

OPSEU Local 527

TIMES on the LINES

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THE PEOPLE'S RALLY OF 2002

BY JUSTINE SPAMOVITZ

Saturday, 23 March 2002. Early morning, still dark. I wake in giddy anticipation. Today is The Day — the day of The People's Rally, organized by the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL).

I haven't been to a demonstration in almost seven years — since the big one in '95 — and I'm more than a little nervous. No, it's not the thought of tear gas which police felt they just HAD to use the night before. And it's not the cops on horseback wielding their clubs. My worry is this: *What am I going to wear?*

I imagine thousands of eager Tories also waking up with anticipation. But they have a different question on their minds: *Who is going to be the new leader?* Never before has so much time, energy and money been spent to make a decision that matters so little. Like the OFL says: "Out with the old, in with the old." Tories don't have to think about important things like what they're going to wear. Tories are going to be inside, tucked away warm and safe behind sheets of tempered glass, walls of concrete and steel, and cops in riot gear with bulletproof shields. We the people will be outside and cold. But I wouldn't have it any other way.

I can hear a cold wind whistling outside, but that's nothing new in Tory Ontario. I jump out of bed and rummage through drawers. Where are my longjohns? My thermal undershirt? Where are my favourite socks? By 6:30 am, I am fully dressed and sweating like a pig. I don't have to be at the OPSEU rally until 10:30 am. Four more hours!

When I get to Victoria Memorial Park, a good-sized crowd is already assembled. Everyone's busy strapping on signs that say: "Learn from Walkerton. Rebuild our Public Service". Twenty-six people show up from Local 527. President Rod Sawyer measures and cuts lengths of twine, handing them to each and every one of his Locals members so we can tie the signs around our waists to stop the wind from picking them up like sails. I wonder at his tireless dedication.

Steward Paul deRege ties orange plastic armbands round our sleeves to us identify as Local 527 sisters and brothers. "So we don't get lost," he says. He must have been a kindergarten teacher in a previous life!

"Let's go see who those guys are," steward Marilyn Miller suggests, "the ones with the badges on their hats. They look like they're from a Conservation Authority." We wander over. They're from a correctional facility in Goderich. "Have you been privatized," Marilyn asks. "Not yet," they say. Later, Marilyn will set a *Toronto Sun* reporter straight and then give Global TV a message for the government: "Tell them to get back to the bargaining table."

Local 527's Big Yellow Banner, developed by members Paul Foster and George Clare, is unfurled. It beams out a blunt mantra:

MPPS GET A 36.6% RAISE! YOU GET CUTS TO PUBLIC SERVICES.

In a perhaps excusable display of discrimination — height discrimination — Local 527's two tallest members, Malcolm Horne and Jamie Henderson, are drafted to carry the banner. They readily comply. Thanks, guys! What a sight you were!

The crowd is growing faster now. There are people from all over Ontario — Sarnia, Smiths Falls, Sudbury and everywhere in between. Leah Casselman gets up to speak. "Our members do not work for the Tory party," she declares. "They work for the public of Ontario!" She reminds us that we're standing on the very site where soldiers from the War of 1812 were buried — when Canadians fought off the Americans. "We're fighting still," Leah calls out. It's time to start marching.

**"TORY TORY TORY! OUT OUT OUT."
"THE ONLY GOOD TORY IS A SUPPOSITORY."
"NO JUSTICE. NO PEACE."
"WHAT DO WE WANT? A CONTRACT."
"WHEN DO WE WANT IT? NOW."**

I could kick myself for forgetting my whistle. I am definitely out of practice! I look enviously at a sister banging a kitchen pot with a wooden spoon. Note to self: *Next time, bring something that makes noise — LOTS of noise.*

We march to Simcoe Park across from the Convention Centre. Once there, we meet up with a sea of people — steelworkers, teachers, CUPE, social justice groups, people with disabilities, to name just a few. The OFL hands out a song book. Pretty soon we're all singing *Choppin' Robin* ("All the little Tories round the Bay St. block / Love to hear the chopper go chop chop chop!"). That was followed by a rousing rendition of *Bread and Roses* ("As we come marching we bring the greater days / The rising of the women is the rising of us all.")

