail the offer on central issues to members of the local bargaining team. Its Human Resources staff threatened the local president that the members would decertify if the local team refused to entertain the offer. Northeast Mental Health Centre and Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital tried to go around the central team and negotiate compensation issues locally.

By October, the team felt it was time to reveal the details of the OHA's offer to the membership and let them decide. The team decided to conduct a vote. "Strike Back!" posters began to appear in workplaces. The members were asked if they would do "Whatever it takes" to get a great contract. At the same time, they revealed the OHA's divisive and insulting offer, one that would not help the hospital professionals in central catch up to their peers in other hospitals or those in professions such as nursing. It was time for the members to express their views.

The team organized a vote. The union sent out meeting notices with the heading "Strike Vote! Strike Back! It's time to react." At membership meetings around the province, the team explained the OHA offer. The OHA wanted some members (those



**Local 659 members picket in Sudbury**

below the Registered Technologist pay level) to accept increases as low as 5.5 per cent. 80 per cent of all members would get 11.2 per cent or less. After 10 years of virtually no increases (less than one per cent a year) and losing ground to inflation, with the severe shortages putting stress on everyone, the team knew this was not going to be acceptable. The offer did not address the need for catch up. It did not address the horrendous working conditions, and it did not provide parity between Technologists and Nurses.

#### **Strike Vote**

The OHA predictably reacted to the “Strike Vote” notices posted in workplaces. Shelagh Quigley of the OHA wrote to OPSEU negotiator Moya Beall with a warning that the OHA would take legal action in the event of “illegal activity” by OPSEU. In response, Beal wrote “OPSEU is prepared to fully support its members in whatever action they are prepared to take to achieve a good collective agreement.” Art Lane, Administrator of the Local Services Division for OPSEU wrote to Aimee Axler that “OPSEU’s policy does not distinguish between so-called legal or illegal strikes, nor does OPSEU distinguish between continuous strikes, rotating strikes or lockouts.” A Provincial Co-ordinating Committee was set up consisting of Executive Board Members Chris Madill and Bob Reid, team chair Aimee Axler, members of the HPD mobilizing committee Frank Pezzutto, Mary Sue Smith, Jan O’Leary, and OPSEU staff.

The members came to the meetings and spoke out. Many told the team that action was long overdue. The team explained the offer and asked the members to vote. When the votes were counted, 91 per cent of those who voted had given the OPSEU team a mandate to do “whatever it takes,” with a clear understanding of what this might entail.

With this mandate, the Provincial Coordinating Committee (PCC) decided that a co-ordinated, collective approach was best, building from relatively small activities to broader ones.

As a result of OPSEU’s complaints to the Labour Board, the Board offered its assistance in resolving the issues. One day of mediation was scheduled for Dec. 19, 2002.

# Mobilizing



Strike vote poster

Member mobilizers were booked off in all seven regions to co-ordinate the actions. For many it was their first taste of full-scale union organizing. The mobilizers were Brendan Kilcline (Kingston), Dave Gibbons (Thunder Bay), Rita Rudo (Owen Sound), Brian Picton (Niagara), Brian Brennan and Mary Ing (London), Robynn Bronson and Lisa Madden (Oshawa), Bryan Mitchell and Joe Healy (Toronto), Laurie Gerrard (Sudbury), Linda McLeod (North Bay), Shelley Soares (Cornwall) and Kathy Woodbeck (Peterborough).

Members were already wearing red in the workplaces to show they were “seeing red” about the lack of progress on the contract. They had buttons saying “Whatever it Takes!” and “Strike Back”, (the latter was banned in some workplaces.) The members organized Red Wednesdays. The first Province Wide Coffee Break was set for 9:30 a.m. Nov. 28. Members from across the province turned out for coffee at precisely that time. Some hospitals actually accused members, who were taking their legal breaks, of “illegal activity.” (Remember, these are the same members that had put in countless hours of free overtime for their employers and their patients.) The intimidation was beginning.

The success of the coffee break in most central hospitals prompted the next phase in the escalation. On Dec. 4, there was a province-wide solidarity lunch break. Again, there was participation from all over.



OPSEU member mobilizers with OPSEU's campaign officer Barb Linds

**December 12, 2002 rallies**

There was time for one concerted province-wide action while the members were still on alert

before the Christmas break. On Dec. 12, 2002, OPSEU held rallies from one end of the province to the other. Across Ontario, members hit the streets with pickets over the lunch break, (or in some cases, the day before or that evening.)

