



Frontlines

April 14 - 15, 2002

Ernie!
We
have
to talk

Why are pensions so important?

Not that long ago, there was no separate pension fund for OPS members.

Pension deductions came off their cheques and went straight to the consolidated revenues of the Province of Ontario – to be used to build roads, or hire consultants or pension off premiers.

After a very long period of lobbying and campaigning, OPSEU finally achieved a separate segregated pension fund, with money that could be invested. The creation of the OPSEU Pension Trust in 1995 was a huge breakthrough.

For the first time, there was a separate fund, and the union had joint trusteeship over it. Members had a real voice in their retirement.

There was an agreement that spelled out how the fund would be managed.

That agreement said that if the fund had an actuarial surplus, the government and the union would each have a say over half of it.

The fund has done well, and OPSEU has been able to use its half of the surplus to give members a premium reduction, to extend Factor 80, to increase pensions slightly through changing the CPP integration factor, and to enhance spousal benefits.

These changes were made after a survey of plan members to find their priorities.

We are talking of actuarial surplus only. This is by definition money that cautious actuaries agree is above and beyond the needs of the plan to meet its obligations.

The government wants to stop this. It wants to tell the union how it can spend its own money, and how it can respond to members' wishes.

Bargain in good faith and settle

(This is taken from a letter sent to Ernie Eves. The full text is available on the OPSEU website.)

Dear Mr. Eves:

Ontario's public service employees deserve to be treated with fairness and respect. I believe they are anxious to get back on the job so they can continue to provide

vital services to the Ontario public. Violating previously accepted negotiation terms and bargaining underhandedly are demoralizing courses of action that can only hinder a speedy resolution.

Rather than playing games with public safety, I urge you and your government to stop running from

Want to reach Ernie?

Here's how:

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Support and understanding

Some wonderful letters have come in to OPSEU since the strike began. These are strong and clear messages from members and from the public about the issues members are fighting for.

Because they are too long for **FRONTlines**, we have put them up on the website. You can read these messages at:

<http://www.opseu.org/ops/bargaining/letters.htm>

your responsibility to Ontarians. I encourage you to bargain in good faith and settle this matter as quickly as possible. The public demands nothing less.

– Dalton McGuinty, MPP
Leader of the Official Opposition
Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party

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

Our important work

Serve resources by ending strike

This letter is in response to an editorial calling for conservation officers to be made essential.

One of the main reasons we are still walking a picket line after five weeks is because of the essential workers' agreements.

If these agreements were not in place we would have been back in the workplace in less than a week.

Unfortunately, under legislation, the public sector must have these agreements in place for the health and safety of the public. What other unions in a strike situation have to provide for the safety of the community? So you see that calling for more essential service workers (we call them inside strikers) does not serve the members of OPSEU, our communities or any resource well. In fact, it places all at a further disadvantage.

I walk the picket line at the ice road going out to Coney Island in Kenora, along with the conservation officers that you believe should be essential workers.

Also walking that picket line are the foresters who should have signed the "Area Forester's Reports" authorizing the licensing of harvesting operations beginning on April 1. Are there illegal harvesting operations "poaching" of this resource happening in the province now?

Also walking the picket line are the senior and resource technicians that do the inspections and prepare the paper work that conservation officers need before charges are laid.

Also walking the picket line are the fire fighters who fight the fires that destroy the fibre needed to keep the mills in our communities running.

Also walking the picket line are the fisheries and wildlife biologists who provide the information and expertise needed to protect those resources.

Also walking the picket line are the planners who prepare the plans for the sustainable use of the resource.

The employer has stated that the moose hunt will happen, regardless of the strike. I and several of my co-workers walking the picket line, work in client services. When we go back to work, we will be the ones talking to the hundreds of hunters in our communities and doing the administrative work to ensure this happens. This is a renewal year for outdoor cards.

Many hunters who have not renewed their card will discover, when they go to buy a hunting licence, that they have invalid outdoor cards. As temporary outdoor cards can only be issued by MNR offices, the workload of client services staff will most certainly be doubled when this strike is over. So you see, we in the MNR, including our conservation officers, believe that all staff are essential for the protection of our resources.

You would better serve the resources and the communities that depend upon them by calling upon the employer to end this strike so that we can all get back to work.

– Sharon Smith, Local 712

Is something missing?

Members in North Bay have been taking a close look at some of the things that aren't happening because of the strike.

Here's their list:

1. This is half-load season for trucks, so they don't damage roads during the spring thaw. If trucks don't enter the scales for inspection, who is monitoring to ensure the load limits are respected? What about watching for flying wheels for trucks that are not going through the scales?

2. Health cards are not being issued. Harris talked always about stopping fraud. With no cards, how do people get health care and how is fraud being prevented? I could enter a doctor's office and state that I am you and have lost my card. The doctor merely has to request your card number with no proof that I am you.

3. How are people accessing the travel grants for health care outside of their area? Grant applications are neither available nor being processed.

4. OPP expense accounts are not being processed and paid.

5. MNDM is not able to help prospectors and the geological information is not available. We are on strike.

6. Small business in Northern Ontario cannot get assistance and advise.

7. Police are still issuing tickets. Who is monitoring and testing drivers with demerit points? What about seniors that need road tests?

This list was compiled by Bob Bird, president of Local 634, MTO in North Bay.

Looking out for each other

by Gavin Anderson
Region 4 EBM

Early in this OPS strike I had the honour of visiting the Local 456 picket line outside of the Sir James Whitney School in Belleville.

I walked for a while with two union brothers who looked to be separated by 20 or 30 years in age. At one point the older of the two became engaged with another picket and I found myself alone with the younger member. He took the opportunity to tell me that he had voted to reject the employer's offer and was on strike to preserve the pension rights of his older friend.

