

PIGS AT THE TROUGH

“Common Sense” has an uncommonly high price!

BY DIOGENES

Last year, after 20-odd years in public office and following a self-approved 36.6% salary increase, Ernie "The Eel" Eves quit his job in order to hoof it through Bay Street's corridors of power. The decision made, he walked away from Queen's Park with a reported \$820,000 retirement fund and a \$78,000 severance package in his pocket and directly in to a high-paying job on Bay Street with Credit Suisse. This necessitated a costly by-election in his riding.

One year later, Mike "the Knife" Harris follows suit, pocketing payouts equivalent to those awarded his crony (... "partner-in-crime" surely?! — ed.) And while the Bay Street job (...don't you mean "sinecure"? — ed.) has yet to be announced, it's likely just a matter of time; Mike is said to be shopping for seven figures! By quitting, Harris also leaves the taxpayers with the \$400,000 bill for holding another by-election to fill his vacated seat.

But it gets richer (...while Ontarians get poorer! — ed.) Compounding this travesty is one Ernie Eves. Having found life on Bay Street somewhat wanting, he decides to return to the political arena. He gets himself appointed (...Diogenes baby! Don't you mean anointed? — ed.) to take over Harris's office. Then, too scared to risk his neck by running in Harris's vacated riding, Ernie The Eel forces another Tory MPP to resign so that he can run in a "safe" Tory riding. The cost to Ontarians? Another \$400,000. This is on top of the \$300,000 cost of the by-election that was held after he resigned his original seat last year.

Let's do the math here. Before it's all over and done, Harris and Eves, by their individual decisions and actions over the last 18 months, including the costs of the three by-elections, will ultimately have soaked Ontario taxpayers for over \$3,000,000.00, of which nearly two-thirds went directly into Mike's and Ernie's pockets! Oh, and this is exclusive of their actual salaries (...as well as the cost of "compensating" the MPP who had to step aside for Slick Ernie to run in a "safe" riding! — ed.)

(cont'd. See PIGS on page 2)

IT'S A FACT: American car horns beep in the key of F.

STRATEGICALLY STRONG

- Diary of a Striker (Part 2) -

BY MALCOLM HORNE

STRATEGIC PICKETING MAKES THE VERY MOST OF OUR REDUCED NUMBERS IN THE CURRENT OPSEU STRIKE. IN PART 2 OF HIS DIARY, MALCOLM HORNE SHARES A FEW HARD LESSONS ABOUT BLOCKING STAIRS, SUBWAY EXITS, WAITING, WEATHER AND EVEN A LITTLE ABOUT TINA LOUISE, THE "MOVIE STAR" OF GILLIGAN'S ISLAND FAME. NOT SINCE THE ANCIENT DAYS OF HOMER AND HIS ODYSSEY HAS ONE MAN'S LIFE BEEN SO ADVENTUROUS. READ ON!

Monday 25 March — Today's strategic picket was at the provincial courthouse (361 University Avenue). Our mission: to distribute flyers about the plight of unclassified courthouse workers. We were limited in what we could do since an injunction limiting any form of obstruction (apparently including picket lines) at the courthouse entrance had been issued (...a great disappointment to the throngs who had gathered to witness Malcolm attempt a quadruple Lutz on his roller blades! Oh well, there's always tomorrow! — ed.) As a news media event, however, it was a great success. The plight of unclassified courthouse workers made it into the news media. Furthermore, we received a positive reception from almost everyone to whom we handed flyers. At about 9:30 we set off for 400 University to finish the shift.

Tuesday 26 March — Kicked off the day at 155 University Avenue where we blocked stairs until about 9:15. Then the strategic picket was moved to 85 Richmond Street, the office of a temp agency. About 15 members were assigned to the street picket while 15 others went upstairs and marched into the agency unannounced. Led by Terry Downey and Gary Shaul, we all sat in the boardroom and discussed our concerns about the use of temps with the president. He was polite, listened attentively and assured us that he would look into some matters. Then, it was back to 400 University to finish our shifts. I topped off my day by going up to the Drum-In at MacDonald Block, where OPSEU received a solid show of support from several other unions and political organizations.

Wednesday March 27 — 400 University again (...yawn. This place should have a theme song or something! — ed.) Things were particularly well organized today — we did a GREAT job stopping all OPS workers and letting the

(cont'd. See DIARY on page 3)

PIGS (cont'd from page 1)

By comparison, if you or I were to simply up and quit our jobs, what would we get? Bupkis, nada, nil, nothing (...*what about "zip"?! — ed.*) And if we quit, we would be further penalized with an extra waiting period of several weeks when we try to collect (un)employment insurance.

