
Liberal Minister reads Tory script: “The cupboard is bare,” etc., etc.

Ontario Finance Minister Greg Sorbara stuck his nose into public service contract talks again yesterday, warning of public service cuts and vowing to manage the “risk” of rising public sector wages in the year ahead.

“Inevitably we will have to stop doing some things in order to invest in the priorities that matter most,” Sorbara said yesterday.

Sorbara’s comments were standard employer rhetoric, not unlike what the Tories used to say, OPSEU president Leah Casselman said.

“You know you’re coming up to bargaining when the employer announces that the cupboard is bare,” she said. “I find it fascinating that the government that just negotiated an average pay raise of 18.6 per cent for the province’s doctors thinks other public employees should put a lid on their contract demands.”

The doctors’ average increase over four years is \$50,725, Casselman noted, greater than the average annual *income* of an OPSEU member in the OPS, which is \$47,089.

Sorbara’s remarks don’t change the fact that the Liberals were elected to rebuild public services, not cut them, Casselman said. In March, Sorbara told a meeting, “We were elected to ensure high-quality public services. That’s what the election was about. That’s what we got elected to do.”

“You can’t rebuild public services by cutting them, no matter what the Liberals may say,” said Casselman.

“We’ve got some campaigning to do:” Casselman

OPSEU’s OPS bargaining teams hope to start bargaining new contract language with the employer later this month.

In the meantime, Casselman said, OPSEU members have some work to do.

“Sorbara thinks he can get away with cutting public services because a lot of our work is invisible,” she said. “In general, the general public doesn’t understand what we do or why our work is so important.

“Our job in this round of bargaining is to put a public face on our work. We have to show these Liberals that cutting public services

comes at a political price that they really don’t want to pay.”

Campaign preparations are well under way, she said, pointing out that OPSEU mobilizers are already moving into OPS workplaces. The Nov. 27 rally in Toronto (for details, visit www.opseu.org) is also part of the work that needs to be done to bring home a new contract for OPS members, she said.

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Sorbara remarks set MoF spinning

A new federal-provincial deal that would see Ottawa take over the work of collecting corporate taxes in Ontario is sending shockwaves through the provincial Ministry of Finance.

“Ontario and the federal government will begin working together immediately to design a single federal tax collection system for both Ontario and federal corporate taxes,” Finance Minister Greg Sorbara said in the Legislature yesterday. “Working together, we aim to reduce red tape and improve service for our businesses, while protecting Ontario’s fiscal and economic interests and meeting our commitments to our employees....”

If it goes ahead, the transfer of work could directly affect 842 people who administer the corporate tax system for the provincial Ministry of Finance.

The OPSEU MoF Ministry Enforcement and Renewal Committee (MERC) is requesting an emergency meeting with the Assistant Deputy Minister in charge of tax revenue to get more details, said Kathleen Demareski, chair of the MoF MERC and a member of OPSEU’s central bargaining team.

“At this stage our first job is to find out what the plan is,” said Demareski. “From the Minister’s statement, it looks like the two governments have not yet started work on the design of the new system. That says to me that, while change could come

quickly, it’s going to happen in months or years, not weeks.”

Whatever happens to OPSEU members in the transfer of work will be based on what’s in the next collective agreement, Demareski added.

“OPSEU members are already protected by the job security provisions in our current contract, but if we want better language we are going to have to bargain it.”

She noted that on the campaign trail, the McGuinty Liberals promised to change the law to restore “successor rights” to Crown employees. With successor rights, OPSEU members whose work went to

another bargaining unit would automatically be transferred to that new bargaining unit.

“There is no reason we should have to pay for successor rights at the bargaining table, when it is something that the government has already promised,” Demareski said. “If members are looking for action they can take now while we work on finding out more, call your MPP and demand that the Liberals fulfill their promise and give us back the rights the Tories stole from us.”

The MERC will provide more information as it becomes available.

Staff and parents rally together to keep Rideau Regional Centre open

“It was fantastic.”

OPSEU Local 436 president Dave Lundy was in high spirits this morning after a rally to save Rideau Regional Centre attracted over 100 people and a swarm of news reporters.

Rideau Regional is one of three centres for people with developmental disabilities that the McGuinty Liberals intend to close, at a cost of nearly 2,000 OPSEU members’ jobs.

The rally in front of McGuinty’s constituency office attracted more parents than staff, Lundy said.

“There were parents with

children in Rideau, but also parents from the community who can’t get the services we provide,” he said. “One woman said it took eleven years to get a doctor for her son.

“She still hasn’t got him a dentist.”

Speakers at the rally included Lundy, OPSEU president Leah Casselman, OPSEU Executive Board Members Bob Eaton and Dave Chew, and two parent representatives.

For more information on the campaign to save the regional centres, check the web at www.opseu.org.