

The Tentative Agreement: Take It or Leave ItBY **DIOGENES**

Well, there's a tentative agreement on the table and we're each going to have to decide for ourselves whether it's a winner or a loser. It may be hard to reach that decision objectively given the financial and other pressures to get back to work that we're all facing. With that in mind, I've have taken a look at the major issues to compare what we're now being offered to what we originally demanded and, in some instances, to what AMAPCEO received. While my study of the offer may not have been as detailed as I would like due to the time constraints under which I was working, I hope that this information will help you understand some of what's been agreed to on some of the main issues.

WAGES: Before the strike started OPSEU was demanding a contract that included basic salary increases of 6% per year in each year of a two-year contract. The employer was offering 1.95% in each year of a three-year contract. The terms of the tentative agreement are: 1.95% + 0.55% "special adjustment" + 1.0% for "productivity and efficiency gains" for a total of 3.5% in the first year; 1.95% + 0.5% "special adjustment" for a total of 2.45% in the second year; and 2.5% in the third year, for a grand total of 8.45% over the life of the three-year contract. On top of this, as I read it, the employer is offering an additional 1% in the first year *or* 2% in the second year *or* 3% in the third year to employees at the top of their salary range; these increases are based on "satisfactory performance".

SCHED. 6 OVERTIME: For those of us in Schedule 6, the employer has most generously offered to compensate any overtime worked between 36.25 and 48 hrs per week with lieu time to be calculated at the rate of ½ hour for each hour worked, to be taken by the end of the calendar year. If all accumulated lieu time is not used up by June 30 of the following calendar year, the employee will be paid a lump sum for the remaining hours based on this 'half-time for overtime' formula. AMAPCEO also agreed to this clause; it is insulting nonetheless.

PENSION FUND: In this one area, we clearly "won", that is, we retain control of our share of the pension fund. This

means that continued access to the OPSEU Pension Trust **may permit** us to use the OPSEU-controlled surplus in the fund to extend Factor 80 to all members instead of just to those being surplus.

FACTOR 80: The employer has agreed to allow the union to continue to fund Factor 80 for the life of the new contract, **but only for surplus employees** (i.e. those facing layoff). If you are approaching Factor 80 and were anticipating early retirement sometime within the next three years, the only way you're going to get it is if your position has been, or will soon be, terminated.

BENEFITS: This gets confusing. In exchange for some improvements to our benefits in a few areas, on the whole we lose more than we gain. Examples: we lose prescription drug coverage while out of the country on vacation; generic drug substitution is mandatory; over-the-counter drugs are no longer covered; and we'll now have to pay a deductible for every prescription (\$5 each in the third year of the contract). The proposed changes to our dental plan include a new \$100/yr deductible and maintaining a one-year fee schedule lag that may require you to pay the difference between what the dentist charges, based on the current schedule, and what the employer will pay, based on last year's schedule. Neither of these clauses is present in AMAPCEO's agreement.

"TERM CLASSIFIEDS": Get used to them, folks. We're agreeing to allow the employer to bring in up to 700 of them.

For the rest of the issues that have been under negotiation, I urge you to read the various documents on the OPSEU Web-site and make up your own mind. The employer's "final" offer was presented on a 'take it or leave it' basis. Or else what? Over the course of this strike the employer has saved nearly a quarter of a billion dollars on our backs. Those are savings that you and I have paid for directly out of our pockets. It's up to you to decide whether 52 days on the line was worth it and then to vote according to your conscience.

PAWS FOR THOUGHT

BY STRATA G. O'MINE

WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF A RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE ON THE HORIZON, IT'S TIME TO COME TO TERMS WITH A FEW HARSHER REALITIES. AFTER ALL, IT'S GOING TO BE A BIT OF A ZOO "INSIDE" WHEN WE DO RETURN, SO IT'S TIME TO CONSIDER WHAT SPECIES YOU WISH TO JOIN. WE AT *TIMES on the LINES* WANT TO MAKE THIS PROCESS AS PAINLESS, AS PRODUCTIVE AND AS MUCH FUN AS POSSIBLE. WE OFFER FOR YOUR INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION THE FOLLOWING "FOUND MANUSCRIPTS". BARKY WOOFER'S CANINE DIARY SPEAKS VOLUMES ABOUT WHAT "A DOG'S LIFE" IS ALL ABOUT. SIMILAR INSIGHTS CAN BE GAINED BY PERUSING THE EXCERPTS BELOW FROM THE DIARY OF MAJESTY, A FELINE OF UNSPECIFIED GENDER.

