

## **Society Newscast 2004:02**

**This is the Society Newscast for Monday, May 10, 2004**



### **Minister to Atikokan: Jobs protected**

The Minister of Energy says while the government phases out coal-fired electricity generation in Ontario, the jobs at the Atikokan GS will be "protected."

The Minister was speaking to the Atikokan Chamber of Commerce on May 1st after touring Thunder Bay and Atikokan's generating stations. He made speeches to the Chambers of both places, but appears to have departed substantially from the text while speaking at Atikokan.

"There will be meaningful, high-paying jobs going forward," he said at one point. He also revealed that the government is considering different electricity rates for the northwest, to encourage economic growth.

The Minister's remarks went well beyond what he told Society members at a meeting in February, in which he said, "As we move forward, you will all continue to have an important role."

In Thunder Bay, he told employees of the generating station that no jobs would be lost, and that OPG would have a "large presence" in the north.

### **Society polling: Public power support rock solid**

Despite all that's happened in the last fifteen years, a poll conducted on behalf of the Society shows the public has little interest in private-sector participation in the electricity industry.



*On Workers Day of Mourning at Richview Station, a wreath was placed at a plaque commemorating lineman Bruce Halladay, who died in 2000.  
Story, page 3.*

Those surveyed were given a choice between a privatized system and market competition and the following:

*... having a publicly controlled system is a part of the province's history and the best way to ensure providers are accountable for making electricity affordable for all Ontarians.*

Seventy-two *per cent* agreed with the latter. The poll was conducted by Ipsos Reid (formerly Angus Reid) among 500 Ontarians, and is considered accurate to within plus or minus four *per cent*, 19 times out of 20.

If anything, rejection of privatization has *grown* since 1996, the last time the Society sponsored such a poll. In *that* poll, 64 *per cent* of respondents rejected privatization, including 52 *per cent* of those expressing a preference for the Progressive Conservative Party of Mike Harris.

"This shows the Society's Board has been on the right track in its preference for public over private solutions to Ontario's electricity problems," said Society President Andrew Müller. "In the focus groups involved, participants felt the private sector was less likely to operate the system in the public interest."

Other notable results of the survey:

- ◆ 74 *per cent* supported (strongly or somewhat) "the government spending more money to build new power plants in Ontario over continuing to import power from the U.S."
- ◆ Less than half (42 *per cent*) of Ontarians are willing to pay more for electricity to avoid black-outs
- ◆ Of those who *would* be willing to spend more, only 19 *per cent* would pay more than 10 *per cent* over the current cost

The poll was conducted as the Board prepares to support the Society's policies with a campaign to influence the government's upcoming legislation. The Society has consulted with Playter Strategies, Inc. on how best to create awareness among the public of the opinions of the professional employees who are employed in the industry. The Ipsos poll prepares the ground for such a campaign.

Most gratifyingly, there appears to be a great deal of support among the public for the Society to speak out. Though only eight *per cent* of those surveyed said they'd heard of the Society (and we're a little skeptical about *that*), once they were told who we were 94 *per cent* said the Society "definitely" (65 *per cent*) or "probably" (29) "should take a public stand on how best to resolve the supply problem." Eighty-one *per cent* said they would find statements made by the Society to be "very" (26) or "somewhat" (55) believable, a better rating than was received by "Special interest groups such as Energy Probe or Clean Air Alliance," with 17 and 58 *per cent* respectively.

"This research shows the public would welcome our comments on issues relating to supply and system reliability," said Müller.

The Board is currently considering the outlines of a public-awareness campaign to be run by the Society in conjunction with the IFPTE. More news about this will be forthcoming soon. A copy of the poll is available on the Society web-site ("resources," "governing documents").

## **Mourning fallen workers**

On April 28th, Canadian workers and employers took time out to mourn the employees lost in work-related incidents in 2003. Many vowed to rededicate themselves to the effort to end the carnage.



*At Toronto Hydro's Day of Mourning ceremony, CUPE Local 1 sponsored a visit by Toronto Mayor David Miller, who declared April 28th a day of mourning for the whole city. With Mayor Miller (r) are Local 1 health and safety representative Joe Pessoa (l) and President Bruno Silano (centre).*

It's clear enough that for Canada as a whole, the effort so far hasn't been enough. In 2003, 953 Canadian workers lost their lives, 19 *more* than died in 2002. According to the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the number of deaths has increased in each of the last six years. CLC President Ken Georgetti blames governments and employers for those increases. "Over the past decade, governments and employers have made bad choices that are costing workers their health and their lives," he told a 6,000-strong health and safety conference in Toronto. "They chose to relax health and safety regulations. They chose to cut resources needed for monitoring and enforcement. They chose not to invest in research and prevention."

Society-represented workplaces had the luxury of no workplace deaths to mourn this year, but Workers' Day of Mourning was a solemn occasion in any event.

