

OPSEU



SEFPO

Our Ontario

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pays off big for
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Act for Medicare

This issue of *Our Ontario* contains a pull-out section on Medicare. Please read it carefully and make your voice heard on at least one of the five specific issues.

Convention 2000

We're building on a proud history



By Leah Casselman

We are nothing without our history.

Without the people at the 1975 Convention, OPSEU would not exist. Those who attended their first convention this year are the future of something important, something worth fighting for, something bigger than any one person – this union.

Let's look at the first 25 years with pride and move into a new century with determination.

In 1975, OPSEU had one grievance officer, no equity committees, no policy of equal rights, little pension expertise. Now we have a track record of fighting for equity and joint trusteeship of an \$8 billion pension fund, with responsibility for strategic decisions affecting thousands of retirees.

In 1975, OPSEU had never carried off a strike, let alone the biggest provincial strike in Ontario history as we did in 1996. Many difficult contracts are reached without strikes, but when necessary, OPSEU members will take action, and they do it well.

Employers 25 years ago weren't as bent on destroying public services and our work. They weren't as organized as they are now. They generally agreed on the value of public sector work and the kind of Ontario and Canada and world that we wanted for ourselves and our children.

Ontario governments 25 years ago were building public services, educational institutions,

and cultural institutions. We had our problems with the governments of the day, but we didn't have Mike Harris. We didn't have the privatizers, privateers and tax cutters that we have today.

We didn't have homeless people begging in the streets. Profit didn't rule workplaces to the exclusion of health and safety. Environmental laws didn't leave parks and forests unprotected. Companies didn't have free rein for profit and public interest be damned.

It's time to draw a picture of what we want in Ontario. No matter what sector we work in, we should be able to articulate to family and friends what it will take to make our services better.

OPSEU has a distinct advantage, being a strong central union with strong locals, activist members and union staff. We're part of a national union and a network of provincial unions, with a history of bargaining hard, speaking out and campaigning.

In the last year we welcomed more than 4,000 new members to OPSEU, and reorganized another 4,000 who had been divested, downloaded, or merged into different bargaining units.

We are building the best union in Ontario, and moving forward together. ▲

Leah Casselman, President

OPSEU Benefit Trust now covers more than 4,000

OPSEU's jointly trusteed benefit plan now covers more than 4,000 members.

"More employers are discovering that our plan can save them money and give their employees better benefits," said benefits counsellor Shirley McVittie.

"Members really like having a drug card. It means they don't have to pay all of the up-front costs when they go to the pharmacy."

OPSEU developed the plan because small agencies didn't have the leverage to negotiate good plans for their employees. It eliminates commissions for insurance agents, and improves benefits for members – all at a lower cost.

Rates and coverage are set by a joint union-employer trusteeship. ▲

Penetanguishene says 'no way' to private super jail

More than 400 people packed Brian Orser Hall in Penetanguishene April 18 to tell Corrections Minister Rob Sampson exactly what they thought of a private superjail. It wasn't what he wanted to hear.

Speaker after speaker told Sampson that a private jail was unacceptable. The minister didn't respond to the concerns. Instead, he repeated his one theme: he was trying to raise standards and change the "culture" of corrections.

Sampson refused any suggestion of a municipal referendum on private jails, and told the crowd that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) would not apply if contracts were cancelled. Penetanguishene resident Gord Wilson, former president of the Ontario Federation of Labour, called Sampson on the NAFTA question. "You are categorically wrong," Wilson said.

Most left the meeting feeling frustrated over the minister's refusal to listen and angry at his arrogance.

Sampson had avoided Penetanguishene since announcing in November that the superjail would be privately run. His chief accomplishment this time was to strengthen the community's resolve to fight for safe, secure and accountable public services. ▲

OPSEU grieves Ottawa Hospital hiring practices

Local 464 has filed a grievance against the Ottawa Hospital over the way it hired new diagnostic medical sonographers.

Diagnostic medical sonographers operate ultrasound equipment to record images of various parts of the body. The images help physicians monitor pregnancies and diagnose cardiac, vascular and other disorders.

In January, the hospital told OPSEU it planned to start new sonographers at the top pay rate in the collective agreement.

"We acknowledge there is a shortage of sonographers, but this isn't the answer," said Mary Sue Smith, an OPSEU member at the hospital's General campus.

"We flatly rejected the idea that they can violate our collective agreement just to remain competitive with the private sector," said staff representative Sue McCulloch.

"We're all in favour of bringing in new people, but you can't start them at a higher rate than staff who are already doing the job," she said.

