

Society NewsFLASH 2004:06

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Hydro One Local: 97 per cent say yes to strike mandate

The members of the Hydro One Local's bargaining unit have given a stunning show of support for their bargaining team's demand for fairness in bargaining.

In a strike vote held across the province over the last week, the Local was given a 97 per cent mandate to call a strike if necessary. While that figure is impressive in itself, it is all the more significant given the 92 per cent *turnout* for the vote.

"Since our employer has not treated us fairly and with respect," said Local Vice President **Keith Rattai**, "we have for the first time been pushed to conduct strike votes across the province."

Rattai stressed that no one in the union wants to go on strike—all hope for a return to fairness and a settlement in bargaining. "Ninety-two per cent of the members of the bargaining unit voted in this strike vote—from Kenora to Ottawa and from Windsor to Niagara Falls—and 97 per cent of them endorsed strike action," he said. "We don't want to strike, but we will if we have to. Our employer's demand for a 14 per cent salary decrease is not fair."

The vote was also a resounding rejection of Hydro One management's desire to discriminate against younger employees starting their careers, said a young employee helping out in the vote count. "I see this vote as being very positive," she said. "With management's offer there's really no incentive for us to stay with the company. With this vote we're letting management know we're important, we're skilled, and we're educated."

For over fifty years, under Ontario Hydro and then Hydro One, the energy professionals in the company have not taken a strike vote. Until recently,



Hydro One Local Vice President Keith Rattai before the vote count

an impasse in bargaining was settled with mediation and arbitration, with neither a strike nor a lockout being an option. Hydro One ended this arrangement in 2003, signalling its preference for strike/lockout.

Bargaining between Hydro One and the Society reached an impasse in mid-February, and the Society applied to the Minister of Labour to appoint a conciliator (See *Newscast* 2004:12).

"I would like to thank *all* our members," said Rattai. "I'm very proud of the level of participation. It sends a very clear message to the employer. Members are angry with how they're being treated unfairly, and with the lack of respect."

"This is an incredible result," said Society President **Andrew Müller**. "Considering in over 50 years of bargaining we've never had to strike, and considering the type of member we represent—engineers, scientists, supervisors, and other professionals—and the first time they face a strike situation, to have so many people turn out and such a high percentage giving us a mandate, it shows they're going to stand up for their rights."

"We're taking this day-by-day," said Rattai. "We're looking forward to meeting with the employer again, and bargaining a fair collective agreement."

Conciliation talks are scheduled for March 29th.

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