One of the most poignant events each year is the ceremony held at Richview Transformer Station in Mississauga. The Richview ceremony takes place at a plaque honouring Bruce Halladay, a Hydro One lineman who was killed in 2000, and is usually attended by members of his family. This year his mother Audrey, brother Scott, and sister Lee Van Der Meer attended. Representing the Society, President Andrew Müller said that *any* death is too many, and every year working people must "renew a joint commitment to the safety of our workplaces."

Toronto Hydro's Day of Mourning was a CUPE Local 1 affair, with the highlight being the attendance of Toronto Mayor David Miller. His Worship declared April 28th a Day of Mourning for the whole city. CUPE president Bruno Silano spoke of the 315 workers in Ontario who'd died in 2003, and also noted that missing from such statistics are the 6,000 or so who have died from occupational diseases such as cancer, diseases of the lungs, or reactions from long-term toxic exposure. They are "not just statistics," he said, but also "our own members and retirees." Society-represented engineers **Able Fung** and **John Rudzroga** were in attendance.

At Thunder Bay's fossil generating station, employees met to mourn, but also to celebrate six years without a lost-time accident. Joint health-and-safety committee co-chair **Daryl Tuck** addressed the gathering, stressing that their good record didn't mean they could rest on their laurels:

*Two weeks ago I had the opportunity to accompany a Ministry of Labour inspector on a plant tour. As you know I have worked at Thunder Bay GS for over twenty years and thought we were*



*Society health and safety co-chair Daryl Tuck addresses a Day of Mourning ceremony at Thunder Bay GS.*

*doing things quite well. After spending the one and a half hours with the inspector and listening to his comments, remembering that this was the first time he has ever been on this site, I was convinced that there were many areas that we must improve on or we will soon have a lost time accident. I am convinced, though, that we can make these changes and preserve our record.*

On the other side of the province, at R.H. Saunders GS, near Cornwall, Local Vice President **Lanny Totton** spoke for the Society, encouraging those present to keep their guard up. "The largest cause of accidents and deaths," he said, "is complacency."

Similar events were held across the province, at most Society-represented workplaces. Society officials and staff encourage all to be vigilant. "Safety must be our top priority," said President Müller. "We don't want to have to mourn a death next year."

## **Government to require provincial licences for electrical contractors**

The Society has congratulated Minister of Consumer and Business Services Jim Watson for introducing legislation that the Society believes will increase electrical safety in Ontario.

A bill introduced in the provincial legislature recently will require all electrical contractors in Ontario to obtain a licence from the Electrical Safety Authority (ESA). Currently, some municipalities require licences, while some don't, and most municipalities' efforts to enforce their standards are anemic at best. The legislation also mandates the ESA to establish a toll-free line for consumers to call to see whether a given electrical contractor is licensed.

"The current system is a patchwork," said Society President Andrew Müller in a letter to the Minister, "and public safety suffers as a result."

**Lucy Impera**, Vice President of the ESA local, worked on the project, and is very pleased that this milestone has been reached. "I was assigned to the ESA team on this in January, 2000, but I met one gentleman who's been trying to get something done about it for 40 years," she said.

Impera says there are approximately 8,000 businesses that claim to be "electrical contractors," but only about 1,000 of them are registered with the Electrical Contractors Association, and 500 with the Ontario Electrical League. As well, there are a number of different organizations involved in licensing one part of the trade or other. "With the legislation," said Impera, "we'll be able to weed out a lot of people that shouldn't be working, and reduce the number of electrocutions in Ontario. Right now it's difficult to do anything."



Impera says the new framework will also:

- ◆ Provide a level playing field for legitimate businesses
- ◆ Improve labour mobility, and
- ◆ Reduce the underground economy in electrical contracting

Another effect of the law is that it will require *all* contractors to be licensed to the same standard, including ones from out of Province. Once the law is fully implemented, expected to take five years, a licensed contractor or electrician will be able to work anywhere in the province without further licensing, and to a single standard.

The team working on the issue included Peter Marcucci, ESA Vice President of Regulatory Affairs and Corporate Services, and Judith MacTavish, ESA's corporate counsel, working in partnership with the Ontario Electrical Contractors Association and the Ontario Electrical League. Five ministries had a hand in the process involved. "It took a lot of facilitation," said Impera. She gave a lot of credit to Minister Watson and his policy and legal staff, as "they were crucial to moving things along."

Impera says the new ESA responsibilities and other ESA initiatives will require a minimum of six new Society-represented employees.

## **Society obtains clarification of CLC nuke policy**

The Society has obtained a clarification of the Canadian Labour Congress policy on nuclear power, as contained in its energy policy.

Upon affiliating with the CLC the Society obtained copies of the Congress's policies on energy. In a policy passed by CLC Convention in 2003, the CLC "reiterate[d] its policy that nuclear power generation should be phased out." This policy statement was very different from the Congress's 1992 version, which viewed nuclear electricity generation as a "crucial, though not a dominant, element of Canada's energy mix."

