

The
end
is
near

Hope fills the air

There was something different in the air as about 1,000 strikers staged a raucous rally at Queen's Park Wednesday morning.

Shouts of "We won't back down!" showed that the resolve was still strong, but it was mixed with something new: hope.

"Yesterday, the government tabled a comprehensive offer," OPSEU president Leah Casselman told the crowd. "Your bargaining teams worked till 4 a.m."

Casselmann received a phone call from Ontario Premier Ernie Eves at home on Sunday.

"He said he doesn't think it's proper for the government to have control of our pension surplus," she said. "I said, 'Yes, that's good, and here's a list of other things we're worried about.'"

Bargaining continues.

"We've got to hold that line until our team tells us that they've got a deal," said Terry Downey, Region 5 Vice-President.

The May Day rally starred guests from unions across Canada.

"When we go out on strike, we always know when we go out, but we never know when we'll come back to work," said Jean-Claude Parrot, Executive Vice-President of Canadian Labour Congress. "With the solidarity you're showing, and the support you're getting from the labour movement across this

Negotiations to end the strike are continuing on two tracks.

The union and the government are still negotiating towards a new collective agreement. There was no tentative agreement as of midnight May 1, but the union bargaining teams remain optimistic that a deal can be reached soon.

In anticipation, talks have begun on a back-to-work protocol.

Watch the website for updates.

country, and from the public you're going to win."

Parrot led the Canadian Union of Postal Workers through several tumultuous rounds of bargaining. In 1978, striking CUPW members were slapped with federal back-to-work legislation after one day. They defied the law for 10 days. CUPW leaders were charged criminally, and Parrot was jailed for refusing to order postal workers back to work.

CUPW made major contract advances without a strike in bargaining in 1980.

"Ernie Eves and the Tories have tried to break your ranks but you wouldn't let them," Peter Kormos told strikers. "Ernie Eves and the Tories have tried to make you invisible, but you didn't let them.

Kormos, NDP MPP for Welland, has been a steadfast friend

to OPSEU members for years.

He led Casselman, other labour leaders, and a delegation of OPSEU members into the Legislative Building to deliver a letter to the office of Mr. Eves along with a bag of rubber gloves worn and inscribed by OPSEU members with the message, "Keep your hands off our pensions."

Other guests included OFL President Wayne Samuelson, and representatives of the Canadian Auto Workers, the Canadian Union of Public

Employees, the Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union of Canada, the Manitoba Government Employees Union, the National Union of Public and General Employees, the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Public Employees, the Public Service Alliance of Canada, the Society of Energy Professionals, the Telecommunications Workers Union (from B.C.), and the United Food and Commercial Workers.

A new email for Ernie!

Some people have had trouble with his election campaign email address. This one is from the Tory party's webpage:
webprem@gov.on.ca

Tory MPP backs union on pension, unclassified

Frank Mazzilli, the Tory MPP for London-Fanshawe, has written to Management Board Chair Dave Tsubouchi backing OPSEU strikers' positions on three issues.

A story in the *London Free Press* quotes Mazzilli as saying: "The members I met with are looking for a fair settlement and are anxious to return to their various professions."

He said he felt he was representing his constituents and he hoped his statement helped the union's cause.

He was supportive of benefits for unclassified workers, and said inequities for that group should be addressed "forthwith."

Keeping people for more than 10 years without benefits is a sign "the employer has abused the process," he told the *Free Press*.

He also support OPSEU's demand to retain control of its share of the pension surplus.

"I can't agree with them more. It's their members' money."

And he opposed the government's demands for concessions in benefits.

Mazzilli said he had followed up his letter with a phone call to Tsubouchi.

McGuinty repeats support

Liberal Leader Dalton McGuinty has written a second letter to Premier Ernie Eves urging him to settle the strike.

"Premier, when are you and your colleagues going to shrug off your apparent indifference to the people of Ontario?"

"The strike is taking a serious toll on the Ontario public. Frustrated and disheartened, Ontarians are extremely anxious to have their services restored.