At Christmas, the mobilizing report chronicled a huge success: "The past month has been amazing! We've had great



Kingston General Local 444 celebrates 91 per cent vote

efforts from Cornwall to Thunder Bay, from Chatham to Cochrane, in all OPSEU Regions. From the day the 91 per cent vote results were

announced, member mobilizers have been on the road. They have worked with local leadership and members from all professions in our locals. The amazing creativity of this big team effort is paying off! Here are some highlights: the Persian doughnuts in Thunder Bay; red hair dye in Kincardine; Santa Claus hats and ear warmers; Red lab coats; "Strike Back" buttons decorating Christmas trees.

You've sent all kinds of letters: letters to the editor; letters to your CEOs, to MPPs, the OHA, hospital board members. You've lobbied MPPs, and CEOs. You've actually taken coffee breaks and healthy lunches. You've held rallies, vigils and information pickets: you've worn buttons and stickers; distributed flyers and posters. You've been active in every community. In turn, we've had support from other OPSEU locals, area councils, labour councils and community health coalitions.



**Rouge Valley in Ajax**

People know who we are! We've generated radio, TV and newspaper coverage both through our public events and through President Casselman's hospital tour. We've done an incredible job of raising our visibility and our issues.

You have developed and perfected ways of communicating with each other, from telephone trees and fan-outs from stewards to

departments to e-mail lists. The HPD

membership has done a tremendous job mobilizing 5,000 people right across the province!

Thanks to the member mobilizers who



**Red Day in Stratford - Local 141**

did such a fantastic job of keeping you informed, helping you with creative suggestions.”

OPSEU did everything it could up to the mediation date of Dec. 19. The union showed it could mobilize the members. The members showed they were mad enough to get out in the streets. The team had every hope the OHA would come back with some proposals to get out of the impasse. This was not to be. The OHA still didn't get it.

On Dec. 19 2002, team chair Aimee Axler delivered a Christmas present to the OHA: more than 1,200 signatures on a

petition, wrapped up with a red ribbon. In just 48 hours, one-quarter of the HPD members who bargain centrally had signed it. The petition read:

“We, the undersigned, fully support our bargaining team and expect you to take our demands seriously. We want a mediated settlement and an agreement on all central issues, and we want it NOW!



Members from Local 344 Northumberland demonstrate in Cobourg

Our team is available and ready to meet at any time. We demand that your team be available to continue to do whatever it takes to get a settlement that recognizes us for the important

work we do, and which deals with our concerns about our wages and working conditions. We will not be intimidated. We ask that your team put as much effort into reaching an agreement as your hospital managers in many communities across the province have put into intimidating our members.”

After less than three hours, the talks broke down, with no more days scheduled. Frustration boiled over. The bargaining team felt it was time to find out what the members thought, “Whatever it takes” really meant.

# Hospital Emergency Day of Action

Before the Christmas break, the team decided to call the HPD Presidents and highest-ranking officers from each hospital to a meeting to find out how far members would go to get a new contract. The meeting was scheduled for Jan. 11, 2003, in Toronto.



#### **London members strike back: Local 106**

Members from each central hospital, and a handful of non-central HPD units, came in for a day of discussion. The full input of the local presidents was required before any further action could be taken. “Were the members prepared to go that extra mile? If not, we might as well just start preparing our 40 briefs for arbitration, because we hadn’t proved anything to anyone yet,” said Axler.

“The OHA called our bluff. They thought we had nothing left,” she said. “We were going to find out if the members were indeed prepared to stand up for what they knew in their hearts was right.”

Cindy Stewart of the Health Sciences Association of British Columbia spoke to the local presidents. Then members of the team spoke out for a clear mandate for action. Then the members spoke their minds. A few doubted their locals could deliver more than they had already done. The matter was put to a vote. The decision was made. Everything was to be focused on one day to show hospitals and the OHA the seriousness of the shortages.

#### **Announcement at Queen’s Park**

The team requested communications materials. Each local held meetings. Members made up picket signs. Plans were made for the announcement. OPSEU’s Communications staff prepared radio ads and billboards. A newsletter, “HPD Action” was created. A 60-foot banner “Hospital Emergency, Your health at risk,” appeared. The results of a Viewpoints survey, commissioned by OPSEU researcher Michèle Haber-Dawson, were released, showing how hospital professionals themselves viewed the impact of shortages on their work. Members revealed what the team already knew: they were working sick, and tired, and were afraid of making mistakes.



