

Clear communication for successful bargaining

A guide to talking to the public for OPSEU members at the LCBO
May 29, 2009 edition

Key messages:

- **The central issue in these negotiations is, “What kind of Ontario do we want?”** Do we want an Ontario with good permanent jobs with decent pay and benefits so regular people can live decently, or will we accept temporary, part-time, insecure, disposable jobs that don’t allow us to bring our kids up properly or offer any hope for the future?
- **Our communities need good jobs now more than ever, and that’s what we’re fighting for.** We want to stop the LCBO from destroying 2,400 good permanent full-time jobs and we want to create good jobs for more than 3,600 casual members who are struggling to survive. It’s what our families need, it’s what our community needs, and it’s what our province needs.
- The LCBO is getting rid of good permanent jobs and replacing them with insecure, casual, throwaway jobs. In bargaining, the LCBO has tabled a proposal that would mean that **not one** front-line LCBO employee would have a guaranteed, full-time, full-year job. As it is, 60 per cent of LCBO employees are casuals who make less than \$20,800 a year on average. **This is wrong.** You can’t bring kids up properly on half a job. You can’t build a decent life on half a job.
- **The LCBO is in a position to create good jobs, and it should do so.** The LCBO makes more than \$200,000 a year in pure profit from each employee. The LCBO has not just the ability, but the responsibility to create good jobs.
- When workers have good jobs, they spend money, and when they spend money they create jobs. **When working people do well, business does well.**
- **Our members are facing the same struggles as millions of other Ontarians** who are struggling to survive on part-time, temporary, insecure jobs of one kind or another. You can’t bring your kids up properly on jobs like that. You can’t live a decent life. You don’t even think about retiring. You don’t even think about owning a home. Our communities need good jobs.



Possible answers to questions you might be asked

1. What are the issues in this round of bargaining?

The central issue in these negotiations is, “What kind of Ontario do we want?” Do we want an Ontario with good permanent jobs with decent pay and benefits so regular people can live decently, or will we accept temporary, part-time, insecure, disposable jobs that don’t allow us to bring our kids up properly or offer any hope for the future?

Our community needs good jobs now more than ever, and that’s what we’re fighting for. We want to stop the LCBO from destroying 2,400 good permanent full-time jobs and we want to create good jobs for more than 3,600 casual members who are struggling to survive. It’s what our families need, it’s what our community needs, and it’s what our province needs.

2. What is the earliest possible date a strike or lockout could occur?

On May 29, the union bargaining team applied to the Ministry of Labour for a “No Board” report and set the clock ticking towards a legal strike deadline of June 24, 2009.

3. Does this mean there will definitely be a strike?

No. The union’s goal is to negotiate a collective agreement without a strike. The LCBO and OPSEU have scheduled bargaining dates for June 8-10 and from June 15 up to the strike deadline.

4. Why did the union set a strike deadline?

The union set a strike deadline as a way to motivate the LCBO to take the members’ issues seriously and get down to bargaining a collective agreement.

5. Has the union already held a strike vote?

Yes. In voting May 20-22, 93 per cent of OPSEU members at the LCBO who voted YES to give their bargaining team the authority to call a strike if necessary to achieve an acceptable agreement.. Voter turnout was 3,672 people, the highest on record for this bargaining unit of 6,000 workers.

6. Aren’t jobs at the LCBO already good jobs?

Right now we have about 2,400 permanent full-time jobs at the LCBO, and these are good jobs, but the LCBO wants to destroy them. In bargaining, the LCBO has tabled a proposal that would mean that **not one** front-line LCBO employee would have a guaranteed, full-time, full-year job. As it is, 60 per cent of LCBO employees are casuals who can’t get regular hours and make less than \$20,800 a year on average. **This is wrong.** You can’t bring kids up properly on half a job. You can’t build a decent life on half a job.

7. Don't you think this is the wrong time to be asking for improvements?

What our community needs right now, more than anything, is good jobs, and that's what we're bargaining for. Our approach is a positive response to the recession. When workers have good jobs, they spend money, and when they spend money they create more jobs. **When working people do well, business does well.** We need good jobs, and the LCBO – more than any other employer in Ontario – is in a position to create them.

8. In times like these, shouldn't you just be happy to have a job?

Obviously it is better to have half a job than no job at all, but half a job is not enough. People need to live.

9. What do you mean by a good job?

It means something different for everybody. It means being able to buy nutritious food, it means being able to fix your kid's teeth, it means being able to schedule your life so you can actually spend time with your family. These are basic needs we're trying to meet. Our members are facing the same struggles as millions of other Canadians who are worried about losing full-time work or already work in part-time, temporary, insecure casual jobs. You can't bring your kids up properly on jobs like that. You can't live a decent life. You don't even think about retiring. You don't even think about owning a home. We need good jobs.

10. How profitable is the LCBO?

Last year the LCBO made \$1.345 billion in profits and sent an extra \$382 million to the province in taxes. To put it in perspective, that's about \$200,000 a year in income for the province from every single worker – no matter how few hours he or she worked.

In its annual report tabled on May 21, 2009, the LCBO said its dividend to the government would rise to \$1.4 billion – a \$55 million increase in profits. Taxes to the government will no doubt increase as well.

11. How many good jobs are you hoping to create?

Well, that's what we're bargaining about. Across Ontario right now we have at least 3,600 casuals at the LCBO, and we think they should all have good jobs. Because that's what our community needs.

