

OPSEU



SEFPO

Frontlines

April 25, 2002

Avoid Algonquin Park, unless you're picketing

OPSEU is asking people to stay away from Algonquin Park this weekend.

"The workers who would normally be managing, protecting, and sustaining the natural beauty of Algonquin Park are on strike," said Leah Casselman. "They have not been on the job to make the park ready to accept 10,000 visitors. It is not business as usual. There is no way visits to the Park can be as safe and enjoyable as they would normally be. We're asking visitors to treat the Park as closed until our strike is over."

The park had been scheduled to open for trout season this weekend.

OPSEU members at Algonquin Park work as Conservation Officers, Wardens, Canoe Rangers, Planners, Biologists, support staff,

Tory staffer charged

Scott Munnoch, who has identified himself to security officers and pickets at the Whitney Block as "a member of the Ernie Eves transition team," has been charged with assault.

The charge stems from an incident in which picket Rosie Rodriguez was knocked down on April 9.

In another incident, Raymond Low, a member of the public, was charged after picket Francine

maintenance staff, and resource and compliance monitoring technicians. They and their supporters will set up picket lines at locations throughout the park this weekend, beginning on Thursday morning.

"Our members want this strike over as quickly as possible so we can go back to doing what we do best, which is using our expertise to serve the public," said Casselman. "That can't happen until this government recognizes the value of the dedicated people who look after wonderful Ontario resources like Algonquin Park."

Ontarians can help return Park services to normal by contacting Ontario Premier Ernie Eves and urging him to take a direct role in negotiating a quick end to the strike, said Casselman.

Morrison was knocked down and hurt at the same location.

A third incident involved a Mike Harris staffer, but no charges have been laid in that case.

No more assaults have been reported to **FRONTlines** from that location since NDP Leader Howard Hampton wrote to Premier Ernie Eves and then premier Mike Harris, asking them to "call off their goons."

Hampton's letter is posted on the OPSEU website.

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



April 28 is Labour's Day of Mourning for workers killed and injured on the job. If you aren't running weekend lines, take a minute Friday to mourn for the dead and make a commitment to fight for the living. Nobody should die making a living.

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

If you **are** going to Orangeville to picket Eves' office or to get involved in the campaign, give Tim Little a call. That way the local campaign will know you are coming and can plan for your participation.

Tim's cell number is:

416-540-7003

From Hero to Zero

The phrase From Hero to Zero really applies to the firefighters with MNR.

They have received international recognition for their heroism, competence, dedication, and state of readiness in emergencies. These qualities have been demonstrated many times in disasters such as the ice storm in southern Ontario and fires in Montana, Washington and B.C.

It's a different story when it comes to their treatment by the employer.

A Fire Ranger Crew leader with three years' experience is responsible for the safety and well being of three other crew members. The leader must make decisions regarding the suppression of a wildfire which could involve thousands of dollars in direct suppression costs, and protect private property valued in the millions. They are responsible for public safety. These people are hired each spring, and laid off in the fall. They have no guarantee of how long they will work in any given year. Is it any wonder we are losing them?

Suppressing a wildfire requires skill, training and experience. Every year the MNR spends taxpayers' dollars training fire management staff, yet the ranger crewperson can expect to get only about 12 weeks work after having spent around \$1,000 of their own money just to apply for a job.

The Government's media statements that they are ready for fire emergencies are not true. In the Kenora area, none of the forest fire suppression equipment has been overhauled since last fall.

The firefighters walking the picket line make decisions that could affect the lives and livelihood of whole communities, yet they are among the government's most poorly treated employees.

People and businesses that rely on forest resources should be wary of government officials that maintain they are prepared to deal with fire emergencies. They are not.

Communities need to start questioning whether this government is actually bargaining in good faith or being mean and vindictive to their work force.

– Sharon Smith, Local 712

Red alert false alarm traps managers

by Suzanne Morin Local 638

Local 638 held a meeting about Emergency Services with Fire Staff from the Hearst District Tuesday.

Their managers had called them in for work for the following day. As we understood the agreement, they could only be called in if there was a fire or if the Strategic Operating Plan (SOP) called for a Red Alert.