A snowy line in Timmins

Finally, on Jan. 29 2003, President Casselman, the bargaining team, and the mobilizers went to Queen's Park to make the announcement before a packed press gallery. President Casselman introduced the

team and said: "I know you have all heard about the shortages in the health care system, but most people just assume its nurses and doctors. The province has been running an expensive TV ad campaign that says it has solved the staffing shortages in our hospitals. We're here to tell the people of Ontario that the government has not solved the crisis in the hospitals. In fact, the crisis is getting worse. There is a whole group of people in our hospitals, the often-invisible professionals that are an essential part of our system. These professionals, including laboratory and x-ray technologists, physio and occupational therapists, pharmacists, MRI and CT scan technologists, and others, who face perhaps the most severe shortages. They have been without a central contract for almost a year.

These professionals are so underpaid and so overloaded with work, that people are leaving and no one is coming in to take their place."

Casselmann spoke about the long road of negotiations and all the roadblocks the OHA had thrown up. Then she made the announcement: "Our members are holding a day of protest at 40 hospitals across the province Feb. 13. This will happen unless the OHA comes back to the table with a substantially improved offer that our bargaining team can take back to the members for ratification. We are giving the OHA and the hospitals two weeks to either come up with the improvements we need or be prepared to look at picket lines outside hospitals.

We're going to be asking our entire union to be on alert that day. And we are going to be asking our partners in the labour movement to be out in solidarity as well. Our union is providing full support for these members. We did not want to go down this road. Our members are doing this because we care about the patients. We will not put patients at further risk. Patient care is already being affected too much by the staff shortages and delays. What we want is one centrally negotiated contract for the whole province, not a series of piecemeal or band-aid solutions. We want an offer on central issues that we can take back to our members to ratify. “

Aimee Axler said “Our members are incredibly dedicated to their patients, but working conditions are so stressful due to staff shortages that we can no longer do our jobs properly. We need a much improved central contract now to keep our members working in Ontario’s hospitals and to attract new people to our professions.”

The news was all over the province in hours. Sister unions promised support.

Reaction from the OHA and the hospitals was predictable. A number of hospitals threatened to discipline or even fire OPSEU members who

**“We’re asking our entire union to be on alert that day.” - Leah Casselman**

participated in the Day of Action. “Intimidation or not, our members will continue to fight to protect patient care in Ontario’s hospitals,” Casselman said. Unfortunately, the OHA made no moves to find out what would cause the Union to cancel the Day of Action. It blithely continued on its way, thinking either that the Union could not deliver on its promise, or that threats and intimidation would be enough to keep the members off the streets. With one week to go, both OPSEU and the OHA knew the protest was a reality. The OHA played its last card.

On Friday Feb. 7, late in the afternoon, the OHA made a 91-page application to the Labour Board for a cease-and-desist order to declare the action an illegal strike. On Monday, before the Board made a decision, OPSEU told the media we would cancel the Day of Action under one condition, if the OHA agreed to unfettered central arbitration for all 40 hospitals. As the team waited for the OHA’s official response, members carried the banner around

Queen's Park. In the evening of the 11th, an image with OPSEU's message mysteriously appeared on the side of Mt. Sinai Hospital in Toronto. The OHA did not respond: it was still banking on the fact



A mysterious message appears on the side of Mount Sinai Hospital courtesy of OPSEU

that a Labour Board ruling was a near certainty, and that confirmation that the planned action was an “illegal strike” would deter members from any action. Their first calculation was correct: On Tuesday, the Board ruled in the OHA's favour. The media, the members and the public awaited OPSEU's decision. Would the

union back down? The public message was “The Labour Board ruling does not address the shortages. We are still waiting for the OHA to respond to our proposal.” We did not say the Day of Action was going ahead. We did not say we were calling it off, either. The protest was still on. Could we send one message to the media and the public, and another message to the membership? We could and we did.

In the meantime, hospital after hospital was publicly asking the OHA why it could not agree to unrestricted central arbitration. London Health Sciences said, “A single unrestricted arbitration at all 40 OPSEU bargaining units would be acceptable from our perspective.” And, from Stratford: “We remain unclear... as to why the OHA remains opposed to a single, unrestricted arbitration,” Huron Perth Hospital Partnership vice-president Andrew Williams wrote to the OHA. Peterborough Regional called “upon both OPSEU and the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) to seriously consider innovative solutions to the labour issues underlying this dispute such as proceeding with a single arbitration case to resolve the outstanding contracts of all 40 participating hospitals in the Central process.”

While the media said OPSEU was being “cagey” about whether the protest was on or off, the members got the message. At

6:30 a.m. there were picket lines up outside hospitals in London, Sudbury, Toronto, Kingston, North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Oshawa, Thunder Bay, Guelph, Cambridge, Peterborough, Cornwall, Barrie, and many other centers. Support pickets came out in non-central hospitals in Hamilton, Ottawa, Sarnia, Toronto and elsewhere.

