



Frontlines

March 21, 2002

On
Strike
Day
9

One successful search

Members of Local 126 took down their line March 14 when a senior manager came out and said a resident of the Southwestern Regional Centre was missing.

The facility called the police, and a picket captain met with the police and facility management.

They immediately collapsed the line and everyone searched for the missing resident, who fortunately was found and is safe.

The senior manager, Terry Monk, expressed how impressed he was with the strikers' response and their professional behaviour.

What else did they expect from professional public servants?

Across Ontario the search for a new collective agreement is going more slowly.

Still no return to the bargaining table, but it shouldn't be too much longer. Our strike is having an impact in many different ways, and

in the last few days other people have started to speak out.

The Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police has issued a press release saying the criminal justice system is "in a shambles." They urged the government to get back to the table and bargain a contract.

The head psychiatrist at Whitby Mental Health Centre said he can't run proper programs for his patients with 80 per cent of his staff on the picket lines. He says that the strike is hurting his patients and he wants our members back helping them.

You can help move the search for a contract forward. Call your MPP. Call Mike Harris. Call Dave Tsubouchi.

Mike: 416-325-1941

Dave: 416-327-2333

Pass the message on to your family and friends. Lets get those phone lines humming.

Barb Coombs

OPSEU lost a valued member Monday with the death of Barb Coombs, past president of Local 713. Before her recent retirement, Barb was a stalwart in the Ministry of Natural Resources. She served on the first Office Administration bargaining team, and was a member of OPSEU's Executive Board.

Services will be held Friday at the Harbourview Funeral Centre in Thunder Bay.

Words of support Admiration

It takes courage to stand up to the Tory bullies, and striking OPSEU workers have had to show that courage time and time again, as cutbacks, privatization and erosion of workers' rights have made working in the public sector nothing short of heartbreaking....

The men and women across the province who are walking those OPSEU picket lines are standing up for all of us.

When your employer is the Tory government, you're up against the king (maybe queen?) of worker-hostile behaviour and you have to be tough. OPSEU workers, you have our admiration and our support.

– Mary Howes, president, United Steelworkers of America Local 1998 (U of T admin and technical staff)

Critical struggle

This is an important struggle faced not only by these workers, but a critical one also for every citizen who cares about this province.

– Wayne Samuelson, president, Ontario Federation of Labour

Mea culpa

Wednesday's Globe and Mail reported that essential service workers would be paid 30 per cent on top of regular pay to balance the increased dues. This is wrong. I gave the Globe inaccurate information. I apologize to everyone affected.

– Katie FitzRandolph,
OPSEU communications

The news from everywhere

Highway safety

Last week OPSEU pulled the inside strikers at four truck inspection stations. The employer was deliberately by-passing the dispute settlement process and going directly to the Labour Board with its essential service complaints.

The board hammered the employer for this.

“Enforcement Officers are sticking to their guns. We are not going to be bullied into a business as usual strike,” reports Local 140’s Tom Grimes.

“Our work is essential because our presence on the highways reduces danger to life, health and safety.” Inside strikers say they can comply with the essential service agreement if they deal with immediate risks to the traveling public. They are “advising” commercial drivers to correct unsafe situations,” Tom said.

Another dumb manager

A lone picketer from Local 546 was standing outside 201 City Centre Drive. She was by herself, holding a sign and not impeding traffic or members of the public.

A manager approached and gave her a card which said that she would be required to negotiate a picket line protocol!

Too true

Cathy Egerter, a nurse in Local 252 found this in a fortune cookie:

“You are interested in public service.”

New contest: Write a suitable cookie fortune for Mike Harris or one of his would-be successors.

Use briquettes!

Gord Towill of Local 706 suggests North Bay strikers should use charcoal briquettes as burn barrel fuel, with mesh over top as a spark arrester. “Use them as cooking fires! That’s what we are using in Thunder Bay. We have the same by-law.”

Not so informative

A number of government websites are not working too well because of our strike. That’s good. We’re having an impact.

