

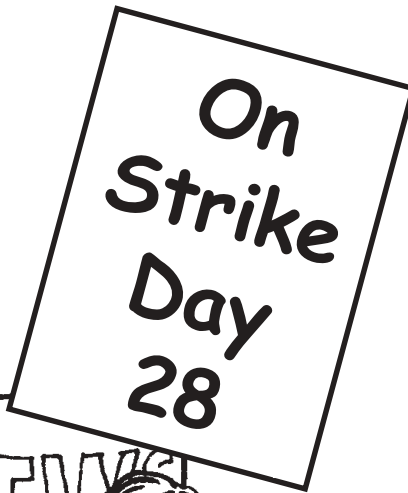
OPSEU



SEFPO

Frontlines

April 9, 2002



Talks continue; so does blackout

“I know how frustrating it is to keep hearing this same message,” said bargaining team chair Marg Simmons.

“Every day you long for some message that will give you the strength to stay on the line and keep up the fight.”

The team is severely limited in what it can say because of the media blackout. They cannot divulge the content of talks or the issues that are either agreed to or are creating difficulties.

“I can say that we would not be still at the table working if we didn’t see any progress being made,” Marg said.

“We are closer than we were when the strike began. We are closer than we were when we came back to the table. More than that, I really cannot say.”

TTC Settlement

There was a flurry of rumours Monday morning as the media reported on a contract settlement.

That settlement (good for them, bad for us) was for the Toronto Transit workers, who got a tentative deal over the weekend.

At our bargaining table, talks continue, with the mediator, and with the blackout.

‘Technical briefings’

There was another flurry of rumours when the media reported that the government had something to say on Monday.

Since the strike began, the employer has hosted a number of “technical briefings” on issues related to the goings-on at the Ontario Labour Relations Board.

Up until now, these have not attracted a lot of advance attention.

Usually the event is conducted by a government PR. person, Julie Rosenberg and a government lawyer. TV cameras are not allowed in, but reporters are. Reporters are not allowed to quote the lawyer, but can still use the information.

What is the information? It is not related to the employer’s offer. It deals with legal issues related to the strike – where they have picket-line injunctions, where they are accusing OPSEU members of not following essential services agreements, and so on.

Since the briefings are intended for reporters across the province, anyone can dial in.

Caution: Calling in to disrupt the briefing is more likely to irritate news media than to make a point with the employer.



Information on the individual briefings is available at the Canada Newswire site at <http://www.canadanewswire.com/cgi-bin/view.cgi?OKEY=2276&BIN=ME>

If this address changes, you will still be able to find them at: www.canadanewswire.com.

Search the day’s releases, or search for releases by Management Board Secretariat.

Why the blackout?

A news blackout allows the parties to negotiate seriously.

If details of bargaining are reported, then everyone on the picket line will be second-guessing every decision the bargaining team makes as it works its way toward a comprehensive settlement.

Nobody can work honestly to represent you in that kind of environment.

Everyone gets to vote on the work of the team when the time comes to ratify the tentative agreement.

Until then, the team is best off doing its work without intrusion.

Check the web: www.opseu.org has the latest on everything.

Victory in courts for the 'P and P 11'

The Ontario Superior Court has dismissed all charges against 11 probation and parole officers, charged with contempt of court.

The employer charged the 11 – a random selection of four from Guelph, four from Hamilton and three from Newmarket – alleging that they had failed to comply with an Ontario Labour Relations Board decision on providing essential services.

“Their professional integrity was challenged by this employer action,” said Dave Kerr, the probation and parole representative on the Ministry ERC.

“The employer dragged these people into court without even filling out the paperwork properly,” said Kerr. “That is significant, considering the seriousness of the alleged offence.”

When the judge made his ruling, dismissing the case, the courtroom burst into applause. “It’s virtually unheard of in a courtroom setting,

but the room was literally standing room only with probation and parole officers and support staff,” Kerr said.

Immediately after the decision, an employer representative phoned probation and parole offices around the province and ordered them to charge and suspend other workers “for anything they can dream up,” Kerr said.

“I personally told the Assistant Deputy Minister, two regional directors and one area manager that they will never intimidate us by these tactics. And we will never forget what they tried to do.”

