

STRATEGICALLY STRONG

- Diary of a Striker -
BY MALCOLM HORNE

STRATEGIC PICKETING MAKES THE VERY MOST OF OUR REDUCED NUMBERS IN THE CURRENT OPS STRIKE. MALCOLM HORNE REFLECTS UPON THIS, AND OTHER, ADVANTAGES OF THE STRATEGIC PICKETING OPTION IN PART ONE OF HIS "STRIKE DIARY".

Diary-keeping has never been among my personal habits. Nonetheless, when OPSEU Local 527's president Rod Sawyer asked me to document my experiences as a "strategic picketer", I really couldn't say no, could I? After all, Rod has been more than dedicated through all this. So, for better or worse, here's my attempt at summarizing my experiences (and adventures) as a strategic picketer. I apologize if I seem a tad hazy about some things; I seem to be drifting into a slower, more relaxed frame of mind as the strike drags on. But I'm pretty sure about the chronology of the events discussed herein. Here goes...

Wednesday 13 March — We started at 400 University at about 6:15 a.m. It was tough for me to watch four "strikebreakers" (I really think that is too polite a term for people who demonstrate such brazen disloyalty!) through the window receive instructions from managers. (*Webster's Dictionary* defines "fink" as "...a betrayer", Malcolm. *Just a suggestion!* — ed.) Ironically, they had to be directed to the stairs since the elevators had broken down. Our numbers gradually grew until about 8:30 a.m. By then, we numbered about 120. At that point, having marched up and down the sidewalk for about two hours, most of us headed up to Bay and Wellesley while a small contingent, headed up by John Carter and Ruth E., remained at 400 University.

At 900 Bay, we joined a massive picket of several hundred and assisted in picketing various MacDonald Block entrances. At the main entrance to the Block, the lineup stretched for 200 yards! We must have numbered close to 300 by about 10:00 a.m. We only allowed about three people in every five minutes. At auxiliary entrances, people were simply turned away and sent to the main lineup. We saw several return and leave, having given up on getting in at all. We all broke up at around noon, having introduced a large body of new picketers to the fine art of walking in circles and blocking doors. (see **DIARY**, page 2)

ENCOUNTER WITH A STRIKEBREAKER

by Pennifah Yathotz

Those of us "on the inside" have witnessed some mighty strange goings-on while our OPSEU colleagues marched outside (*stranger than usual?! My stars!* — ed.)

Last week, managers ripped our nameplates off our doors just before OPSEU work-site inspectors were scheduled to come by. To wit, particular "employees" were given the option of taking a coffee break at that precise moment (*quelle coincidence!* — ed.) A group of AMAPCEO members refused to protect these strikebreakers (hereinafter referred to as "creepy-crawlies"). We complained to our managers and put our nameplates back on our doors. After all, we've nothing to hide.

Earlier on in the strike, I was accosted by a creepy-crawly looking for sympathy. I barely had my coat off before she was all over me like a dirty shirt.

"You know very well where I stand on this issue," I said diplomatically, barely able to conceal my contempt. But creepy-crawlies are nothing if not persistent when it comes to self-justification. Hence, this one pressed on. I held my ground (*and your nose, surely!* — ed.) Sensing that she was fighting a losing battle, the creepy-crawly went running to her manager and complained that I was harassing her.

Excuse me? Let's look at the math here! A creepy-crawly has the nerve to confront me in my office and then complain about me? Par for the course, I suppose. I can safely say that I didn't say anything to her that I wouldn't say to anyone else, including my manager.

A similar situation unfolded later the same day. An AMAPCEO colleague told a different creepy-crawly who sought shelter in her office that she didn't agree with what the creepy-crawly was doing. That one also had the nerve to complain to her manager about my colleague giving her a hard time! (*If you've met one creepy-crawly, you've met 'em all, I would venture!* — ed.)

(cont'd. See **ENCOUNTER** on p.2)

IT'S A FACT : Barbie's full name is Barbara Millicent Roberts. It is also a fact that few of us care! **TIMES on the LINES** continues to blaze new trails for truth! It's a fact!

ENCOUNTER (cont'd from p.1)

What's up with these people? Why can't they have the decency to crawl back to their cubicles and at least be ashamed of what they're doing rather than strutting around, mouthing off and then seeking the protection of their managers? (*maybe abject stupidity enters the equation at this point?! — ed.*) Do they not consider that just maybe their managers were OPSEU members at one time, too?

