

FEAR AND LOATHING IN ORANGEVILLE

BY MARILYN MILLER

April 22 — Four of us drive up to Orangeville to “find Ernie”. Privately, I hope we recognize the man if we run across him. After all, the face he’s been presenting to the public lately bears little resemblance to the one with which most of us are familiar. More than one of us reflects upon how his new song and lyrics seem more than unrelated to the realities of the lives of most striking OPSEU members.

According to the plan, we meet up at a local arena with approximately two thousand other strikers who were bussed in from surrounding communities. From there, we march to Ernie election headquarters located in a local strip mall.

The streets are virtually deserted. Orangeville has become a bedroom community for people who commute daily to jobs in Mississauga and Toronto. Most people are out of town during the day. We stop what little traffic there is on one half of the main street, which is only about six blocks long, as we march along for a couple of blocks. We receive approving honks from a good proportion of the few cars and trucks driving along in the other lane.

Any “Ernie” signs we see have received a little bonus – an “Ernie Let’s Talk” sticker. One irate homeowner storms out of his house and defends his sign, thinking we meant to take it away. He doesn’t seem to notice the sticker attached to it. Another home has a more welcoming sign in their window: “Ernie, it’s not a cake-walk”. This blunt message is accompanied by numerous “Green” signs in the front yard.

The march line is very long, maybe the biggest parade this town has seen since the Orange parades of old. We go by one of my old projects – The Dufferin County Courthouse – from the days when the ministry responsible for culture provided grants to support the restoration of heritage buildings. The Courthouse really looks quite beautiful.

(Cont’d. See **FEAR AND LOATHING** on page 2)

IT’S A FACT: The citrus soda 7-UP was created in 1929; “7” was selected because the original containers held seven ounces; “UP” indicated the direction of the bubbles.

LOCAL 527 NEEDS STEWARDS!

BY ROD SAWYER, LOCAL 527 PRESIDENT

You’ve become active in your Local and are helping us win this Strike. Why not stay active after we get our contract and go back to work? Local 527 needs more Stewards.

We need good Stewards to represent co-workers. We need Stewards to handle workplace disputes. We need Information Stewards to ensure that vital information is passed along to every Local 527 member.

Ideally, there should be a Steward in every Unit or one Steward for every 10 members. Right now, some of our Stewards cover several floors – that’s dozens of members! – and are over-extended. Your existing Steward would welcome some help, so don’t be shy about volunteering. Stewards can share responsibilities on floors or within branches.

More Stewards could help us get management to post positions now filled by fee-for-service staff. More Stewards could help us get unclassified members converted to classified. Right now we could use more Stewards at the following locations in the ministries and floors that Local 527 serves:

Location: 400 University

Ministry: Labour

Stewards are needed for Floors 14, 12, 10, 7

Location: 400 University

Ministries: Citizenship, Tourism, Culture

Stewards required for the following floors/branches:

Information Technology (8th Floor); Communications Branch and Deputy’s Office (6th Floor); Arts and Cultural Industries (5th Floor); Floor 2.

Location: 505 University:

The Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) requires three or four more Stewards.

If you’re interested, please let any member of Local 527’s executive. All Local executive members can be located on the picket lines. Alternatively, leave your name and telephone number at Local 527’s Strike headquarters. When we are all back on the job, you can reach Local 527 executive members as follows:

(cont’d. See **STEWARDS** on page 2)

IT’S A FACT: Pearls melt in vinegar.

STEWARDS (cont'd from page 1)

Rod Sawyer: Bus. Tel. 314-7627 or e-mail Rod at his personal address at rod.sawyer@sympatico.ca;
John Carter: Bus. Tel: 314-7151;
Ruth E. Adams: Bus. Tel: 326-7329;
Victoria Lernell: Bus. Tel: 326-7662;
Paul DeRege: Bus: Tel. 314-7335.

FEAR AND LOATHING (cont'd from page 1)

Finally, we arrive at Ernie's office. A party atmosphere quickly establishes itself. We listen to speeches by: Bruce Davidson of Concerned Walkerton Citizens; Doug Wilcox, the local NDP candidate; and Josh Matlow, the Liberal candidate. Leah Casselman addresses the crowd as well. Hot dogs are served, songs sung, photos taken, old friends greeted and much "strike-talk" exchanged. Flyers are distributed which detail the significant sums Ernie has received lately and will receive in the not-too-distant future – an \$810,000 lump sum payment when the MPP's pension plan was re-structured, \$78,007 in severance when he resigned his seat in 2001, his current Premier's salary of \$148,384 per year (plus a generous benefits package), the three per-cent increase he's scheduled to receive in 2003 and the 25% pay raise after the next election if he remains premier. Naturally, not to put too cynical a spin on it, what's on everybody's mind is: "Geez, and to think all we want is a fair contract and no rollback of gains won in the past!"