# Around the Regions

Here's a brief tour around the lines, courtesy of local activists:

## Region 1

### Local 106, London Health Sciences Centre and St. Joseph's

Pickets at all three LHSC locations plus St. Joseph's were supported by electrical workers doing construction at the University campus. The protest had good support from patients and all departments. Rick Witherspoon, president of the labour council,



Local 106 on the Day of Action in London

addressed a rally. A unionist from South Carolina, who was in his hotel room watching the news Feb. 12, saw us and thought, “Those folks are taking such a risk to go out there because they believe so strongly in saving their Healthcare. I need to be there.” He stayed out on our freezing cold picket line for more than three hours with a windbreaker, a ball cap, cotton pants and loafers.

### **Local 131, Sydenham District**

Member Paul Caron said “We had members that walked the line that previously found



Leah Casselman and allies at Mount Sinai demonstration

it difficult to file a grievance. One gentleman stopped to talk to me on the line and asked if we were on strike and if so he would not cross a Union picket line. He explained he was a retired Union Gas employee that was scheduled to sell Nevada tickets for the hospital auxiliary. He then proceeded to call the

hospital to explain his position and they in turn had to replace his shift that day. ONA, SEIU and a “surplussed” hospital director stopped to offer support along with coffee and donuts. Also many compliments from ONA, SEIU, OPSEU and non-union groups as to our determination and actions to date! I don’t think our membership would have participated without the baby steps we took up to the Day of Action.”

### **Local 141, Stratford General Hospital**

Local president Tony Hirdes said more than 80 members and friends showed up on the line, starting at 6:30 am, despite temperatures of minus 25. “Members came out in good numbers even after heavy-handed threats and intimidation on the 12th. HPD members were joined by Correctional Officers from the OPS, CUPE members, and CAW.”

### **Local 143, Windsor Regional Hospital (non-central)**

In Windsor, nearly 100 members came out and walked the lunch-time picket line. There was a lot of media coverage and a lot of smiling faces and lots of red. “We also had support from some of

the OPS members. It was a great turnout, one that the employer wasn't anticipating. It makes me proud to be a healthcare professional in this Union. A job well done!" said Marisa Forsyth.

**Local 145 - Sarnia General and St. Joseph's (non-central)**

There was a supportive information picket in Sarnia over the lunch hour. About 80 professionals took part over the lunch break. Alexandra Smith of Local 145 told the media her local was also without a contract since March and that shortages were hurting patient care.

**Local 149, Chatham-Kent Health Alliance**

Chatham had 50 pickets out in the protest despite heavy-handed threats. "It's taken a lot of soul searching and courage for them to come out and do something like this because it is quite an action," said Fran O'Keefe, President of Local 149. "It reflects their dedication and their passion . . . that they can be out here is an amazing thing," she told the local newspaper, adding it's a precedent-setting move at the Alliance.

**Region 2**

**Local 206, Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital**

The members gathered at a nearby park in Burlington and marched to the Hospital at 7 a.m. They braved the cold and were supported by other members from their hospital, members from St. Joseph's Hospital, members of the Corrections Local, the Community Care Access Centre in Hamilton and other locals in Region 2. EBM Jay Jackson also joined this picket line. The members embraced each other at the end of the day in solidarity.

**Local 206, St. Joseph's Hospital, Hamilton – (non central)**

150 members came out on their lunch hour to show support for the members in central bargaining. St Joseph's was in bargaining for a first contract. NDP MPP David Christopherson addressed the chilled members, as did Wayne Marston, president of the Hamilton and District Labour Council and Fran Borsellino of the Hamilton Health Coalition. It was a great demonstration of support.

**Local 215, Niagara Health System (central) and Hotel Dieu St. Catharines (non-central)**

Well over 250 people were on the line at the St. Catharines site, joined by the CAW, the labour council, correctional officers and even some retirees. There were no hassles except for the lab at

Welland. There, members were told “You can’t do this.” They left a skeleton staff in place and did it. There were 30 people on the line at Hotel Dieu with support from CUPE. One member, a CAT Scan Tech, wanted to picket alone at the Welland General site. She intended to picket alone from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. rather than miss



Niagara Health System Local 215 members on the line Feb 13.

demonstrating her anger at the OHA. Hotel Dieu Hospital members, who are not in central bargaining, staged a solidarity picket.

They all came out on an extended lunch break and were joined on the line by CUPE members. Members on days off also joined in.

