

OPSEU



SEFPO

# Frontlines

April 18, 2002

Spring is sprung.  
The grass is riz.  
We wonder where  
Our contract is?

## Keeping the heat on Ernie

Monday's huge rally at Queen's Park provided a shot in the arm to picket lines across the province.

It was exhilarating to see 10,000 unionists, with flags and placards all together in one spot, all fighting for the same things.

Reports from local strike newsletters echoed the feeling of being connected in a new way by the sheer size of the demonstration.

But that was Monday and we have to move on.

One of the next big events on the strike calendar has its focus on



Premier Ernie Eves and his bid for election in Dufferin-Wellington-Peel.

OPSEU has been picketing his campaign office, and getting friendly honks from passing vehicles, but there is more to come.

Next Monday, the union is planning a march, rally, barbecue and leafletting blitz to make sure Ernie has no doubt that we are a force to be reckoned with.

OPSEU is encouraging members from Regions 2, 3 and 5 to get to Orangeville by 11 a.m.

We will be meeting at the Orangeville Arena for a march through the town, followed by a rally and a barbecue lunch.

After that, participants will be assigned to different zones to drop a leaflet explaining our issues and the need for a speedy settlement.

A flyer will be circulating shortly to picket lines that are close enough to participate in the Monday event.

### Funny business for EES workers

Essential Services workers are getting a new hit from the employer.

It is clear that the employer is not honouring the Collective Agreement, which should apply to all essential services workers. In at least one instance, "policy people" have told the shared services bureau to override the contract.

Problems that have come to the union's attention so far include:

- Denial of top-up for pregnancy or parental leave.
  - Requiring people to work four days before and after a statutory holiday to qualify for payment for the holiday.
  - Routinely requesting a doctor's note for absences due to illness of five days or less. This is only permitted if the employer suspects abuse, and a strike is no reason to suspect abuse.
- If this is happening to you, grieve.

### We're at the table

We are at the bargaining centre night and day, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays, ready, willing and able to bargain.

When we have made a proposal to the employer and are waiting a reply we don't literally wait at the bargaining table.

However, we do wait in the bargaining centre.

— Andy Todd,  
OPSEU chief negotiator

### Want to reach Ernie?

Here's how:

Ernie@ErnieEves.com

163 First Street,  
Orangeville, ON L9W 3J8

Phone: 519-941-1255

Toll-Free: 1-866-225-3837

# Our important work

## Algonquin access threatened

The season at Ontario's fourth largest tourist destination, Algonquin Provincial Park, usually begins in late April.

But Algonquin and other Ontario Parks, are also OPS workplaces, and it will not be "business as usual" if the strike continues. Local 306 President Ed Hovinga, whose members work in Algonquin, said "access to the park could be hindered next week."

"Algonquin Park management have not been discouraging tourists, and have advised privately contracted workers to be ready for the park's opening," said Hovinga. OPSEU does not believe the park should open during the strike to ensure public health and safety.

"Striking public servants will bolster park staff numbers to cover all main access points if they plan on opening," said Hovinga. "Tourists should make other plans if the strike is not settled."

"The park takes three weeks to get ready, and our staff play an important role in its operations. A

few managers cannot run and patrol as much as more than 60 staff.

"The only way to return Algonquin Park to business as usual is for the government to negotiate a settlement with OPSEU. We encourage park users to voice their concerns to their MPPs. Ontario's public servants are our 'living legacy,' and we must have a fair and reasonable contract."

### Three weeks to make parks ready for visitors

It will take at least three weeks after the strike is settled before any of Ontario's full service parks can open, says Ken Gracey, vice-president of Local 319.

Staff would normally start April 15 clearing winter-damaged trees, road washouts, fixing and flushing drinking water lines and so on.

The trained seasonal employees who do this work would be particularly hurt by the government contract offer that members rejected by 88 per cent, he said.

## Turning binocs on the staff

Former Natural Resources Minister John Snobelen has issued a press release saying he could call in Conservation Officers, in an emergency, to stop poaching.

Problem is: The Essential Services Agreement doesn't cover poaching.

Then he said his trained managers "have spent hundreds of hours monitoring for potential poachers and responding to reports."

