

# 2009 CONVENTION UPDATE

## Welcome to Day 2 – April 24



### Convention Day 1 Highlights

## Keep your eyes on the prize

This year's convention theme "Keep Your Eyes on the Prize" can mean different things to different people. "For us, the prize is making lives better – for members, for their families, and for the world around us. Sometimes, in the heat of battle, we can lose focus on our objectives."

OPSEU President Warren (Smokey) Thomas said. "A combination of a bad economy, job losses, cutbacks and uncooperative employers all play a role in knocking us off our game. But we don't look at the short term. We look at the long term."

Smokey addressed the participants at the opening of the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual OPSEU Convention. He spoke about the past, present and future outlook of OPSEU. "We have a dynamic history and continue to make OPSEU the union of choice for the province of Ontario," he stated.

Smokey looked back on what OPSEU achieved over the past year. "It's easy to forget our achievements while we're still fighting our battles," he said. He spoke about a new pension plan for the Broader Public Sector, the fight against layoffs and cutbacks in hospitals, and the huge pay equity settlements for many of the members. He also was proud to report that, in the last year, OPSEU organized more than 2,000 new members, including 700 at

the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario.

"Of course we have lots to do," Smokey said. "We continue to work hard defending our contracts and our members from vicious attacks by the employer." These include attacks on the work performed by members at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), Niagara Parks Commission, Ministry of Finance, and others across the province.

"One of the biggest obstacles for us right now is the economy," Smokey said. "Tens of thousands are losing their jobs, and it's hard to see where it's all going to stop. OPSEU will hold community forums this spring to bring people together and talk about ideas for restarting the economy. I don't want to leave a legacy to our children where they get a University education with no job at the end."

The "Prize" we keep our eyes on is good jobs, quality public services and a future that our children and

grandchildren will thrive and prosper in. "With every contract we bargain, every agreement we sign, every forum we hold, every rally we attend, and every commitment we make to a sustainable future, we move that much closer on our journey to the Prize. As your President, I am humbled and proud to join you on that journey, in solidarity, one step at a time," Smokey said.



# OPSEU joins thousands at pension rally

Convention participants joined close to 15,000 union sisters and brothers and retirees at Queen's Park on April 23, 2009. The rally was in support of the Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW) fight for pension protection.

The provincial government had originally promised to protect the pensions of General Motor retirees, should bankruptcy of the auto giant happen. However, politicians now indicate the Province may not have the financial ability to uphold the promise made, citing the current global economic crisis as the source of the woes.

OPSEU President Warren (Smokey) Thomas joined other union leaders on the podium at the rally. He urged all Ontarians to lobby the provincial government to fulfill its legal responsibility to ensure the continuation of retiree pensions in cases of corporate bankruptcy.



Brian Rutherford, President of GM Salaried Pension Organization stated, "We don't want a hand out, we want justice."

Ken Lewenza, CAW President stated, "Retired auto workers are not a legacy cost but human beings that have bills that need pension protection and pension income."

## New flag unfurled

A new OPSEU flag was unveiled at the 2009 Convention. The new flag contains the OPSEU logo and is vibrantly coloured.

The new flag reflects OPSEU's energy, strength and optimism. The new design also symbolizes the greening of OPSEU and the union's continuing expansion and organizational strength.

New delegates to Convention presented the flags to their Regional Vice-Presidents at a ceremony prior to joining the CAW rally.



# Thomas and Rout unopposed

Raising their hands in solidarity President Warren (Smokey) Thomas and 1st Vice-President/Treasurer Patty Rout acknowledged their unopposed nominations for a second term in their respective offices.

Smokey and Patty thanked the members, who gave them a standing ovation.

Brenda McCullough, Local 542, nominated Smokey. In her nomination, she noted Smokey had delivered on his previous election promise to bring the union back to grassroots members and end divisive politics. As a testament of his work, one media outlet called OPSEU, “the most powerful labour union in the province of Ontario.”

Ted Montgomery, Executive Board Member (EBM) for Region 5, nominated Patty Rout for a second term in office as First Vice-President/Treasurer. “When the right person rises through the crowd with all the talents and skills and says ‘I’ll do it for you’, it’s a moment to cherish,” Montgomery stated. “Rout has brought all the talents and skills admirably and superbly, with unwavering courage and has stood for our members. She has done it for us.”

<b>Who is here?</b>	
Delegates	857
Alternates	442
Observers	182
Retirees	7
EBMs	21
Committees	38
Solidarity Guests	14
Guests	58
<b>Total</b>	<b>1619</b>

# Welcome from David Miller

Toronto Mayor David Miller was among the many dignitaries welcoming members to the annual OPSEU convention.

Elected as mayor of Toronto in 2003 and to his second term in 2006. Miller started by welcoming OPSEU to Toronto. “It is a privilege to be Mayor of this City especially now in times of economical downturn.” Miller said. “The people expect politicians to help build cities and provinces that are not only good now but are here for our children and grandchildren to enjoy.”

During his time in office as mayor he has been responsible for the Mayor's Community Safety Plan, the Clean and Beautiful City Initiative, rejuvenation of parks and public spaces and through ongoing revitalization of the waterfront. Mayor Miller has also worked to make Toronto a world-leading city on environmental issues and on June 4, 2008 he was appointed chair of the influential C40 Group of World Cities leading the fight against Climate Change. He spoke of the government’s responsibility to help the people of Ontario, through initiatives like the new web site [www.toronto.ca/helps](http://www.toronto.ca/helps), which is a portal that offers programs to Toronto residents.

Miller closed his address by encouraging OPSEU members to enjoy his city, its beauty and all it has to offer. Miller thanked members for the great partnership the union has with his office and the great job members do for Ontario.



## Resolutions

### 650 the magic number

OPSEU policy on local book off was changed by the delegates. Now composite and mutli-unit locals with 650 members have full-time book off for one officer of the local.

### Small Claims training for members

The union will develop a campaign to provide the activists with the training and support to attend Small Claims Court with members who have been denied benefit rights.

### Government lobbying continues

OPSEU is committed to eliminating wage discrimination based on employment status for workers performing the same work as full-time workers employed by the same employer. A letter will be sent to all levels of government reminding them of the obligation to compensate workers equitably, regardless of employment status. Also OPSEU will lobby both federal and provincial governments, to reinstate funding for women's organizations that give voice to the issue of violence against women. Through NUPGE, pressure will be put on the United Nations to form a women's agency within its organization. Both resolutions carried unanimously.

### Electronic or paper? You decide.

Within six months, members will be able to submit a paper copy or an electronic version of all grievance documentation. If requested, OPSEU will provide locals with electronic versions of grievance forms, checklist forms, etc.

### Support for migrant workers

OPSEU will donate \$30,000 to three organizations who support migrant workers. We will join grassroots organizations in demanding the regularization of immigration status and support an end to the criminalization of undocumented workers and temporary foreign workers. This is in response to recent immigration raids.

### No discussion needed

Delegates passed new Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion negotiation procedures without debate. The public health labs recently moved from the OPS to the BPS. During their first bargaining conference held in February, public health lab members adopted the procedures passed at this convention.



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This is the sixteenth year that the Editorial Committee of **In Solidarity** has produced the daily updates. We will provide a record of Convention events and happenings.

**Who we are:** Karrie Ouchas, Local 340, Laurie Sabourin, Local 368, Edwin Mercurio, Local 526, Felicia Fahey, Local 681 and Jim Ziolkowski, Local 137. Ex-officio members are: James Tocker, Executive Board Liaison and Don Ford, OPSEU Communications.