#### **Local 227, Dufferin-Caledon**

“We had a great time,” said local president Chris Madill. She reported excellent participation and lots of media interest. Of 55 members, 45 were in the line, and the others were either in critical care or stayed home. A few members were called in during the day for critical care and came back out immediately afterwards. Six members also tried to pay a visit to their local MPP Ernie Eves, who was opening a nursing home addition in Shelburne. They were prevented from going in by security. “Just tell Ernie we’re here,” said the members.

#### **Local 231, Guelph General Hospital**

Members were on the line in rotating shifts from 6:30 am until 3:30 pm. Spirits were good for a bunch of members who had never been on a picket line before. Lots of coffee and hot chocolate were delivered to the line including an offer from the HR Director. About 60 members participated and the Hospital was phoning people asking them to reschedule outpatient visits, where possible.

### **Local 239, Cambridge Memorial Hospital**

There was 100 per cent participation. Reception from passing vehicles on Coronation Blvd. was amazing. There were 50-80 people on the line at most times during the day, and media interest was high. Cathe Vermeersch, local vice president, explained how Diagnostic Imaging handled the day “There were three techs chosen to work at Christmas Day staffing levels, and the rest were on the line. The Nuclear Medicine Department went in to accommodate



Noon demonstration in Owen Sound

MIBI scan patients. These are the techs who joined us on the line at lunch and afternoon break. The other 30-odd members were on the line all day.”

### **Locals 260, Grey Bruce Health Services**

About 150 union members attending a

CLC winter school in Port Elgin bolstered the picket line in Owen Sound. Speakers included CLC executive vice-president Barb Byers.

### **Local 273, Hamilton Health Sciences (non-central)**

Information Picket Lines were set up at three work sites (McMaster University Medical Centre, Hamilton General and Henderson) in support of the members in Central Bargaining. Local 273 was in negotiations for a first agreement.

### **Local 275, South Bruce Grey Health Centre**

People were out at 7:30 a.m. at the Kincardine Site at minus 13 and blowing snow, reports Karen Passmore. “We had all paramed departments represented and members from the Power Workers and the CAW walked with us. The hospital administration let us have our demonstration on hospital property and even had the snow blower clear a spot for us! Our service unit came out in full force to support us. The public was very understanding and brought us coffee, hot chocolate and timbits.”

### Region 3

#### **Local 305, South Muskoka Memorial, Bracebridge (non-central)**

Members of Local 305 at South Muskoka Memorial Hospital Bracebridge put up a display in the main corridor of the hospital. They are not in central bargaining, but have been without a contract

since April 1, 2002.

They are eagerly awaiting the outcome of the central process.

#### **Local 309, Ross Memorial Hospital**

More than 40 hospital professionals in the City of Kawartha Lakes were on the lines all day, supported by



Ross Memorial in Lindsay

members of the Ontario Public Service and the labour council.

#### **Local 311, Rouge Valley Health System**

Many members participated in pickets.

#### **Locals 321, 342 and 343, Peterborough Regional Health Centre**

The vast majority of members were on the line in minus 25-degree weather. Members of ONA, CUPE, the OPSEU clerical local at Peterborough Regional Health Centre, OPS members from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Millbrook as well as members of the CAW and the local labour council walked with our professionals throughout the day.

#### **Local 344, Northumberland Health Care**

About 50 members held a successful picket in Cobourg, with impressive news coverage.

#### **Local 346, Royal Victoria in Barrie**

The hospital director brought coffee to the line twice and muffins. He also told members there would be no discipline for their participation in the Day of Action. More than 80 per cent of members turned out, with support from local management. About 30 members were on the line, with members taking time on the line in shifts. When we arrived at 7 a.m., we were greeted by the HR person who told us where we could picket. We were also told we

were welcome to go into the hospital and use the facilities and get warm, provided we didn't take the signs in. Managers brought coffee, and even put on soup and sandwiches for lunch. There was terrific support from the media and the public. Doctors joined the line and were very supportive. ONA members were on the line as well.

#### **Local 347, Collingwood General and Marine**

President Len Fligg reports 80 per cent participation (19 out of 24) from the diagnostic imaging and laboratory staff. The picket lasted from 9 a.m. until noon. "It was really encouraging. Many of the people who were unsure and afraid of going out did really well." Two TV stations and two newspapers dropped by. Response from passing vehicles was overwhelmingly positive.

#### **Local 348, Lakeridge Health Corporation**

HPD Division chair Patty Rout reports on a great day in Oshawa. "At lunch the police counted more than 180 members out.



**Local 348 members show the flag at Lakeridge Health Oshawa facility**

Everyone was great and we will have some great stories to tell. Management came out to get members five times, and we responded immediately. Thanks to Leah Casselman who came to the line and made us proud of what we were doing! Thanks to EBM Pauline Tapping who braved that cold all day long. Members from Port Perry and Bowmanville joined the Oshawa line.

