

# The Ottawa-Carleton

*The official newsletter of OSSTF D25 Teachers*

October 2015



## Ok, Take a Breather, OSSTF!

I'm sure most of you were as surprised as I was when I heard that OSSTF teachers had a tentative central agreement with the Ontario Public School Boards Association (OPSBA) and the government. With OSSTF stating its intention to strike extracurricular activities across the province as the school year began, and with negotiation dates seemingly scarce, I figured we were getting ready for a repeat of 2012, when teachers in Ottawa-Carleton began to withdraw from extra-curriculars as a protest against Bill 115.

But then, in the last week of August, a tentative agreement was reached, and central strike action was suspended. It sure did take long enough to get to this point. We haven't had a chance to negotiate a contract since 2008. Bill 115 stripped teachers of sick leave benefits, and imposed cuts to salaries that totaled thousands of dollars for teachers on the salary grid. After Bill 122 formalized a two-tiered bargaining process, OSSTF's new Provincial President, Paul Elliot, stated loud and clear that OSSTF was seeking real improvements to teacher working conditions across Ontario.

Last May, OSSTF delegates met in Toronto for a Special Meeting of the Provincial Assembly to approve a bargaining strategy. That strategy played out in OSSTF Districts 13 (Durham), 19 (Peel), and 3 (Rainbow) as teachers engaged in walkouts that went on for weeks. The strikes were only ended when the local strikes were found to be "tainted" with central items, and back-to-work legislation being passed by the government.

And now, as we move into October, contract teachers in Ottawa have ratified their local agreement, meaning we are now working under the first negotiated contract since 2011. Occasional teachers have yet to ratify their local agreement, but that will probably change by the time this goes to print.

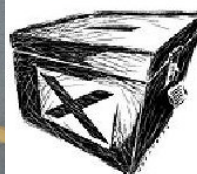
It won't be long until 2017 rolls around and we gear up for two-tiered bargaining, round two. We've learned a lot about this new process through the trials and tribulations of the last year. With the central agreement being supported by 78% of members in the ratification vote (a noticeable decline from the 84% that voted for the 2013 MOU), it seems that teachers are not yet willing to fight for the time of salary increases that will stop the erosion of their purchasing power that began in 2012. But two years is a long time in the politics of public education in Ontario.

*Andy Wilson is OSSTF D25 TBU communications officer.*



OSSTF D25 members march in this year's Labour Day parade.

**Election Day  
October 19**



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## I wouldn't wish strike on my worst enemy

As a member of District 3 I was one of the many OSSTF members in Ontario that were asked to participate in a full withdrawal of services. It was an honour to walk the line with my fellow union members and to this day it is my opinion that we in D3 had just cause for a local strike. For years the relationship between my district and the board could only be described as dysfunctional. As a front line educator I felt that walking off the job was the only course of action to provide enough pressure to bring about change to our working conditions.

Following Durham, District 3 walked off the job May 27, 2015, becoming the second board to fully withdraw their services. After years of being told by union leadership "the public will never be on our side during a strike" I was shocked at how supportive the community was. Expecting angry honks accompanied by terse words of discouragement, we instead were greeted with tremendous public support throughout the four and a half week strike. On the line members who would never have the opportunity to share time, now did. And members who had never before taken an interest in OSSTF affairs were finally becoming engaged and opening their minds to the reality of what was at stake. Our first week of strike it felt like we were full of purpose and ready to face the struggle ahead. As Peel walked off the job the week after I was filled with a feeling of encouragement due to the fact that we were part of a grand OSSTF plan.

Yes, I was concerned that we would be out on the line for many months to come. Yes, standing on the line, looking my students in the eyes as they shared their wishes to be in the classroom was heart breaking. But I felt empowered by the solidarity of my fellow union members as we fought to significantly improve our working conditions.

Then it all started to unravel. As the following Friday had come and gone with no announcement of a fourth board going out, confusion struck the line. Was progress being made? Did provincial abandon the strategy? With no announcement come Monday, my own confu-

sion transformed from confusion to panic and dismay. And, with Tuesday's announcement that OPSBA was heading to the OLRB asking for the strikes to be declared illegal, I started to question if the provincial plan had come to a grinding halt. By Thursday the OLRB hearing had started and the line was glued to the live tweets coming out of the OLRB courtesy of Random Teacher. Trying to put on a brave face I continually tried to quell the frustration and anxiety of my fellow members by repeating that the only thing OPSBA had on us was the placard signs. But, internally I felt the cards were stacked against us and that the OLRB, a semiautonomous government body, was not going to side with the union.

As the OLRB case dragged on my lack of trust in receiving a fair and just decision filled me with a sense of helplessness. I had been removed from the equation. The resolve of the membership was no longer the deciding factor in settling this labour dispute. The lack of control had become unnerving. A week and a half after the hearing started, the strikes were deemed illegal. Not only was the ability to defend my collective bargaining right striped from me, but it was now a matter of public record that the actions I took, which so directly affected my students, were illegal.

The very next day after the decision I was legally bound to walked back into work. I felt demoralized, used and beaten. How did OSSTF get this so wrong? Did we really not see this coming? Where did we go from here?

I need to thank the members of OSSTF Durham, Peel and Rainbow for standing in solidarity as we unwaveringly followed the directives from those within OSSTF who controlled the strike strategy. But more importantly I need to thank my wife and my children for supporting me not only through the strike but the many months after while I attempted to reconcile the emotional cost a failed endeavour.

*Warren Tilston is a secondary teacher in Epanola, OSSTF D3 Rainbow.*



OSSTF District 3 (Rainbow) maintain the picket line at Lo-Ellen Park Secondary School in Sudbury.



