

news FLASH



News from the Society of Energy Professionals

A SPECIAL REPORT! ←

November 21, 2005

For the 1,000 members of the Hydro One local who spent 105 days on strike this summer, victory is sweet.

Arbitrator Kevin Whitaker, appointed to determine a settlement of last summer's fifteen-week strike at Hydro One, released his ruling Thursday evening.

His ruling vindicated the Society's stand against two-tier wages and working for free.

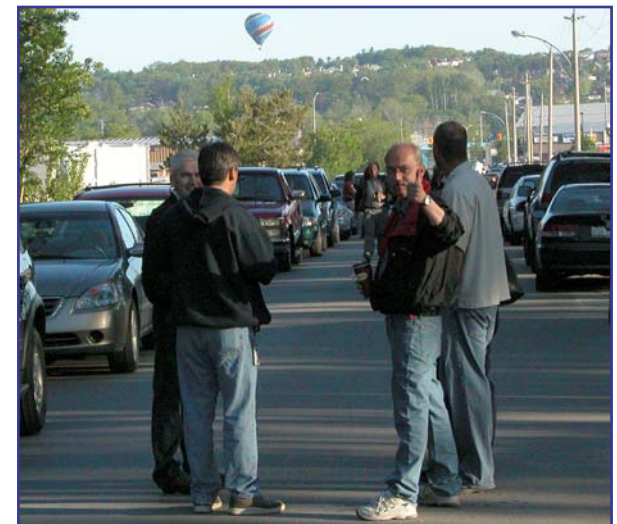
Arbitrator ruling a Society victory

"I think our members will be pleased with this," said bargaining team member **John Cameron**. "They fought a hell of a fight for Hydro One's future employees, and they won."

Faced earlier this year with Hydro One CEO Tom Parkinson's demands that the company's professionals swallow unprecedented and discriminatory cutbacks, members of the Local walked picket lines and dogged provincial government ministers from June to September. In September, a report from a mediator appointed by the McGuinty government said the dispute couldn't be resolved by the two parties themselves, and recommended that all issues be determined by third-party arbitration. The union agreed readily.

Hydro One wanted:

- ♦ all professionals hired after March 31, 2005 to be subject to a wage scale 10 per cent lower than that of current employees, and lower pension and health benefits—for their entire careers
- ♦ for the huge majority, four more hours of work per week with no compensation—an eleven per cent cut in pay, or 25 days of unpaid labour per year



June 1st: Society members walk out in Barrie.

Arbitrator Whitaker ruled:

- ♦ No two-tier wage and benefits
- ♦ No increase in the base hours of work
- ♦ Three per cent wage increase in each of the three years of the contract

There will, however, be a few minor differences in the pension plan for new employees, and they will have the right to opt out of the plan entirely.

Hydro One produced a surprise proposal in arbitration that the settlement be for one year only, raising the spectre of another attack on the collective agreement next summer. Perhaps much to the relief of Premier McGuinty, Mr. Whitaker stuck to the three-year agreement both parties had pursued in bargaining.

The employment guarantees included in Hydro One management's "final offer" of last April were not granted by Mr. Whitaker.

Other items in the ruling include:

- ◆ No reduction of existing protections under Article 64 (surplus staff procedure, redeployment)
- ◆ No substantive change to the existing protection against the contracting out of Society work.
- ◆ No specified minimum annual performance payout.
- ◆ New default Units of Application (Article 64), in which the "business unit" default Units of Application correspond to the organizations headed by direct reports to the President of Hydro One.
- ◆ Disciplinary penalties resulting in a suspension without pay may not be imposed until a final decision (agreement between Society and Hydro One or an arbitrator's decision) has been reached.
- ◆ Employees who take a voluntary severance package under Article 64 may elect to receive their cash-out payment over two tax years and to have all or a portion of this money directly deposited into an RRSP.
- ◆ The employer is allowed to appoint graduate trainees to ongoing MP2 positions upon successful completion of the graduate trainee program without having to advertise these positions, except during the operation of Article 64 or when there are surplus employees.

- ◆ Vision care coverage is increased to \$425 every two years effective April 1, 2005.
- ◆ Coverage of food supplement products like Nutramigen for children and Ensure and Boost for adults.
- ◆ Coverage of incontinence products for cancer patients.

The Hydro One bargaining team has scheduled a series of meetings across the province to explain the ruling to members of the Local.

Many former picketers believe the ruling helped make the fight worth it. **Mike Sullivan**, a recent hiree-one to whom the lower tier of the salary structure would have applied-said, "I would like to express how proud I am of all the Society members who took a stand against these unfair demands. Congratulations, we won."

The two-tier wage structure for new hires that was at the centre of the bitter battle would not have affected the great majority of those who walked picket lines, losing many weeks of pay for their determination. Senior engineer **Wojciech Ziolkowski** said, "It was an uplifting experience. We did the right thing."

Former strike captain **Laurie McIntyre** said, "We can't change the situation we're faced with, but we can decide how to let it affect us and how to react. We fought, with dignity and respect, an ethical and moral battle for future generations of Hydro One employees. I was proud to be part of this, and proud to continue to stand beside my fellow employees."

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