The seven buses of OPSEU members load up and drive off to leaflet all the neighbourhoods in the riding with OPSEU material about cuts to public services. We're determined to ensure that this by-election won't be a cakewalk for Ernie. This is one man who has already helped himself to far too much pie! And we're sick of being told we should be happy with the crumbs he and his Tories leave in their wake.

GOD BLESS YOU, MR. STEFANIUK

Does the name Walter Stefaniuk ring any bells for you? If not, it sure will by the time you've finished reading this short piece. Walter Stefaniuk writes the YOU ASKED US column for *The Toronto Star*. In a response to a reader's inquiry published in the April 24 edition, Mr. Stefaniuk explained that the OPSEU strike is the reason for the current absence of the air pollution counts which normally appear on the weather page of that daily paper, adding: "The myriad tasks civil servants do are taken for granted, it seems, until they are gone either due to layoffs or, in this case, a strike." God bless you, Walter Stefaniuk! — ed.

IT'S A FACT: The first CD pressed in the United States was Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA".

SPOT THE HERO

– ODE TO A CANINE SYMPATHIZER –
BY SHAKESPEARSON

Spot is a good dog, that can't be denied,
Marching from Day One of this Strike with pride
Beside his dear mistress, one Janet Barnard,
Instead of cavorting in his own backyard.

He never complained, that Spot never bitched,
He didn't stop marching to scratch when he itched!
No canine we've known has shown such dedication!
What a spokesman is Spot for his breed - the Dalmatian!

But as you all know, the Lines can be depressing,
The wind, cold and rain can be downright distressing!

So one day Spot, feeling consid'rably blue,
Took it into his head to cross the Avenue.
Against a red light Spot marched into the traffic!
The images this evoked all were quite graphic.

All the OPSEU strikers cried: "Spot! Please come back!"
But Spot didn't hear them and hit the tarmac.
Spot ended up on University Island,
When he stopped to glance back, I believe he was smilin'!

Y'know, striking's a dog's life, we all know it's true,
But here was one dog smarter than me and you!

Spot had chosen to break a brain-numbing routine
And as a result created quite a scene!
Now issues of canine brain let's put aside
And regard what dear Spot did with more than just pride!

For Spot did alone something we'd only seen
It take thousands of us to do April 15!

Spot stopped all the cars, the trucks and SUVs,
And had all his pals begging down on their knees!

His friends they retrieved him alive and quite well,
And Spot went home early which he thought quite swell!

In the end, y'know, Spot did indeed get his way,
But returned to the Lines on the very next day,
With his good friend Bam-Bam who is somewhat smaller,
You might even say Spot is several heads taller!

Bam-Bam the Chihuahua and Spot the Dalmatian
March on to this day with the OPSEU nation!

(SHAKESPEARSON is a Toronto-area freelance writer and frequent contributor to this publication.)

IT'S A FACT: AMAPCEO staff at 400 University have raised over \$3,200 for Local 527's hardship fund. Fundraising is ongoing. **TIMES on the LINES** and Local 527 wish to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt appreciation to these wonderful people "on the inside". We take great comfort in knowing you are on our side.

IT'S A FACT: 1 in every 4 Americans has been on TV.

STRATEGICALLY STRONG

- Diary of a Striker (Part 4) -

BY MALCOLM HORNE

STRATEGIC PICKETING MAKES THE VERY MOST OF OUR REDUCED NUMBERS IN THE CURRENT OPSEU STRIKE. IN PART 4 OF HIS DIARY, MALCOLM HORNE REPORTS ON HIS EXPERIENCES AS AN UNDERCOVER OPSEU AGENT, WAXES PHILOSOPHICAL ABOUT PARANOID CORPORATE CULTURES AND HANDS OUT AWARDS TO PARTICULARLY OBNOXIOUS INDIVIDUALS HE'S ENCOUNTERED IN HIS TIMELESS QUEST FOR THE PERFECT PICKET LINE. READ ON!