In any case, the upshot was that my entire branch was hauled into a meeting at which we were all told to keep our opinions to ourselves. Fair enough! But if someone comes into my office seeking my opinion, they're damned well going to get it!

(**PENNIFAH YATHOTZ** is an AMAPCEO member reporting "from the inside". Unlike the subject of her article, Pennifah is of strong ethical character.)

IT'S A FACT : In its 2001 tracking report for Ontario elementary schools, People for Education found that, under the Tories' education funding formula: only 42% of Ontario elementary schools qualified for a full-time principal; only 1% qualified for a full-time teacher-librarian; and only 64% qualified for a full-time secretary! See <http://www.peopleforeducation.com> for more amazing Ontario education statistics.

IT'S A FACT : In March 2002 during his last full month as Ontario's premier in an interview with TVOntario's Steve Paikin, Mike Harris claimed that changes he introduced to Ontario's education system are among his greatest accomplishments. It's a fact!

The Warm Picket

BY FAUSTA SIU

Unseasonably cold temperatures have characterized the weather ever since the current OPS strike began. And in case you haven't noticed, it feels even colder when you are out for hours on the line. Furthermore, the stronger the wind, the greater the potential for heat loss! (*enough! You're depressing me! — ed.*) I can't help but notice that many pickets are not dressing in consequence. To stay warm and healthy, we need to maintain a body temperature of about 37°C. Who wants to be cold? Noooo-body! So here are some tips on how to stay toasty on the picket line.

REDUCING HEAT LOSS

Use these "double-double" or "triple-triple" formulae to keep yourselves warm and toasty:

- **HEAD** - Wear a woolen hat underneath the hood of your winter jacket. Wear ear muffs if necessary. If the wind is too strong and cold, consider wearing a woolen mask to cover your face.
- **HANDS** - Wear two pairs of gloves, preferably a thin pair underneath thermal mitts or gloves.

- **BODY** - Although a winter jacket is indispensable, several layers of thin clothes covered by a sweat shirt underneath your winter jacket will provide sufficient insulation to prevent heat loss.
- **LEGS** - Wear one or two layers of underlay beneath your jeans or windpants.
- **FEET** - Wear two or three pairs of thin socks. Wool socks they are the warmest. Make sure you have waterproof winter boots that are not too tight.

GENERATING MORE HEAT

- Continuous walking will keep you warm.
- Drink hot beverages such as coffee, tea or hot chocolate.
- Warm up at the bonfire.
- Eat some energy boosters such as chocolate, ever-present doughnuts etc.

REDUCE THE EFFECTS OF THE WIND

- Avoid exposing any parts of the body to prevent heat loss due to the wind.
- Wear clothing with a plastic/synthetic outer layer and cotton or down lining to insulate you against wind
- Wear a placard in front of your body. It will be an excellent shield against cold wind.

Finally, when you feel cold, take a short break inside a heated area. It's important to keep warm and stay healthy throughout this Strike. The Employer may not care, but we do!

DIARY (cont'd from p.1)

Thursday 14 March — I signed in at strike HQ, ran some signs and a sign-up sheet down to 400 University, then joined the strategic picket line at 720 Bay (Ministry of the Attorney General). The line was already large and grew larger until we encircled the entire building in a line two-to-three people wide at its peak. I met a few brothers and sisters from the Ontario Heritage Foundation (Local 568) – the start of an ongoing partnership, I hope. Anyway, there had to have been about 400 people there in all; when I left at 11:00 a.m., the line was actually having problems with congestion! The numbers definitely drew the media! What a morale booster!

Friday 15 March — Today, the strategic picket location was 400 University. The line grew slowly from until about 7:30 a.m., at which point the OPSEU mobilization staff started to herd us into formations to completely block all stairs and ramps. And it worked! By 8:30, all stairs and ramps were blocked with members standing shoulder-to-shoulder; picket lines circled in front of each set of stairs. There must have been 300 to 400 of us; every downtown cluster member and then some was there. As far as I could tell, no OPS worker got in without a considerable wait.