We're well rid of Harris; some would argue that it would have been worth almost any price to get shut of him. But now we have Dapper Ernie to contend with. This is the guy who was appointed to the Premier's office by a mere 0.16% of the population; the same guy who, according to *The Toronto Star*, spends \$30,000 annually on clothes alone (...*you mean that doesn't include the hair products!?! — ed.*); the same guy who has already snookered taxpayers to the tune of about \$1,700,000.00. And he hasn't even taken office yet! Heaven help us all!!

(**DIOGENES**, in a former incarnation, was a Greek philosopher and teacher. In this incarnation, **DIOGENES** "walks the lines" with/for OPSEU. See <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/d/diogsino.htm> for further information on **DIOGENES**' "Greek period".)

WE GET MAIL!

CORRESPONDENCE FROM *TIMES ON THE LINES* READERS

Dear Editor: I really enjoyed Issue 3 of *Times on the Lines*. I laughed, I cried, and I couldn't believe the part about Marilyn Monroe.... Please Thank Malcolm Horne for his diary. I am enjoying reading about his adventures on the strategic picket line. I can't wait to find out where he went next, and what happened... — Melissa Gordon

Dear Editor: The latest newsletter (Issue #3) is extremely entertaining and informative. I thought that the bit about Marilyn Monroe having six toes was just an urban legend! Malcolm's diary is particularly good. I had no idea that he was gallivanting about so far afield. I don't know how he has managed to keep his temper in check what with all the "finks" he's had to deal with. Good on you both!

Now that the employer is back at the bargaining table, please convey to the bargaining team that, at least among those with whom I talk every day on the lines, most of us are prepared to stay out for as long as it takes to get a fair settlement. Don't accept a weak offer just because some folks think that "...we've been out long enough...". It's not about money! At this point, any purely monetary benefits we might gain have already been lost due to the length of the Strike. This is money we will never make back. We must, therefore, concentrate on forcing the employer to back down on their other outrageous demands. It's not about money but about respect for civil servants, respect for the work we do, respect for our retirees, respect for the public, and above all, fairness and equity for all.

— Chris J.-Andersen

(*We shall never, ever write another word about Ms. Monroe! It's a FACT!* — ed.)

JUST A LITTLE STORY

BY RÉAL S. TATE

It is the morning of the last day of the month when real estate purchases can be registered. I've heard that a long wait is expected because of the OPSEU strike. I am planning on going to the Registry Office to do some research on my house (and check out that long line!). I have to worry about my clothes this morning because I want to blend in with the legal beagles and clerks. I spend 15 minutes removing dog hairs from my black wool pants. I bring my black briefcase, a portable CD player and my copy of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. I remove all political buttons from my coat. My disguise is complete. I look like nobody I want to know!

Accompanied by a friend, I enter the Atrium on Bay. We approach a very busy security guard and ask her where the Registry Office is. (I think security guards should thank us for bringing such infinite variety to their usually boring work-lives). The guard told us the line up was downstairs in the atrium.

The line was very long, starting at a bank of elevators and circling to the end of the mall and back to where it started. I took my place in line and made friends with my line mates, most of whom appeared to be quite agitated about the delay. They were confused and anxious, but not blaming anyone in particular for the wait.

I commenced my wait at 11:00 a.m. By Noon, I had made it upstairs to a scene of pandemonium — clerks shouting into cell phones, yelling at co-workers. I was given two folders with numbers in the mid 400's. Apparently, the rule is "two folders per customer"; those needing to register more transactions had to go to the back of the line for more folders. I heard one person call out plaintively: "\$100 bucks for a folder!" I admit it, I was tempted. Strike pay ain't great! But I held my peace (and my folders), not wanting to call attention to myself. By the time I got up to the Title Search area, I decided it was a bit busy and declared I would come back another time. I felt a little sorry for all those agitated people being held up from doing their jobs by a government that does not value its staff or its services enough to keep supplying them.

On my way out someone warned me that "...There's demonstration coming!" I thanked them and stepped back into the familiar world of OPSEU pickets blowing whistles and banging drums up and down Dundas Street. What a lovely day!

(**RÉAL S. TATE** is a pseudonym of an OPSEU member who undertook this little experiment and did NOT make \$200 for her/his trouble. *TIMES on the LINES* thanks her/him most profusely.)

IT'S A FACT: The king of hearts is the only king in the deck without a moustache.

DIARY (cont'd from page 1)

Zurich workers (...*drones, surely!* — ed.) pass through. I was at the entrance to the parking garage this time. Every OPSer I encountered was cooperative, patient and pleasant (...*I think this is called "support" under the circumstances! Ernie, are you listening?* — ed.) Despite having been forewarned (most Zurich workers actually had letters with them issued by their HR Department to help identify them), a few Zurich people chose to be very "political" and put up a very big fuss, refusing to show any ID at all (...*my stars! What "cojones" these number-crunchers have!* — ed.) We finished up the shift with a "most excellent wienie roast".

