



Our track record: OPSEU campaigns for the environment and whistleblowing protection

November 9, 2000

www.opseu.org/walkerton/index.htm

Ontario Public Service Employees Union

100 Lesmill Road, Toronto, Ontario M3B 3P8

- May 1, 1990** OPSEU is part of a coalition of environmental groups holding a press conference at Queen's Park, calling on the Liberal government to stop its plans to sever responsibility for water and sewage plants from the Ministry of Environment to a crown corporation. "Environmentalists alarmed by Nixon plan", Toronto Star, May 1, 1990
- November 22, 1991** OPSEU publishes its response to the NDP government's discussion paper on whistle blowing. OPSEU brief: "Promoting honest and open government through protection for whistleblowers", November 22, 1991.
- February 9, 1993** OPSEU speaks out against the NDP government's decision to take a page from the Liberals' book and create a separate agency for provincially-owned water and sewage plants, later called the Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA). OPSEU press release: "Provincial moves endanger services, union warns", February 9, 1993.
- December 6, 1993** OPSEU publishes its response to the NDP government's Bill 117, amending the Crown Employees Collective Bargaining Act and the Public Service Act. The amendments include whistle blowers protection. Bill 117 passes on Dec. 13, 1993. Section 28.14 calls for the appointment of "a Counsel to advise employees concerning wrongdoing and to provide a means for making those allegations public." Despite persistent lobbying from OPSEU, particularly in 1994, a Counsel has never been named and OPSEU members in the OPS remain without whistle blower protection. OPSEU brief: "The Rights of Public Servants", December 6, 1993
- July 21, 1995** OPSEU speaks out against the newly-elected Conservative government's initial round of budget cuts including a \$15 million cut in operating spending for the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MOEE). OPSEU press release: "Government by amputation threatens public safety, union says", July 21, 1995.
- September 19, 1995** OPSEU holds a press conference with noted environmentalist Dr. Rosalie Bertell to warn that MOEE layoffs jeopardizes the health of all Ontarians. OPSEU press release: "Health at risk if environment enforcers cut, OPSEU says", September 19, 1995.
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- May 22, 1996** The Conservative government hands out layoff notices to 362 MOEE staff including 259 OPSEU members. OPSEU cites four polls from the preceding seven months that show that Canadians support strong enforcement of environmental regulations. Union president Leah Casselman tells the media: "Poll after poll shows the public wants strict enforcement of regulations that guarantee clean, breathable air and clean, drinkable water." OPSEU press release: "Pollution control slashed despite public support", May 22, 1996.
- Oct. - Dec. 1996** OPSEU members from the Ministry Employees Relations Committee (MERC) of MOEE and staff carry out a research project to determine the effect of the Conservative government's cuts to the ministry.
- December 5, 1996** OPSEU joins a coalition of environmental groups and unions called Save Ontario Water to oppose the sale of OCWA which the Conservative government is rumoured to be considering. The coalition cites an April 1996 poll conducted for the Ontario Municipal Water Association. The poll found that 76 per cent of Ontarians support preserving public control of their community's drinking water systems. Save Ontario Water press release: "Save Ontario Water Coalition formed to oppose the sale of provincial water resources," December 5, 1996.
- January 13, 1997** OPSEU publishes the first edition of *Nothing Left to Cut*, a comprehensive review and analysis of the cuts to the MOEE. Among its findings: the number of surface water monitoring stations dropped from nearly 700 in 1991 to just over 200 in 1996 and no surface water monitoring was done north of Barrie in the 1996-97 work year.
- January 14, 1997** The government announces the elimination of a further 303 jobs at MOEE, including 186 jobs in the OPSEU bargaining unit. OPSEU points out that the layoffs and the closures of offices in Gravenhurst, Parry Sound and Pembroke means that the MOEE will have no presence in cottage country. OPSEU press release: "Environment cuts hit cottage country, pollution control," January 14, 1997.
- January 17, 1997** OPSEU responds to the Conservative government's plan to download \$6.5 billion in public services onto municipalities with a fight-back campaign. Included in the download is Bill 107, The Water and Sewage Services Improvement Act, which transfers provincially-owned water and waste water plants from OCWA to municipalities. Bill 107 also outlined the process for the sale of such plants, essentially opening the door to privatization. OPSEU newsletter: "Fight Back It Works: Mobilizing to Win", January 17, 1997.
- February 13, 1997** OPSEU publishes the second edition of *Nothing Left to Cut*, to include the January 14 layoffs at MOEE. OPSEU report: "Nothing Left to Cut: a field report on the activities of the Ontario Ministry of Environment and Energy", second edition, February 13, 1997.