BARKY WOOFER'S DIARY

8:00 a.m. – Wow! Dog food! My favourite!
9:00 a.m. – Wow! A walk! My favourite!
10:00 a.m. – Wow! A car ride! My favourite!
11:00 a.m. – Wow! Dog food! My favourite!
12 Noon – Wow! The kids! My favourite!
1:00 p.m. – Wow! The yard! My favourite!
3:00 p.m. – Wow! A bone to chew on! My favourite!
5:00 p.m. – Wow! Dog food! My favourite!
8:00 p.m. – Wow! A Walk! My favourite!
11:00 p.m. – Wow! Sleeping on the rug! My favourite!

Every entry for every day of Barky Woofers' life is exactly the same.

MAJESTY THE CAT'S DIARY

DAY 127 – My captors continue to taunt me with bizarre dangling objects (*Can you spell "employee recognition initiatives"?* "*Discovery Awards*"?) They dine lavishly on fresh meat; I am forced to eat dry cereal. What keeps me going is the hope of escape (*Factor 80?*) and the mild satisfaction I get from ruining the occasional piece of furniture. Tomorrow I may eat another houseplant.

DAY 192 – Today my attempt to kill my captors by weaving around their feet while they were walking almost succeeded; I must employ this strategy at the top of the stairs next time. In an attempt to disgust and repulse these vile oppressors, I again induced myself to vomit on their favorite chair; I must try this on their bed or pillows next time.

DAY 246 – Today I decapitated a mouse and brought them the headless body. I want them to know what I am capable of, thereby striking fear into their hearts. Their strategic response was to coo at me and tell me about what a good little cat I am! Hmm... this is not working according to plan.

DAY 279 – Their sadism knows no bounds! Today they tore at my fur (*professional/personal integrity*) with what they called a "kitty brush" (*Performance Management*) What sick minds could invent such an instrument of

torture? My only consolation is the piece of thumb still stuck between my teeth.

DAY 305 – I am convinced the other captives are flunkies, maybe even snitches and spies! The dog is routinely released and seems more than happy – even eager - to return. He is obviously a half-wit. The bird they keep in the metal mini-room (*Hmm...just like a pet rat!*), on the other hand, must be an informant. It speaks with them regularly, often flattering them by repeating exactly what they say (*I knew it! A strikebreaker!*) This pleases the captors. Clearly they haven't the brains to entertain intelligent debate. I am also certain that the bird reports my every move (*Knew it! A rat-strikebreaker!*). Due to the protection its metal mini-room affords it, the bird's safety is assured. But I can wait. Oh yes, I can wait. It's just a matter of time...

WHAT KIND OF BACK-TO-WORK PET WILL YOU BE? MEOW! SEE YOU AT THE SCRATCHING POST! PURRR-PURRR-PURRR.....

MAY DAY IN 21ST CENTURY ONTARIO

BY MARILYN MILLER

May 1 is International Worker's Day. Many think of it as 'the real Labour Day'. Its roots predate the labour movement by many eons, reaching back to the days of prehistory and pagan celebrations of Spring.

Appropriately enough, OPSEU celebrated May Day pagan-style with a rally at the Legislature. Like the ancients, we sang and danced – albeit to rock'n'roll – and we ate the charred flesh of animals (barbecue). There was even a May Pole with people frolicking around it like Hydro One privatization groupies do around Ernie Eaves. The highlight of the event was Leah Casselman's address from the east stairs. She announced that the government had tabled an offer and that our bargaining team is working towards a settlement! Happiness reigned. It seemed that, along with the warming Spring sun, some light could at last be seen at the end of the tunnel.

Back in the 19th century, May Day was linked to the campaign for an eight-hour workday. In 1884, the Federation of Organized Trade and Labour Unions of the United States and Canada passed a resolution declaring that, as of May 1, 1886, eight hours would constitute a full and legal workday. It is notable that, in Ernie's Ontario (...surely 'ErnieEarth' has more of a ring to it! — ed.), the legal workweek has been expanded to up to 60 hours! OPSEU members are more fortunate than many in that our collective agreement protects us from a workweek like that. Justice, just like real common sense, remains a rare and elusive thing in Ontario AM (After Mike).

IT'S A FACT: In 1517, during 'Evil May Day' riots in London, apprentices attacked foreign residents. Wolsey suppressed the rioters, of whom 60 were hanged.

STRATEGICALLY STRONG

- Diary of a Striker (Part 5) -

BY MALCOLM HORNE

STRATEGIC PICKETING MAKES THE MOST OF OUR REDUCED NUMBERS IN THE CURRENT OPSEU STRIKE. IN PART 5 OF HIS DIARY, MALCOLM MEETS REDNECK SHOPKEEPERS, A BUS DRIVER INTO ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE AND MASSAGE, AND SUNDRY OTHERS. HE ALSO OFFERS IMPORTANT ADVICE TO PUBLIC SPEAKERS. JOIN HIM ON HIS QUEST FOR THE PERFECT PICKET!