12. Are you really creating new jobs, or just improving existing ones?

Both. We do want to see more hours available, which would create new jobs and provide better service to our customers, but we also want to improve existing jobs. For a lot of our people who are casuals now, getting a permanent job would fundamentally change their lives. It will be just like getting a new job. We're also fighting to protect the good permanent jobs we have.

13. What's wrong with being a casual? Don't some people like having the flexibility to work just a few hours a week?

In retail there is always some need for part-time positions, and there are some workers who would rather work part-time. But nobody wants to be poor. Nobody prefers to work at reduced wages with no benefits in a job where you have no control over your hours. We need good full-time jobs, but we need good part-time jobs, too.

14. The LCBO says it needs the flexibility to hire more staff at peak periods and reduce them when business is slower. Why should the LCBO create more full-time positions when they only need extra staff at peak periods?

The LCBO has always had permanent full-time positions, and in recent years LCBO stores and warehouses have increased their hours of operation. So the LCBO is able to create full-time permanent jobs. In retail there is always some need for part-time positions, but there is no reason these part-time jobs can't be good part-time jobs with decent wages, pro-rated benefits, and predictable scheduling.

15. If you create more full-time jobs, won't that take hours away from the casuals you say you're trying to help?

The LCBO has been seriously understaffed for a long time and has cut back even more lately. We have people working alone in stores at night, we have people unloading trucks by themselves. We're worried about the safety of our people because of understaffing. In retail we don't have enough staff to guard against theft. Our goal is to have more hours available so that our customers get better service, the LCBO saves money, and our casuals can have a better life.

16. If you get better jobs, won't that just take money away from public services?

OPSEU members at the LCBO are really proud that our work raises money for the public services Ontarians need. But in the end you can't pay for public services if your economy is built on insecure, casual, throwaway jobs. When people have good jobs, they spend money, they create more jobs, and they pay taxes. That's how you pay for public services – with good jobs.

17. The LCBO says you have the highest wages in retail. How can you be asking for more?

Actually, the LCBO has pushed wages down to the point where wages for casuals are not much different from wages right across the retail sector. Fixed-term casuals get \$10 an hour. New casuals get \$13.84 an hour. That's less than the average wage for retail in Canada, which is \$14.87 an hour according to Statistics Canada. The average wage for an LCBO casual hired since 2002 is \$15.95 an hour – certainly not high when you consider the average LCBO casual only works 20 hours a week.

18. The LCBO says it employs more full-timers and uses fewer casuals than the rest of the retail sector. Why should you have more full-timers than similar retail operations?

The LCBO is not telling the truth. The retail sector (including stores, offices, and warehouses) in Canada is about two-thirds full-time jobs, whereas the LCBO is 60 per cent casual. Even Loblaws plans to convert up to 10,000 part-time jobs into permanent full-time jobs. That's what our communities need. Another aspect of this is that since 2008, more Canadians now work in the retail sector than work in manufacturing. Obviously we need policies to boost manufacturing, but with so many workers in retail now, we need to start bringing retail wages up right across the economy.

19. What is your wage demand?

Right now the issue of good jobs is such a high priority that we haven't even tabled a proposal for a general wage increase. Our whole focus is on good jobs.

20. Would you accept a two per cent wage increase?

Obviously that's a discussion for the bargaining table. But for us, the overall issue of good jobs is such a high priority that we haven't tabled a specific number for a general wage increase. Our whole focus is on good jobs.

21. Some people think that if you don't like the jobs you have, the government should just privatize the LCBO. How do you answer those people?

Some people see privatizing the LCBO as a way to enhance their personal fortunes, but there is no business case for privatization. Privatization destroys good jobs, and what our communities need right now is more good jobs, not fewer.

Privatization is poor public policy for two other reasons as well.

- a) First, alcohol is a controlled substance, and uncontrolled access to it will mean more health problems and more deaths due to alcohol abuse. Other countries are studying the LCBO as a model of responsible alcohol management. The Ontario Public Health Association, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health have all opposed privatization.
- b) Second, the LCBO is a significant source of steady income for the Ontario government. It pays for public services and helps keep taxes low. It makes no sense to give that income to private investors in exchange for a one-time windfall.

22. Didn't I hear something in the news lately about LCBO employees receiving free gifts and swiping Air Miles that didn't belong to them? Why should people support you if you can't even be honest?

Right after the union asked its members for a strike vote, the LCBO began a smear campaign against us to divert attention away from its plans to destroy 2,400 permanent full-time jobs and create even more part-time, temporary, disposable jobs.

These are the facts:

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- a) The LCBO has had a policy against employees accepting freebies from suppliers for over a year (although this policy was only brought in **after** CEO Bob Peter's daughter had her university tuition paid by the Association of Canadian Distillers). Our members follow the policy. The news that came out May 11 – the Monday after OPSEU announced the strike vote at the LCBO – made it sound like there was a new policy. Apparently the LCBO neglected to tell reporters that CEO Bob Peter had already announced the policy in a memo dated July 2008.
- b) With respect to Air Miles, any workplace can have a few bad apples who don't understand or don't follow the rules, but the LCBO staff working today are honest people who work hard to provide the best service possible to all customers.

We are very disappointed that the LCBO decided to attack its own workers, but we are not going to be distracted from our fight for good jobs.

23. Aren't you afraid of inconveniencing the public if you go on strike?

We don't want to go on strike. We like our customers, they like us, and we don't want to inconvenience them in any way. But when it comes to good jobs, what we are saying is in tune with what the public wants.



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