The practice angered the senior sonographers, many of whom have turned down more lucrative job offers in the private sector because they like working at the Ottawa hospital. "It tells them that all of their years of experience and dedication mean nothing," said McCulloch. "We suggested a new salary scale for sonographers that would let the hospital attract new staff and recognize our members' experience." ▲

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Property assessment staff sign first contract

Negotiators for about 1,900 members working for the Ontario Property

Recent Settlements

Assessment Corporation (OPAC) bargained for five hours beyond their strike deadline, but pulled off a first agreement without job action.

Key gains in the three-year contract include:

- wage hikes of 2, 2, and 3 per cent in consecutive years of a contract that expires Dec. 31, 2002;
- a \$750 signing bonus;
- improvements in dental and vision care;
- time off for union business;
- an Employee Assistance Program; and
- conversion of contract employees to full-time status after two years, effective on ratification.

The contract recognizes seniority for employees, including those divested from the Ontario Ministry of Finance when OPAC was created on Jan. 1, 1999.

OPSEU President Leah Casselman congratulated the bargaining team and members of the bargaining unit for their hard work leading up to the deal. "They went to the brink of a strike, and the employer knew they would take that step if they had to."

Casselman said the contract completes an important transition. "Over the last three years, we have lobbied to keep property assessment united under one organization.

"We lost our collective agreement through Tory changes to the law, we have re-organized our members, and we have negotiated a very respectable collective agreement.

"I think our members have shown a real commitment to moving forward and making progress in the midst of very stressful change." ▲

New contract for hospital paramedical professionals

About 5,000 hospital paramedical professionals have ratified a new three-year agreement which provides 2 per cent wage increases effective April 1, 1999 and 2000. Increases on April 1, 2001, range from 2 per cent for Technicians 4 and 5 to 3 per cent for Registered Technologist and higher classifications.

Physiotherapy/occupational therapy aides and pharmacy technicians move up on the grid in 2001.

The settlement, reached with the Ontario Hospital Association, provides \$875,000 to standardize wage grids in the participating hospitals. This will mean increases of up to \$3 an hour for some members.

A single central pay equity agreement supersedes any outstanding local pay equity agreements.

The settlement provides gains in vision and dental care. Job security gains include early retirement opportunities in advance of layoffs, training allowances, and benefit coverage during layoff if the employee pays the premiums.

New health and safety language will ensure one OPSEU member is certified at each hospital. A simplified grievance procedure is designed to encourage early settlement of disputes. ▲

Downloading complicates path to ambulance deal

After more than 12 months of difficult bargaining, OPSEU reached a settlement for ambulance operations in central bargaining.

The on-going downloading of ambulance services to municipalities complicated the negotiations. Since Jan. 1, seven services moved to other employers during the course of talks.

The two-year contract, which runs to March 31, 2001, increases wages by 1 per cent retroactive to April 1, 1999, and another 1.35 per cent April 1, 2000.

The settlement staved off an employer bid for a lower-paid classification for staff on new vehicles used to transfer patients to scheduled appointments.

Where employers expand within their municipal area, members, both full- and part-time, are guaranteed a job offer. There is enhanced severance for employees who don't get an appropriate job offer. ▲

Canapress photo



Diana Smith, president of Local 153, holds the pay equity cheque which softened the blow of her local's three-and-a-half month strike.

Salvation Army Village strike ends

OPSEU Local 153 members at the Salvation Army London Village have ratified a three-year collective agreement ending a bitter three-and-a-half month strike.

The new contract is unchanged from the one they previously rejected; however the employer agreed to bring people back to work on the basis of seniority.

Local 153 president Diana Smith called the end result anticlimactic. "We've settled for no increase in the first two years of the contract and one per cent in the third year. I guess the important thing here is that we saved valuable jobs for our members and the services that our clients need will continue." They will, however, benefit from a recent pay equity settlement. (See Page 6)

Local 153 members care for developmentally handicapped clients. ▲

Retired inspectors wanted for study

Researchers at the University of Toronto want to talk to retired liquor inspectors for a study on the Ontario Liquor Licencing Act. They are interested in how the work has changed over time. Any retired inspectors interested in the study should contact Dawn Moore at (416)978-7124 ext. 250. ▲

Members at CNE promote Women's March 2000

Watch for OPSEU members at this year's Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) in Toronto.

They will be helping to run an information booth about the World March of Women 2000. It is one way members and social justice activists are working to eradicate poverty and violence against women.

In Belleville, teachers' unions are linking up to provide ongoing support to a local women's shelter. OPSEU women in Region 5 are meeting monthly to hear speakers on aboriginal issues, poverty and other themes.

Similar events are happening in more than 150 countries around the world. In October women will converge at the United Nations in New York.