He has about 31 Enforcement Supervisors and perhaps 11 qualified managers who could do this and their "hundreds" of hours fall far short of normal enforcement.

So what are they doing? At many district offices, the Enforcement Supervisors are turning their binoculars and cameras, not on poachers, but on the picket lines.

Mr. Snobelen was right when he said, "it is not business as usual at the MNR."

### Save Medicare

Log onto [www.opseu.org](http://www.opseu.org) and click on "The Future of Medicare" to see how you can help.

## It's time for a reality check, Ernie

Dear Mr. Eves:

I work as a Macintosh Desktop Publisher for the Education Quality and Accountability Office. I am bilingual, university-educated, hard-working and dedicated. I believe I am the type of worker that the PC government claims it is trying to attract into the public service through Term Classified positions.

While I admire your stated goal of hiring good people into government service, I must present you

with a reality check. How can the benefits you are proposing outweigh working for an employer who does not respect you? The bad-faith bargaining and callous prolongation of this strike has shown what it truly means to be in the public service in Ontario under the current government and no perks could compensate for that.

Who is going to want a public service job when that means being offered less with each round of

negotiations and facing a long strike each time we refuse to lie down and allow our benefits to be slashed or have other rights wrenched from us?

While I am dedicated to supporting my brothers and sisters on the picket lines until this strike is resolved, I have begun to seek work in the private sector. It would take a fast, fair and generous offer to convince me that I should continue with my career in the OPS.

- Alexandra Hickey, Local 503

# Red hot and rolling

by Cally Thompson, Local 533

Toronto's Yonge Street OHIP office was treated to a Day of Action Tuesday that included picket activities and a building invasion.

Local 533 was joined by the North York Cluster (Locals 504, 555, 510, 534, 599 and 533), the Downtown Cluster and the Oshawa Locals for events that began just after 6 a.m.

The line was close to 200 pickets for most of the day – a demonstration of our strength and determination. It was a sight to behold – the drums were beating, the whistles blowing, the signs lifted high and worn proudly, the voices were singing loudly and sincerely and the sun was shining with a record high temperature. The energy was almost electrifying. It lifted our spirits even higher.

And we were already feeling great after the rally at Queen's Park

## Walkabout visits ministers

Queen's Park strikers brought the picket line to the doors of several cabinet ministers Wednesday morning.

At 9:30, about 75 strikers stormed through security lines at the Ferguson Block to visit Management Board Chair Dave Tsubouchi. His doors were immediately locked and the OPSEU visitors chanted "Contract Now!" and similar messages for about 20 minutes, reported David Rapaport.

Nervous staffers were busy on their cell phones calling over to the Cabinet meeting.

The group was joined by another 200 pickets and they rolled over to the Mowat Block to visit Deputy Premier Elizabeth Witmer. Then

the day before.

Compliments to all who participated for their creativity. A number of other picket activities including a building invasion where about 40 pickets blocked the elevators and took control of the lobby for almost 45 minutes. A victorious exit was negotiated with the police, the participants left the building and were greeted by the cheers of their fellow pickets. Scabs were not allowed to enter as they have been during the strike. Two building inspections were completed. And the media were invited.

Thanks to the Downtown Cluster who provided lunch.

The day was a superb example of team work, cooperation and synergy. Thanks again to everyone who contributed – you were sensational! Stay strong; a fair contract is just around the corner.

they visited Health Minister Tony Clement and ComSoc Minister Brenda Elliot.

The crowd grew as more outside pickets joined in. They returned to the Ferguson Block to see management negotiator Kevin Wilson and ended the tour with Enterprise, Opportunity and Innovation Minister Jim Flaherty.

Finally, by now about 400 strong, they finished their Queen's Park walkabout outside the window of Premier Ernie Eves.

And in Whitby, Local 331 members went to Finance Minister Janet Ecker's office where her assistants listened and commiserated. They haven't had a raise either, said Joan Gates.

## Everything worthwhile has been a struggle

All we have today came by the struggles of our predecessors. It did not fall from the employer's heaven like manna.

"Those who profess to favour freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are people who want crops without ploughing the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning; they want the ocean without the roar of its many waters. The struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, or it may be both. But it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never has and it never will."