"Clearly, your government's lack of action is threatening their safety, a

threat steadily on the rise as every week – and every day – passes.

"Ontario's public service employees, demoralized by your underhanded bargaining tactics, want to get back on the job as soon as possible.

"I urge you and your government to give them that opportunity by encouraging, not dissuading, the resolution of what has become the longest public service strike in Ontario history. You owe it to our valued public servants and to all Ontarians."



It is worth fighting for

I used to be non-supportive of unions and their purpose. I even voted for the PCs in the last election.

This strike is a landmark in the stand for all people in Ontario and for workers' rights everywhere.

Since our strike in '96, I've done a lot of soul searching over whether serving the people of Ontario as a profession is worth standing up and fighting for. I now know without a doubt that it is. I commend you and your staff and our members for fighting the good fight.

If I had known that the Common Sense Revolution was nothing more than the Common Assault Revolution, I would have stood more defiantly in days gone by.

Planned for failure

Dear Premier Eves

[The government] is creating an employment atmosphere planned for failure.

This government knows that once its employees gain enough training and experience at the expense of the taxpayers of Ontario, they will then move on to more attractive employment in the private sector where their skills will be fully utilized and appreciated. Savings to the Ontario taxpayers are an illusion since the MNR and many other ministries are turning into training centres for the private sector.

– Gordon Kayahara, Local 649

– Brian Berdusco, Local 671

Worksite reps beware management document

Union worksite representatives should not be misled by a management document: Procedure for OPSEU Worksite Visits.

OPSEU has complained about this misleading material and the

Labour Relations Board has ruled that it is a management document, not something agreed to by the parties.

Even with employer revisions, it is neither a board document nor an

OPSEU one.

The real rules for worksite visits are in joint agreements and board decisions. You don't have to sign any document in order to do a workplace visit.



Child care not monitored

Since the strike began, the people who licence and monitor child care centres have been walking picket lines, reports Beth Anich of Local 601.

This means nobody is checking on illegal child care operations.

The Ontario Day Nurseries Act addresses health and safety and many other concerns beyond staff-child interaction. Program advisors are responsible for responding to child care inquiries, start-up facilities, monitoring, enforcement practices, serious occurrences, complaints and illegal operations.

Mass actions in North Bay

by Sue Brown, Region 6 EBM

We have been doing mass hits lately.

About 300 members hit the Tory candidate office yesterday, in the Nippissing by-election to replace former premier Mike Harris.

“We demanded that he meet with us. We shut down the Court house today in a mass picket

Tomorrow is a surprise (we want no leaks).

Our service area leaders meet daily, and are putting in 10 to 12 hours a day for regular strike pay.

Many actions do not get into the **Frontlines** newsletter because there is simply not enough room.

Why not go back in a rotating strike?

Several members’ emails have suggested that members return to work, possibly on a rotating basis, but continue bargaining.

On the surface it may look tempting. You get paid, talks continue, and a good contract results. Some have suggested it would be a show of good faith.

So, why not?

Perhaps the most obvious reason is that if an employer is resisting a decent contract settlement while the workplace is disrupted by a strike, why would they change their mind when all the pressure is gone?

Quite simply, this is a move that would completely undercut the bargaining team.

Why not try for a rotating return, to keep the employer off guard and give people some pay?

Organizing a rotating strike is incredibly difficult at the best of times. As a tactic, it is more easy to control at the very beginning of a strike.

At this point it would involve crossing our own picket lines. Confusion generated by the tactic could expose members to reprisals from managers for strike activity.

Without the solidarity and communication of the picket line, many people might well bend to the lure of a paycheque or pressure from managers to betray the planned rotation and keep working.

Management pressure is a very real threat in this strategy.

This is another reason for dismissing the idea. Because if members returned to work, they would do so with absolutely no

• You ask, we'll answer.

union contract and no union protection.

It is not like the period from Jan. 1, when the contract expired, until the strike began. During that period, the old contract continued in effect, even after its expiry date, while the two sides were negotiating for a replacement.