"Other OPS locals came to show their support. Labour council came, we had a rally at lunch with Pauline, Labour Council's Bill Harford and (CUPE's) Sid Ryan as well," Patty said. "Our members are ready to do whatever it takes."

#### **Local 366, Huntsville District Memorial Hospital**

Members staged a 50-minute protest and had a huge picket, then went in to work at 7:50 a.m. and met with the administrator, who bought a round of coffee. The doctors applauded.

### **Region 4**

#### **Local 402, RHSJ Healthcare and Hotel Dieu Cornwall**

It was very cold, warming to minus 20 by noon. The whole local came out at 6:30 a.m. except for those providing critical care. There was no trouble on the lines. OPSEU represents everyone at Hotel Dieu, including the nurses, and everyone inside was wearing red. The only police problem involved cars honking their support in the hospital zone. “We weren’t encouraging it. It’s a union town,” said EBM Gavin Anderson. Presidents of other locals and the labour council visited the line.

#### **Locals 444, Kingston General Hospital**

“Exceeding all expectations” was the report from member mobilizer Brendan Kilcline of the KGH event. A constant stream of hot chocolate, timbits, sandwiches, and hand-warmers brought by members of other locals and other unions made facing the icy winds off Lake Ontario bearable. Representatives from the Labour Council, Health Coalition and the NDP spoke at a noon rally. OPSEU First Vice-President/Treasurer Smokey Thomas divided his time between here and Belleville.

Central team chair Aimee Axler had a good day. “In spite of the bitter cold, the line was so solid, so positive, and the day was a huge success. Members showed up at 7 a.m. to picket with their arms loaded with home baking. One of our CUPE brothers made a most delicious soup. We had roughly 150

**"The members felt empowered and proud."  
- Aimee Axler**

people on our lines. The non-participating OPSEU local was out with us at noon, as were many CUPE members on breaks and lunch. The CUPE president quit work an hour and a half before his shift ended so that he could picket with OPSEU. The members felt empowered, and proud.”

#### **Local 461, Hawkesbury General Hospital**

Luc Lafrance, secretary-treasurer of Local 461 reports that Hawkesbury General Hospital was out during the lunch period. “Fifteen members were on the line. We gave three interviews to media.”

### **Locals 464, 479 and 484, Ottawa Hospitals and Ottawa Children's Treatment Centre (non-central)**

Local 464 president Mary Sue Smith reports that more than 200 members of Local 464 and Local 484 gave up their lunch break



**Ottawa members on the lines in support picket Feb. 13**

to march in bitterly cold weather in support of the Hospital Emergency Day of Action. “Honks of support and words of encouragement from passing patients bolstered the spirits of all and confirmed their belief that their work is as important as the more well known members of the health care team.

Despite several veiled threats from the

employer, there was no sign of security or management.” At the Civic and General Ottawa Hospital sites, members held the line for two hours steady in 15-minute shift rotations because of the minus 30 temperatures. They were joined by members from the Riverside Campus and the Rehabilitation Centre (also Local 464); Royal Ottawa Hospital (Local 479); the Ottawa District Labour Council; the Children's Treatment Centre (Local 484); and others.” Local President Michael Donaldson was an articulate media representative for the local.

### **Local 466, Perth - Smiths Falls Hospitals (non-central)**

Chris Luscombe-Mills reports lunchtime demonstrations at hospitals in Perth and Smiths Falls with about 15 demonstrators at each site, and support from OPSEU Local 436 Rideau Regional Centre, CUPE and ONA, and local media. For many members it was their first union demonstration. One member said “I didn't know that so many people would honk their horns in support and I will never pass a demonstration again without honking my horn.”

### **Local 480, Quinte Health Care Corporation**

In Picton, there were 14 members on the line and two inside doing critical care work. That accounted for 100 per cent of the unit. Belleville reported 70 members out, and Trenton another 15.

### Region 5

**One rally at Mt. Sinai, Toronto General and Princess Margaret, including members from Sinai, University Health Network, Bridgepoint, Humber River, Rouge Valley, Baycrest (see next page) from Locals 566, 569, 570, 571, 575, 577, 583, 590, 595, 311**

Toronto area locals held a huge rally lasting until 1:30 p.m. “The OHA needs to be listening,” Casselman told a crowd of 300 on Toronto’s hospital row. “They need to be listening to you. They need to be listening to their hospitals,” she said. “It is a crisis. It is getting worse. It needs to be fixed now.” Casselman called on Ontario Health Minister Tony Clement and the Queen’s Park Tories to get involved in settling this contract. “You’ve got their attention,” she told the crowd. “I’m asking them to step in and step up to



President Casselman on “hospital row”

address your issues and get their heads out of... wherever they are. The system doesn’t work without you folks, and we’re going to work to make it better for you.”

