



Photo: Emily Visser

Bus shelter in Toronto protesting hospital cuts



Photo: Rick Janson

Smokey speaks to members from the Hospital Professionals Division, who are drawing attention to professional shortages outside of Health Minister David Caplan's constituency office in North York.

Hospital organizing drive — a huge victory

by Don Ford

OPSEU's Organizing Unit pulled off a stunning victory last fall when nearly 700 non-unionized hospital professionals at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) chose OPSEU as their union.

This wasn't the first attempt at organizing the hospital. Back in 2004, a merger of programs triggered a vote. At that time, employees at the hospital chose to remain non-union.

So what changed four years later? Organizer Leslie Sanders explains:

"Back in 2004, employees at CHEO considered themselves part of a 'family'," Sanders said. "The hospital fought the organizing drive tooth and nail. Yet, even with all the opposition, we still got 38 per cent of the vote."

Then things changed. The hiring of a new hospital CEO left employees very disillusioned about their former work relationship.

"Suddenly, employees weren't part of a 'family' anymore," said Sanders. "When the opportunity came again to vote for a union, there was a very different attitude."



Photo: OPSEU files

The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario

Once again, a merger of only 14 OPSEU physiotherapists into the non-unionized group of nearly 700 triggered another vote. On September 24, 2008, OPSEU emerged as the winner.

Sanders said the victory was a real team effort.

"The former Ottawa Children's Treatment Centre physiotherapists at Local 484 and members at Local 464 (Ottawa Hospital) worked tirelessly during the campaign," Sanders said. "Many CHEO staff also provided invaluable help in getting their colleagues out to vote."

The lesson for non-unionized employees? Never count on an employment relationship remaining the same.

"In a non-unionized environment, things can change quickly and drastically," said Rout. "The employees at CHEO were lucky to get another chance at a legislated vote. It would have been much harder to start from scratch."