



Public services or 'social hell'

Without public sector work, "we would descend into a social hell," Murray Dobbin, journalist, author and social activist, told Convention delegates.

"If intelligent life came from another planet, it would conclude we were in a state of advanced collective dementia. Nurses have six minutes to bathe patients. Water companies cut out pipes for non-payment. Doctors get bonuses for denying medical services to patients. Corporations see pupils as 'emerging consumers.' It's insanity and it's what we're fighting."

Dobbin, guest speaker for the 2000 Convention, said corporations have turned their backs on society.

Corporations used to see democracy – including unions, health and safety, welfare and a healthy environment – as part of the cost of doing business, in return for reasonable profits.

In the mid-70s, they balked. Now they want out of health care, education, environmental regulations, labour standards, zoning bylaws and other regulations that protect citizens.

Corporations decided citizens should expect less, and campaigned for that objective starting with free trade. They moved on to privatization and deregulation, and followed that up with 'debt terrorism,' Dobbin said. They claimed there was no alternative.

Then they attacked public sector workers as overpaid lazy bureaucrats – completely

separate from the rest of society – and tried to make citizens hate the people who work for them.

Governments, manipulated by the corporations, cut health care and education until they were failing – then proclaimed the private sector as the only salvation. The global scale of the assault is designed to make people feel it is inevitable and natural, Dobbin said.

Corporations are circling like vultures around public services. They see health care and municipal services as new sources for profit, secure there will always be tax dollars to pay for them.

International treaties are giving corporations control over governments. Trade treaties overrule national laws. That's in large part what the World Trade Organization (WTO) talks in Seattle were all about.

The WTO is likely to become more powerful than any institution in history, Dobbin said. "It's a terrible threat to democracy." Governments won't even try to pass some laws because of the "chill effect."

Despite the relentless campaign, Canadians tell pollsters they want services. Progressive forces must "revisit our vision of a just and equal future so expectations will begin to rise," he said.

"You must see yourselves as citizens and not as customers. We will lose Medicare if we don't redouble our efforts."

He asked delegates to commit three hours a week to being better informed, and to contribute to organizations that are fighting for social change.

"We've lost sight of the truly just and equal society we want and we need to re-imagine the role of government as an advocate for citizens.

"Harris has turned social workers into policeman and Medicare into a business." ▲

Bill Majesky photo



**"Mike Harris
has turned
social workers
into policemen
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– Murray Dobbin



Convention approves \$50 million budget

The 2000 Convention approved a \$50.3 million budget, which will see the union ending the year with a deficit of \$3.5 million in its General Fund.

After transfers to the Strike and Education funds, the General Fund has projected spending of \$45.2 million.

The Strike Fund is projected to grow by \$4.6 million to more than \$21 million (subject to strike activity), while the Education Fund runs a \$46,000 deficit to provide regional educational programs for members.

OPSEU will continue building a strong strike fund to fend off employer challenges at the bargaining table. Putting 10 per cent of dues into the strike fund is the main reason for the General Fund deficit.

OPSEU projects dues revenue of \$46.5 million, of which \$24.2 million will come from the Ontario Public Service, \$7.9 million from the college sector and \$14.4 million from the Broader Public Service.

Of every dollar received, 45 cents goes to direct support of member services, including regional offices, local rebates and meetings. ▲

Network for Better Contracts gets green light

Convention backed a new "Network for Better Contracts" – a program of leadership development, support for communication and research and coordination of union efforts.

In today's harsh economic climate, OPSEU must organize new and divested members, bargain strong contracts and continue its tradition of speaking out for justice, equality and fairness in the delivery of public services.

The policy speaks to training staff and members in more effective negotiations, coordinating bargaining goals across sectors and supporting local leaders with communications and research.

"Building a Network for Better Contracts won't be easy. It will take time and it will require a shared responsibility between our central union, regions and locals." ▲

Put down that *National Post*

Your union doesn't want you to read it, and here's why.

Bill Majesky photo

It's owned by Conrad Black, and workers at the *Calgary Herald*, also owned by Black, have been on strike for such basics as seniority since Nov. 8.

On Day 152 of the strike, Andy Marshall, president of the union local at the *Herald* told the tale to convention.

A short video showed an angry confrontation in which Black called Marshall "a gangrenous limb which should be amputated" to improve labour relations at the *Herald*.

The people on the line refuse to buckle to corporate bullying, Marshall said.

The sticking points are seniority and similar language that Canadian unions take for granted. ▲



"Black is using his 58 Canadian daily newspapers to pursue hate and intolerance, and to vilify those who disagree with him."

