



FOCUS ON QUEEN'S PARK



House Rises for March Break

The Legislature completed its three-week sitting on March 2 and rose for the March break. It will resume sitting on March 23 when the government will introduce its spring budget. Several pieces of legislation of particular interest to union members were debated during the three-week sitting.

OMERS Bill Passes Despite Widespread Opposition

On February 23, the Liberal government's Bill 206 passed Third Reading in the Legislature and received Royal Assent over the protests of CUPE members, municipalities and opposition parties alike.

NDP Pensions Critic Andrea Horwath told the McGuinty Liberals in the House, "Your Bill is so flawed that it was entirely rewritten in committee, and it's still offensive in many ways, particularly in the supermajority processes that are still in there. Continued opposition by CUPE members, municipalities and serious concerns from stakeholders like

OSSTF, OPSEU and school boards show that it's still a flawed Bill."

Liberals End Debate on LHINs

On February 28, the McGuinty Liberals brought in a time allocation motion to end debate on Bill 36. The *Local Health System Integration Act* will establish local health networks and is strongly opposed by unions in the health care sector.

NDP Health Critic Shelley Martel summed up the opposition to the Bill. "This Bill will allow for privatization of health care services through Section 33, which gives the Minister, and then the LHINs, the power to outsource any number of non-clinical services from hospitals, even if they don't have the approval of the Board of the hospital to do that."

"Secondly, the Bill permits the privatization of health care services because competitive bidding will be used as the mechanism for LHINs to acquire services. I moved an amendment that would prohibit competitive bidding from being used as a source to acquire health care services," said Martel, "and the Liberal

members, except for one, voted that down despite everything that we heard at the public hearings about how destructive competitive bidding has been in home care."

"It's a fallacy for this government to pretend that the LHINs are all about the community and more local control," said Martel. "The LHIN members are appointed by the government; they serve at a time directed by the government; they are defined as agents of the government in the Bill; they are accountable back to the Minister. There is no method of accountability for them back to the community that this Minister purports to say they serve. The power that the Minister has to integrate services, which includes transfer, merge, cease operations, etc., is a power that the Ministry staff told the Committee is above and beyond the powers a Minister of Health has already had."

McGuinty's Broken Promise Puts Child Care at Risk

On February 2, NDP Children's Critic, Andrea Horwath called on the McGuinty Liberals to keep their promise to fund Ontario's child care program with provincial, not just federal, money.

"The sad fact is the McGuinty Liberals haven't spent any Ontario money to create new child care spaces. In the last provincial election, they promised \$300 million of new provincial funding for child care on top of any federal funding. After the election, they failed to put in any provincial money," said the Hamilton MPP. "Now it's time for them to show parents the money and guarantee the future of Ontario's child care program."



Parents and child care advocates are worried that Prime Minister Stephen Harper's promise to replace the regulated child care program with cheques for families will put Canada's federal child care

funding in jeopardy. Mary Anne Chambers, Ontario's Minister of Children and Youth Services, said this week that scrapping current agreements would be "disastrous" for Ontario. But she did not appear prepared to offer the promised provincial dollars to protect the program.

"Before the election, Dalton McGuinty promised to invest \$300 million in child care to preserve existing spaces, create new ones and cut long waiting lists, said Horwath. "Ironically, in 2004, Liberal MPPs on the government's Finance Committee voted against an NDP motion to invest at least \$75 million in child care as a down payment on keeping the Liberal election promise."

Horwath said New Democrats repeatedly warned the McGuinty Liberals they were playing a risky game funding Ontario's program entirely with federal dollars. "A big part of their problem rests with their failure to invest their \$300 million to create more regulated child care. They set up a 'when the bough breaks, the cradle will fall' situation," Horwath said.

KORMOS' KORNER

"Study after study tells us that applied ergonomics and early intervention can prevent repetitive strain injuries in the workplace if legislation is implemented."



NDP Labour Critic
Peter Kormos

When will Ontarians see real ergonomics regulations that will protect the workers of this province?

All this government has done to date is create a website, as if injured workers needed more information about the tragedy of being injured in the workplace. Look, raising awareness among the general public just isn't good enough. British Columbia and Saskatchewan have ergonomic regulations that work.

When is this government going to implement ergonomic regulations that have been tested, that have been tried, that have been demonstrated to be effective? I say to the Minister that his efforts to achieve balance betray workers on a daily basis in this province."



- Peter Kormos

By-Elections Finally Called

On March 1, Premier McGuinty finally called the by-elections in Toronto-Danforth, Whitby-Ajax and Nepean-Carleton. Election day for the three by-elections is Thursday, March 30.

Forestry Job Losses Continue

NDP Leader Howard Hampton continued to call attention to the fact that skyrocketing energy costs are costing jobs. On February 16, Hampton told the Legislature, "Here's the reality: When the Cascades mill closed in Thunder Bay, they announced they were moving production to Saint-Jérôme, Quebec. When they shut down two paper machines at the Domtar mill in Ottawa, they also announced they were moving production across the river to the paper machine in Quebec."

"What's happening here is, thousands of jobs are leaving Ontario. They're going to Quebec, Manitoba, British Columbia, they're going to Michigan and Minnesota, and the McGuinty Government does nothing. You've got a responsibility to do something, because if more paper mills and more pulp mills shut down, then that means sawmills are going to shut down because they'll have no place to sell the residual wood chips," said Hampton. "Forest industry companies have told the government repeatedly that their policy of driving hydro rates through the roof and their policy of forcing up

delivered wood costs have killed thousands of forest sector jobs across northern Ontario. But the Minister of Natural Resources says that workers are to blame for forest industry layoffs."

Hampton pointed out that in Terrace Bay, woodland employees offered \$15 million in concessions to help the Neenah Paper Mill continue to operate. The workers offered pay cuts, pension cuts, benefit cuts and increased contracting out to save the company \$15 million.

"Why is the McGuinty Government blaming forest sector workers for forest industry layoffs when it's clearly the government's hydro policy and forest policies that are killing jobs?" asked Hampton.

"Here's the tally so far of forest sector jobs destroyed under the McGuinty Government: Thunder Bay, 860; Terrace Bay, 130; Kenora, 420; Red Rock, 175; Rutherglen, 63; Hearst, 106; Timmins, 19; Dryden, 510; Opatatika, 78; Cornwall, 910; Ottawa, 200. When you add them all up, it's 3,700 direct jobs and thousands of indirect jobs."

FOCUS ON QUEEN'S PARK

Publication of
The Political and Legislative Department
Ontario Federation of Labour
(416) 441-2731
Available on web site: www.ofl.ca

cope343