How can they call for Red Alert with snow on the fields, nights at -10

Celsius and a forecast for rain and snow?

When we drove by the MNR office, we noticed three managers' vehicles. Two members decided to start a late shift and keep the managers in. When the managers tried to leave around 8:30 p.m., the two-member line said they would be delayed. Two managers respected the delay but the third crossed the line and left.

Around Ontario

Barbecue and sit-in

Local 230 staged a sit-in in the lobby of the Probation and Parole office in Kitchener Wednesday.

It started about 8 a.m., reports local president Gib McIlwrath. When the pickets arrived at the strip mall office, managers locked the door and would not allow essential services workers in. Then they called police to complain that the ES workers had not reported for work.

"We pointed out that it was management that had locked the doors."

The sit-in, leaving a pathway for clients, lasted until after noon, when the pickets left and joined a barbecue in the parking lot that had fed burgers and hotdogs to about 75 pickets over the lunch hour.

The eventual resolution involved six police cruisers and a motorcycle, and staff rep Kerry Gennings on the phone.

We called in more members to join the two-person flying squad. In a few minutes, the line grew to nine, a fire was burning, and music playing.

We kept the managers in until 10 pm. We made it clear that we didn't agree with their Red Alert and we wouldn't let the Fire Staff in the next day. The Fire Staff reported as requested Wednesday did not cross the line. Give us a real Red Alert and we will respect it.

Nipigon Office shut; honks of support

Beefed up pickets lines kept everyone out of the Nipigon Government Information Centre and MNR Office Wednesday.

Local 724 members were “stepping it up a notch.” Affected were MNR managers, AMAPCEO members in MNR and MTO and an essential services worker with the Ministry of the Attorney General.

The action came as a result of disappointment over Tuesday’s hollow offer from government negotiators. After six weeks on strike and three weeks of media blackout, the best the government could do was reiterate parts of the March 13 offer and parts of an April 2 offer.

“The government’s response is an insult, another slap in the face,” said Local 724 President Tim Cavanagh,

as discussions continued under cloudy skies and driving rain off Lake Superior.

While relations with local managers have been tolerable, strikers were adamant that more needed to be done.

“It’s just not enough for them to sympathize with us and still keep answering the phones,” said picket captain Rosemary Hartley.

“It seems like they have been hung out to dry as well, by the government’s impotence at the table. Our fight is also their fight. When this is over we are all going to have to go back in together and try to pick up the pieces.”

Union members are disgusted that the government would allow the business of the public sector to shut down for such an extended period.

“Our resources have never been left as exposed and vulnerable as they are now,” said Hartley.

The local picket line received an unusual show of solidarity as hundreds of northbound Canada geese honked in support.

Environmental monitoring in limbo

Since March 13, when the strike began, none of the laws protecting Ontario’s environment have been enforced.

For the first time in 30 years there is no air quality monitoring. There is no basis for Medical Officers of Health to issue air quality warnings.

There is no enforcement of drinking water regulations. Nobody is inspecting drinking water supplies. For seven weeks, notifications of serious drinking water violations have accumulated in the Ministry of the Environment. The system is relying on those operating the system to regulate themselves and implement corrective action.

“Walkerton has proven to us that this is not an effective way to ensure water safety,” said OPSEU President Leah Casselman. “Yet again, the government is gambling with public safety and public health.”

Without enforcement, nobody is checking to see that business and industry are complying with the regulations on discharging pollutants or illegally dumping wastes. The bad actors know that the enforcement staff are on the picket lines and they have an excellent chance of getting away with it, said Casselman.

Fines or imprisonment

The government is starting to bring out the heavy legal guns against actions by union activists.

At the Michael Starr Building in Oshawa (Ministry of Revenue, Local 340), the government has filed a court action charging the union and three activists with contempt, and seeking serious fines and imprisonment.

At issue is a blockade of the building’s doors in violation of previous injunctions. The motion for the contempt charges has been adjourned for two weeks to allow the union and the activists to prepare their defence.

The adjournment was granted only because the activists were able to advise the court that they had been trying to get members to comply with the injunction and

because the injunction was being complied with on Wednesday morning.

