

March 28, 2008



TableTalk

Bargaining information for OPSEU members
in the Ontario Public Service

Your voice, your contract

Contract expires Dec. 31, 2008

OPSEU members in the Ontario Public Service are heading into bargaining for a new collective agreement. Starting this spring, OPSEU members will:

- ☑ complete the demand-setting survey in April-May
- ☑ attend local demand-setting meetings to set their local's priorities for bargaining by the end of May
- ☑ elect bargaining teams in June
- ☑ start contract talks on Nov. 4.

This issue of Table talk will give you the information needed to ensure this contract is your contract.

Your voice can be heard at the bargaining table

It only takes two easy steps

The demand-setting process is your chance to let the bargaining teams know what is really important to you. For that to happen, you just have to follow two easy steps.

1. Fill out your bargaining survey

The bargaining survey is a separate document that accompanies this issue of Table Talk. In the survey, you will choose the issues that mean the most to you and your family. Check as many or as few as you want, but remember these should be important issues for you. Once that is done, go to Page 7 of the survey and list, from your choices, your TOP 10 priorities (these do not have to be in order). Detach Pages 7 and 8 and return them to your local representative.

2. Attend the local demand-setting meeting

Prior to the meeting, the local will combine your priorities with those from your co-workers. At the meeting, you and your colleagues will vote on the local's TOP 5 bargaining demands for each of the Central, Unified and Corrections bargaining units, as well as other demands from the local. **IT IS THE LOCAL'S DEMANDS THAT GO TO THE BARGAINING TEAMS.** By attending the meeting, you will add your voice to the demands the local sends forward, and ensure that your issues get recognition.

**Two steps is all it takes to
make this contract your
contract.**



Your voice, your contract – Plug yourself in

Dear friend,

Although it may seem like only yesterday, it is once again time to start bargaining for the new OPS contract.



So where do we find ourselves in 2008? Dalton McGuinty is sitting comfortably in his second term of government. The direction of the economy remains uncertain due to the rise of the Canadian dollar and talk of recession coming from the US.

However, Ontario is still the economic

engine of the country, and strong public services still define how we live and work.

What does that mean for bargaining? It depends on your point of view.

Despite gains made in the last contract, the government continues to exploit unclassified workers. Workload issues are pushing members to the breaking point. A lot of Ministries remain underfunded, and key OPS jobs are being transferred out of our bargaining unit. Many more of our members just want a fair wage increase and improvements to benefits, job security and pensions so they can feel safe, secure and live a little easier.

Can these issues be resolved? Absolutely! We have shown in the past that when we come together, we can accomplish great things. The key is to show the employer, and, by extension, the Ontario government, that we are united in our objectives. Investing in public services,

especially during an economic downturn, is sound policy. The Liberal government appears to be making that investment, and has acknowledged that public services should be properly funded.

One of our best lessons learned from the last round of bargaining is that the McGuinty Liberals respond to pressure. Your hard work of lobbying MPPs last round paid huge dividends at the bargaining table. Now, it is time to make your voice heard again.

The first step in making sure you're heard is having input on the bargaining demands. Your bargaining survey is the way to do that.

Please take the time to go through the survey, and really think about what improvements you want in your next contract. By filling out the survey and attending your local demand-setting meeting, you will tell the bargaining teams directly what issues matter most to you and your family. This is your chance to make your voice heard. We need your voice to bargain your contract. We need you to plug yourself in, and be a part of this process.

This round of bargaining will be about strengthening our public services. It will be your strength, your professionalism and your dedication we will rely on in the months ahead. Ontario has the best public service workers in the country, and we will remind the government of that fact where it matters most...at the bargaining table.

In Solidarity,

Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President
Ontario Public Service Employees Union

A different way of bargaining:

Issues first...

essential and emergency services only if necessary

The 2008 round of OPS bargaining will mark a different strategy on how we negotiate the OPS collective agreement.

Since 1996, OPS bargaining has followed a strict pattern: negotiate essential and emergency services (EES) first, then bargain the issues.

We have learned a lot since 1996, and the main lesson is this: EES negotiations are long, frustrating and exhausting. These negotiations take their toll on the bargaining teams, and the members as well.

Members spoke...OPSEU listened

Many members said there had to be a change. They said to the bargaining teams, "Why are you spending twice as long negotiating a strike (meaning EES) than you are bargaining the contract?" When you look at it, that view has a lot of merit. The majority of time at the bargaining table *should* be talking about issues.

Issues first

So this time, we change the order. Thanks to an agreement signed between OPSEU and the government earlier this year, issue bargaining will begin on Nov. 4, 2008 and continue until mid-to-late December. OPSEU's goal is to reach a deal during that time. If we don't, the teams will return to the table in the new year and start negotiating EES.

