

The election choice for OPS employees: The ballot box or the picket line

One in a series of election fact sheets from the Ontario Public Service Employees Union

What's wrong with the Ontario Public Service? One word says it all: **Tories**. Since Mike Harris was elected in 1995, the OPS has been the Conservatives' whipping boy. Sometimes they're demolishing crucial public services. Sometimes they're attacking public employees. Most of the time, they're doing both. Even now, new cuts loom as the Tories struggle to make it look like they know how to manage Ontario's finances.

It doesn't have to be this way. The OPS can make government work for us all. Here's how:

1. Rebuild our public service

When the Tories came to power, they vowed to cut 13,000 OPS employees. Instead, they cut over 20,000 – a drastic 25 per cent reduction.

Walkerton showed there is a limit to how far you can cut a service before it collapses. Workers right across the OPS face crushing workloads, work speed-ups, and high stress. Important work is simply not getting done.

The next government must rebuild the OPS to the point where it can provide safe, effective service wherever the public wants it.

2. Stop privatization and deregulation

The corporate interests who bankroll the Tory party have seen a great return on their investment in the last eight years. In 2001, the Tories showered \$662 million on private consultants. According to the provincial auditor, these consultants were often charging two, three, or four times what it would cost to have public employees doing the same work. From private jails to private labs to private roads, corporations are feasting on public dollars. Their shareholders love it. The rest of us pay the bills.

Deregulation has done just as much damage. The Tories have laid off our watchdogs and let corporations police themselves. Ontario

companies are so relaxed now that in 2001, half of them didn't even bother to file income tax returns!

3. Improve labour relations

The Harris-Eves Tories have shown unrestrained glee in picking on their own employees. In 1996, they used the Legislature to target OPS employees by abolishing successor rights. Then they provoked a 35-day strike. In 2002, they provoked a 54-day strike when they demanded that OPSEU surrender control of our share of pension surpluses (worth billions of dollars) and agree to other concessions.

The Tories have been anti-worker from Day One (legislating the 60-hour work week, for example), but they have reserved their most sadistic attacks for OPSEU members in the OPS.

The attack on OPS benefits in the last round of bargaining is just one example. The OPS classification system is a mess since the Tories outlawed arbitration for classification issues. The current logjam means pay rates for thousands of OPSEU members are completely out of date. In three rounds of bargaining, the Tories have refused OPSEU proposals to fix the mess.

Meanwhile, 30 per cent of OPS workers are unclassified. Most of the work is permanent, so why aren't the jobs? Unclassified workers do the same work. They deserve the same wages and working conditions as classified workers.

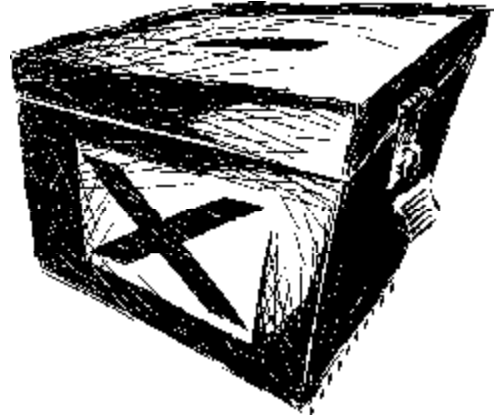
The Tories have (twice) forced OPSEU members to try to deal with these and other issues on the picket line. We have had some successes; we can do much better. To move forward, we need an employer that appreciates the work we do. The boss will always be the boss, of course, but this election is a great opportunity to put a less obnoxious employer on the government side at Queen's Park.

For OPS employees, the choice is clear: it's the ballot box or the picket line.

We've got to rebuild the Ontario Public Service. The ballot box is the place to do it.

Here's how you can help rebuild the Ontario Public Service:

1. Vote. Voter turnout in the last Ontario election was just 58.3 per cent of those eligible. Low turnouts mean voting has never been more important – and your vote has never been worth more.
2. Work to defeat your local Tory.
If Conservatives were going to make the OPS work better, they would have done it by now.
3. Help a public-service-friendly candidate.
Call the candidate's campaign office. Offer to take a lawn or window sign. Wear a button. Volunteer to go door-to-door to talk to your neighbours. Sign up for a phone bank. Help out in the campaign office.
4. Urge all your co-workers to help oust this government – and start rebuilding the Ontario Public Service.



Talk to your candidates

You've got a right to ask questions of the people who want to represent you. On your doorstep, on the street, or at all-candidates meetings, ask candidates what they will do to strengthen the OPS. Will they:

- Invest in the Ontario Public Service so that it can once more do the work that it needs to do?
- Hire more staff in the OPS?
- End the corporate welfare program known as privatization?
- Bring back regulations on private companies (like the lumber companies that are looting our forests with minimal oversight) to protect the public interest?

Most of all, ask your candidates this:

- **What will you do to improve labour relations between the Ontario government and its front-line employees?**

Take Action Now

The future of the Ontario Public Service for years to come will be decided on Election Day. Play a part in this election.

Together, we can make things better.



To find out how to get involved in the OPSEU campaign, check our web site at www.opseu.org.