I venture to the edge of the rally to peer across the street at the Convention Centre. Across the front of the building is a wall of police in full riot gear. Strangely, it's not anger I feel. It's incredulity. I can hardly believe that this is what it's come to — an elected government so afraid of the people that it hides itself away like a military dictatorship. *Shame!*

The OFL has organized a powerful line-up of speakers. One by one, they recap the government's seven-year record. Dudley George — killed protecting a sacred burial ground. No inquest. Walkerton — seven dead and thousands still suffering from the results of *E. coli* in their drinking water. Bruce Davidson of Concerned Walkerton Citizens describes the Walkerton version of the term "Tory legacy" — in a small town of about 5,000 people, there's a need for 100 new kidneys. Kimberly Rogers — five months pregnant, cut off from all benefits and under house arrest, found stone-cold dead in a sweltering apartment. An inquest promised, but it could take more than a year. The speakers lay it on the line. This government, whoever its leader, is unfit to govern.

We all turn and look south to the Convention Centre and chant: *Unfit. Unfit. Unfit.*

A fitting epithet for an unfit government.

IT'S A FACT: Mosquito repellants don't really repel. Rather, they hide you. The repellants actually block the mosquito's sensors. Effectively speaking, the mosquitoes don't even know you're there.

IT'S A FACT: The reason firehouses have circular stairways is a holdover from the days when engines were pulled by horses. The horses were stabled on the ground floor and figured out how to climb straight staircases.

WE GET MAIL!

Correspondence from *TIMES on the LINES* readers

Dear Editor: Thanks so much for BETWEEN THE LINES! My friends and I agree that it's really crucial to keep up with what the media are saying - even if they are biased and outright wrong a lot of the time. And that Merry-Spring Meadows is a real treasure!

JAMIE HENDERSON, TORONTO

(We agree. M-S. M. is a gentleperson and a scholar. – Ed.)

Dear Editor: Ernie Eves is our new premier? Hmm... Can a person who is not a sitting member of a provincial legislature or federal parliament be legally sworn in as a premier or prime minister? Since it has happened three times in the past (John S. Macdonald in 1867; Sir Oliver Mowat in 1872; and Ernest Drury in 1919), the answer is, unfortunately, yes.

Nonetheless, I think there is something more than a little questionable about letting a person who is not a sitting elected member take over a government. Oops! I almost lapsed into thinking that we live in a democracy rather than a 'benevolent (?) dictatorship' – oops again! – I mean a "constitutional monarchy". Silly *moi!*

But just so everyone's clear on this, let's take a look at the numbers. According to *The Toronto Star*, 101,028 members of the Conservative party were eligible to vote in Saturday's Conservative leadership convention. On the second - and deciding - ballot, only 34,608 party members made the effort to vote again, of whom 54.6% - that's 18,896 people - succeeded in electing Ernie Eves to the party leadership and, by default, to the premier's office. That means that about 82% of provincial Tory members didn't actively support Ernie's candidacy. To top it all off, a number of those who did support him are so-called "Tiny Tories" – that is, party members between the ages of 14 and 19 who would not even be eligible to vote in any real election. As a result of this fascinating process, Ontario's 11,874,400 citizens now find themselves in the position of being dictated to by a man who was actually put in power by less than 0.16% of the population! If anything could ever prove that our system of government does not conform to even the most basic principles of democracy, this is it.

Given this outrageous situation, the only morally correct and politically ethical course of action for Eves and the provincial Tory party to follow would be to call a general provincial election at the earliest available opportunity. But Ernie is already on-record as stating that he has no intention of calling an election for at least a year. Again, hmm...

Unfortunately, however, moral and/or ethical conduct are both apparently anathema to the Harrisite Tories in general and to Ernie Eves in particular. As a Tory party leadership candidate, Eves was quoted as saying he wanted to see an early end to the OPSEU strike. But on CBC Radio 1, the newly elected provincial Tory leader "Slick Ernie" Eves said that the government's existing offer is fair and reasonable and demanded that OPSEU "come back to the table" and resume discussions with Dave Tsubouchi. Psst! Earth to Ernie: OPSEU never left the negotiating table!