A different EES negotiation

In the past, EES negotiations took a long, long time. After four rounds of this, we shouldn't have to re-invent the wheel once again.

This time, our intent is to make EES negotiations short and to the point. The majority of workplaces already have agreements in place, and all of those agreements will be "rolled over" for this round of bargaining. The only EES negotiations that will take place is in workplaces where there has been a *significant* change since 2004.

New advantages...

By bargaining issues first, we will gain a lot of new advantages. The bargaining teams will know much earlier in the process where the union stands in terms of the employer's offer. There will be more focus on both sides to seriously bargain the issues. Bargaining won't drag on and on, and the first bargaining done will be on the issues – the things members really care about.

...some challenges too

The teams need to build leverage to demonstrate to the employer they have the support of the members. That means members need to get involved more quickly in the process. If the employer doesn't see the members standing squarely behind their bargaining teams, they will not give the union anything at the table.

Get involved

To make this round successful, the employer must know you are serious about your issues. Talk it up at the workplace; talk to your local stewards, support your bargaining teams. That's all it takes to give the teams the leverage they need to make this round a successful one.

The bargaining climate: Recession woes?

Ontario should do just fine

There's a lot of talk of doom and gloom these days.

Most of the news forecasts predict tough times ahead. The soaring Canadian dollar has hit the manufacturing sector hard. Recession talk coming from the United States has everyone bracing for the worst. Ontario, the province that sends most of the country's exports to the U.S., could suffer major repercussions.

But does that really reflect what's happening?

Not if you look at the Provincial Budget released on March 25, 2008. While not exactly flush with cash, it appears the Ontario government will have the revenue it needs for fair settlements with the OPS in 2009 and beyond.

The questions we have to ask are:

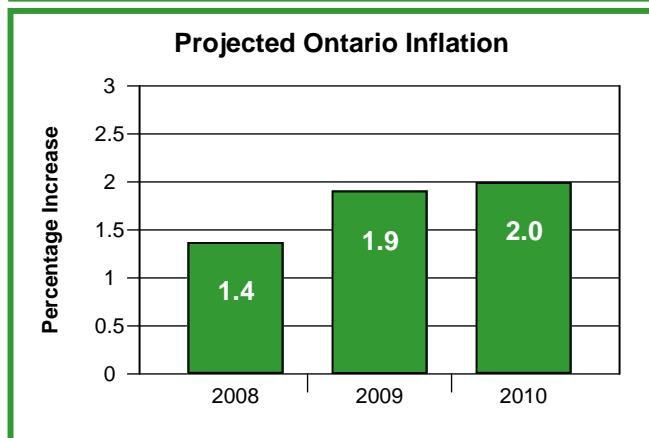
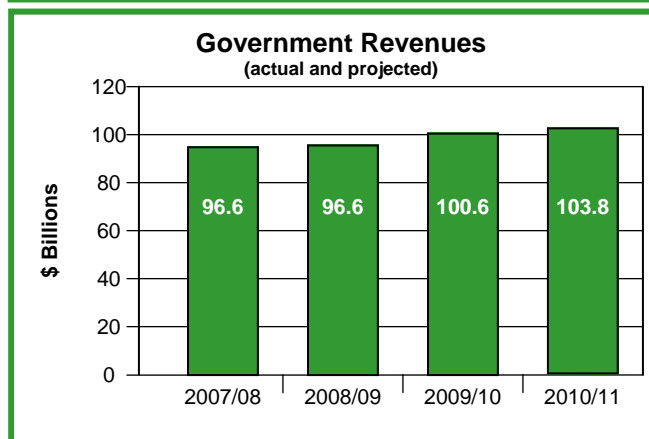
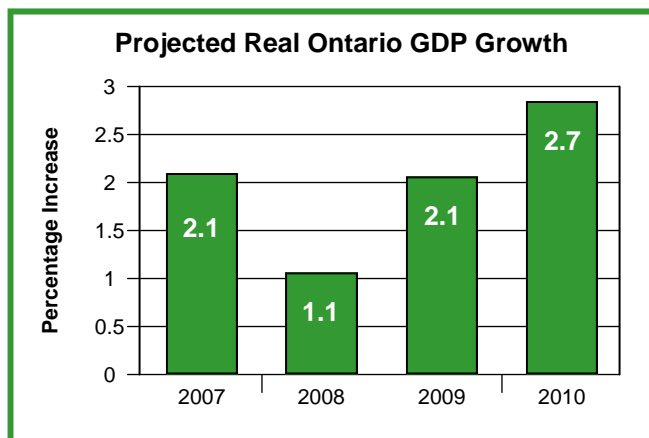
- How is the economy *really* doing?
- Does the government have a budget deficit?
- Are government revenues rising or falling?
- What is the inflation rate?
- Does the government recognize the importance of public services?