Monday 15 April — see WAITING FOR ERNIE (*TIMES on the LINES*, Issue #5, 19 April 2002).

Tuesday 16 April — Going back to the lines after the big rally was a bit of a letdown. Nonetheless, a strong turnout at the Ministry of Health building at Yonge and Eglinton. Strikebreakers trying to enter were invariably surrounded by crowds of 30 or more pickets chanting "Go home" until they turned around and left. At about 9:00, they launched their 'project' which involved 40 pickets entering the building without warning demanding that the strikebreakers inside leave immediately. After about 20 minutes of negotiations, which included police, they left peacefully.

Wednesday 17 April — Back at MacDonald Block. Somehow I missed the building invasion at 77 Wellesley Street West, where over 50 members entered and went up to Tsubouchi's office. By the time they reached his office, it was dark and full of security guards. However, the corridor added a charming echo effect to their chants, so they stayed made noise for 20 minutes. At around 10:00, I went on door-blocking duty (they always seem to need somebody, come on up and try it some time!) Pickets so enjoyed the first building invasion that they decided on an encore performance at the Grosvenor Street entrance. At approximately 11:00, they passed through the main lobby behind us; we flung open the doors to allow about a hundred people to join the 100 already inside. Even from outside you could hear their noise as they screamed and chanted their way through the lobby. I left before they'd finished their "walkabout".

One other thing: while they were inside, me and other door-blockers encountered several people who claimed to have lost the time-slips they'd been handed when they joined the line-up waiting to enter. Hmm... makes me wonder how they manage the rest of their lives.

Special Cheapo Tin Stars to the two older guys with English accents who, incapable of waiting their turn, complained and made comments about Maggie Thatcher's abilities to deal with unions. Another Cheapo Tin Star to the young woman who walked up to the door with two identical cell phones, talking into one while carrying the other ready-to-go in her other hand (...*self-importance comes in so many colours nowadays, huh?* — ed.) Without

stopping her conversation, she told us she was late for a meeting and just had to get in. We made her wait. We saw her leave later, still engaging in the same multi-tasking performance (...*we favour the comment: "Your voice sounds so familiar! Don't you work at 1-976-SPANK Me?"* — ed.) The Most Childish Dolt Award goes to the suited dude who, when asked for his time-slip, put his hand up to his nose and either pretended to or actually did blow his time-slip out of his nostrils (...*under-endowed and/or small-brained "men" are capable of incredible antics to puff themselves up, aren't they?* — ed.) On a brighter note, a Special Gold Star to the Chinese delegation whose escort, also with an English accent, made a point of seeking out the picket captain, arranging to have the group do its 10-minute wait in a separate area and then file in with him. While they waited, they took numerous photos of pickets, especially of two small dogs wearing their own picket signs.

Thursday 18 April — The Registry Office. Some members have made a routine of going there, waiting in line and then asking dumb questions when their turn comes up. Anything to slow down the process! Past experience with the Registry Office has familiarized me with this unique corporate culture of title searchers and paralegals. Already a paranoid crew, they see "OPSEU sabotage" in every unfamiliar face now. It's actually very funny. We actually don't need to send another OPSEU member there for the rest of the strike; this culture is so intrinsically paranoid that it now sabotages itself! Time-consuming speculation among managers and staff about who is or isn't an OPSEU infiltrator is doing the job for us. Furthermore, managers there really don't know the business of the Registry Office, referring a large percentage of inquiries to other staff (...*as in: "Can you tell me where the washroom is?"* — ed.)

Friday 19 April — Me and about 45 others got on a school bus to visit Dan Newman's (associate minister of Health) constituency office in Scarborough. Several OPSEU members who live in the area met up with us there. Terry Downey took an advance party and scouted out the location. The initial plan was for all of us to enter the office and fill it up with people and noise while Terry and several of Newman's constituents presented their demands. However, since the office location is so small, only Terry and the constituents entered. The rest of us formed a picketed outside and made one hell of a lot of noise about half an hour. Some neighbouring store owners called the police, who showed up but did nothing to stop us. Unfortunately, Newman was not there. Downey and her crew presented their demands to his assistants. We stayed a little longer just to prove we could, then we departed peacefully. This strategic picketing thing takes its toll!

IT'S A FACT: A Boeing 747's wingspan is longer than the Wright brothers' first flight.