"He's nearing retirement and has paid his dues," the brother said. "He deserves a good pension."

The older member rejoined us and, a little further on our walk together, the younger member left us to attend to something else. This time it was the older picket who quietly told me that he was supporting the strike for the sake of his young companion.

"He's just starting out with a family and is unclassified. He should get a classified position with benefits and some job security," he said.

This little snippet of picket line conversation has served to ground me in the issues at stake in this strike. The union and our OPS members are fighting to renew our public services yes, but we are also looking out for each other.

The issues that separate us from the government at the bargaining table are issues that bind our members together in one strike, one fight.

Making employees the enemy

As taxpayers we, too, want efficient responsible government, but we also want to be able to carry out our jobs in a manner which best serves the public. Reductions in staff and services, ever increasing workload and an attitude from the government that its own employees are the enemy, has made this very difficult to do. Look around at our schools, our hospitals, amalgamation in municipalities and the future privatization of hydro. Has this government earned our

respect for its management of these institutions? Are we better off? Please consider and question what the government of Ontario is saying about the OPSEU strike. While MPPs have voted themselves a 36.6 per cent pay raise, the government moralizes about what is fair to the taxpayer when it comes to paying front line public service employees – people who do the real work.

– Gerry Hope
President, Local 225

End OPSEU Strike: Conway

Sean Conway, Liberal MPP for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke is urging Premier-elect Ernie Eves to speed up talks to end the OPSEU strike.

"This strike is causing hardship for millions of Ontarians who are without important services and for Ontario government employees who are on the picket lines," he said.

"If talks are stalled, I expect the new Premier to do whatever he can to get them going again," Conway

said. "Mr. Eves keeps talking about a fresh approach, so this is a good opportunity to turn that talk into action."

Conway said the strike is causing a variety of problems for his constituents.

"Mr. Eves should set the tone for his new administration after he is sworn in next week by doing all he can to expedite negotiations and bring about an end to this dispute."

Honour public service

Mr. Eves:

I couldn't agree more with your Vision, posted on your website: "*I have always felt that serving the public is one of the highest callings to which we can aspire.*"

It is time to resolve this bitter dispute. In order to "*... build the future that Ontarians envision and deserve ...*," the government must recognize the contributions made by its public service employees. Ontario's public servants take great pride in their work that helps to build the future you speak of. We are only asking

that the government share in this pride.

You also speak of "*... the kind of Ontario that I want for my daughter Natalie, and for all of our young people.*" How do I explain to my daughters the high calling and importance of public service, when their Mom and Dad are both walking the picket line for the second time in just six years?

I implore you to direct government negotiators to honour our contributions with a fair and reasonable contract.

– Chris Davies, Local 270



Strike Shorts

Don't mess with court workers

The outburst of court workers, angered over errors in paycheques and absence of paycheques extended to Oshawa on Friday.

Court workers there, almost all unclassified and women, walked out when management refused to correct pay errors.

Their courageous stand virtually closed the courts for most of Friday.

Or OHIP either

On Thursday, about 40 Local 333 members who work for OHIP in Oshawa prevented scabs from entering the front doors to the elevator.

The police threatened to arrest all our members, reports staff rep Tom Tangie.

"They stood strong and delayed entry for several hours. Again, our members were all women. I was very proud of their actions."

Gimme shelter

A local supporter brings a shelter extension!

"A local supporter was driving by yesterday when we were walking the line in the wet and cold day," writes Suzanne Morin from Hearst.

"We would take turns in our four by eight foot' shelter and get warmed up. He just couldn't let this be. He left the picket line saying, 'I'll go get you a tarp.'"

He came back in a few minutes with a large tarp, some rope and a ladder, and installed a huge extension on the little shelter.

Another newcomer

Kelly and Brian Green of Local 341 and big sister Abby are proud to announce a new addition to their family on Saturday. Emma Clara Lillian was 6lbs, 4oz. Everyone is doing well.

BBQ in Alfred

On Friday, members of Local 426 prepared a BBQ thanks to donations from former members of the local that now work for the Alfred Agricultural College in Eastern Ontario. "Many thanks from all of us," writes Guy Belle-Isle.

No smokes; No peace

The government is threatening an injunction to force OPSEU to allow cigarette deliveries at the Oakridge Mental Health Centre in Penetanguishene.

The ministry is hoping for an injunction to stop Local 329 from holding up deliveries to the hospital where some of Canada's most dangerous men are held.

Pickets blocked delivery of about 50 cartons of cigarettes and several kilograms of chocolate bars on April 9.

No concessions

Negotiations require both parties at the table, Economic Development Minister Robert Runciman wrote to a member in March. "Both sides are looking for concessions from the other."

He admits the government wants concessions from the union. And he sees workers' desire for a raise as seeking concessions from government. Interesting.

Strikebreaking scientists disgust colleagues

Since we ran the article about picketing the Ontario Forest Research Institute in Sault Ste. Marie on April 11, pickets have heard from two highly respected MNR scientists in Peterborough.

They expressed disgust that some of their peers in the Sault are strikebreaking. So pickets see significance in this.

"I am sure that many of the strikebreakers at OFRI rationalize that crossing is okay for scientists because their work is so important it can't be left for five or six weeks, and that it's the lowly mindless technical and support staff who are stupid enough to walk the picket line, writes one.

Maybe the Peterborough scientists could tell their colleagues that strikebreaking is not acceptable not matter what your work is.

Opening college provocative act

Rumours that the province might reopen the Ontario Police College in Aylmer during the strike are jarring to the staff who work there.

Local 115 President David Kerr, whose local includes 67 support staff at the college, said that reopening before the strike is settled would be provocative.

"The government would be setting us all up, pitting our members against the recruits," he said. It would also see recruits crossing picket lines to get their training.