First, we look at the real Ontario GDP growth. In 2007, the GDP grew by 2.1 per cent from the previous year. This was more than the government had projected in their last budget. This growth is projected to slow to 1.1 per cent in 2008, but then increase to 2.1 per cent in 2009 and 2.7 per cent in 2010. This is not a recession, but moderate growth in 2008, with greater increases in 2009/10, the years that apply to our next collective agreement.

Next, government revenues have steadily increased since the last round of bargaining, and are projected to continue to increase through to 2011. Also, the government is projecting a budget surplus for the third year running, totaling at least \$600 million for 2007/08.

Lastly, we look at inflation. In 2007, inflation

leveled out at 1.8 per cent. It is projected to drop to 1.4 per cent in 2008, then rise to 1.9 per cent in 2009 and 2 per cent in 2010. This is actually less than it was during the last round of OPS negotiations. OPS wage increases have, since 2006, steadily kept ahead of the inflation rate.



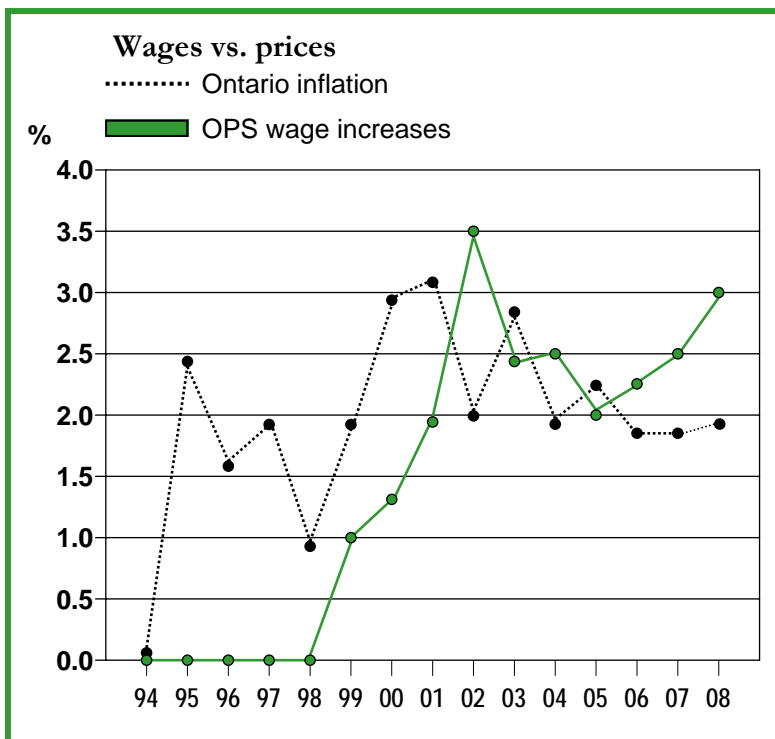
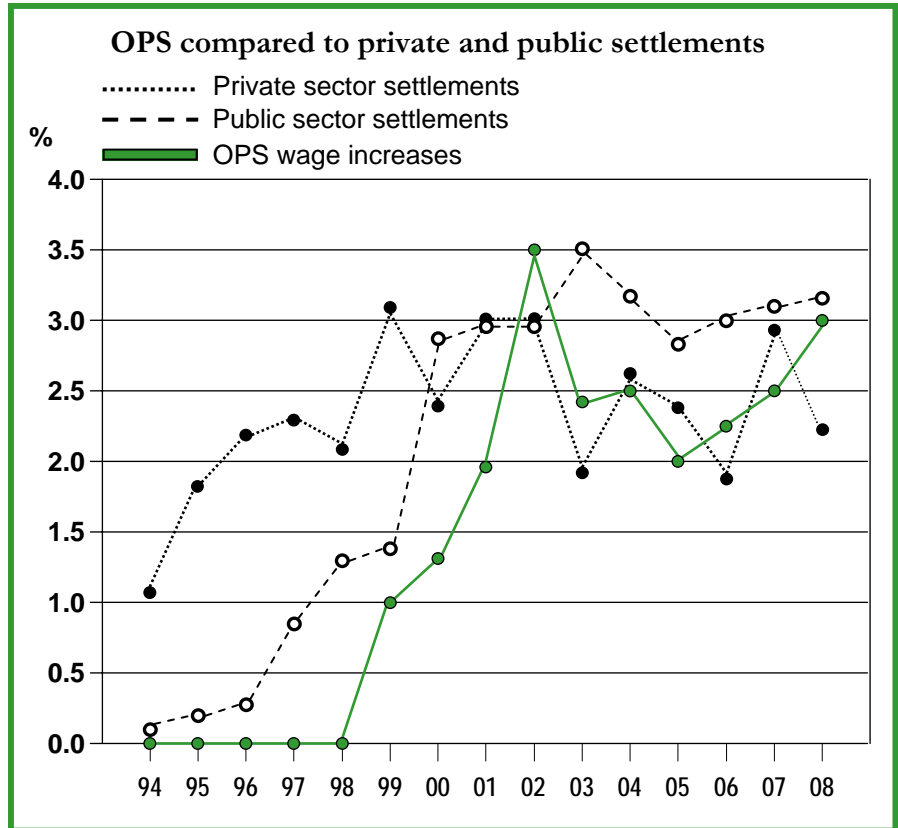
Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance

Moving forward...

A chance to make real gains

OPSEU members are just beginning to see their wages staying competitive with other public and private sector wage settlements. Of course, this doesn't make up for all of the losses suffered under the Harris Tories, but the gains made since 2002 have made up for most of the past losses.

In this round of negotiations, members of the OPS need to ensure that any wage increases stay even or above inflation and other public and private sector levels. In the March 25 budget, the government affirmed the importance of public sector workers. It's time to make some real gains in our standard of living.



For eight years, members of the OPS paid a stiff price for the slash-and-burn tax-cutting policies of the Ontario government.

In 2002, that finally began to change. In four of the seven years from 2002 to 2008, OPS members have seen their wage increases move ahead of the rate of inflation, and that *must* continue.

OPS members paid heavily for years of right-wing Tory policies, and although the recovery has started, it is nowhere near complete. If the Liberal government wants to restore justice and dignity to the public service, the first sign should show up on our pay cheques.

Who we are: Basic facts about the OPSEU bargaining unit in the Ontario Public Service

As of Dec. 31, 2007, there were 41,815* people working in the OPSEU bargaining unit in the Ontario Public Service. The bargaining unit is made up of five classification groups:

Administrative Classification Group (ADM).
Typical jobs: Conservation Officer, Environmental Officer, Forester, Librarian, Occupational Health and Safety Inspector, Systems Officer, Tax Auditor, Transportation Enforcement Officer.

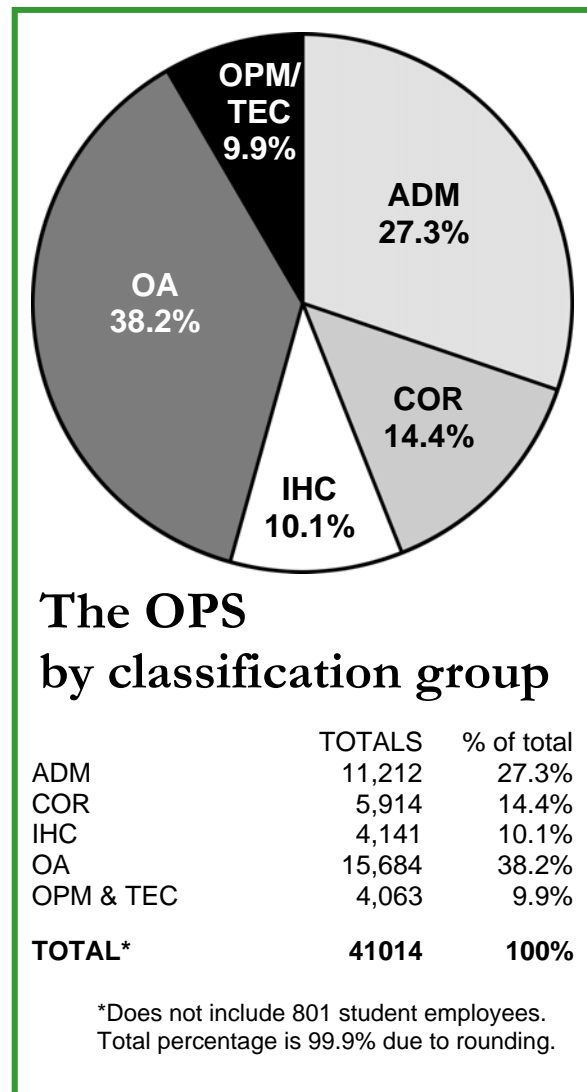
Correctional Classification Group (COR).
Typical jobs: Attendant (Oak Ridge), Correctional Officer, Probation Officer, Provincial Bailiff, Trade Instructor.

