

Society Newscast 2005:02

This is the Society Newscast for Monday, May 2, 2005



Hydro One Local just says no

Members of the Society's Hydro One bargaining unit have solidly repudiated their CEO's "final offer."

When the votes were counted last week in the management-forced "final offer" vote, 97 per cent of Society-represented employees had voted, and 95 per cent of those rejected the offer. The turnout was several percentage points greater than that of the strike vote in March, and a week and a half of heavy pressure from Hydro One management had made hardly a dent in support for the Society position.

Shortly after the vote was counted, CEO Tom Parkinson phoned Society President **Andrew Müller** and asked the Society to return to bargaining, which they did, the next day (but see story, immediately below).

Society Local Vice President **Keith Rattai** announced the vote results at the Church of the Holy Trinity, across Trinity Square from Hydro One headquarters, to about 400 assembled members and supporters.

"Our members have resoundingly said no to discrimination against future employees and young energy professional graduates," he said. "They have said no to increased hours of work without pay, and they have said no to demands for concessions solely from energy professionals when the company is highly profitable and Hydro One President and CEO Tom Parkinson has just received a 35.2% pay increase."



Hydro One professional employees in the Church of the Holy Trinity cheer as Local VP Keith Rattai announces results of the vote

Parkinson had written all Society-represented employees on April 13th, and told them they would be locked out if they were to vote in the way they just had.

If the professional employees were to be locked out, said Rattai, it "will put the safe and reliable delivery of electricity throughout the province in jeopardy, significantly increasing the risk of power disruptions and blackouts for the people of Ontario." "We call upon Premier McGuinty to reject the irresponsible position of Hydro One management that is jeopardizing the security of the provincial electricity system."

Rattai also said it's time for the public to take some action. "We ask members of the general public to please immediately contact their MPPs and tell Premier McGuinty to stop putting the electricity system at risk by withdrawing Hydro One's demands for concessions from its energy professionals and by offering us a fair and reasonable contract."

Bargaining with Hydro One frustrates

Negotiations since the final offer vote can only be described as frustrating.

On Tuesday, April 26th, Hydro One management had nothing to offer, so the Society team tried to stimulate discussion with a comprehensive settlement offer of its own, along with an undertaking that the Society was prepared to meet "all night long," if necessary, in order to resolve the situation. The Hydro One team said it would "get back" to the Society; when they did, they informed the Society that they had no response.

"Hydro One has basically refused to respond to our comprehensive settlement proposals with an offer of their own" said Mr. Rattai.

The rest of the week was spent in attempts to set up a meeting that would be acceptable to both parties, with Hydro One proposing that the purpose of such a meeting be to present to the Society an explanation of Hydro One's finances that would rationalize their demands for concessions. The Society was equally insistent that any meeting be of a more traditional, bargaining format directed at resolving differences.

Currently, a meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 3rd, with presentations scheduled from each side.

Only one thing emerges with any clarity: it will not be until Hydro One management comes to the table willing to bargain that a solution will be found without further job action of some kind.

Society calls on Premier to step in, rallies at Queen's Park, announces education sessions

The Society's Hydro One bargaining team went to Queen's Park on Tuesday, called on Premier McGuinty to step in, and held a rally in support of Hydro One professionals.

Though the two sides had resumed discussions, said Local Vice President Keith Rattai, Hydro One management had brought nothing positive to the table. "Despite the resounding rejection of Hydro One's last contract offer by 95 per cent of our members, Hydro One has refused to withdraw its demands for concessions.

"We appeal to Premier McGuinty to exert pressure on Tom Parkinson to withdraw [his] demands for concessions, offer [his] energy professionals a fair and reasonable contract, and thereby ensure the continued safety and reliability of the provincial electricity system."

He informed the media that despite management's intransigence, the bargaining team would do everything it could to reach a settlement.

In the event a deal was not reached before midnight, Rattai said, limited job actions would begin on Wednesday. "Tomorrow our members will be conducting education sessions for members of the public." The educational sessions, he said, would be conducted from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. in several locations a day over the next three days.

Rattai was joined in the media conference by Society President Andrew Müller, Hydro One engineer **Lynn Andrews**, and Ontario Federation of Labour President Wayne Samuelson. Samuelson told media representatives that he found Hydro One management's behaviour—insisting on a final offer vote before job action even began, and then not respecting two



Society President Andrew Müller (third from left) addresses the media. With him are (l to r) OFL president Wayne Samuelson, Hydro One VP Keith Rattai, and Hydro One engineer Lynn Andrews.

votes rejecting their position by over 95 per cent—as highly unusual.

Andrews told the media that Minister Dwight Duncan was incorrect in saying that Hydro One's "contingency plans" ensured the electricity system wouldn't be in jeopardy. The managers who would be trying to do Society jobs, she said, don't have the "expertise and experience." Managers will have to play it safe, she said, as they don't have the technical knowledge it takes to put the system back together after an outage. Little outages will mount up, she said, to the point where "cascading outages" are a possibility.

After the conference, Ontario NDP leader Howard Hampton led Society representatives to the front steps of the legislature building, where he addressed the close to 500 members and supporters who had gathered there.