He commended OPSEU legal counsel Don Eady for his excellent job for OPSEU and the members.

Not a career

Amelia, 6, to her mother Louise in Elliot Lake: “When I grow up I think I want to work on the picket line.” Sounds like that line is having some fun during the strike.

Not much has changed?

“Greetings,” writes Greg Murray, who used to work at MTO.

“I am on a WCB pension of 15 per cent (until someday soon when I get bumped to 25).

“I was injured on the job. I was ordered to carry a photocopier to another location and wrecked my back. I was probationary and could have refused such an illegal order, but I would have been fired on the spot.

“I had no rights while a probationary. OPSEU did try but because of the collective agreement of the day, they could not protect me. I got royally screwed. That was 14 years ago.

“Not much has changed it seems.

“From my experience working in government, and knowing how dedicated the OPS is, it would be a sad occasion if all the perils you are fighting to avoid came true.

“Maybe if some of the senior bureaucrats had a day in my place, they’d be a little more understanding and compassionate towards the goals OPSEU stands for.”

MTO: 0 OPSEU: 2

MTO members in Eastern Ontario had the same success as members at the Trafalgar weigh scales. [reported in **FRONTlines** April 6]

On April 4, the MTO scales in Lancaster drew pickets from Local 453, who found a suitable place to mount their lines and tell their story, despite injunctions.

If other scales have successes to report, we’ll adjust the box score again.

Tips are not enough

A striking Region 5 member was being treated to a fancy dinner in downtown Toronto.

She looked up from her menu to see, coming into the room: None other than Mike Harris

Without thinking, she stood up and screamed at Harris: “You’re the reason that I’m out on strike!”

Startled, Harris turned, gave a weak version of a politician’s smile, and scuttled away to another section of the restaurant.

In the deep and startled silence that engulfed the crowded restaurant, a waiter approached her table and asked if everything was all right.

Our member explained that she was a striking public sector worker and couldn’t restrain herself when she spotted Harris.

The waiter replied, “That’s okay. We fought among ourselves about who would be forced to serve his table.”

Picketing pooches

Four-legged additions to the Sudbury lines drew smiles and alliteration.

From *On the line Again*:

“These pugnacious pups proudly parade with their pickets pillorying PC Tories as OPSEU professionals persevere to protect the public.”

Won't fuel the Chevy

William Laidlaw of Local 727 wrote to the *Dryden Observer* and the Thunder Bay *Chronicle Herald* of his experience with the government's “salary calculator.”

“I chose the position of Resource Technician Senior 1, with the weekly salary of \$844.11. The calculator told me that in the first year, the salary would jump to \$877.70 per week, a raise of \$33.59. In the second year, the person would receive a raise of \$26 a week to \$903.76. In the third year the raise would be \$26.84 a week.

“None of these raises would pay to fill the gas tank on my 2000 Chevy Cavalier.”

Former OPS group supports strike

Local 500, which includes the former Queen Street Mental Health Centre, has actively supported the strike.

Since the 1996 strike, Queen Street has been amalgamated into the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (a BPS local), much of which is represented by OPSEU.

Members there found their employer was transferring clients to

a previously closed unit at Queen Street Mental Health Centre, in violation of essential services agreements.

So Local 500 held an information picket at the Queen Street site demanding properly staffed centres.

“We demand a fully-supported and integrated mental health system, not the mismanaged and fragmented system brought to us by the Tories. Support public service workers on the front lines. Rebuild public services.”

Street dance? Eggzactly!

Local 331's April 1 Easter egg hunt and street dance was judged a huge success.

It drew about 300 people to search for the eggs and dance it up.

Hobby picket

OPSEU retiree Bill Henry has been out every day, at every possible hour of picketing in the Barrie area. Since his retirement, Bill has become quite a hobby picket.

Creative lines

Local 362 has been creative and disciplined in its approach to five strikebreakers who have turned up every day at the MNR building in Peterborough.

The pickets, 150 to 200 of them, would line up, and turn their backs on the scabs, and stand shoulder to shoulder until the five left.

Sometimes the ritual would see them turning their backs and line dancing. But they kept the scabs out.

Now they are faced with a third injunction which limits them to five pickets. Oddly enough, one of the scabs decided not to cross the five-person line. And the local is looking for other ways to have fun.