Institutional and Health Care Classification Group (IHC). Typical jobs: Dietitian, Hospital Housekeeper, Laundry Worker, Nurse, Nutritionist, Occupational Therapist, Pharmacist, Psychologist, Social Worker.

Office Administration Classification Group (OA). Typical jobs: Clerical Services, Court Reporter, Data Processing Technician, Office Administration.

Operational and Maintenance/Technical Classification Group (OPM/TEC). Typical jobs: Cartographer, Cleaner, Forensic Analyst, Highway Construction Inspector, Highway Equipment Supervisor, Maintenance Mechanic, Museum Assistant, Pilot, Research Scientist, Radiation Technician, Laboratory Technologist, Steam Plant Engineer.

**December numbers are the lowest in the year. Summer numbers may be up to 10,000 higher.*



Bargaining teams

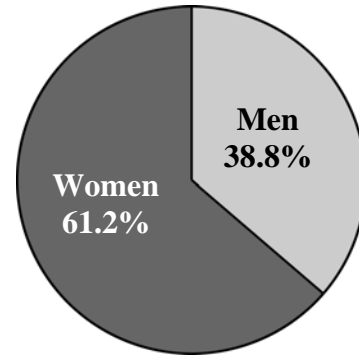
Although there are five classification groups in the OPS, members are divided into two bargaining units: Unified and Corrections. The Central/Unified Team negotiates all Central issues (pensions, job security, benefits, etc.) and all bargaining unit issues (wages, shift schedules, training, etc.) for the Unified Category, consisting of ADM, IHC, OA and OPM/TEC.

The Corrections Team negotiates all Corrections bargaining unit issues (wages, shift schedules, training, etc.) plus any Central table issues agreed to between the employer and the union.

The OPS by gender

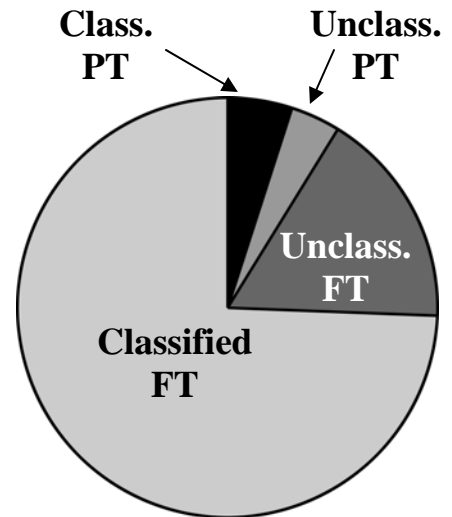
Female employees in OPSEU (as percentage of total)

ADM	47.1%
COR	38.9%
IHC	74.3%
OAD	84.6%
OPM/TEC	29.4%

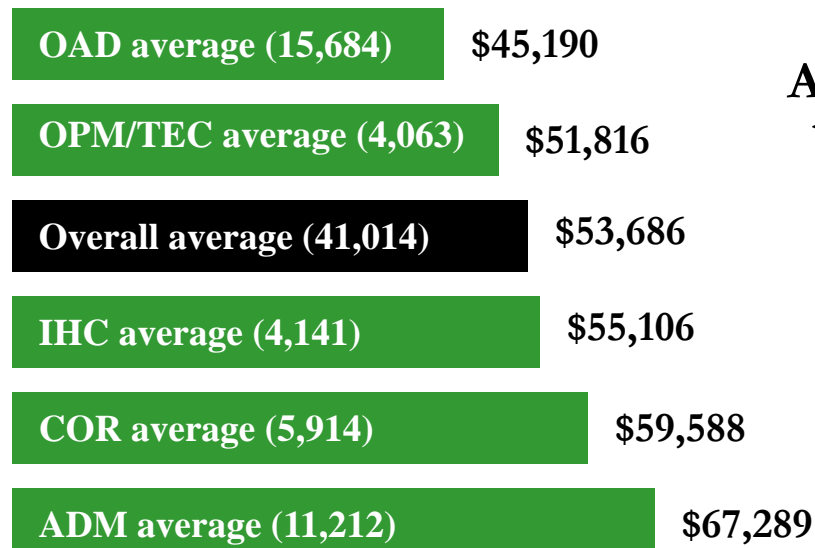


The OPS: Classified & Unclassified - Full-Time and Part-Time

Classified FT	73.8%
Unclassified FT	18.7%
Classified PT	4.4%
Unclassified PT	3.1%



Classification group (number of employees)



Average annual pay
by bargaining unit
January 2008

\$ 0

40k

80k

“The most important financial document of your life”

Setting priorities for your next collective agreement.