Monday 22 April — Goody! A bus-ride to Orangeville to visit Ernie. Of course, he wasn't there (...*is he ever? He isn't called Ernie the Eel for nothing!* — ed.) Why would he be? He doesn't live there and is only using the riding's constituents to win a seat in the Legislature. But wow! Genuine Greyhound buses! Ooo-wee! And, due to my previous experience, I am Marshal for Bus #3; Local 527er Paul Foster is my assistant. We arrive early and join the beginnings of a lineup for the march. A folksinger provides entertainment. Finally, we set off at 11:30 – at least one thousand strong – led by the usual banners and flags. We stop by the Orangeville courthouse, march up the main drag and then down First Street to Eves' campaign office. Somebody dared to launch a snowball at one of Ernie's campaign sign (...*what panache!* — ed.) prompting a homeowner to come out to yell at us.

A few of us try to enter Ernie's office but are refused. Lots of police. Seems that all Orangeville's Finest have been called out! OPSEU's Orangeville local valiantly attempts to feed hotdogs to a thousand supporters, but could probably use some divine assistance of the 'loaves and fishes' variety. Speeches from Leah Casselman as well as the NDP and Liberal candidates. Somewhat mysteriously, the Conservative candidate is unavailable (...*perhaps Ernie was out buying hair products? Shopping for clothes? Or a new cosmetic surgeon with "life partner" Isabel?*— ed.)

At day's end, Paul and I tackle the thorny issue of getting all those kids back on the bus. The we distribute about 300 pamphlets in Snelgrove, a subdivision in Caledon, which takes us about 20 minutes. Our bus driver is very cooperative. This is by no means her most unusual tour. She tells me with stories about her regular job conducting sightseeing tours, gives me lots of advice about driving, road conditions and alternative therapies (she's a trained masseur).

Tuesday 23 April — 900 Bay. Some speeches from labour leaders. I picket and help block doors for a while. The picket captain is impressed with my "style"! I'm invited back to block doors anytime – something about my "intimidating appearance". I wonder what she means by that? (...*could be a reference to those devilish horns. Then again, it might be the Strike-crazed eyes!* — ed.) The line-up of employees is a cinch – all very routine for them now. Door-blocking became more difficult after 10:00 or so; that's

when the first-timers show up and get offended at being asked to wait or act surprised that there's a strike (...*duh!* — ed.) Some simply attempt to walk in on the assumption that the line-up does not apply to them (...*double-duh!* — ed.) while others are bluntly defiant (...*time to look "intimidating", Malcolm!* — ed.) Any crisis results in a rush of picketers to the door (...*hey! It's something to do and it beats the hell outta walking in circles!* — ed.)

Wednesday 24 April — A day off in return for the Orangeville effort. I celebrate and buy myself a Mars Bar.

Thursday 25 April — You've probably heard/seen a fair bit about this day on TV. I start the day with an information picket at the west door of the Legislature building. I encounter lots of Liberal staffers since this wing houses mostly Liberal MPP offices. Most stop and do the 10-minute wait (we were only asking, not blocking). Several interesting conversations. Around 9:30, a navy blue Mercury Grand Marquis pulls up and parks partly on the sidewalk in front of me. I ask the security guard if this is a problem; she says it's okay for a few minutes. Weird! Out gets a well-dressed woman who walks rapidly towards the door. She takes the flyer that I hand her but doesn't do the wait; in some kind of hurry!. The driver, an Aryan-alpha-male type, gets out and follows her. Minutes later, Rod Sawyer tells me that I just handed a flyer to Elizabeth Witmer. That explained the weird parking and the no waiting. Still, I'm surprised she took my flyer. Stuck around for another half-hour. Nobody moved the car.

We head over to the east door where a couple hundred OPSEU members are gathered. We learn that Terry Downey has gone inside to try and talk to Ernie Eves. Lots of police, four on horseback. Media folks mill about. After a few minutes, Terry emerges and tells us that no one has been willing to meet her. She tells us that it is time to crank up the heat, and urges us to come up on the porch and go inside. Several dozen people walk up and advance on the doors, which are locked. We fill up the hall and steps leading to the doors. Noise, chanting. Someone is jimmying the door handles hard. You can hear and see the glass shaking. After 10 minutes, some of our leaders get the people shaking the doors to cool it. Terry urges us all to sit down. We do, filling up the steps. Meanwhile, OPSEU staff discuss things with police. Two police sergeants tell us that they have no problem with us exercising our public right to demonstrate – in fact, they wish us well! – just please don't break the doors. They leave and we continue to chant, yell, blow whistles etc. The news cameras shoot miles of footage from every angle. They are very keen on getting footage of the door shaking. Naturally, everyone complies (...*CITY-TV's broadcast news "reporter" Adam Vaughan used this footage as background to his report about Hydro One, Malcolm! Connecting them dots ain't Adam's forte!* — ed.)