Last month, Society President Andrew Müller wrote to CLC President Ken Georgetti, inquiring as to how the policy had been changed.

Mr. Georgetti has since written the Society clarifying the issue, stating that the 2003 policy had been voted on in error. He states that he has taken corrective action, and the CLC's policy on the matter is:

*...nuclear generation of electricity should remain a crucial, though not a dominant, element of Canada's energy mix... [N]ew nuclear reactors in Ontario should be approved only if proper consideration has been given to all environmental and economic factors, and only if all available alternatives have been thoroughly considered. Further, [the CLC recommends] against expansion of nuclear capacity or replacement of existing units outside Ontario.*

## **Hydro One Local ratifies bylaws, first Local Council to meet**

The Society's Hydro One local is the first to ratify a set of local bylaws.

On Tuesday, May 4th, the results were announced: 263 in favour to nine opposed. According to Local Vice President **Keith Rattai**, there is one step left for the Local to have a full slate of officials under the new Society Constitution—election of Council Representatives for the Society Council meeting to be held in September.

This will take place at a Local Delegates' Council meeting on June 14th. Delegates are currently in the process of being elected.

Locals must have named their Council Representatives by July 20th in order to have representation at Society Council.

## **California engineers, architects join IFPTE local**

An organization of employees of the municipality of San Jose, California have voted to affiliate with the IFPTE. The vote passed by a margin of 92 *per cent*.

They are now represented by IFPTE Local 21, which represents 6,000 professional, technical, managerial, supervisory, and administrative employees in municipalities and other public agencies throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

The employees involved had been members of the Association of Engineers and Architects (AEA) since 1969. According to its president, Mary Follenweider, the AEA hadn't used its collective bargaining rights in many years. "Engineers and architects recognized that we were too vulnerable," she said. "When the City can't get anything out of the other unions, it comes after us."

Over the last two years, the City had imposed cuts that affected step promotions and benefits. Employees were also concerned with attempts to outsource their jobs.

"We needed a partner who understands our rights and has the expertise to give us a place at the table," said Follenweider. "We couldn't wait another year."

The architects and engineers formed a task force which over eight months worked to select a union to recommend to the AEA membership. A newspaper story about the organizing efforts of professionals and managers in Palo Alto led them to Local 21.

### **The World's Electricity**

## **Electricity workers fight privatization in France**

Electricity workers in France have spent much of the first part of 2004 fighting the plan of the government of France to sell off part of their utility.

France's Industry Minister announced late last year that *Electricité de France*, and its gas utility counterpart, *Gaz de France*, would be converted from state agencies to limited-liability corporations. Doing so would allow them to seek private investment, but the State would no longer guarantee their debt. The plans were announced as a method partly to meet the competition requirements of the European Union, and partly to fill French coffers and reduce the national deficit below EU standards.

Managements of both companies support the move, anxious to expand their enterprises and compete more fully in the European market. EDF, for example, purchased a controlling interest in Germany's EnBW (*Energie Baden Wuerttemberg AG*) in 2001.

Though the government has assured them that they would not go below 51 *per cent* ownership, unions representing electricity workers say they are "not convinced." The plan is just a step toward full privatization, they say, and such a move would put their livelihoods and pensions into jeopardy.

To conform to EU unbundling requirements, EDF's transmission component has already been split off into a subsidiary, which will remain fully owned by EDF.

An initial strike in January cut 6,000MW of EDF's production, or seven *per cent*. It coincided with strikes of railway and hospital workers, teachers, and university research workers, who were protesting other parts of France's wide-ranging economic reforms. (France is struggling to bring its economy in line with EU rules.)

In March, unrest over government plans and unemployment of almost 10 *per cent* led to President Chirac's "Union for a Presidential Majority" party being routed in local elections, losing control of 13 of the 14 regional administrations it had held to the Socialist Party. The UMP now hold only one of the



22 administrations. In the wake of the election, the French Cabinet was shuffled, but the new Industry Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, announced that he would "press ahead" with plans for EDF, and the unions shouldn't worry.

Instead, another strike was held on April 13th. Power failures were reported all over France. In some cities, customers were switched from the daytime to the nighttime rate, which is cheaper. Workers reconnected homes which had been cut off for lack of payment. At the Palais de Versailles, employees let thousands of tourists in for free, as the lack of electricity for their equipment prevented them from collecting admission. Unions attempted to confine the outages to government buildings and businesses, sparing homes; when homes *were* cut off, other workers would hook them back up.

On April 28th, Minister Sarkozy announced that France would not sell off more than 40 *per cent* of EDF.

*And that is the Society Newscast for Monday, May 10 2004.*

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*Members can hear the current Newscast by calling (416) 979-2709 x.2035.*

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