Other speakers at the rally were Keith Rattai, Lynn Andrews, Samuelson, Toronto and York Region Labour Council President John Cartwright, Society President Andrew Müller, and IFPTE President Gregory Junemann.



Society President Andrew Müller addresses rally in support of Hydro One energy professionals on the steps of Queen's Park

Society holds education sessions across province

With Hydro One management dragging their feet in negotiations, the Society was conducting education sessions from Wednesday to Friday in locations across the province—from Thunder Bay to Ottawa to London to Thorold.

Society-represented employees spent an afternoon off their jobs meeting the public, city mayors, MPPs and MPs, and discussing the issues with them. Our Society educators were also distributing emergency candles, for use in the case of lockout-driven outages.

One example is the group in Belleville, who, with attention from CKWS (Kingston and Belleville) TV and the Belleville Intelligencer, visited Mayor Mary-Anne Sills at City Hall and MP Daryl Kramp in his office. Both were attentive and promised to follow events further. While they missed local MPP

Ernie Parsons, **Kent Lewis**, Chief Captain of the group, left an information package for him and followed up with e-mail.

In Toronto at Trinity Square, so many employees were on the square providing education that it was a large task just to keep them supplied with flyers and candles. On proceeding to Nathan Phillips Square, home of City Hall, the educators met and spoke with Mayor David Miller.

Members in Timmins educated the public and showed support for some CUPE picketers on strike, who welcomed the Society educators to their line. The team from Timmins also met with Timmins Mayor Victor Power, and has scheduled future meetings with mayors in nearby towns. They were written up in the *Timmins Daily Press* the next day.

In the three days of actions, there were over a dozen other teams and locations where successful Society educationals were carried out, mostly as successful as these three. "I do believe we are making a difference and raising our profile with the Liberal Government," said organizer **Jim Botari**.

Superior Court rules against Society request for injunction

An Ontario Superior Court Justice has dismissed the Society's application for an injunction preventing the exclusion of four positions from the Hydro One bargaining unit.

The positions are at the Ontario Grid Control Centre in Barrie and the backup control centre at Richview. Hydro One notified the Society on April 8th that it would be removing the positions from the Society bargaining unit. The Society immediately filed a complaint at the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB), alleging that the exclusion of the employees involved, and their transfer into management ranks, was a "blatant attempt to undermine the [Society's] bargaining rights on the eve of a final offer vote and a threatened lockout."

(The Collective Agreement with Hydro One has a clear process set out for making such exclusions—it's not enough just to notify the Society that the employer will do so.)

The Society requested the OLRB to schedule an expedited hearing on the complaint, but the OLRB refused to do so. Therefore, the Society applied to the Courts to issue an injunction against Hydro One implementing the exclusion before the case could be heard.

As a result of the Superior Court ruling, Hydro One will be able to exclude them at least until the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) has ruled on the Society's complaint.

Neither the Superior Court Justice ruling nor the Labour Board decision dealt with the issue at hand—whether the exclusion violates the Labour Relations Act.

Hampton says Premier McGuinty should take responsibility

NDP leader Howard Hampton took the government to task in Question Period on April 27th, putting several questions to Premier McGuinty about the Hydro One situation.

Ontario's electricity system is already under pressure. A couple of weeks ago ... [it] was either reduce voltage or face the prospect of a brownout or blackout. Now, with the hot, humid days of summer ahead of us, that electricity transmission system will be under even greater stress. The engineers, the scientists, the maintenance schedulers—those people who work at Hydro One and call themselves the energy professionals—are going to be more important than ever. Premier, in that context, can you explain to the people of Ontario why you as the sole owner of Hydro One have threatened to lock these very important people out at the very time when we need them to keep the lights on?

Energy Minister Dwight Duncan answered for the Premier in each case. He told Mr. Hampton that he preferred to let the Board of Hydro One manage the company, reminding him that former NDP premier Bob Rae was on the board. Also, he said, he believed free collective bargaining would in due course produce a settlement.

Hampton said Hydro One's bargaining tactics reminded him of the government's tactics with the doctors, and "[W]e know what a disaster that was: 'Either take it or we're going to shove it down your throat.'"

The Hydro One Local on the web

A web-site has been set up for information about the situation at Hydro One.

Surfers can find it at <http://www.fairnessforh1professionals.ca>. Thanks are due the IFPTE's staffer Faraz Khan, who set up the site for the Society.

Meanwhile, Hydro One Local member Kai Wong has set up a blog for Hydro One members to discuss current issues. It can be found at <http://proudenegyprofessionals.blogspot.com/>.

Hardship Fund: another way to donate

For members of Meridian Credit Union (formerly HEPCOE), there is an easy way to donate to the Society Hardship Fund.

Inspired by the impending lockout at Hydro One, the Hardship Fund has been set up to deal with colleagues in exceptional financial circumstances due to strikes or lockouts (see *Newscast 2005:01* for more details).

Meridian members can establish an "autotransfer authorization" to Society Meridian account 21088-0.

The autotransfer can be cancelled at any time.

And that is the Society Newscast for Monday, May 2, 2005.

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

Society Newscast No. 2005:02

Copyright © 2005 [Society of Energy Professionals]. All rights reserved.