Zurich Canada staff seemed completely unprepared for this possibility. Their reactions spanned the full range from outrage and anger to total mystification. It took us a while to figure out how to deal with them. Ultimately, we accepted almost any form of identification. Even so, several Zurich employees literally assaulted the lines, resulting in some falls and a lot of pushing and shoving (*this bespeaks quite a corporate culture at Zurich Canada!* — ed.). They were remarkably desperate to get into work, despite our accepting virtually any ID! It was the only time in my life that I have been knocked over by a small woman (*surely not ANOTHER strain of "Tiny Tory"?! — ed.*)

The police arrived around 8:00 a.m. but did not interfere or become directly involved at any time. Ultimately, OPSEU's Mobilization team were told to shut down the line or some arrests would be made. The line was shut down. What a week — oops! — I mean, three days!

Monday 18 March — I arrived at Strike HQ at 7:00 a.m. and was recruited onto a school bus to go to Newmarket. Terry Downey and me and about 30 others rode up for the hearing on the contempt of court charge against Leah Casselman. About 250 members from all over central Ontario had gathered at the Newmarket courthouse. There was a folk singer, about a dozen police and — imagine this! — a little dose of justice in the end! Here's how things rolled out.

First we escorted Leah Casselman to the door of the courthouse where she addressed the assembled news media who were quite aggressive with one another in their attempts to position themselves. Then the OPSEU brothers and sisters returned to the burn barrel. Half-an-hour later, we met Leah and learned that all charges against her had been stayed. Another media scrum was followed by a bumpy school bus ride home.

Tuesday 19 March — The Ontario Hydro building at 700 University where there are SSB offices. This was a tough one to block since it has so many entrances, including the direct access tunnel from the Queen's Park subway station (*perhaps "Fink Alley" would be a more fitting description!* — ed.). Then we all marched to 777 Bay, home of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Another large information picket line - probably about 200 people! Very noisy with lots of singing and shouting. A contingent of Caribbean-Canadian women seemed to be doing the strategic picketing thing together and having a helluva good time to boot! Note to self: make a point of picketing with these women again! Fun, fun, fun — and on a picket line no less!

Wednesday 20 March — Ontario Heritage Foundation. Again. About 70 members at peak, including two volunteers from the Ontario Pension Trust (also Local 568 but not OPS and not even on strike!). We shut the place down, including a film shoot slated to start that morning. We blocked the front door and stopped a member of the film crew; he threatened to "...make us..." let him in.

Hmm...we interpreted this as a threat of physical violence (*could it be that the Zurich Canada virus is infectious?! — ed.*) So did the manager monitoring the situation. We faced him down and obtained the number of his union president. The latter was contacted by telephone and said no one from his union should cross a union picket line. He came down to the line immediately; he organized and moved the film crew as well as the shoot to another location. Sean Fraser did a super job as Local 568 picket captain! He thanked Locals 527 and 514 for their help. Can you spell "exciting"?

Thursday 21 March — Today it was 180 Dundas/123 Edward. Lots of entrances, but a good turnout and we made a lot of noise. I met Kelly O'Connell's father, the 35-year veteran Teamster member who talked a blue streak about unions and union history. I ended up at the back (on Edward Street), where I picketed with the Caribbean women and did a lot of chanting. At about 9:00 a.m., we collapsed the lines and marched as a group to the MacDonald Block where we were all served pancakes and sausages by the NDP. OPSEU President Leah Casselman spoke — something she's darned good at. But then, practice makes perfect!

Friday 22 March — I joined the bus tour to support Corrections Officers. We filled two very cushy highway cruiser buses and rode out to the Metro East Detention Centre. We unloaded and sang a song of appreciation to the Corrections Officers at one gate, marched over to another gate and did the same thing. A cold, barren, windswept location with the massive lock of the jail looming over us. Makes you think (*surely about how much warmer the "occupants" inside are!* — ed.) We were then addressed by a one of the largest, most extroverted individuals I have ever encountered! He was the vice-president of the Local. He led us on several marches around the parking lot, with stops to wave at the superintendent's office, and more stops to wave at the security guys filming the picketers. We loaded up and headed off to the Don Jail. Once there, we sang our song again and mingled with the Corrections crowd. Lots of gruesome stories about what goes on in there. They also gave us balloons and fed us chocolate bars. Picketing can be both fun and fattening!

Saturday 23 March — Rally with the OFL at the Tory leadership convention. W-O-W!!! (*see The People's Rally of 2002 by Justine Spamovitz, TIMES on the LINES Issue #2 — ed.*)

(Part Two of STRATEGICALLY STRONG – Diary of a Striker will appear in our next issue.)

IT'S A FACT : Apples, not caffeine, are more efficient at waking you up in the morning.

IT'S A FACT : Most dust particles in your home are made from dead skin.