In Canada, a demonstration is planned for Oct. 15 in Ottawa. Check with your local labour council or your Provincial Women's Committee representative to get involved. ▲

OPSEU staff vacancies

OPSEU will post staff vacancies on the union's website in future. This will permit filling vacancies more quickly than is possible with a quarterly magazine. If you are interested in a union job, keep an eye on www.opseu.org. ▲

New OPS grievance system has unexpected benefits

When Local 340 president Kathleen Demareski learned her new contract meant she had to track local grievances, she wasn't thrilled.

Until Jan. 1, staff in OPSEU regional offices watched the deadlines, dealt with management, and moved cases on to arbitration. Now, with changes to the contract for the Ontario Public Service, it's the local's responsibility.

Once they got over the shock, Kathleen and her Local Executive Committee have decided they like the new system. More control over the process is only one of the benefits.

An unexpected gain is the local's improved status with Human Resources.

"There's much more communication with H.R. More grievances are getting settled at Stage One."

Kathleen and Local 340 stewards at the Ministry of Finance in Oshawa have always been a strong resource to their members. Now, managing grievances right up to arbitration, she knows what's happening with them all the time. "If a member phones me up, I can get them the answer right away."

The local set up a tracking system, and bought a scanner to help store documents and send them electronically to head office. With it, they can keep close tabs on all grievance timelines and requirements.

Recently, Kathleen and vice-president Christine Freschette took a labour law course at the CLC Winter School. Already a seasoned advocate at grievance meetings, Kathleen says that the course reinforced her knowledge, and focused on some Stage Two issues to keep in mind. She

and Christine are already planning to take a CLC course on mediation-arbitration.

For Local 308 president Steve Clancy, a Correctional Officer at the Peterborough Jail, more education has meant more skills for his local's stewards. His local has 17 worksites, and members in both the OPS and the Broader Public Service.

The first reaction was resistance, he said.

"The regional office provided an educational right away which built on the excellent skills the stewards had. All the stewards took it."



Canapress photo

**Kathleen Demareski (left) and
Christine Freschette gain
control and respect**

by Ruth Walker

Steve works closely with vice-president, Tamara Look. She acts as a grievance officer for members at the Peterborough Jail where they've set up a central drop-off for grievance forms.

"We sit down with them and listen to what they have to say. We check on wording, violations of any pertinent contract clauses or legislation," says Steve.

The regional office is still a good resource, but Steve sees changes to the OPS grievance procedure as a plus in several areas. For example, his local has been pressing management to accept the stewards' early involvement in grievances.

Steve would like to see more grievances settled in the beginning stages, right at the workplace.

While they've set up new systems to track

"Meeting attendance has doubled"

– Steve Clancy, Local 308 President

grievances, Local 308's executive has also been busy explaining the changes to members. Steve says that this has helped trigger another benefit for the local. "Attendance at our general membership meetings has doubled, and we expect that to continue."

While regional offices will help locals, both Kathleen and Steve see ways to fine-tune the new process. Despite initial frustration, they're proud of the way their stewards have taken on the new responsibilities. ▲

Three sectors, three ways to solve grievances

Grievance procedures vary from one collective agreement to the next. They are a product of history and collective efforts of the parties.

Within OPSEU, the different sectors have negotiated different structures.

In all cases grievances move by step toward final arbitration.

In the Ontario Public Service (OPS)

One contract covers six bargaining units. Arbitration is done by a single arbitrator selected by the Grievance Settlement Board (GSB). OPSEU and individual ministries each pay half the cost as set by the GSB. The new collective agreement has formalized a mediation-arbitration process that is reducing the number of formal hearings and resolving workplace problems more quickly and more economically.

In the Colleges (CAAT)

Two contracts cover two bargaining units – faculty and support staff. In most cases, a three-member panel hears arbitrations. Both union and employer appoint one nominee. A union-management team meets regularly to schedule arbitration hearings. The union pays for its nominee plus half the cost of the chair and half the cost of the hearing room. Locals can agree to use mediation-arbitration.

Academic workload and support staff classification questions use an expedited arbitration system, where members present cases at informal hearings before a single arbitrator.

In the Broader Public Service (BPS)

More than 400 contracts cover individual bargaining units. Most hearings are done by a single arbitrator, chosen by agreement between union and employer. Regional Grievance Officers on OPSEU staff set up arbitrations. OPSEU pays half the cost of the arbitrator and half the cost of the hearing room. Most grievances are resolved before reaching arbitration.

Arbitration policy

The 2000 OPSEU Convention decided that the union must schedule arbitration hearings for all unresolved grievances involving dismissal, layoff, human rights and harassment.

Discrimination and harassment cases may have a separate procedure.

However, it balked at ordering the union not to cancel arbitrations for financial reasons. Delegates decided this would "open the tap" for uncontrolled spending on arbitrations. ▲

Pay equity:

It may be the law but it's still a battle

Equal pay for work of equal value.

