

Jump in to the election conversation

Dear friends:

Ontarians go to the polls to elect a new provincial government on Oct. 6. It's time for all of us to jump into the conversation.

That's because if you are an OPSEU member, this election will be about you.

Politicians are falling over each other talking about plans to cut public spending. Liberals are already chopping away at jobs and wages. Tories are sharpening their axe to do the same thing – only more so.

In 2010, Liberal Finance Minister Dwight Duncan said “It's time for us to do our part” to reduce government spending. That's when he announced his plan to “freeze” (i.e., cut) the wages of provincial workers. After announcing 3,400 job cuts in the public service in 2009, he added another 1,500 in 2011. To make things worse, he hired a bank economist to figure out ways to sell our jobs to the private sector.

And then there's Tim Hudak.

The new Tory leader acts like Premier Mike Harris never happened. Today, Harris makes \$750,000 a year at a part-time job at Magna Corp. But from 1995 to 2002, he was changing Ontario full time. He attacked the poor and gave us homelessness. He made it harder to join a union. He gave us chaos in health and education and electricity. He gave us the Walkerton water disaster and the Aylmer meat scandal.

He did these things by attacking public employees and the work we do. Now his protégé Hudak wants to do the same thing. His “changebook” is all about tax cuts (to pad corporate profits and starve public services); public service cuts (to pay for the tax cuts); and privatization (to feed public dollars to private profiteers).

All of which he says will make people's lives better. It won't.

I think it's a privilege to pay taxes. That's because I know where the money is going. It's looking after our seniors. It's teaching our kids. It's protecting our air and water. It's building healthy, safe, and prosperous communities.

But in Tim Hudak's world, you're on your own. If it takes three low-wage part-time jobs to keep your family together, he's fine with that. If you can't afford health care, well, that's fine, too.

The thing is, it's not fine. In this election, OPSEU members have to speak up about the work we do. We helped build this province. We make it a better place to live.

It's time to speak up for the Ontario we want.

In solidarity,

Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President
Ontario Public Service Employees Union

Fighting today for the workers of tomorrow

June 9, 2011

In our union, like many others, we naturally give primary focus on the events that have a direct impact on our members. Cuts in the OPS, the closure of jails, proper funding for developmental services, CAS, mental health, privatization...all of these issues and many more keep our activists busy and engaged in protecting rights and improving services.

Our union is also constantly bargaining new collective agreements. On August 31, the collective agreement for CAAT Support workers will expire. Many comment that with the current economy, there couldn't be a worse time to negotiate new contracts. Yet now is the time we must be the most vigilant and ensure that our collective actions, or our inactions, do not cause irreparable harm in the future.

We must look beyond our union at the struggles other workers are facing. The strike by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers is a prime example of this. One of the major concessions the employer is seeking and the union is fighting, is a proposal for a two-tiered wage system. If Canada Post has their way, new postal workers will be paid 30 per cent less than their counterparts doing the exact same job.

This idea, along with the replacement of good, full-time jobs with lower-paying, part-time or contracted out employees, is one of the biggest threats labour will ever face. Keep in mind that Canada Post's two-tier wage proposal does not affect any of the workers now on the picket line. What they are fighting for is the future of jobs at Canada Post, and the future of jobs for the young people of today.

We will likely confront a similar situation with CAAT Support bargaining. According to StatsCan, the education sector makes up eight per cent of all jobs in Canada, but has 22 per cent of all contract temporary jobs. The Colleges have been consistently hiring more and more part-time employees, work-study students and contracting out work. The result is the loss of good, full-time jobs with decent wages.

That is what our children and youth are faced with today as well as in the near future: finding a job in a market that is almost completely deprived of good jobs. Young people will be leaving school and entering the workforce for the first time, and positions such as a college admission clerk or a postal worker may not be what these new workers would have been in school for, or even thinking about. But like many young people that came before them, these jobs should be quality jobs that they can apply for, and jobs that even allow these workers to make them career positions, with a lifetime of dedicated service.

That is why we must fight today for the workers of tomorrow. Our young people must have good paying jobs to go to. We as Canadian citizens deserve good paying jobs, to sustain and contribute toward viable and healthy pensions, social health care and our community's economy.

None of us can take that fight on alone. We must defend good paying jobs, and sacrifice if necessary in the short-term to protect all in the long-term. We owe it to our children, our youth and our future.

In solidarity,

Eduardo (Eddy) Almeida

First Vice-President/Treasurer, OPSEU