In a video address to local presidents on March 1, CERC Chair Eric Morin referred to the OPS collective agreement as “the most important financial document of your life.” Just think about how many ways your collective agreement affects you:

- It determines what kind of house you can afford
- It determines the education you can afford for your children
- It determines what kind of car you drive
- It allows you paid time off for rest and recreation
- It allows you to afford prescription drugs and hospital care for you and your family
- It gives you dental care, hearing care and vision care
- It protects you from hazards at work
- It provides insurance for you and your family if something should happen to you
- It gives you protection if something happens to your job
- It allows you to retire with dignity after years of providing valuable service

These are just a few of the hundreds of benefits and protections in your contract. No other insurance plan or investment gives you all this in just one package. So, doesn't it make sense to pay *very* close attention when this document is up for discussion?

Unlike other insurance policies and investments, you have the chance, through the bargaining survey and demand-setting, to get a direct say on how you want your contract improved.

However, you need to remember a few things about setting your priorities:

Bargaining is not an all-inclusive wish list. Just because you want it, doesn't mean you will get it.

The employer will only spend a set amount of money on contract improvements. **You** need to decide what's most important to you.

So ask yourself these questions: What things do I need the most? What contract

improvements are low-cost but high in importance for me? What changes to the collective agreement will make an obvious improvement in the quality of life for me, my family, and my co-workers?

Also ask yourself what action you are willing to take to get what you need? Will you call your MPP, talk to your boss, wear a button, or even vote to reject a bad offer from the employer and give your teams a strike mandate? All of these actions will build bargaining power, increase pressure on the employer (namely, the Liberal government) and give the teams leverage they need at the bargaining table.

“No other insurance plan or investment gives you all this in just one package.”

Completing the survey: What you need to know

Your bargaining survey is formatted with various demands grouped under headings. Read the descriptions below to assist you in filling out your survey and establishing your priorities for bargaining.

Wages, Classification and Pay

For years, wages for OPSEU members in the OPS fell behind the rate of inflation. It has only been since 2006 that OPS members saw their pay remain steadily ahead of the inflation rate (see chart on Page 5).

That, however, is only a start. Since 1994, OPS members have been earning less due to inflation losses.

Should OPS wages remain above the inflation rate? Absolutely. This would continue to make up for past losses. And, more importantly, it would make OPS wages competitive with the private sector, and other non-OPS public sector jobs as well. This would help restore respect and dignity for OPS employees, and attract more skilled professionals to the public service.

There is, of course, more to wage issues than a General Wage Increase. Some wage issues are related to the extra duties or inconvenience that come with some jobs. For example, shift premiums, weekend premiums and standby time exist to compensate for the extra costs – personal and financial – of irregular work arrangements.

Lastly, problems with individual classifications require disputes to be solved by a neutral third party.

Benefits

In the 2004 contract, OPS members made moderate gains to their benefit plan. OPS members finally got a drug card. Vision care benefits were increased to \$340 every two years and can be used for laser treatment and one

routine eye-exam every second year. Assistance for the purchase of insulin pumps and supplies was negotiated, and LTIP recipients received an increase to their benefits equal to the general wage increase negotiated.

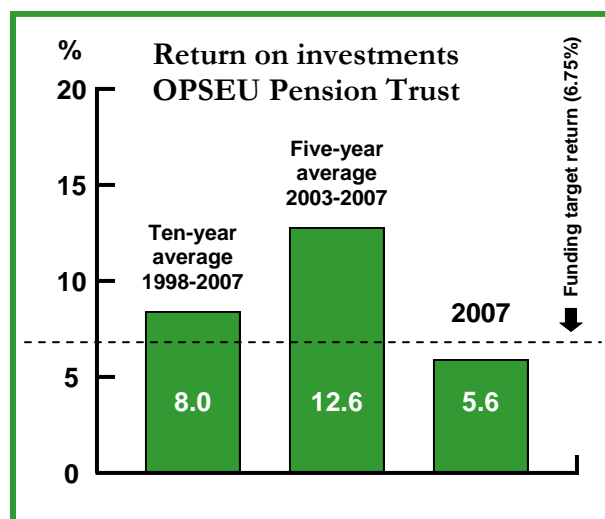
These gains, however, do not make up for the fact that the OPS benefit plan still needs some major improvements.

Due to rising costs and inflation, many of the coverages in the collective agreement do not cover much of the cost of the item or service (e.g. chiropractic services at \$25 per visit). OPS members must continue to strive for benefit improvements so that the coverage provided actually covers the cost.