Top labour leaders offered support. Wayne Samuelson spoke for the Ontario Federation of Labour. Marie Clarke-Walker spoke for the 2.5 million-strong Canadian Labour Congress. “The Ontario Nurses Association applauds your courage,” said ONA vice-president Marcia Taylor. “OPSEU members, you deserve a contract and the right to have a single unrestricted arbitration. Don’t be intimidated. We’re standing with you.”

“The government is running slick ads declaring that the health system is in great shape,” said Ontario New Democratic Party leader Howard Hampton. His message to the Tories: “Get the ads

off TV and get [the OHA] to the bargaining table.” Hampton voiced support for a single unrestricted arbitration covering all 40 hospitals involved in central bargaining. “Even the hospitals are agreeing with you,” he told OPSEU members.

#### **Local 566, Toronto East General (non central)**

Local President Pat McNamara reports great support from this non-central unit. “We all had coffee together in the cafeteria with our red OPSEU shirts on. As well we held a lunch-time picket around the hospital and had a great turnout. Everyone was really into it.”

#### **Local 583, Baycrest Hospital**

Local President Robby Hersh calls her members amazing. “You should all be proud of yourselves! You took back some personal and professional power. You weathered the cold with grace. And you had FUN! Every time I turned around and saw another smiling familiar face, it made my heart swell. For those of



Members of Toronto locals brave the cold at Mount Sinai

you who could not come down but stayed out in support, that took courage too. Those of us downtown had each other (and a couple of hundred others) for support. Thanks to those who were selected to stay back as emergency coverage. You had

to brave the faces of your own directors and also of senior management. We could not have done our day of protest without your bravery. ‘Mazel Tov’ to you all. I truly am proud to work (and walk) with you! Thank you for your support. YOU REALLY ROCK!”

**Region 6****Local 620, Sault Ste. Marie General Hospital**

Things were rocking, with 45 on the line. Our walk on the line was great—cold but great. Margaret Rafter, local President reports, “Our nerves were all frazzled and we needed some really fresh air. Our management helped mobilize my members with their poor attitude and harassment. The morning of the 13th brought -29C temperatures, and some really dedicated people to our line. Our shelter was a bus stop, our cameras froze, our radios froze, and most of our cell phones froze. Water bottles and lunches were solid (good for Friday). Out of 136 members, only 27 without an excuse never managed to make it for a visit.

The community support was amazing. We had coffee, donuts, baking, juice and other foods brought to the line for us from both the public and private sectors of our community. We had our MPP, Tony Martin visit, as well as our Labour Council President, Dan Lewis. Area Council presidents were on the line throughout the day. My members were told that they could shut the line down two hours early because of the cold, but surprise, the line ran on for the best part of the day. We believe in ourselves and no one can take that away. We can always tell them “we told you so”. I have some new heroes in my life. These people with their foresight, their dedication to healthcare and their community have shot right up to the top of my list.

**Local 627, Manitoulin Hospital**

Pickets were a great success, with a story and picture in the local paper.

**Local 643, Timmins and District Hospital and MICs Group**

About 60 members joined the protest including members from Cochrane. “A large part of the group are lab and x ray technologists and respiratory therapists who 10 years ago had wages on par with registered nurses and that is what we want today,” said Local president Larry Lovelace. “This is the first time that many of these health professionals have protested, so you know they feel very strongly about the issue.” Membership was pumped up and the line was strong. Only critical care was covered. At 6:30 a.m. it was minus 38. Cell phone batteries died instantly and cameras would not work but the members kept moving and stayed warm. Gilles Bisson, NDP

MPP, arrived for the lunch hour and was a great morale booster. Bisson told the hospital H.R. that the members were returning to



MPP Bisson and pickets in -38°c weather in Timmins

work. The entire picket line was coming into the hospital led by Bisson with media waiting in the lobby or if they did not let them return to work, it was a lockout. They agreed to let people return.

#### **Local 646, Timiskaming Hospital**

A lunch time picket was held.

#### **Local 659, Sudbury Regional Hospital**

A day like today helps illustrate why unions exist, says local president Yves Shank. “The empowerment that members get from a collective action is overwhelming. Today my 309 members were able to put differences aside, and fight for what they believe in. And they were amazing. We had a rally at 11:30 with a speech by Shelley Martel, NDP MPP, and we counted 150 members. People were scheduled over the entire day and we asked people who were



Local 659 members at Sudbury District hospital were vocal

deemed essential to wear red and “13” buttons, give us their lunches and breaks, and to give the line an hour before and after shifts, and they did.