But when negotiations head toward a strike deadline, things change. When a conciliation officer submits a “no board” report, that starts the clock ticking toward a legal strike deadline.

When the strike deadline hits – in our case, midnight March 12 – the old contract ceases to exist. It is gone, over, done with.

Only essential services workers are covered by the continuation of the contract, because they are working under the Essential Services Agreement. Nobody else would be covered.

Working without a contract means working without a grievance procedure, with no rights beyond the minimum in legislation. You are at the whim of whatever the employer chooses to do. There is no guarantee of wage rates, job responsibilities or any other terms and conditions of employment.

There is absolutely no protection against layoff, discipline or dismissal.

Obviously this opens the door to favouritism and many forms of workplace pressure. It’s a huge risk that promises no rewards.

Thanks to all strikers

To: webprem@gov.on.com

I'm sending a big thank you to all OPSEU strikers for all of their determination and sacrifices to try to keep the services all the people of Ontario have enjoyed and needed for most of my life.

As an eleventh generation Torontonian, my ancestors fought for generations to help make Ontario what it is today. I don't know any other Canadians, other than Aboriginals, who can boast this with such pride. I hope the Eves government does not let me and other Ontarians down by destroying all of this. Please fix this terrible mess!

– *Respectfully, Ruth Davidson*

Be proud of your courage

Hopefully you will not have to do this again. Hopefully you will eventually have an employer that respects you and all Ontarians. I hope that you are proud of yourselves and your courage.

– *J. Martin*

Next stop Toastmasters!

Paul Gallagher has decided that he can practice public speaking and, at the same time, annoy people waiting to cross the line.

“I have prepared a speech thanking them for waiting and respecting our picket line. I outline how the government is trying to fool the public and that the government will do the same to them.

“Then I will read to them articles outlining how the strike is affecting the public service. The speech will be repeated every few minutes.”

Action briefs

At Algonquin Park:

A large tourist group lit a large bonfire, normally not allowed for reasons of safety and protection to the environment of the park. Managers supposed to be enforcing the rules watched.

Contractors are normally paid out of the profits at the gates, but management is paying them out of the operating budgets. Not enough gate revenue?

In Oshawa

Restaurant sales in the neighbourhood of government buildings have plummeted during the strike. Several restaurateurs were moaning about serious losses to local reporters.

In Brantford

Inmates serving weekend sentences stayed home last weekend while three fully-staffed units at Burtch Correctional Centre were empty. The beds were supervised while the inmates stayed home.

In Nipigon

After holding the line at the Dorion Fish Culture Station for almost a week, OPSEU members watched a hatchery truck with 30,000 yearling splake head down the road to an uncertain future in Rongie Lake.

Area biologist Linda Melnyk-Ferguson said it was far too many fish for the little lake. “That many fish cannot survive there.”

Lakes that normally would get the little fish will not be stocked as a result of the dump.

In Newmarket

Whistles, bagpipes and song greeted visitors to the Land Registry Office on April 30 for the busy end-of-month house sale closings.

Reinforcements from the Tannery at noon reinforced the line. Each visitor was given a number, and while they waited, Local 310's Don Maitland handed out leaflets and calmed frayed nerves. Carmen, the timer, ensured that everyone had a full 10 minutes with Don to understand the strike issues. Most took the delay in stride.

Dedication to public services

As our local leaders visit your picket lines across the province, they report how strong and solid your members remain in their lengthy struggle for a just and fair settlement.

That is a great tribute to your leadership, to your cause and to the dedication your members have to preserve public services in this province.

We also know that in a lengthy strike, both patience and pocketbooks run thin, so please accept our second donation of \$10,000 to your strike fund. We wish you a speedy and successful resolution.

– *Phyllis Benedict, President, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario*

To restore pride

“This is a strike about workers taking action to restore their pride in their work; and in so doing, rebuilding the public services they proudly provide to the citizens of Ontario.”

– *Canadian Labour Congress President Ken Georgetti*