Pensions

The OPSEU Pension Trust (OPT) is one of the most successful pension plans in Canada. The OPT's assets hit \$13.6 billion in 2007 after a return on investment that year of 5.6 per cent.

These funds exist to provide inflation-protected pensions for more than 80,000 plan members who are either still in the workforce or already retired.



The performance of the fund in 2007 did not meet the funding target of 6.75 per cent due to lower market returns. However, the Plan did lower the funding deficit to \$105 million (down from \$517 million in 2005). The funding surplus/deficit determines whether there are funds available to OPSEU and the government to reduce contributions, improve benefits, etc.

The bottom line is that the OPT is fundamentally sound. The Plan is expecting some gains, and surpluses can be used for improvements (e.g. pension buybacks for time spent on leaves, as an unclassified worker, etc.). However, options such as Factor 80 (temporary or permanent), Factor 75 for Corrections or other early retirement options have a substantial cost attached to them. It is unlikely that Plan surpluses would be substantial enough to pay for these kinds of retirement options.

Health and Safety

Following the SARS crisis of 2003, the final SARS Commission report called for the introduction of the Precautionary Principle into all relevant laws, regulations, standards and guidelines. Simply put, the Precautionary Principle means to “err on the side of caution.” If employers were guided by the Precautionary Principle, the onus would be on them to demonstrate that any new technologies, processes, chemicals or activities in the workplace would not harm the workers affected by them.

Other ongoing issues include improvements to ergonomics and language on workplace violence, bullying and harassment.

Job Security

While the OPS has grown by about 8 per cent over the past four years, there are still 35 per cent fewer employees in the OPS than there was in 1996.

While growth is positive, the OPS has lost some significant services. Two more psychiatric hospitals were divested, Ministry of Finance auditors were transferred to the feds, and we will

lose developmental service workers soon. While we regained successor rights, many of the services they would have protected in the last 10 years have already been lost, permanently transferred or divested.

Contracting out continues to erode our bargaining unit as the employer hires consultants at a much higher price than if they had invested in training and using their own permanent employees. This is especially the case in information systems and computer programming.

Job security provisions in the collective agreement are the members’ last line of defence when it comes to downloading, downsizing, transfers or contracting out.

Bargaining Unit Work, Postings, Transfers and Training

Having a career in the public service means having the ability make advancements in your current job or change your work path to something you have the skills and ability to do.

Hampering that is the transfer of jobs to other bargaining units (like AMAPCEO), the hiring of external applicants instead of qualified OPS members, and restrictions on job sharing and job trading.

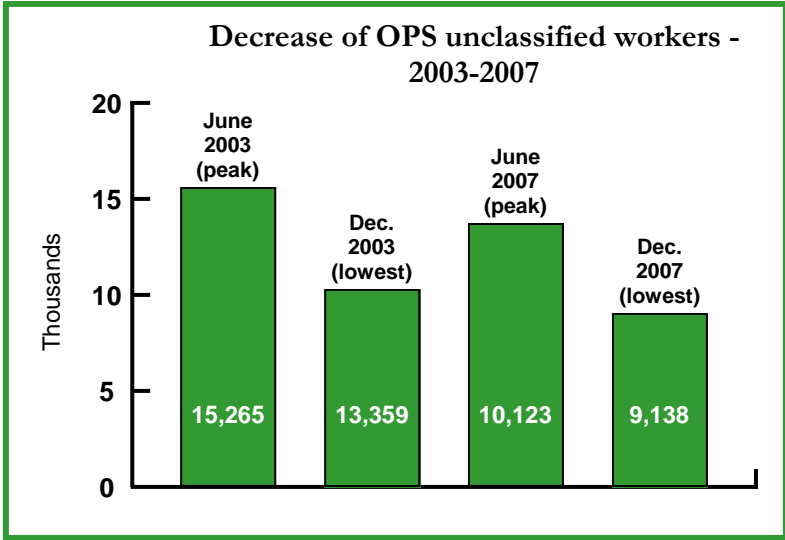
Fair access to more opportunities is the way to build careers in the OPS. That access must be united with expanded training and personal development opportunities for all OPS members.

That’s how you restore dignity and pride to the public service.

Unclassified issues

Unclassified workers continue to be the largest group of deliberately exploited workers in the OPS. They do the same work as classified workers, but without job security protection or many other collective agreement rights. If they continue to be employed in large numbers they are a threat to the job security of all OPS workers since they are a cheaper source of labour to the employer.