The malfunctioning worksites all refer people to another site with government strike propaganda. That’s not so good.

Principled stand

Linda MacKenzie-Nicholas, president of the Northumberland Labour Council, has issued a press release of support.

“We need quality public services and the resources to have these services provided within Northumberland County. The provincial government has sold and continues to sell off our services. The provincial government has reduced job security, job quality and wages for public employees while increasing workloads and decreasing safety. The Walkerton Disaster is a prime example of the impact that cuts to our public services have created.

“After years of cuts, lay-offs, and privatization, it is now clear that we must rebuild our Public services.

“So we stand in solidarity with the striking OPSEU workers and their principled stand to restore what has been ripped away from our communities in Northumberland.”

You broke my heart

(to the tune of Silver Threads & Golden Needle)

by Rachel Hill – Local 711

Silver threads and golden needles
Can’t mend this heart of mine
I need more than an empty offer
To do the job I did so fine
You can’t buy my pride with head games

Cause I never was that kind
Silver threads and golden needles
Can’t mend this heart of mine

I don’t want your lousy contract
With a tear on every page
All I want is the deal you promised
Before the next ice age
And you think we should be happy
With a 1.95 raise
And forget the cost of living
That don’t matter none these days.

Chorus: Silver threads and golden needles ...

Our stand applauded

On March 12, I went to a 90th birthday party for a remarkable woman. She has been a member of the Communist Party of Canada since the 1930s and taken part in marches and demonstrations about Vietnam, the Middle East, etc.

At the close of the party everyone joined in singing Solidarity Forever. She talked of Mike Harris and said she never expected to see a government try to union bust. Our strike came up and everyone applauded our stand.

This was uplifting.

– Nancy Tobis, Local 521

Confidential files shocker

Striking members at Whitby Mental Health Centre have discovered thousands of confidential patient records in their strike headquarters.

The boxes of personnel and patient records were abandoned in the building they are leasing from a private landowner.

It is part of the former Whitby Psychiatric Hospital site, sold in 1996 by the Ontario Realty Corporation.

Local 331 President Joan Gates immediately notified the hospital administration and the Ontario Privacy Commissioner's office as

soon she learned of the matter.

"Once again, this government has shown it does not care one bit about public safety or security," said OPSEU President Leah Casselman at a press conference with Gates and NDP Labour Critic, Peter Kormos.

"It's disturbing that these confidential records could be left lying around when the government sells a property to a private landlord," she added. The files contained enough information for criminals or terrorists to create a false identity. "The Conservative government has violated the privacy

of Ontarians once again."

"Mental health and personnel records are extremely private," said Gates. "This is **not** the fault of the hospital administration but of the Conservative government that has allowed this to happen."

The government's repeated privacy breaches include the release of confidential bank account information from the Province of Ontario Savings Office to a polling firm.

OPSEU represents workers at Ontario's mental health institutions operated by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

No filming today; we're on strike

Local 568 Picket Captain Sean Fraser tells of shutting down a TV film shoot Wednesday morning.

"More than 70 brothers and sisters picketed the Ontario Heritage Foundation for the first time in the 2002 strike."

With strong support from locals 514 and 527, Local 568 managed to completely close their home worksite at 10 Adelaide Street East for almost 3½ hours. A television film shoot, scheduled to start there at 7 a.m., was delayed for the morning, forcing the production company to relocate a portion of the filming to another site and hitting the employer where it counts most – the pocketbook.

"We would like to thank the solidarity shown by IATSE Local 873 whose members honoured our picket line. While only 23 members of Local 568 are on strike, striking members from the Heritage Foundation were joined by fellow

568ers from the OPSEU Pension Trust, who gave personal time to help keep the Foundation closed. Thanks to all who braved the inclement weather and made the day a success.

Once again OPSEU members demonstrated that until the employer returns to the bargaining table with a real contract offer, we can and will, shut them down wherever we choose, for as long as we choose.