IT'S A FACT : Marilyn Monroe had six toes on each foot.

Roasting Wienies

BY MILLER SAWYER

Wednesday 27 March — Today's strategic "wienie-roast" garnered a large turnout. Paul deRege is to be congratulated for recruiting a very fine marimba band - Nyamamusango - to provide entertainment and bolster spirits on our line. The day held many memorable moments. Here are a few highlights:

- Erstwhile vegetarian Nicole Stewart, aided and abetted by Sven Saring, flipping hot dogs (*flipping hot dogs?! That's a stretch! — ed.*) despite her dietary preferences!
- George Clare moving our two Big Yellow Banners down to face the northbound traffic, thereby permitting passing motorists to read the searing messages;
- Fausta Siu and all the pickets who helped out on the colder Simcoe Street side of the building ran a great line despite the fact that it was sometimes difficult to get others to join it or replace them. People were having too much fun at the front;
- CITY-TV filming our line and interviewing Terry Downey;
- Anne Weniger blocking cars on the 400 ramp and Malcolm Horne skillfully interviewing the drivers.

The intrepid Anne was ever-so-lightly bumped by a self proclaimed "Zurich Executive" when she jumped in front of the latter's SUV. Anne was quickly joined by a contingent of about four more OPSEU picketers. When Malcolm Horne asked the Zurich drone for any sort of ID she could produce (e.g. business card, Zurich letter, badge etc.), the alleged executive had nothing to offer (*except attitude, it would seem! — ed.*) "Do I look like a government worker?" she asked in a belligerent tone (*told you so! — ed.*) This perplexed us all. What does a government worker look like? Do we have something akin to the "mark of Cain" on our foreheads? (*at least we HAVE foreheads! — ed.*) Finally, the Zurich drone called her office and was identified by her secretary who came accompanied by two security officers. The latter looked thankful for the opportunity to get outside for a moment!

There were probably lots of other heroes, but at least this names a few!

At the end of the day when all had been cleaned up, some roving pickets from other Locals - in a burst of enthusiasm, no doubt - started stopping anyone from entering the building! But just for a little while...

(MILLER SAWYER is the collaborative pseudonym of two OPSEU Local 527 operatives)

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Between The Lines

BY MERRY-SPRING MEADOWS

Reporters are just now realizing how fickle is sensationalism. As the OPSEU strike moves into its fourth week, Ontarians need more than zippy headlines to explain why things are getting messy. Reporters may finally have to get out their pencil and calculators. What better way to generate attention than to remind Ontarians of their wallets?!

"Jailers on top earners' list" (*Toronto Sun*, 3 April). Why this sudden need to "...provide more accountable, open and transparent government by releasing an annual list of top public servant salaries" (*Toronto Sun*, 3 April)? Of course, they failed to note that the majority of these 'top earners' have nothing to do with the strike. It took Mike Klement of Guelph to provide some context in his letter to the editor. "As usual, your pro-Tory rag only reported half the truth. You say 19 provincial guards made over \$100,000 last year...first of all, that is 19 out of 35,000. Second, not mentioned is that the base salary of a jail guard is \$47,000, which means these 19 poor SOB's practically lived on their jobs to make that kind of money." (*Toronto Sun*, 4 April)

Not much is said about our salaries. But that would cause the wrong *kind* of sensationalism. After all, highlighting the fact that a fair deal is all we want wouldn't do. It might even generate more uncomfortable money questions. And incoming premier Ernie Eves has enough of those to deal with right now. "The liberal opposition is suggesting Mr. Eves should return the \$78,000 severance package he received when he resigned." (*National Post*, 1 April)

How important is the work we do? Very important, it seems, but its value goes mostly unnoticed. People haven't a clue about what it takes to keep things running smoothly. The problems now being felt aren't new but simply more noticeable with us not around to quietly mop things up. So perhaps absence does make the heart grow fonder.

One wonders if the government's sudden interest in getting back to the bargaining table may have more to do with keeping the dirty laundry of Harris' "Common Sense Revolution" well hidden. It's a good thing Ernie Eves "...remains fully committed to reaching a negotiated settlement ... that is fair to employees." (*Globe and Mail*, 1 April)

And I don't mean to be unfashionably blunt when I say: "Hey! Mr. Harris! Your 'slips' are showing. It's a pity you won't be around to share the embarrassment." Or is it?

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

IT'S A FACT : The liquid inside young coconuts can be used as a substitute for blood plasma.