AFTER A 5-DAY LEAVE, MALCOLM RETURNS TO THE LINES....

Tuesday 2 April — By 6:40 a.m., we're at 80 Grosvenor. Things there have become routine. People show up and do their jobs, each knowing exactly what is expected. Doors are blocked, stickies with times at which entry will be allowed are issued to people waiting to enter. The time is announced monotonously at one-minute intervals as if by some medieval night watchman announcing the hours. People waiting don't stand in line; rather, they pose among the pillars, some gazing vacantly into space, others listening to Walkmans, still others engaging in desultory conversations with colleagues and/or pickets. When their time is announced, they spring to life and move rapidly through the doors. I have the not uncommon experience of engaging in one of those desultory conversations with a former colleague (now in management). There's an awkwardness to our exchange arising from our different roles in this drama.

Later, Gary Shaul comes marching through with a group destined for the legendary "Fink Alley", the tunnel linking Queen's Park subway station and Queen's Park itself. He's looking for volunteers. Along with Tamara Anson-Cartwright and Nicole Stewart, I fall in with Gary's merry band of pickets. We arrive at the subway station's northeast entrance. At the bottom of the stairs, we're met with the remarkable sight of some 30-40 well-dressed government workers clustered in a tight group facing the doors to the tunnel. They're doing their 10-minute wait. Three or four OPSEU pickets are blocking the doors. We join them. Gary chats with some members from Oshawa who have dropped in to join the Fink Alley picket. This, we learn, has become pretty routine. The Oshawa people leave after a bit and, shortly after, all but four of us leave as well. Within 20 minutes, there is only one CUPE volunteer and a guy called "Joe" whose last name I didn't catch.

Joe works with the picket captain to time the entry of the queue of waiters. TTC cops observe this activity, appearing highly amused by it all. Time passes; our little band shrinks some more. Joe and I continue our jobs until about 10:15, at which point the queue is non-existent. Two women who have been controlling the flow of waiters to the door tell us

that they often handle this be themselves! Amazing! Joe and I head over to 900 Bay for the rally. I confide to him that my experience at Fink Alley has left me feeling like a combination shepherd/POW camp guard. The waiters were very much like a cross between sheep and POWs. Strangely dehumanizing for all concerned, we agree.

We reach 900 Bay. It's snowing hard. About 300 people march in large picket lines. The rally hasn't started. I head over to the front doors. I encounter several of the usual strategic pickets (Warwick Bignell, Winston Wong, Nicole Stewart, Heather Thomson, Tamara Anson-Cartwright) and some Local 568ers from the Ontario Heritage Foundation. To my surprise, they're blocking the doors. This is usually the job of MacDonald Block workers. I join them. Shortly after, one guy tries to skip the wait and get in. He argues with pickets at the door, then comes over and argues with me, Tamara and Nicole – the usual tired logic about his right to enter, we have no right to stop him, yadda-yadda-yadda. He apparently fails to recognize the fact that there are 50 or so others patiently and cooperatively waiting in line. The picket captain comes over and starts arguing with him. He abandons our door and moves on to argue with others for several minutes. Finally, about half-a-dozen pickets break into a loud "Solidarity Forever" directly in his face, at which point he gives up and gets in line (...*I react the same way to even ONE person singing You Light Up My Life!* — ed.)

The rally begins. Lots of flags. A folk singer. A big crowd. Lots of noise. A solid speech by Leah Casselman followed by one from Howard Hampton encouraging us to stand strong. Wayne Samuelson of the OFL and the presidents of several other unions encourage us. Then Leah asks everyone to begin marching to the Colony Hotel for a rally at the Romanow Commission's hearing on the public health system/medicare. We cluster at the edge of the sidewalk and step out onto Bay Street. Escorted by bicycle cops, we march down the right-hand lane, filling it in with a human column about two or three hundred yards long. We arrive at the Colony, where a large crowd with lots of flags and banners is waiting. We are loudly welcomed; we double the size of the crowd. I circulate for about 10 minutes. Soaking wet and freezing cold, I decide that I'd better go home. As I leave, a mounted policeman jokes with me, saying "You can't leave!" I don't have much of a reply for that.

Wednesday 3 April — I arrive at One Yonge Street, home of both *The Toronto Star* and the Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA), pronounced "aukwah". At 7:00, we deploy and start picketing. We start at the main entrance; by 7:30 we're covering all four doors. I end up at the back door to *The Toronto Star* wing where I have many interesting discussions with Star workers entering the

(cont'd. See **DIARY** on page 4)

IT'S A FACT: Walt Disney was afraid of mice!.