OPSEU members are proud of themselves, their fellow members and their organization. We continue to walk the picket line with respect, dignity and strength. The employer and the community are aware of this.

In solidarity:

– Sharon Smith, Local 712

## Tourism affected

On Monday, I went to the Fort Frances airport where an employee told me that our strike was affecting the business there. The cross border traffic of people flying from the U.S. is down due to the uncertainty of tourist businesses in the north.

In the same vein, a local tourist operator took exception to one of our picket signs that suggests there are no fish catch limits. He doesn't seem to understand that our Conservation Officers are all that stand between him and bankruptcy.

– Bob Dakin, Local 711

## Out of the bad comes the good

In 1996, I was on the outside walking but this time I am on the inside being deemed an “essential worker” and it has afforded me a chance to see a strike from both positions. It gives you a better understanding of the hard issues and concerns facing all of us.

And it is true: “out of the bad comes the good.” We have had a BBQ for the entire local, arranged by Shawn Folz, one of our courthouse workers who has been deemed non-essential and has been walking since day one. We have had a pizza day for inside strikers paid for by one of our Ontario Court judges and a chilli day for outside strikers arranged by management. The inside strikers collected for a strike fund which has provided hot chocolate, coffee, juice, and water to the hardy souls on the line.

And a special thanks to Olga Scarfone who staffs the parking booth. On every payday, she gives us \$10 for the strike fund.

Be strong; victory will be ours!

– Louise O’Neill, Local 601

## Swedish unionists visit picket line

OPSEU strikers received support Wednesday from a group of Swedish trade unionists.

Twelve members from SEKO, the union of service and communication employees joined an Ottawa line.

Peter Rundqvist, international secretary for SEKO, told OPSEU members their cause is part of a global effort by trade unionists around the world to defend and preserve public services for the common good of all people.



## Strike Shorts

### Out of hibernation

Smokey the Bear joined the line at Local 727 in Dryden, apparently worried that waterbombers and firefighters will not be ready when the first blaze flares up.

### Thanks, your honour

Thunder Bay Mayor Ken Boshcoff was to join the MTO lines in Thunder Bay on Monday.

### High drama

Fort Frances’ Little Theatre group has offered strikers a cut rate on tickets for its current production, “Death Trap.”

### Sports enthusiasts

Elliot Lake strikers are planning a hula hoop competition, a basketball free throw contest, and a putting tournament.

### Humour him

On April 15, Premier Eves wrote saying he wanted to hear from the people of Ontario. “I hope you will take a moment to share your thoughts with me.”

[www.premier.gov.on.ca](http://www.premier.gov.on.ca)  
or [webprem@gov.on.ca](mailto:webprem@gov.on.ca)

### Peeping Tom?

A Local 720 manager was seen recently making his way through the bushes and peering into the windows at Thunder Bay Psychiatric Hospital. Essential work? Worth \$942 a day? For sure they know it isn’t an OPSEU job.

### Cold fingers

Sioux Lookout strikers made a field trip to Pickle Lake where they found spirits high. Now that it’s getting warmer, they are considering acquiring a burn barrel.

## Best of luck

On behalf of more than 1,200 members of the Graduate Teaching Assistants Union at the University of Western Ontario, we would like to express our support for your struggles against the Ontario government.

– PSAC Local 610

## Support in struggle

The members of Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 550, representing the employees of the six Metro Toronto Community Care Access Centres, along with the employees of Rehab Choice and Rehab Express would like to indicate our support in your struggle to obtain a fair and just contract.

– Judith Suraski, President

## Means a lot

B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell probably through he’d escaped the protests and demonstrations against his draconian actions when he visited Ontario last week. Thanks to OPSEU, who distributed leaflets at the Toronto Convention Centre where he was speaking, he learned that his draconian measures are unacceptable to all Canadians.

We now understand even more fully the pain that your members continue to endure under the governing Ontario Conservatives and your leadership and solidarity mean a great deal to us.

– Fred Muzin, President  
Hospital Employees’ Union

## Best wishes

Please find a cheque for \$200. We would also like to send our best wishes for a successful conclusion to this dispute.

– Brian Docherty, Secretary-Treasurer, Local 1000A UFCW