– Andy Marshall

The program:

- recognizes the challenges of the times;
- helps locals mobilize around workplace issues;
- supports local leaders in building local strength;
- commits to on-going training and development of activists and staff;
- emphasizes communication, including the web and email, to link and support members;
- builds on OPSEU's strong central union and strong locals;
- recognizes that resources are not growing as fast as demands; and
- works for better ways to meet the challenges.

To get involved, see page 14. ▲



Bob Arnold gets the lead out at Kingston Psych

Bob Arnold of Local 431 won OPSEU's Health and Safety Award this year for his attack on lead poisoning at Kingston Psychiatric Hospital.

In presenting the award, President Leah Casselman described the symptoms of lead poisoning: twitching, convulsions, paralysis, loss of appetite, high blood pressure, agitation, coma, hallucinations, headaches, irritability, confusion, and difficulty sleeping.

Parts of Kingston Psychiatric Hospital date to the 1850s, when lead was common in paint. Old paint turns to dust which is breathed in. Bob made the link between the old paint and health problems at the hospital.

He tested paint flakes and found lead levels up to 10 times the acceptable standard in the hospital greenhouse and the day care centre.

Bob took his findings to the Joint Health and Safety Committee, which ordered complete lab tests. His work forced the employer to begin a thorough clean-up and to inform every hospital employee of the presence of the lead.



Bill Majesky photo

"We're building on what other people have done before us. I appreciate the honour, but I wish to share it with the others in our local at Kingston Psychiatric Hospital." – *Bob Arnold* (centre, with Leah Casselman and Len Hupet)

"Throughout his investigation and advocacy, Bob was subject to employer harassment, intimidation, and attacks on his character. Still, he persevered," Casselman said. ▲

Life membership awards honour three former activists

OPSEU honoured three former activists with life memberships during the 2000 convention.

Delegates were greatly moved when Donna Bryant's three daughters accepted the honour on behalf of their late mother.

Region 4 Executive Board Member Smokey Thomas told how Donna had touched so many people. "She had a never-ending commitment to mental health to ensure the members she represents and works for can provide the best care, safe in their work, and understanding that the union will support them.

"Donna was my local president and the person who got me sucked into the union, and also a close personal friend."

The other recipients were retired ambulance division leader Bob Patrick and retired North Bay activist Dalton Carmichael. ▲

Bill Majesky photo



"I accept this award with the honour I know she would have felt." – Donna Bryant's daughter, *Paula Brooks*



Local 213, John Rae, win human rights honours

OPSEU honoured Local 213 for its collective work for human rights and John Rae for his individual contribution.

Vivian van Wagner accepted on behalf of her local, for a decade of hard work and achievement, including creation of local human rights and employment equity committees and vigilance in monitoring human rights violations. "The Local has also raised awareness of human rights issues through its support for activities like Martin Luther King, Jr., Day and the annual multicultural dinner," said President Leah Casselman.

John Rae was honoured as "a steady force promoting access and equity" who provided "vision and leadership."

Casselman said, "John has never failed to lend his expertise on disability issues. No question was ever too trivial to merit a response. Although he has first-hand knowledge of these issues, he is committed to fighting for dignity, access, and human rights for all people." ▲

Bill Majesky photo



"I have focused on disability rights, but I have tried to build bridges among various equality seeking groups. A lot of the issues we confront are issues others must confront." – *John Rae* (centre)

Humanitarian award honours Paul Robeson

OPSEU honoured singer, actor, activist Paul Robeson, "a towering giant in the search for peace," with its annual Stanley Knowles Humanitarian Award at this year's Convention.

Accepting the posthumous award on his behalf, Dr. Sandra Awang of the Paul Robeson Centennial Committee, expressed appreciation for the recognition of "this tireless crusader on behalf of working people around the world."

Raised by a father who had escaped slavery, Robeson grew up during legal segregation, when lynching was commonplace.

He attended Rutgers University on an athletic scholarship and graduated in law from Columbia University, but left the legal profession when a white secretary refused to take dictation from him.

"He had the greatest voice of his time," Awang said. "He is a man who future historians will rate as one of the few truly great men of his age. His words winged to all continents of the world where there is oppression, and he never charged for appearing before a labour group."

Robeson linked the oppression of working people to the oppression of blacks. He raised money for the orphans of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. He refused to perform for segregated audiences, and he raised funds for Jews fleeing Europe during the Nazi regime.