Is it possible that the right-wing wolf has shed his moderate sheep's clothing so quickly? I trust that no-one is going to hold their breath for either a snap election or a quick settlement to the strike. The odds of either happening would appear to be longer than a Tory politician's nose!

CHRIS J.-ANDERSEN, AJAX

(Mr. J.-Anderson, you dig a little deeper than most. Have you considered a career in archaeology? Just wondering... – Ed.)

Dear Editor: I was at the OFL/OPSEU rally last weekend. I saw Local 527 steward Marilyn Miller and Justine Spamovitz there as well. Both were chatting people up and gathering stories for your august publication. Marilyn was interviewed by a Toronto Sun reporter as well as a Global TV. I also saw Winston Wong and Malcolm Horne on another station. In all, twenty-five Local 527 members were in attendance. I spied Ms. Spamovitz scribbling frantically during all the real barn-burner speeches. Unfortunately, she had to leave early and missed the teenaged male rapper who did a truly excellent song about Mike and the Tories, a brief speech about injured workers, and another about the homeless and cuts to social spending. Without exception, the musicians were excellent and the speakers inspiring. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the performers and speakers for their contributions. You made it an awesome day for us all!

PAUL DEREGE, TORONTO

(Our August publication? Surely you jest! Oh, our "august" publication. Now we're blushing! – Ed.)

IT'S A FACT: This was actually published in The Housekeeping Monthly (13 May 1955), as part of an article entitled *The good wife's guide*:

- Don't complain if he's late for dinner or even if he stays out all night. Count this as minor compared to what he might have gone through that day.
- Make him comfortable. Have him lean back in a comfortable chair or have him lie down in the bedroom. Have a cool or warm drink ready for him.
- Arrange his pillow and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, soothing and pleasant voice.
- Don't ask him questions about his actions or question his judgement or integrity. Remember, he is the master of the house and as such will always exercise his will with fairness and truthfulness. You have no right to question him.
- A good wife always knows her place.

No wonder feminism is here to stay! That's a fact, too!

Frontlines HIGHLIGHTS

(March 23 - Strike Day 11)

OPSEU protects Factor 80 to Nov. 30 — OPSEU has arranged to extend Factor 80 early retirement until Nov. 30. And despite what you may have heard or read in the media, the employer had no role in this. In fact, if we accept the government's pension proposals, OPSEU will never be able to do this again. Here is the truth about how this happened.

In the final hours of OPS bargaining, the OPS team realized that they were being forced toward a strike. The Factor 80 window was scheduled to close on March 31, so there was a risk that this might happen during the strike. To protect members, the team called on the union's Executive Board. The board approved a motion asking the OPSEU Pension Trust to use the members' share of the actuarial surplus to extend the window until the end of November. Under the trust agreement, both sponsors - union and employer - must sign amendments to the plan. The government was required to sign this change. Had they not signed, we could have forced them to sign through arbitration. However, the language the government has on the table would give them a veto over any such amendments in the future.

One of the big reasons we are on strike right now is to retain our control over our pensions.

Government propaganda makes it sound as if it has given us something. This is a lie! In reality, they want to take it away forever. We can do this now, but if they get their way in bargaining we will not be able to do it again.

The good and bad in Walkerton — Local 225 president Gerry Hope approached the Tim Horton's for a donation of day-old donuts to the striking picketers. The manager - Peggy - told Gerry it was Tim Horton's corporate policy to: not support strikes; feed day-old donuts to the cows. Something to remember the next time you feel like a cup of coffee and a bagel or a light lunch. Tim Horton's corporate head office is located in Oakville (905-845-6511).

Lorri Monk of Lorri's Hairstyling, on the other hand, is offering strikers a 33% discount on all haircuts. Clearly, Local 225 will be stylish and svelte when the strike ends.

Blizzard's Blather — A recent rant by Tory cheerleader Christina Blizzard has OPSEU members perplexed at the very least. In a recent article entitled *Here's The Deal*, the alleged journalist "...treats us to an anonymous rant from a 'government insider'..." writes Charles Faust (Local 724). "Who is he/she and what is his/her role? Instead of providing factual arguments she (Blizzard) has chosen to cloak suspicions and rumours in language designed to further polarize an already emotional situation," Mr. Faust underlined.

