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LABOUR: More than 150 clerical, administrative and technical staff at Northern Ontario School of Medicine on strike

Posted By RACHEL PUNCH THE SUDBURY STAR

Updated 7 hours ago

A provincial government request to freeze public sector wages for the next two years should not have an effect on bargaining a collective agreement for unionized staff at Northern Ontario School of Medicine, says the president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union.

"For the employer to hang his hat on the fact that the (wage freeze) applies, I would disagree with that and dismiss it from your talks," said Warren "Smokey" Thomas during a rally at the picket line outside Laurentian University on Monday morning.

OPSEU Local 677, which represents more than 150 clerical, administrative and technical staff at Northern Ontario School of Medicine, has been on strike since Aug. 16. The union is attempting to negotiate its first collective agreement with the school.

Thomas visited rallies at the Sudbury and Thunder Bay campuses on Monday to show support for the striking.

Administrators at the school say they asked the union to pause collective bargaining until the outcome of provincial consultations with the public sector on a two-year wage freeze are concluded.

"The government has a policy of public sector restraint. The policy actually is that as collective agreements come up in the public sector there should be two years of 0% compensation increase in each of those collective agreements," said Dr. Roger Strasser, dean at NOSM. "We've asked for a pause in negotiations to allow the provincial process to be complete and that was declined."

Ontario Finance Minister Dwight Duncan announced in his spring budget he was freezing pay for MPs and non-bargaining government workers for two years. He has made a pitch to major public sector unions for no pay increases for two years. The province is not prepared to break open existing collective agreements, but Duncan said there would not be provincial funding for salary increases for the first two years of new contracts.

"The fiscal plan provides no funding to NOSM for incremental compensation increases for new collective agreements. This is particularly challenging for NOSM as it manages a structural deficit," states a press release from the medical school.

Thomas said he has spoken to both the premier and finance minister about the wage freeze and "they don't know exactly what it is they want out of it."

"That whole process is just as ill thought out as eco-fees were," Thomas said. "Here we've got a strike based in large part around this province wanting this (pay freeze), when the province doesn't know what the hell it wants. How do you bargain a deal when you've got that kind of outside interference?"

Thomas said any changes would have to go to cabinet.

"They are really setting themselves up to beat a charter challenge on any wage restraint legislation they might introduce," Thomas added.

"In my mind, even if you could make it apply to the direct public service, it certainly doesn't apply to a university because you don't get your lion's share of the money from the province. It's some, but not all," Thomas said.

Strasser said the Ontario government is the main funder of the medical school.

"We are really dependent on having at least good will and support from the Ontario government," he said. "We are really in a situation where we have no choice but to follow the government policy."

Strasser estimated about 90% of the school's funding comes from the province.

"There is some funding that we receive through tuition fees, but that's really a small proportion," he said.

The issue of wages aside, the union says the school is looking for concessions on several fronts. For example, the union says the school is looking to strip the sick leave benefits, change the hours of work and eliminate any potential for overtime.

"The money didn't cause the strike, it's everything else," Thomas said.

"My message to the employer here is pretty simple. Bad bosses organize workers. You organized, which probably tells me there is a bad boss here," he told about 40 strikers at the Sudbury rally. "The boss must have wanted a strike because they keep tabling a package that no self-respecting union would ever put to the members for ratification."

In response to the union's statements during the week-long strike, the school has posted a question-and-answer document on its website outlining its perspective on issues such as wages, benefits and sick leave.

"From 2005-2008, NOSM employees received wage increases totaling 14.15%. Over this period, someone starting in 2005 at Step 1 and progressing to Step 4 would have also received step increases totaling another 12.6%," the website states.

The website states that NOSM provides pregnancy, parental and paternity leaves.

"In addition, NOSM provides maternity/parental leave supplemental unemployment benefits," the school states. "Employees also have access to four special leave days per calendar year for personal, compassionate or emergency reasons."

Despite the strike, orientation for first-year medical students began Monday. The school has 64 new medical students this year, up from 56 in previous years.

"We are looking forward to another exciting year with a group of bright and enthusiastic new medical students," Strasser said.

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O'Connor Park and Donovan Days Build Community

The sun, wet and cold did not stop the 204 volunteers that came together to help rebuild O'Connor Park on Thursday, August 19. Volunteers came from all walks of life including citizens, police, fire services, business people, community leaders, children, and city staff and managers. All ha

BBO and Yard Sale

Finlandia Village Nursing Home Annual Yard Sale and BBO August 28th from 9 am to 2 pm at 233 Fourth Ave., 524-3137 ext. 233 for more info. Gently used items graciously accepted.

Donations for Copper Cliff fire victims

St John the Divine Church, Godfrey Dr. Copper Cliff (across from Bystroms) is accepting household items, non-perishable food items and monetary donations to help the Lalonde family who lost their home in a fire last week. Anyone who has furniture donations is asked to call the church at 682-2623

This survey says Police want to scrap the Long Gun Registry and say the Registry is unsafe

This is the survey used by the Conservatives to end the registry. Read them both and then decide who is telling the truth. Canadian Shooting Sports Association Press Release. EPS Cst. Randy Kurta. Sunday. Randy speaks. Posted on August 20, 2010 by cprnrgmfire Officr's su

companies scamming customers

I don't know if its getting to be a common practice now, today i went to big well known store to get a new tire, what followed was disgusting, so went back to get my car then when I arrived home, there was no tire on rim in trunk, then went back to customer service to explain, the clerks math was no

the way we were ...

has it ever occurred that we the people have simply less to do - i.e. "less honest purpose" - since we gave much

New phone book

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Canadian companies are being sold out from under our feet and have been for several decades Now it would appear to be our potash industry that

AND The Worker is The BAD Guy (in all of this)??

In those 2 years of historic nickel prices everyone made bucket loads of money, the company, staff, hourly, and contractors alike... There was none nickel

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