A LOCAL 527 TELEPHONE LIEUTENANT SPEAKS OUT!

A Local 527 phone tree lieutenant sent *TIMES on the LINES* the message reproduced below. The lieutenant asked to remain anonymous, doubtless because lieutenants already spend enough time on the phone! The term “common sense” has become somewhat notorious in Ontario, due in no small measure to how the Harris administration perverted the concept to its own ends. Nonetheless, genuine common sense remains all too uncommon. Take a look!

"In an effort to encourage people to stay on the picket line, I have tried to explain how important it is to support OPSEU in its determination to maintain decent pensions and benefits for our members. In an era in which governments around the globe are coming to terms with the undeniable realities of aging populations, it is important for us to ensure that we are not stripped of the pensions and benefits we've worked so hard to build up when we need them most. All our working lives, we have contributed to pensions and paid for benefits in order to ensure decent incomes and benefit coverage in the years we need them most. We must take to heart the importance of these two issues and protect the investments we have made? Why must not allow the this government to dictate how we manage our share of the pension surplus when they already have half of it to do with as they will? If we do not support the OPSEU at this time, we may well have no bargaining chips at all next time around! Collectively we have some say, but if we are constantly looking for someone to blame for present difficulties, then we put a powerful tool of destruction in the hands of government and bureaucrats. To me, it's really very simple: united we stand, divided we are at their mercy. If we cede control of our own affairs, then we will have only ourselves to blame. I also ask all of you to remember the many initiatives this government has rammed through without public input – initiatives which have left the public without support and services. Imagine trying to negotiate with people like that! It is a hard fact that these Tory politicians care only about themselves and how they can milk the system by using government tools (including legislation, as we are seeing in the case of selling off Ontario Hydro) to get away with it! Then they take umbrage in the questionable assertion that they have been “democratically elected”, and the public be damned! We must not let these people steal from us! We must stand together or we'll all lose everything. This government doesn't care!"

TIMES on the LINES is published by Local 527. Contact Georges Tremblay (Tel.: 416-763-0448 or e-mail: geotrem@atcanada.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

Well, my head is simply spinning! Keeping up with all the proclamations and accusations is becoming harder than watching... actually, I can't think of anything harder at this point. What's a girl to do? It's been almost six weeks since the fun and games began and there's still no end in sight. So we walk round and round in circles – watching, waiting and trying to keep the hope alive that those aren't fangs peeping out from behind Ernie's blinding pearly whites.

"My management style obviously isn't the same as Mike Harris'. I think... (I) will have a more inclusive approach... (seeking) input from the people in the front lines every day... it's important to listen to those people and hear what they have to say. Heaven forbid, you might actually learn something." (*Toronto Star*, 20 April). Bloody inspiring, that is! Now that you've warmed the cockles of our hearts, do start reading the writing on the wall! "Eves faces tough crowd at riding's lone debate" (*Toronto Sun*, 23 April). Surely you've noticed that the recent Tory popularity contest is over? You'll achieve greater popularity – not to mention respect – by addressing the pressing issues immediately at hand. Keeping your side of the bargaining team in line instead of leaving that to us would go a long way in clearing up some of the confusion: "Government negotiating unfairly, OPSEU charges" (*The Globe & Mail*, 23 April). And, oh yes, what's up with those 'mystifying statements' that Leah Casselman mentioned – statements which more than suggest that "...they (Eves and Management Board's David Tsubouchi) are unaware of the real issues in play." (*The Globe and Mail*, 23 April). Just how many times do you need an invitation to pop down into the trenches where all can be so easily explained?

Although striking OPSEU members may appear to have been walking round in circles these past few weeks, we've not grown giddy yet. "Tories out to soothe labour" (*The Toronto Sun*, 18 April) The OFL's president Wayne Samuelson isn't buying it, either: "... (I) will not meet with (Minister of Labour) Clark until the strike with provincial civil servants is resolved." (*Toronto Sun*, 18 April)

Ernie, you're dangerously close to proving your accusers right: "Eves was challenged by his rivals and jeered from the loudest part of the 700-strong audience with boos and taunts of 'liar'." (*Toronto Sun*, 23 April).

To quote an old hit by The Who: "Meet the new boss / Same as the old boss!" When next they get the chance to vote, I suspect Ontarians won't get fooled again.

(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 sound of E.T. walking was made by someone squishing their hands in jelly.