

Ontario Federation of Labour Biennial Convention: November 2009

From November 22-27, 2009, I was privileged to attend the 10th Biennial Convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour.

After taking some time to reflect on the event, I have come to the realization that there are certain situations going on in this province that we all can be brought up to speed on.

First of all, and I think it is plain for our members to see, we are part of a unique situation with regards to our 'union'. When it comes to the unions, the OSSTF is viewed in a very favourable light. On a number of occasions over the week I was afforded great respect from those in the trades. At times there even seemed to be an unnecessary differentiation between what you could term as professional and trade unions.

In any case, our particular contract and benefit situation allows us the ability to focus on strengthening the labour movement in a way other unions cannot. We can stand up for others in the province!

Newly elected OFL president Sid Ryan outlined it best in a conversation with our caucus. He spoke to the fact that it was the OSSTF who brought the largest and most widely heard arguments against the Harris Conservatives. It was a great acknowledgement. But, where are we now?

When it comes to our position, compared to other union workers in this province, we are lucky. Let's look at two examples of those who are not so well off.

Members of United Steel Workers Local 6500 have been off the job since July 2009 at Vale Inco. Previously known as Inco, these workers found themselves being directly targeted by their new Brazilian based company. As the workers were told, the company had to change the workers 'culture'. For example, why should a miner be able to afford a new truck? Yet, the company made yearly profits of hundreds of millions of dollars. The 3000 workers on the picket line deserve support and the OSSTF donated \$5000 to their struggle. It is hoped that the money will help get the workers through the winter as many already rely on food banks to survive.

LINK: <http://www.thesudburystar.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=2220596>

The second example I have to share is that of Drive Test employees. In September 2003, Serco DES Inc. (UK based) acquired the rights to provide driver examinations for the MTO for 10 years at a cost of \$114 million. Privatization at its finest. This strike affects 550 USW 9511 workers. Hundreds have been laid off since 2003 with many more being moved from full time to part time employment in the summer months. Serco believes in profits. That is the cost of privatization.

LINK: <http://www.usw9511.ca>

So, in other words, despite our relatively "good contract", we still need to be wary of what is going on around the province. We need to be prepared ahead of time for the type of situation that could face us. It faces others everyday. Spread the message of at least these two distinct struggles in our province. Those workers deserve our support.

James Grant
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