

## TOM WATSON

### Inspirational Leader with OPSEU

#### *Background of his beliefs*

Tom Watson has spent a quarter of a century in OPSEU and in the labour movement, helping lead the struggle for human rights and respect for working people and, in particular, for workers of colour. Tom's struggle and his work for social justice has been an inspiration for many.

Tom's father worked for the state civil service in Ohio and worked part-time for the federal postal service. Tom was born in Findlay, Ohio in 1949 and graduated from East High School in Columbus, Ohio, 1967. He attended North Carolina A & T in 1967-68 and Ohio State University 1968-69.

#### *Moving to Canada*

Tom, already firm in his beliefs, came to Canada in 1969 to avoid being drafted into the American armed services. He lived in Montreal for two years before moving to Toronto in 1971.

Permanent employment was hard to come by. Finally Tom got a job as a maintenance mechanic and became a stationary engineer. In June 1976 he was hired by a management company to be building superintendent of OPSEU building on Davisville Avenue in Toronto.

#### *Tom joins OPSEU*

OPSEU and OPSSU (OPSEU staff union) brought the building staff into the staff union in 1981. Tom had already been active in the labour movement. He had been involved in the struggle, along with other unionists around the world, in supporting South African trade unions and the California farm workers. Labour studies

Tom served on the executive of OPSSU and meantime, pursued and achieved a certificate in Labour Studies from George Brown College.

In 1985, Tom attended Labour College in Ottawa. In 1986, he became an OPSEU Staff Representative at the Queen's Park Office in Toronto. In 1987, Tom became a staff representative in London, a position he still holds.

#### *Family ties*

Tom met his wife Barb at an OPSEU meeting organizing supply teachers in Toronto and they were married in 1983. She has received her nursing degree and is clinical instructor for the University of Western Ontario.

Tom and Barb have a daughter Mary, 19, attending Brock University; a 16-year-old son Cory, attending secondary school in London, and a 9-year-old daughter Candice attending elementary school.



#### *Solidarity First*

Tom has a broad vision of solidarity and union activity. His goal is to see unions band together to conduct great organizing campaigns around the world such as occurred in the 19th and 20th centuries. "We need this to counteract the global political and economic forces arrayed against us. This means our foes are the same as those facing peoples in the developed and underdeveloped countries," says Tom.

In 2001, Tom was given OPSEU's 25-year award in recognition of his quarter-century of service to the union.