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

DIARY (cont'd from page 3)

After another half-hour, we pull out and march around the building making noise and cheered on by a large group of schoolkids. When we return to the east door, the front of the line heads right on up the steps and sits down right away. I end up standing behind the news cameras that have again assembled. The people sitting on the steps look like they're sitting in bleachers; Howard Hampton is sitting in the front row. The TV cameras are focused on Hampton. The sitters chant for a bit, then Hampton delivers a speech which seems peculiarly unsuited to the nature of the crowd and the media's preference for "sound-bytes". Despite frequent interruptions, Hampton persists in trying to present complex paragraphs of ideas. There's a lesson here: When addressing a group of seasoned demonstrators who want and expect to make noise, speak in one-statement sound-bytes; find and work with the rhythm of the crowd.

Friday 26 April — On the bus to Dan Newman's Scarborough office. Again, he's not there. When we return to the buses in the strip mall's parking lot to discover that some redneck shopowners have blocked in our buses with their trucks. But they're not actually very good at blocking in buses (...or reading critically! Or thinking coherently! — *ed.*) In under five minutes and using only two reverses, the buses drive away. It takes 15 minutes for OPSEU members to vent on the theme of redneck shopkeepers with nothing better to do than try to provoke confrontations with us. Another lesson: bus guards are a good idea.

Steve Gilchrist's constituency office in the Morningside Mall. Strange location — no storefront, tucked way back along an office hallway. About 100 of us sneak in and up the back stairs. We fill up the hallway. Terry Downey and David Rappaport knock on the door. The secretary answers it; she says that Steve Gilchrist isn't there. She thinks she's talking to a few people until she leans out the door. "Oh, my!" she exclaims. More pleasant than Dan Newman's staff, she promises to tell Dan we stopped by.

IT'S A FACT: The old name for May Day is Beltane. The name means "Bel's Fire" (literally, the ascent of Bel, the Sun) and marks the beginning of the Light Year or the planting and growing season. A magical period during which the barriers between the mortal world of humans and the unseen world of Faerie are at their most transparent and penetrable. Unlike Samhain (pronounced 'SAH-wen'), the beginning of the Dark Year (Hallowe'en), Beltane encounters with creatures from the world of Faerie are usually happy occasions marked by good fortune.

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BETWEEN THE LINES

BY MERRY-SPRING MEADOWS

Pickets, winter woollies, a seemingly endless winter chill. Gloom and apprehension drizzle down. The media's bland rehashes of cold, old and obvious issues seem to serve only to remind us of our nuisance value.

"OPSEU strike puts inspections on hold" (*Toronto Star*, 26 April); "OPSEU accused of blocking court vehicles" (*Toronto Star*, 29 April); "OPSEU strikers may delay opening of parks" (*Toronto Star*, 26 April). Sheesh! And am I the only one who's noticed an astonishing new level of concern for the residents of Ontario's correctional facilities? When these fine citizens aren't busy pigging out on pizza and porn or puffing on ciggies, they regale the press with accounts of deprivations due to the OPSEU strike. Credulous media scribes dutifully record their woes for public consumption. "Strike bad medicine for Don" (*Toronto Star*, 26 April); "Jail strike squabble in courts" (*Toronto Star*, 28 April). Oh, and let's not forget the creative challenge of reporting court injunctions. Meanwhile, OPSEU strikers refuse to behave like placid little civil servants, so it's: "Province Bans some OPSEU jail pickets" (*Toronto Star*, 30 April)

It's not your imagination. *The Toronto Star* appears to be the only newspaper providing any kind of sustained, albeit incredibly biased, coverage, thereby serving to illustrate that quantity is not the hallmark of quality.

But in a lone Letter to the Editor published under the headline — "Strike demands more coverage" — one Gary Dale of Toronto wonders "...why you (*Toronto Star*) have printed absolutely no analysis on the subject (of the OPSEU strike)... Surely the crippling of fundamental parts of the provincial infrastructure is worth at least a comment or two somewhere. And what about the new premier's pronouncements a week ago that the strike would be over in 48 hours? Does the honeymoon afforded new leaders require that such blatant lies go unquestioned? Isn't the spectacle of a government attacking its own workers a story in itself? As the...second largest strike in the province's history enters its eighth week, I hope *The Star* will begin giving it the coverage it deserves." (*Toronto Star*, 2 May) Our thoughts exactly, Mr. Dale.

ADDENDUM: Mere hours after I penned the paragraphs above, potentially good news burst through on all fronts: "OPSEU, Eves say agreement imminent" (*Toronto Star*, 2 May); "Ontario public service strike nears end." (*Globe & Mail*, 1 May); "OPSEU deal closer: Eves" (*Toronto Sun*, 2 May). This may be the last opportunity for the Toronto media to redeem themselves. But don't hold your breath, you cheeky monkeys! *Bon courage!*

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