It sounds straightforward – so why did it take more than a decade for Registered Practical Nurses at Stevenson Memorial Hospital and for members working for the Salvation Army?

Because nothing is easy when an employer says, “No.”

For both groups, the pay equity saga began in 1990, before they were organized into OPSEU.

RPNs Shirley Cranston and Cathy Mundy belong to Local 361 at the Stevenson Memorial Hospital. The hospital's 1990 pay equity plan compared their jobs to those of ambulance officers and raised their salary to match the ambulance officers.

When their first OPSEU contract went to arbitration, the arbitrator ignored pay equity. He raised ambulance officers to the provincial rate but left the RPNs behind.

Shirley and Cathy felt pay equity meant recognition that their jobs were equal in skill and responsibility to those of ambulance officers, even though the work is not identical.

After several meetings with the hospital, OPSEU complained to the Pay Equity Commission to re-establish pay equity for RPNs. A commission review officer agreed.

The hospital had 45 days to appeal that decision, and waited until the end of day 45. “We couldn't believe it,” said Cathy. “The hospital was downsizing, especially the RPNs, and we were already pretty demoralized.”

Then the hospital stalled getting its

documents to the Commission. OPSEU finally pushed the Commission to schedule the appeal whether or not the hospital was ready.

“The Union stood behind us and did something,” said Cathy.

The Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal upheld the Review Officer's decision. Early this year, Shirley, Cathy and the other Stevenson RPNs finally got the equity they had been denied for nearly 10 years.

Some will receive one-time cheques as high as a year's salary.

The delay had its price. While the hospital dragged its feet, one retiree who could have used the money died. “Her passing away while the hospital delayed upset all of us,” said Cathy.

For workers at the Salvation Army, pay equity has been equally torturous.

The units are female dominant. Without male jobs to compare to, and no legislation to allow proxy pay equity plans, the union considered the question of

who was the real employer – the individual agency or the entire Salvation Army?

When the Salvation Army posted pay equity plans for the non-union employees, a number of workers appealed to the Pay Equity Commission. Carl Evans, an off-site Residential Counsellor with Broadview Village knew the law – and he knew the Salvation Army was his employer, not Broadview Village or any other individual worksite.

Supporting the non-union workers' position, OPSEU put pay equity on hold for the unionized workers at Wycliffe Booth in London,

Steve Daynes photo



Carl Evans

“The law is all well and good, but you need resources to enforce it when an employer says no.”



Bertha Geon, Janice Mackenzie and Cathy Mundy benefit from the 10-year battle for pay equity. For some, members of their local, the eventual payout equalled a year's salary.

and Community Mental Health Services in Toronto.

While all this was happening, three units (Salvation Army London Village, Toronto's Broadview Village, and Sunset Lodge in Orillia) joined OPSEU. As in the Stevenson Memorial case, the review officer upheld the workers, and the employer appealed. In 1997, the Pay Equity Hearings Tribunal ruled that the combined locals had one employer.

Even so, the Salvation Army pushed to negotiate individual worksite pay equity plans. OPSEU held firm to "one employer – one plan."

Negotiations continued, and on March 1, members of Locals 108, 153, 314 and 512 finally saw pay equity adjustments on their paycheques.

Carl was on the bargaining team from the

start. "In the beginning, it wasn't about money, it was about rights. But in the end it was all about money because it took 10 years to get there."

For Local 153 president Diana Smith of London Salvation Army Village, the raise represented years of hard work. "Most of us figured we'd never see it. We kept saying 'don't get your hopes up' whenever it looked possible."

Sustaining the 10-year battle for pay equity without union support would have been extremely difficult. "If it hadn't have been for OPSEU, we wouldn't have had the resources to make this happen," said Carl.

"The law is all well and good, but you need resources to enforce it when an employer says no." ▲



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
and Medicare into
a business."**

– 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. ▲



Support our People; Build our Future

OPSEU is under attack. Ontario's Tory government and its powerful backers would like to undercut the power of all unions.

This makes it harder for us to organize new members, bargain strong contracts and fight for effective public services.

We are rising to the challenge with our new Network for Better Contracts. We want to draw in members and staff from across all sectors of the union. We'll provide the training and support to build on your experience.

The result: we are all winners.



*Leah Casselman,
President*

Take up the challenge

OPSEU is recruiting members and staff for training and development positions. These are not regular union jobs.

You will get training that you can use in your local or on assignment to a specific project. You need a commitment to OPSEU's goals. Combine your experience in the union and other community organizations to help build OPSEU. We encourage participation from all sectors of the union and all equity-seeking groups.

Our website (www.opseu.org) has full details. You can find application forms on the website and at regional offices. The deadline is July 28.

Get involved!

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