DIARY (cont'd from page 3)

building, a Teamster who wants to know if he can make a delivery and a member of the OPSEU Board killing time until a meeting. We've been told that 28 of 30 OCWA members have crossed here. During a work-site inspection; none of the alleged 28 are around, but we see many apparently empty and abandoned OPSEU work-stations. We're suspicious, but what can you do?

We stage a successful information picket, talk to lots of people, attract *muchos* attention from workers in the building and passing motorists. Local 527 makes a strong appearance. At the end, I hike back to Strike HQ with Winston Wong and a chap named Ivan, whom I had met previously at the first 400 University mass picket. Ivan regales us with tales of his membership in the *Gilligan's Island* fan club, including his in-depth knowledge of the life of Tina Louise (...ah, the "Movie Star"! Personally, I always preferred "Lovey" aka Mrs. Howell! — ed.) and the *Gilligan's Planet* movie (...damn it! I missed that cinematic masterpiece! — ed.) What you learn on the picket line!

Thursday 4 April — Picketed the OHRC at 180 Dundas West and the Ministry of Citizenship at 123 Edward Street. Good turnout, strong lines. I'm starting to recognize certain faces from other strategic picket locations; I chatted with several of them since it was a pretty quiet. Stuck around until 10:00 and then went to 777 Bay, home of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. Well over 200 people there. The Fox-40 whistles were deafening. Left with ears ringing!

Friday 5 April — Local Lines day. Started around 7:15. Everyone knows the routine now. Most workers seem resigned to turning up at the line and waiting. Several members in attendance at the OPSEU convention all the way down from Kenora showed up for the first hour-and-a-half! Good barbecue out back. Note: Never allow tofu wieners to be exposed to high flames, it results in parts of the wiener skin inflating like balloons, a truly unnerving (as well as disgusting) sight (...hey! We "veggies" think your meat wieners are made of ground up cows' lips, eyelids and — oh, nevermind! — ed.)

EXTRA! EXTRA! An OPSEU bargaining team insider tells us that the "leaked memo" report in *THE TORONTO STAR* (11 April) saying that the Strike would likely continue for 2 to 3 more weeks is a ploy to demoralize strikers. The same ploy - almost the exact same words and originating from the same government desk at the same point in the bargaining process - was used during the Strike of '96. Didn't your mother always tell you not to believe everything you read? Just so you know...

TIMES on the LINES is published by Local 527. Contact Georges Tremblay (Tel.: 416-763-0448 or e-mail: geotrem@attcanada.ca) or Marilyn Miller (Tel: 416-769-1872 or e-mail: marilyn.miller1@rogers.com) with your comments or ideas.

Between The Lines

BY MERRY-SPRING MEADOWS

Dear Media-types: So sorry to disturb, but I thought someone should let you know the times have changed. Yup! The clocks have moved forward. In case you aren't familiar with this "spring forward" concept, it requires action, the expending of energy as in "movement" or — my stars! — initiative! Are you with me? Not from the evidence I've been reading of late!

So I understand Margaret McCorman's dismay in her letter to *THE TORONTO STAR* (7 April): "The media seem to be slanted against the OPSEU strike. Either...the press doesn't understand the issues or the media have been swayed by the 'cash cow' of advertising dollars the Tory government has offered...in the form of propaganda (at the taxpayer's expense, I might add)." Margaret is a nurse, an OPSEU member and apparently quite awake.

If you doubt my assertion that many in the province actually need you, read some of the other letters that have been pouring in from certain other "concerned citizens".

For example, Ms. Vivienne So enquired: "When did Canadian public servants become so selfish? It's their right to ask for higher wages, but they should know better than to be so reckless and to put all our lives at stake." (*Toronto Star*, 1 April) There's a lady in dire need of an information infusion! Or John Fava, who believes the "...TTC and OPSEU workers believe they deserve more than cops, nurses or firefighters..." (*Toronto Star*, 1 April) Someone really needs to update that chap as well, dontcha think?

A pity Vivienne and John hadn't had the opportunity to read the letter from Paul McMaster, a Corrections Officer at the Toronto Don Jail who described how and why he became "...the third highest paid correctional officer in the province in 2001." Paul wrote: "... this overtime is forced upon you when your supervisor says, 'I'm ordering you to stay.' I don't have a job where I can simply walk away when I'm finished my shift...The people I work with are physically tired, they're fed up with being bashed in the media, and basically demoralized with their jobs. But even after the threats on their lives, the violence they have to endure at times, and the unsafe working conditions they face every day, they still come to work. Why? Because they're professionals." (*Toronto Star*, 7 April)

Now I'm sure that you alleged journalists would be springing into action to rectify all this misinformation about what civil servants do, how we're paid and what our work lives are actually like if you had simply been informed about the time(s) change. Consider this your wake-up call. *Hugs and Kisses* — Merry-Spring (Forward) Meadows

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