Swimming on the job

Alicia Czekierda of Local 104 says a workplace inspection March 18 turned up a strikebreaker sleeping on a couch. Others were reading magazines, browsing the internet or swimming in the pool. No work was happening.

"Management complained that we had a spending freeze but these scabs were allowed to do nothing."

Making the OPS a better place

AMAPCEO President Gary Ganage has encouraged his members to support our strike.

Examples of such support include walking on OPSEU picket lines before or after normal working hours or during breaks, providing refreshments to pickets, wearing OPSEU buttons, respecting picket line protocols and communicating your views to senior OPS management and MPPs.

"I will personally be walking on the OPSEU picket line on a daily basis and I encourage all AMAPCEO members to do likewise. OPSEU members supported AMAPCEO during our negotiations with the Employer and it is only right that we show the same support in return.

"By supporting each other through these trying times, we will all emerge stronger, thereby making the OPS a better place in which to work."

Coming events – events to come to!

Thursday, March 21

Everywhere – It's the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

See the statement on the OPSEU website, and think of ways to combat racial discrimination through our work, our strike, our lives.

Friday, March 22

Dryden – Noon rally and barbecue at the Government building. The place to be is the Subway entrance to the OGB. Call the strike HQ at 221-2180 for more details.

Sault Ste. Marie – Rally. Check the regional office for details.

Saturday, March 23

Toronto – Super giant rally, gathering and protest at the **Tory Leadership Convention**.

This is one to remember Walkerton, the killing of Dudley George, the OPS destruction, welfare cuts, health care restructuring, education cuts and all your other favourite crimes of the last seven years.

It includes:

11 a.m. – OPSEU gathering and march

noon – Rally with the Ontario Federation of Labour

2:30 p.m. – Solidarity picket at the Peel Southwest Region Water Plant.

All this and a bus trip too!

Contact your regional office or your Executive Board Members to get on the buses to tell the Tories

what you think of them and their policies.

If you can't make it to Toronto, check with your regional office for flyers to hand out at Tory Leadership voting stations. It should be in regional offices Thursday.

Monday – March 25

Across Ontario – A province-wide Day of Action in support of workers in the Ontario court system.

“Beneath the regal façade of the Ontario court system is a shaky foundation built on the tired backs of some of the most oppressed workers in the Ontario Public Service,” said President Leah Casselman.

“On Monday, we will be putting their case before the public in every part of the province.”

Ontario's 2,500 court workers include court clerks, counter clerks, court reporters, court service officers, trial coordinators, judges' secretaries, and many others. Over 90 per cent are women; over 50 per cent are contract workers with no benefits, no pensions, and no job security except their short-term contracts. Eighty-eight per cent of court reporters work on short-term contracts.

“It is ironic that the workers who are deemed to be 100 per cent essential to the work of the province, even in a strike situation, are the least likely to have permanent jobs,” said Casselman.

The Toronto focus of Court Action Day in Toronto will be at 361 University Ave. starting at 8 a.m.

Tuesday – March 26

Toronto – The Drum-up is a multicultural/community of colour rally in support of a strong public service, organized by the Ontario Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and the Asian Canadian Labour Alliance, and endorsed by NAC and other community groups. Join the Lion Dancers, Asian Women Drummers, and other community activists as we drum up support for public services, from our drinking water to our correctional system.

Noon to 1:30 p.m., at the OPSEU Picket Line at 900 Bay Street (at Wellesley)

Bring drums, water buckets, pots and pans, or whatever is your favourite noisemaker.

From *ON THE LINE* - Local 727 in Dryden - this thought: With each day on the line, we're one day closer to the end of the strike.

New resources to win the strike

Regional offices have a three-fold leaflet about rebuilding public services. There were 40,000 of them printed. Get some and hand them out on the picket lines.

A revised version will be on the website Thursday in pdf format. Print it off locally and hand it out.

And there's a new one-page flat piece that can be either a picket-line hand-out or a newspaper ad, if you want to pay for space in your local paper.