- February 21, 1997** OPSEU launches a citizens mega-week Feb. 24-28 to promote public debate around the Tory downloading. OPSEU sponsors a mock trial Feb. 25 of Environment Minister Norm Sterling's environmental record with three environmental groups.
- March 24, 1997** OPSEU mails *Nothing Left to Cut* to stewards in MOEE locals. Also included in the package is the report *Our Future, Our Health*, prepared by a coalition of 13 environmental groups and Intervenor, a publication of the Canadian Environmental Law Association.
- May 29, 1997** OPSEU president Leah Casselman tells a corporate conference on water privatization that the British experience is an excellent reason to reject the idea in Ontario. (On May 26, the Conservative government passes Bill 107, which could pave the way for privatization.) Outside the conference, members from OPSEU and the Save Ontario Water coalition hand out this leaflet to the public: *Ontario's Drinking Water for Sale?* OPSEU press release: "Let the people decide on water privatization: Casselman", May 29, 1997. OPSEU is concerned that a planned review of OCWA will lead to privatization. OPSEU cites a February, 1997 poll for the Ontario Municipal Water Association which showed that 86 per cent of Ontarians believe water should continue to be provided to consumers at cost, not for profit. That number was a jump of 10 per cent over the previous year.
- July 24, 1997** OPSEU is concerned that a planned review of OCWA will lead to privatization. OPSEU cites a February 1997 poll for the Ontario Municipal Water Association which showed that 86 percent of Ontarians believe water should continue to be provided to consumers at cost, not for profit. That number was a jump of 10 per cent over the previous year. OPSEU press release: "Tories pick dead of summer to move on water privatization", July 24, 1997.
- August 1997** OPSEU issues a flyer on water privatization prepared for the November 1997 municipal elections. OPSEU flyer: "What's happening to Our Ontario: Focus on water privatization", August 1997.
- October 9, 1997** OPSEU president Leah Casselman speaks about Bill 107 and Britain's experience with water privatization at the "Jane Jacobs: Ideas that matter" community event in Toronto. The video *Consequences: The Private Side of Britain*, which OPSEU helped fund, is shown that night. When water was privatized in Britain, water bills went up by as much as 450 per cent. One year, 21,000 people had their water cut off because they could not pay. Dysentery increased by 600 per cent; Hepatitis A increased by 200 per cent.
- April-May 1998** OCWA members in OPSEU Local 584 lobbies Peel Regional Council to keep the region's water and wastewater plants publicly-owned and operated. OPSEU flyer: "Your water works: should foreign corporations profit from Peel Region's water supply?"

- July 24, 1998** OPSEU president Leah Casselman speaks out against water privatization in response to Peel Region's call for competitive bids to operate its water and waste water plants. Letter to the editor of the Toronto Star: "Re: Peel water works up for bids", July 24, 1998.
- August 10, 1999** The Commission on Environmental Co-operation rates Ontario as the second most polluted jurisdiction in North America. OPSEU says its time for the Conservative government to start solving the environmental crisis. OPSEU press release: "Pollution needs solutions, not excuses: OPSEU", August 10, 1999.
- May 31, 2000** OPSEU calls on members to contact Mike Harris and demand that the terms of reference of the Walkerton Inquiry include examining the effects of the drastic cuts to the MOE. OPSEU Action Fax: "Time to pick up the phone: Tories try to limit the terms of the inquiry", May 31, 2000. OPSEU press release: "'Common Sense' Tragedy exposes the depth of public service cuts", May 31, 2000.
- June 6, 2000** Working with the opposition parties, OPSEU lobbies the government for whistleblowing protection. OPSEU press release: "Public Inquiry must protect whistleblowers from reprisals, OPSEU says", June 6, 2000.
- June 13, 2000** Attorney-General Jim Flaherty tables amendments to the Public Inquiries Act, making it illegal for employers to take "adverse employment action" against employees for disclosing information to a commission, or commission staff, of a public inquiry. The amendments become law June 23. OPSEU press release: "Whistleblower protection a positive step, OPSEU says", June 13, 2000.
- June 15, 2000** OPSEU's Executive Board votes to set aside funds to provide legal support for OPSEU members, where necessary, involved in the Walkerton Inquiry. OPSEU makes individual legal advice and assistance available to any member whose job may relate to the events in Walkerton. OPSEU retains the law firm Gowling Lafleur Henderson to act for OPSEU and its members in connection with the Walkerton Inquiry. Gowling lawyers work under the direction of Tim Hadwen, OPSEU's staff legal counsel.
- July, 2000** OPSEU mails a four-page memo and confidential survey to current and retired members of OCWA and MOE, and to current members at the Grey Bruce Owen Sound Health Unit, the South Bruce Grey Health Centre (Walkerton site) and OPSEU Local 225 in Walkerton.
- July 12, 2000** OPSEU president Leah Casselman meets with OPSEU members in Walkerton.

- July 20, 2000** OPSEU announces it will apply for standing at the Walkerton Inquiry. OPSEU Action Fax: “OPSEU to request standing at Walkerton Inquiry”, July 20, 2000.

- August 8, 2000** OPSEU responds to the Conservative government’s long-awaited release of a drinking water regulation. OPSEU news release: “New drinking water regulation meaningless without staff to enforce it: OPSEU”, August 8, 2000.

- August 11, 2000** OPSEU sends an open letter through the Ontario media to Conservative MPP, Bill Murdoch, responding to his offensive and insulting comments on CBC radio that “... we [the Harris government] didn’t cut the right people” at the MOE.

- August 25, 2000** OPSEU submits its 22-page application for standing at the Walkerton Inquiry. The submission is based in part on interviews with OPSEU members and members’ responses to the survey distributed earlier in the summer by the union.

- September 5, 2000** OPSEU staff legal counsel Tim Hadwen and Gowling lawyers appear before Justice Dennis O’Connor, the Commissioner of the Walkerton Inquiry, to argue for standing.

- September 12, 2000** Justice O’Connor grants OPSEU standing in the Walkerton Inquiry. The Inquiry is divided into three sections referred to as Part 1A, Part 1B and Part 2. Part 1A deals with the direct circumstances of the Walkerton tragedy. Part 1B deals with “...the effect, if any, of government policies, practices and procedures.” Part 2 deals with the broader issues involved in ensuring the safety of Ontario’s drinking water. OPSEU has the standing needed in Part 1A to protect the interests of directly involved members, full standing in Part 1B as part of a “bargaining agents coalition” with CUPE and PEGO and full standing on its own in Part 2. Justice O’Connor writes with respect to Part 1B: “In light of OPSEU’s broad representation of provincial government employees, it may be appropriate for OPSEU to take the lead in this coalition.”

To add any items to this campaigns chronology, please contact Megan Park at OPSEU Head Office at 1-800-268-7376 ext. 207 or e-mail mpark@opseu.org

Authorized for distribution:



Leah Casselman, President