Local 130 President Gino Franche asks: "Why is this 'informed source' unidentified?... I have reviewed your coverage of the OPSEU strike. Could it be that newspapers dominated by two media moguls are unable to present a balanced view of issues involving labour and management?"

(Perish the thought, Gino, and bite your tongue! Surely not in Ont-arie-arie-ario! – Ed.)

IT'S A FACT: The present Ontario government would have you believe that the current strike by OPSEU only inconveniences those who need to renew their drivers licences, obtain birth certificates, register land transfers or go to the Ontario Science Centre. The facts tell a different story. Did you know that:

- OPSEU members are the people who keep your environment green.
- OPSEU members are the people who provide the science and expertise to manage your forests, your fisheries, your wildlife, your endangered species and your provincial parks.
- OPSEU members are the people who enforce laws which protect our environment and our natural resources.
- OPSEU members are the people who work with local interest groups in the community to enhance our natural resources and promote sustainable use.
- OPSEU members are the people who manage the activities that occur on Crown land – that's 87% of Ontario, by the way.
- OPSEU members are the people who maintain our provincial park network, and protect sensitive areas.
- OPSEU members are the people who collect millions of dollars in revenue, derived from the use of our natural resources, for the people of Ontario every year.
- OPSEU members are the people who respond to your inquiries about nuisance animals, rabies, hunting and fishing regulations, dredging, filling and other activities on Crown land.
- OPSEU members are the people who work hard every day to keep Ontario's land, water and air clean and safe now and for future generations.

Oh, and one last thing! OPSEU members are the people who would be on the job right now if the Ontario Government was serious about negotiating a contract.

(Source: Frontlines, March 26, 2002)

Between The Lines

BY MERRY-SPRING MEADOWS

Is it just me? Yesterday I had to keep checking that I wasn't simply reading the same article over and over again. Is it my lack of experience? Of course the newspapers are genuine and journalists are all hardworking chaps intent upon reporting the facts and causes fairly to their faithful readers. It must be that, well, you know, mistakes happen! How else to explain the frequency with which one encounters words like "allegedly" or "apparently" and terms like "an unidentified government source" – so kindly inserted to remind us that reporters are not legally (or illegally) insinuating anything – in our local media?

For example, did you know that OPSEU is only "allegedly" or "apparently" responsible for "Sparking health worries" (*The Toronto Star*, 22 March), for holding up "Benefits for disabled" (*The Globe and Mail*, 25 March) and for "...creating havoc for clients trying to close real estate deals..." (*The Toronto Star*, 24 March). Oh, and let's not forget the "Mentally ill deteriorating" (*The Toronto Star*, 24 March). But I don't want to give you the wrong idea. After all, they did manage to squeeze in, near the bottom of the page, Leah Casselman's point that "...institutions across Ontario have lacked proper staffing for years."

But I'm a cheeky monkey! I've left the best for last. Did you know that we're responsible for "...an apparent attempt to disrupt service and tie up the phone lines..." at the Don Jail (*The Toronto Star*, 25 March)? And how was this done? Well, according to Ontario Corrections spokes-man Ciaran Ganley, "...an unlisted number that only employees that work there would know..." was used on a sales flyer in an "...east-end No Frills grocery store." The tragic result was a total of

“...three calls from disappointed bargain hunters...” Furthermore, it seems that “...members of the public...” – all three of them, presumably – are “... being victimized.” Oh dear! Where are my smelling salts? I do believe I’m going to swoon...

I’m relieved that journalists don’t set aside their dedication to tracking the truly BIG issues while traipsing through Toronto’s grocery stores hunting for fresh fruits and veggies. And I’m not alone in my opinions. Janice Porter took the trouble to speak out in her recent letter to the editor. “I support the strike and have wonderful deaf-blind intervenors who teach and care for my child and she wouldn’t be where she is today without them. I think your newspaper has forgotten to mention our situation.” (*The Toronto Star*, 25 March). Thank you, Janet. It’s nice to know that we’re not the only ones reading between the lines.

(**BETWEEN THE LINES** looks at Toronto’s daily media over the last few days, and is a regular feature of this publication.)

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