Maryann Chmiel of Local 233 reports another addition to OPSEU's family.

Local 233's Sue Bremner and her husband welcomed their fifth child, a daughter. Lauren Mackenzie, weighed 9 lbs, 2 oz. Lauren will have a plenty of playmates: Callum, Nolan, Kent and Marley.

Flower power in Hearst

They are planning a 70s theme Tuesday in Hearst – Flower Power, Peace and Love, Make Love not War – the first of a promised series of theme days, Suzanne Morin says.

We can hardly wait for the tie-dyed bellbottoms and beads pictures on the website.

In other events, Jacques Jean, business agent for the International Woodworkers of America, held a press conference on one of the lines to talk about a problem in the forest industry.

He and his members also provided food for a barbecue and delivered a lunch on Tuesday.

Teachers and support staff have also been on the line and generous with donations.

You and me too

The message on the roof of Local 154's picket shelter makes a strong point. “We are all essential.”

OHIP solidarity

Local 533 at OHIP (Yonge and Eglinton) is grateful for the support from AMAPCEO members who walk their picket lines and bring coffee daily, reports Iolda Fraser.

Mike Flynn's excellent adventure

Local 355 President Mike Flynn straightens the editor out on his bicycle trip to Convention:

"I didn't leave from Orillia. I started at the picket line at the Barrie Courthouse April 3, delivering muffins and donuts. The ride seemed as long as if it was from Orillia because of the winter conditions and I drove my tandem bicycle solo (which was all decked out with signs in solidarity).

It was quite the adventure. Some of the highlights included:

- picketing the Bradford and Newmarket court house solo.
- picketing (with my own sister, a teacher, on the back of the tandem) at the Queen Street Mental Health Centre.

- being evicted from the Sheraton by the head of security for being different. (Even though I was given a complimentary room in the winter of 1983, when I road my bicycle from Vancouver to Halifax (Jan. 6 - Feb. 28) to raise money for the kidney foundation.) (Mike has faxed a couple of clippings from that venture in case any of us doubted the journey).

- Sister Casselman coming to my rescue (I hoped you received the flowers.)
 - a police chase on Yonge St.
 - my encounter with the homeless.
- For "the whole story" you can email Mike at mflynn@catulpa.on.ca

CEP joins a rally at Barrie Courthouse

At 1 p.m. Tuesday, the picket line in front of the Barrie Courthouse will get bigger and louder as members of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union join striking OPSEU workers for a show of solidarity.

The CEP members, who are attending the Ontario Women's Conference, are outraged at the callous attitude of the provincial government toward its own employees and toward citizens of Ontario.

"This strike is about more than wages, benefits and working conditions," says CEP Ontario Vice-President Cec Makowski. "This government continues to slash

public services which citizens rely upon to ensure their safety and well-being. Ontarians are very concerned about that."

OFL says thanks

OFL Secretary-Treasurer, Ethel Birkett-LaValley, has been crisscrossing the province visiting picket lines and speaking at rallies.

"This strike is about hope for a better Ontario after seven years of Tory destruction," she said.

"The strong lines, the enthusiastic members, and the sheer determination to help all the people of Ontario is admirable, and the 650,000 members of the Ontario Federation of Labour thank you."



Rebuilding

This strike by our members is not about wages alone, rather it is also about rebuilding the public service so that we may continue to safeguard the public.

– Michel Chaumont

Unprotected

As a result of this labour dispute, the natural resources of this province are unprotected. Those who choose to violate natural resource laws by poaching, harvesting timber illegally, selling contaminated fish and wildlife products, or taking fish during the critical spawning seasons, are well aware that they can do so without apprehension.

– Brian Morrison

Hard won control

We fought long and hard to have control over the half of the pension fund which comes directly from our own contributions.

– Kelly Del Vecchio

Is gov't interested?

Is the government really interested in providing services to the public, or is it punishing the public servants for giving a strike vote of 88 per cent province-wide and 98 per cent in Corrections. I object to the government using my tax dollars to advertise their position in the media.

– David Picard

Appreciate support

We appreciate those of you who took the time to come to the picket lines and spend some time with us. We are also grateful for support from Dave Levac, MPP.

– Ken Aicken