During the period of the adjournment, there is a further order banning any picketing at all at the Michael Starr Building until the contempt trial is concluded.

The decision upset Local 340’s Florence Larkin. “It’s appalling how the courts can trample the rights of citizens. They thought this would kill our morale, but it only made us stronger. If that was their strategy, it backfired.”

In Peterborough, where injunctions have limited picket action, members have taken their line to the streets and sidewalks of the community so the message of the strike reaches a broader audience.

Canadian Tire picket works

Members in London took their line to two Canadian Tire outlets which were selling hunting and fishing licences.

Faced with a strong OPSEU picket line, the managers came out and negotiated, reports Linda Thibert, vice-president of Local 107.

They both agreed to stop selling the licences and to post a notice that they would not sell the licences until the strike is settled, Linda said.

That's the White Oaks and Maisonville Canadian Tire stores. Good places to do business.

Managers doing well, thank you

A striker in London reports that her husband, a government manager, was offered \$8,000 a week to work at the Elgin-Middlesex Detention Centre. That's fact, for at least one manager.

This is rumour: It apparently originated with someone at CorPay, who said an unknown number of managers are getting \$14,000 bonuses every two weeks on top of their strike paycheques. This bonus money is allegedly for working in the jails or being on call. Repeat, it is rumour.

One man's strike

Paul Heersink of Local 362 has been keeping a strike journal since Day 1 on the picket line.

As he says, it may not "toe the party line," but it is one picket's view of being on strike. If you are interested, it is up on a website at www.peterboroughcollective.org

Mayworks: free to strikers

Mayworks is Toronto's annual Festival of Working People and the Arts.

In a special message of solidarity to OPSEU strikers, Mayworks co-chair Lisa Walter reminds Toronto area pickets that Mayworks has a long-standing policy of making events free to pickets.

"Mayworks wholeheartedly supports striking OPSEU members' efforts to achieve a collective agreement which reflects the critical importance of public services in Ontario," Lisa wrote.

"Artists and cultural workers have also been devastated in recent years by the provincial

government's self-serving agenda. The future of all who labour in the public sector will be reflected in the outcome of your struggle, and Mayworks stands with you in solidarity."

Under Mayworks' long-standing Pickets-don't-Pay policy, OPSEU members on strike can enjoy any event free by identifying themselves as being on strike.

Programs for Mayworks are available in many locations.

The 2002 theme is "Si Se Puede! Yes We Can! Culture in Action."

The official opening is April 27, 8 p.m., at the 360 Club, 326 Queen St. West.

Shelters help shelters

Ministry of the Environment staff in Owen Sound (Local 224) have been keeping busy and constructive during the strike.

With donations of wood from a local furniture manufacturer, the strikers have been building and selling Blue Bird houses and Bat houses to raise money for charity.

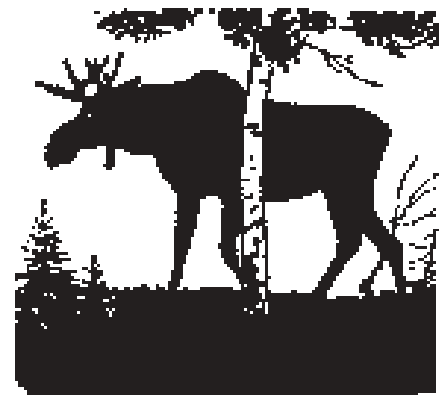
To date, strikers have raised almost \$200 for the Women's Shelters of Grey and Bruce Counties which provide refuge to abused women.

"We all have a responsibility to aid in the support of our social safety network. This is our way to assist the women of Grey Bruce and wildlife also benefits," said Wally Illman.

Moose on the line

It was Hunting and Fishing Day for Local 638 members in Hearst on Thursday. A Moose on the Loose in impressive costume joined the line and turned heads.

Reactions were mixed. Pickets speculate the humourless ones were probably moose hunters worried (as they should be) about the moose draw, and wondering if the strike will have an effect on it.



The feast of the day was moose meat and fish. (The moose eaten was not the visitor to the line.)