However, we have seen an unprecedented shift in the numbers of unclassified workers in the OPS. Over the duration of the 2004-2008



Student issues

The current wage rates for the majority of students in the OPS did not keep track with increases to the minimum wage. Recent minimum standards have had to be applied to update our contract.

While student workers often do the same work as regular employees, few collective agreement articles apply to them and the pay is substantially lower.

Overall, the OPS is not the employer of choice for students trying to save for post-secondary education.

contract, the number of unclassified workers *decreased* by over 12 per cent. This decrease is largely due to the creation of Classified Flexible Part-Time employees. Also contributing to the decrease was the gain in the current contract that prevented the employer from “shuffling” unclassifieds to avoid the 18-month rule for conversions.

This trend is encouraging, but there is still a lot of work to do. In 1996, unclassifieds made up 24 per cent of the OPS. By June 2007, there were fewer unclassifieds, but because of the massive reduction of classified employees in the same period, the proportion of unclassifieds increased to 29 per cent.

We need more conversions, and part-time employees should be included in the conversion language, so they have access to the better provisions that apply to classified regular part-time employees. Unclassified workers who are working on a long-term basis need to have rights and entitlements closer to what classified workers receive.

Seasonal issues

Seasonal workers are (technically) unclassified workers, but their real job status lies somewhere between unclassified and classified. Their work is an integral part of the public service for many months every year. The collective agreement could do more for seasonal workers.

Regular and Flexible Part Time and Term Classified Issues

These groups of employees are increasing in numbers due to gains made in the last contract. In order to ensure that they don’t lag behind the rest of the OPS, we must ensure that they have protections and benefits equivalent to full-time classifieds.

One way to start is to get the employer to increase their share of benefit costs. Just because you work part-time, doesn’t mean you only need part-time benefits.

Hours of work, overtime

Your life is often built around the hours you must be at work. In today’s society, more and more employers are realizing the value of flexible work hours and shifts. The OPS, which often touts itself as an “employer of choice,” needs to learn the word “flexible” when it comes to employees’ choices for hours of work.

Flexible start and finish times, job sharing and compressed work weeks should be the standard in the OPS. And if you choose to work overtime, there must be standards in place to ensure fairness. Further improvements in overtime provisions are also needed for Schedule 6 employees.

Time off: vacation, holidays, and leave

Everyone needs time away from work. Vacations and holidays allow you to spend much-needed time with family and friends. Pregnancy/parental and dependant care leaves help us care for new babies and say good-bye to dying parents – if the collective agreement makes such leaves affordable. Union leaves help OPSEU activists learn more and represent members better. Sick leaves allow you to recover without additional financial stress. Emergency leaves should be there to help you deal with the unexpected.

Statistics show that employees who have access to quality time off are happier, more productive and generate superior work. Less time off has the opposite effect - a tired, sick and overloaded group of employees that are too overwhelmed to do their job effectively.

Expenses and related issues

No one should have to pay to do the employer's work - they are supposed to pay you. If you work overtime and miss a meal at home, travel for your job or are required to pay professional fees, the employer must compensate you properly. Otherwise, the money you pay out is actually a pay cut.

Basic fairness

The goal of every collective agreement is fairness. The contract is designed to ensure that every employee is treated fairly, regardless of what the situation is.

There are many issues in the collective agreement that don't fall neatly into one of the previously listed categories, such as no discrimination, pay equity, the grievance procedure, an employer contribution to the Live and Let Live Fund and so on.

If it's unfair, it should be changed. And the collective agreement will be better for it.

What happens next?

Once your survey is complete and collected by your local, you will have the opportunity to attend your local's demand-setting meeting.

At that meeting, you will:

- Discuss and vote on the Top 5 priority demands and other demands for your bargaining unit (Unified or Corrections).
- Discuss and vote on the Top 5 priority demands and other demands for Central issues.
- Elect delegates and alternates to attend the Regional Bargaining Conference on June 7.

Your local will then submit to OPSEU the local's priority demands for this round of bargaining. Those demands will then be compiled by OPSEU's Research Unit for the bargaining teams.

The delegates to the Regional Bargaining Conference will have the very important task of electing the 2008 Bargaining Teams. Any delegate can run for election, providing they have been an OPSEU steward for at least six months immediately prior to the conference.

Starting September 8, the bargaining teams will begin team training, then start formulating the demands from the locals into proposals for the bargaining table. They will also begin reviewing any special case submissions.

Finally, on Nov. 4, the teams will sit down with the employer for the first time to start bargaining your next collective agreement.

The success of the teams starts right now, with you. Fill out the survey, attend your local demand-setting, **and make sure that this contract is your contract!**