His outspoken opposition to oppression attracted the repression of the McCarthy era, and Robeson was blacklisted and denied a passport as a dangerous man. He was hounded by the FBI and written out of the history books. Paul Robeson died in 1976. ▲



Paul Robeson (c. 1970)



Forward Together 25 years in 14 minutes

A new video highlights 25 years of history since the 1975 Convention created OPSEU from the old Civil Service Association of Ontario.

Past presidents and present activists speak of what is important to them.

“OPSEU is a union. It is not a federation of locals,” says Local 460 president Gavin Anderson. It can deliver in ways other organizations can’t.

For Patty Rout, vice-president of Local 348, OPSEU is the union for health care professionals in Ontario.

Local 558 President Eileen Burrows sees OPSEU as the only force within the college system that takes on quality of education in any kind of serious way.

Sean O’Flynn (president 1978 – 1984) says dissatisfaction with CSAO’s effectiveness prompted the change. He credits Charlie Darrow (president 1974 – 1978) with leading the transition.

Fred Upshaw (president 1990 – 1995) recalls a time before real bargaining. “They would take CSAO leadership out to lunch and they would have lunch and come back and there would be a deal. ... Now we had to negotiate with the employer. We fought and so we became militant.”

Liz Rose, vice-president of Local 654 talks about the union’s first legal strike in February, 1979. “OPSEU hadn’t done this before, CAAT support hadn’t done this before.” College support staff workers won respect immediately, and substantial wage increases in their next round of bargaining.

1979 also saw a three-day illegal strike by Correctional Officers – demanding their own bargaining category.

Local 224 president Peter Ietswaard remembers walking off the job at 6 a.m. with his employer threatening him. “I started my picket line in front of the Owen Sound Jail with myself, my wife and my three kids.”

He praises the support Corrections got from the union – support which sent O’Flynn to jail for 23 days for contempt of court.

For O’Flynn, “It came with the territory... and it gave a new life to the union” – looking beyond day-to-day interests to broader social issues.

That broader view was challenged by disaffected community college teacher Merv Lavigne. Backed by the right-wing National Citizens Coalition, he took OPSEU all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada.

As James Clancy (president 1984 – 1990) remembers it, “They argued that we cannot spend any money on any issues unless they are directly related to collective bargaining. In other words, it was a direct attack on our vision of social unionism. The Supreme Court upheld our view.”

President Leah Casselman says the emphasis on social policy attracts new members. “When they see a union standing up not only for their members but for the work they do, and the importance of it, that says to them, I want to try that union: They’ve got their act together.”

Today one of the policy issues the union is fighting is private jails. “The communities are working with us hand in glove,” Casselman says. “They understand the importance of having safe communities and a quality service in corrections.”

The broad policy approach appeals to Gavin Anderson: “Everybody is the champion of kids’ issues during the election, but the day after the election, where is everybody? OPSEU’s there.”

Upshaw praises OPSEU’s growing commitment to human rights, expressed in the women’s and human rights committees and in enhanced services for francophones. Liz Rose picks up the theme. “I think the belief that unions are for everybody and you represent your members has carried over. It’s one of the reasons I believe in unions, in this union.”



The emphasis on sound social policy, backed by vigorous campaigns, also enhances the union's position in bargaining better collective agreements.

As Clancy says, every campaign gives the bargaining team more authority in dealing with the employer.

It was during Upshaw's presidency that the huge Public Service bargaining unit won the right to strike.

When the OPS walked out in 1996, it was unprecedented. Casselman reflects on it: "It showed the rest of the union the importance of being part of that whole group because it was a turning point for the labour movement. Having that group of workers stand up to the Harris government, so strongly, and for such a long period of time.

For Local 508 president Julien Marquis, the strike built solidarity. "Members of the public sector suddenly discovered they were militant. It was a discovery for me, to see that people, secretaries, people that were doing administrative work in front of a computer were capable of standing up in front of this heavily armed squad dressed like Darth Vader from

Star Wars."

The other historic event during Upshaw's presidency was gaining joint trusteeship over the OPS pension plan.

Bargaining solid collective agreements, attracting new members to the union, and campaigning for solid public policy are the three aspects of OPSEU's Network for Better Contracts – three sides of a triangle that brings together the Ontario Public Service, the community colleges and the Broader Public Service into one proud union.

As Casselman says, "We have a very strong and proud history in this union. And we can only do better to make it stronger. And my commitment to this organization and the commitment each member should have to this organization is to make it better than it is today. That's what we're all about. Making sure people want to join us, because we are the best union in this province."

Copies of the video are \$5 from the campaigns unit at OPSEU head office. ▲