“We rented a moving van, lined the back with carpet, and filled it with chairs. We got a generator and heated the back of the truck and the portapotty, and powered a commercial wiener cooker for lunch. We had water, hot chocolate and coffee, timbits and doughnuts, feet and hand warmers. CUPE joined our line at lunch break. Nurses bought us coffee. Many non-OPSEU people were wearing red, and a few asked for t-shirts. We are the smallest Union local in my hospital, but after today, we are the strongest.”



**Striking Back in Sudbury**

### **Local 662, North Bay General Hospital and West Nipissing**

Things began in North Bay at 7 a.m. with more than 60 members out even though the thermometer hit minus 36. As the day wore on and the temperature warmed to a balmy minus 30, they were joined by more members coming off nights, ONA, CUPE, and of course a number of OPS members. The members did everything

they could to help drive the message home to the OHA. All in all, an excellent demonstration.



**Local 662 pickets in Sturgeon Falls**

Pickets were also held in Sturgeon Falls. Some members put a loonie in a jar for tickets to win a raise because we felt that might happen quicker than getting one through the OHA. The

hospital sent out free coffee for us. It was almost too cold to add cream and sugar because you had to take off your mitts and gloves to do it, reports Linda McLeod from the local.

**Region 7****Local 715, Thunder Bay Regional Health Centre**

Between the two sites there were hundreds of people on the lines, with great support from ONA, SEIU, CAW, CUPW and CUPE, and OPSEU members from the OPS. The president of the College of



Thunder Bay picket with Local 715 “Tremendous support from the public”

Respiratory Therapists, Keith Olimb, spoke at the demo. There were 32 in the morning at the Port Arthur site. Over the day, there were probably 50 at all times. At the McKellar site,

there were close to 100 people most of the day, with 300 at noon including members of other unions. We had tremendous support from the public. We passed out leaflets and I don't know of one incident where people were negative. It went really well, despite being so cold for so long. One member was called in for an emergency and we responded right away. The employer was on TV almost congratulating us on how orderly and cooperative we were.

# Success

On Friday, Feb. 14, 2003, the OHA agreed to terms for central arbitration for all 40 hospitals. In addition, the parties agreed to mediation with the Board of Arbitration on March 7. Unfortunately, this mediation also failed and arbitration began on March 21. The final day of hearing was held May 22 and we are now awaiting the award.

At the OHA's recommendation, several hospitals elected to discipline members, send letters to regulatory colleges, and file grievances against the union, about the Day of Action. But other

hospitals, including Cambridge Memorial, Royal Victoria in Barrie, Quinte, and Niagara, decided not to discipline staff.

OPSEU said the hospitals that suspended members were vindictive and were putting their own agenda before patient care. In some locations, patients were inconvenienced to fit the employer's discipline schedule. Patients had little warning of how discipline might affect them.

In contrast, OPSEU had given two weeks official notice of its plans for Feb. 13. Len Fligg of Collingwood General and Marine told the Enterprise Bulletin the suspensions created "a negative mood towards management." Tony Hirdes of Stratford said in a letter to the Beacon Herald that "as a result of the suspensions, some departments are being equally or shorter staffed than on the Day of Action . . . through this hospital's heavy-handed approach, it is willing to damage and sacrifice our professional reputations and livelihoods just to make a point." Subsequently, disciplinary



**A cold day in Bruce County:  
Local 275 and Power Workers in solidarity**

measures were withdrawn at Collingwood and Rouge Valley, and Thunder Bay rescinded all its college complaints.

Members across Ontario felt empowered to take on the employer. They knew their cause was just and that the public were in support. A year before, fewer than 20 per cent of the members were

ready to attend a rally or information picket. This same group had done province-wide actions culminating in the events of Feb. 13.

### **Aftermath**

The hospitals were in disarray, with the OHA and its member hospitals feuding openly. The members learned that, working together and standing together on the line, if necessary, gave them the power to stare down the employer.

But, after 14 months, members were still without a contract. Meantime, many had to deal with the horrors of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), or the threat of SARS, in their workplaces. OPSEU - HPD members gave their all once again, not on the picket line this time, but on the job.

This was not an end, but a beginning. “Bargaining is not just about one round - it is an ongoing process,” said Casselman. “Next time we will be even stronger. This round showed what could be accomplished when 5,000 plus members act as one. We’re a heck of a team!”



**Don't say we didn't warn you: HPD billboard campaign**



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