



The Real Beef

A Bulletin for Ontario "Contract" Meat Inspectors

February 2004, #4

Welcome to OPSEU

Union pushes for whistleblower protection

An update for all contract meat inspections regarding the transition into the Ontario public service and the Haines' judicial review of the meat inspection system.

1. Job Hiring Process

As you know on November 28, 2003 OPSEU settled their long standing grievance with OMAF management over the use of contract meat inspectors. A copy of the settlement is included in this package.

Present in the settlement discussions were Brian Burdick, Earl Yantzi and Robert Lowry. Doug Peebles, an OPSEU member who works at OMAF and is elected by OPSEU members, was the member rep. at the mediation.

The hiring process with the posting of jobs, the tests and interviews has been conducted through January and February.

Solid victory

The settlement is a solid victory on many fronts for meat inspectors. Sixty-one (61) permanent, full-time positions were created. Fifty-seven (57) unclassified positions were created, primarily to cover the positions that are not working full-time hours. Inspectors will move to either an Agriculturalist Specialist 3 (Meat Hygiene Officer) position, if they have more than 12 months experience or an Agricultural Specialist 2 (Meat Hygiene

Officer) position if they have less than 12 months experience or do not have the appropriate training. The wage grid is \$942.09 to \$1138.50 weekly for the Agriculturalist Specialist 3 positions. It is a significant wage increase for contract meat inspectors.

Union protection

The settlement brings union membership and coverage under the OPS collective agreement. Inspectors will have access to a variety of improvements: mileage, meals, and a grievance procedure. For permanent staff have access to a benefits plan and pension. For unclassified members, it means pay-in-lieu of benefits and access to buy into the pension plan.

Not enough full-time positions.

During the settlement discussions, OPSEU argued there should be at least 85 full-time positions, based upon the hours worked by inspectors over the past year. When inspectors regularly worked part-time hours, they should be in regular part-time positions. As well, we argued that all inspectors should

be public servants. It is still OPSEU's position that there should be more full-time positions and regular part-time positions and all should be public servants.

We want to draw your attention to one important point. For inspectors who are moving into the 'unclassified' positions, it will be very important to keep track of your hours of work. Under the collective agreement, if you are in an unclassified position, perform the same full-time work for 18 months (1,732.75 hours per year), do not replace a classified employee on leave, and there is continuing need for the work to be performed on a full-time basis, the Ministry is required to convert your position into full-time work. It is article 31A.15.1.1 in the collective agreement. This will be a key enforcement issue over the next year.

You have rights

As OMAF announces the results of the job competitions, we want to point out the key details of the settlement that relate to the hiring process. OMAF agreed to ensure that the job competitions would be take place in good faith. The hiring process cannot be conducted in a way that is either discriminatory (i.e. under the Human Rights Code or arbitrary (i.e. someone hired without qualifications or needed experience). It is also agreed that the "length of demonstrated experience" as a contract inspector is one of several relevant factors to be considered (see point #4 in the settlement).

If you feel that the hiring and allocation of positions has not been conducted in good faith, please call OPSEU. It is important that all of your questions are answered. Contact Jan Borowy, OPSEU campaigns officer at 1-800-268-7376 ext. 383.

2. The Judicial Review of the meat inspection system

On Jan. 9, 2004, the new Liberal government announced a judicial review of the meat inspection system to be conducted by Justice Haines. Our demand had been for a full public inquiry. "Whistleblower" protection for employees (contractors or crown employees) was not guaranteed. The letters sent by the Ministries announcing the review to affected staff where too vague.

A copy of the terms of the Haines review is attached with this mailing. You will see the review deals with all aspects of the legislative and regulatory regime. It will consider who does what in other provinces and federally. It will consider the 'further' processing question. The review will not look directly at the situation at Aylmer.

OPSEU to participate in review with goal to improve the system for front-line staff

OPSEU will be working with front-line staff, including contract inspectors, to ensure that the perspective of front-line staff is front and centre. OPSEU will be making written submissions and intends to participate at all public hearings.

Our goal will be to improve the meat inspection system so that front-line staff can more effectively work to protect the public and food safety. We do need your help and input to ensure all relevant and important points are brought forward.

Strengthen the review with greater protection for front-line staff

OPSEU's position is that the Haines review needs to be strengthened by providing effective whistleblower protection for all employees, especially if we are to get to the

real story about improving the meat inspection system.

OPSEU knows that inspectors have lots to say about improving the system: stronger enforcement powers, fostering a culture to support inspectors in OMAF, adequacy of staffing and funding and badly needed training.

We have already sent Justice Haines a copy of the survey results we conducted in September 2003.

Remember, 60 per cent of inspectors said they don't get adequate backup from OMAF when they report incidents. And 60 per cent feel that OMAF did not take appropriate action when incidents and illegal activities were reported. We know it's more than Aylmer. We have attached our letter outlining our initial position to Justice Haines.

Have something to say about the meat inspection system? Say it through the union.

The mandate of the Haines review goes until April 30, 2004. The Review has tentatively scheduled two public hearings: March 24 in Peterborough and March 31 in London. To participate in the hearings, you must make a written submission to Justice Haines by March 15, 2004.

The timelines of the review are short, but this is an important opportunity to bring forward the concerns of front-line staff.

Fortunately, you can participate in a confidential way with the meat inspection review. You can do so through the union.

Contact OPSEU directly. Call Jan Borowy, OPSEU campaigns officer at 1-800-268-7376 ext. 383. All calls are strictly confidential. We can discuss how you might ensure your voice is heard in a way that protects you.

On March 6, 2004, learn about OPSEU. Get your copy of the collective agreement

We understand that on March 6, OMAF will be hosting information sessions for all newly hired inspectors. OPSEU has not been provided any details about the meeting. Doug Peebles, OPSEU chair of the Ministry Employee Relations Committee has asked to make a presentation at the OMAF-held meeting. We have not yet received any word if OMAF will allow this.

One way or another, OPSEU will be present in Guelph on March 6. We will hold an OPSEU meeting immediately following the OMAF meeting. We want to ensure everyone has a collective agreement, knows who their local president is and where they fit into OPSEU's structure. Collective bargaining for improvements into the collective agreement begins this fall and it is important for you to know how to get plugged into the bargaining process.

We want to review with you OPSEU's submission to the Haines review. Are there key points that you want OPSEU to make? We'll discuss these on March 6.

We don't have details of the meeting time and location arranged yet. Please watch the website for the final details.

For further information contact:

Brian Burdick (Lindsay) 705-741-1703

Robert Lowry (Vineland) 905-357-7881

Earl Yantzi (Guelph North) 519-3926743

Jan Borowy (OPSEU) 1-800-268-7376 ext. 383