## Class Action

We can conclude certain things from this most recent round of acrimony between educational (mis)management and labour; whether anyone actually *learns* anything from the more than a full year spent hurling invective while spinning perspective is, well, yet to be seen.

It should not have happened but it had to happen and it sure shouldn't have happened the way it did. Proper and appropriate negotiations, introduced even before the expiration of the ersatz M of U, might have been useful.

Of course, management would have had to approach the table with something other than arrogance and disrespect for the very folks whose labours they claim to value. That apparently was never part of management's game plan.

The stupidity of the M of U was underscored by the severity of what followed – on a number of levels. The government clearly did not learn very much during the phony war taking place between the implementation of the M of U and its expiry on Aug 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014.

Instead of acknowledging that the M of U was merely a stopgap and hopelessly flawed and would have to be followed up with much more meaningful dialogue, the government merely built yet another layer into the negotiating process and then just provided itself with an ally for that deepening morass (after all, what's one more ass at the table?).

The result was that this 'new and improved' bargaining template with its ridiculous tripartite array of participants was a nightmare from the get go – a behemoth created by those smitten by bureaucracy which must needs be exorcised so that when all the sniping and smiting is finally finished, there is a reasonable, useful, workable model restored. Labour (teachers represented by union leaders)

must be able to properly negotiate with management (board reps, with government lackeys relegated to seats far removed from the decision making table).

Union strategy was vastly more effective when it became inevitably clear that helping Ms Wynne keep her job was not going to make ours any better or easier. Despite the ongoing challenges of efficiently getting out the teachers' message and perspective (something all of the various teachers' unions still need to improve), the strategy of retaining classroom instruction while withdrawing services which only marginally affected students in any real sense managed to maintain a significant level of pressure. The issue of extracurriculars is a sore point, not only among parents and students but also among teachers themselves. Fortunately, push never had to come to shove for 2015-16. Work to rule not only has its place/merit, but it can also be applied effectively without necessarily withdrawing extra curriculars, as we clearly saw last spring.

As for what happens next time around, that is anybody's guess. Both management and labour have the opportunity as well as the responsibility to ensure that the next contract negotiations do not sink into the abysmal abyss from which we have recently almost emerged.

And even though it may be well past the seventh inning stretch, the last out has not yet been made; ETFO continues to do battle with the evil umpire. Pitching ideas that are based only on political gamespersonship will only encourage the fat lady to start practising. Let's hope that October will bring only a World Series and not a series of rotating strikes.

*Jeff Kanter is a teacher at Nepean High School.*



Cathy Bailey & John Ross fly the OSSTF flag at the Labour Day parade.

OSSTF / FEESO, along with the Canadian Labour Congress and most unions in Canada, are promoting #betterchoice.ca during the federal election. Please check with your local candidates and the political parties to find out their positions on health care, child care, good jobs and retire-



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## Chris Turner, author of *The War on Science*, speaks to the Ontario Teachers' Federation.

I don't usually travel during my summer break, but during the last week of August I took a little road trip to hear Chris Turner, author of *The War on Science*, address the Ontario Teachers' Federation conference in Kingston.

Over the past few years, I have become more and more upset and saddened with how this Harper government treats Canadian scientists. Archives are neglected and destroyed, scientists are muzzled, and the Harper government continues to practice "decision-based fact making," rather than the fact-based decision-making Canadians deserve. Instead of curbing our fossil fuel extraction and consumption in response to ever-worsening climate change, the Harper government continues to encourage the development of the Alberta tar sands. When I think about our future as a species, I get worried! So here was an opportunity to take a quick trip down the 401 to hear a well-informed author's perspective on the subject—maybe there was an opportunity for hope.

Well, the trip was worth it. OTF delegates were kept in rapt attention for over an hour and a half as Chris Turner traced Canada's relationship with the environment through the ages. Canada, according to Mr. Turner, has a kind of dual identity when it comes to its relation-

ship with its natural environment. On the one hand, Canada's economy and identity is based on resource extraction. Even before Confederation, Canadian industry was known for resource extraction in the form of fur, lumber, minerals, and other natural resources. That identity was created centuries ago, but it endures today in the form of our fixation on fossil fuel extraction and pipelines.

But, on the other hand, more recently Canadian identity has begun to include the idea of good stewardship of our environment. For example, in 1991, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and US President George H. W. Bush signed the U.S.-Canada Air Quality Agreement, a cooperative effort to respond to pollution in the form of acid rain. What remains to be seen is how Canadians reconcile our current double identity: an economy that profits from the dirtiest form of resource extraction that contributes to dangerous climate change, but a country full of citizens that believe that preserving our natural environment is important.

All in all—a good trip. We'll have to wait until after the election to see how the next Canadian government uses (or misuses) science.

*Andy Wilson is OSSTF D25 TBU Communications Officer.*



ETFO teachers picket outside of the OCDSB head office, pressuring the board to negotiate a fair deal.

### A Message of Solidarity

District 25 Teachers are reminded that although our negotiations struggles may be coming to a close, we must show our solidarity with OSSTF support staff, members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), CUPE and all other support staff unions who are still seeking central deals. Each union has its own collective agreement; one size doesn't fit all. OSSTF pushed hard for negotiation dates early in the process. It took 29 days of bargaining with the Ontario Public School Board's Association and the Government of Ontario before we got a central deal for teacher & occasional teacher members. None of the groups without tentative agreements have bargained for that many days. Colleagues in the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) and l'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO) and the vast majority of other OSSTF Teacher / Occasional Teacher bargaining units still need local deals.

*The OC provides a forum for discussion and exchanging information on educational issues, but does not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of District 25 or OSSTF. Submissions from members including articles, letters, photographs, or drawings are always welcome. Submission from non-members will be considered. The OC Editorial Board reserves the right to publish and edit submissions.*

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