

December 22, 2008

Members of the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) Local are voting to ratify a first collective agreement, arrived at last Tuesday evening after 13 months of bargaining.

“This is not a trivial accomplishment,” said bargaining team member Edik Zwarenstein, in presenting the agreement to members at a ratification meeting on Wednesday, December 17th. “Many of the provisions in this contract are those of a mature bargaining relationship, not a first collective agreement.”

OEB Local gets first agreement!

“We’re absolutely pleased and gratified at what our members at the OEB have been able to achieve,” said Society President **Rod Sheppard**.

Crucial to the last minute bargaining was an agreement reached on contracting out, which had been a sticking point throughout the process. Management wanted to retain the unfettered right to contract out, while the Society bargaining team considered it a real threat to the viability of the bargaining unit. In the end, the parties agreed that:

- ◆ When management intends to contract out for more than one year work normally performed by the bargaining unit, the Society is entitled to prior consultation
- ◆ Where the Society finds the contracting out involved unacceptable, the dispute can be submitted to arbitration
- ◆ Contracting out of work for less than a year, or of work not normally performed by the bargaining unit, is exempt from prior consultation; however, Management will report quarterly to the Society on all such contracts

The salary grid for OEB employees will rise 3.0 per cent, *back-dated to April 1st, 2008*; 2.75 per cent on



Members of the OEB Local line up to get their ballots for the ratification vote

April 1st, 2009; and 2.75 per cent in 2010. Also, instead of having an infinite number of points, there will be six steps on the grid, including the bottom and the top. Employees will be placed on the grid based on their current assessed performance. In the

[T]he bargaining team ... did one hell of a job.

-OEB Local member Stephen Shields

step system, employees will reach the maximum salary in their sixth year (if they start at the bottom).

Beginning the second and third years of this agreement, then, each employee will get the yearly general salary increase, plus the step increase of 3.3 per cent, until they reach the top step.

Employees at maximum pay levels are still eligible for a one-time, non-pensionable increase of up to 10 per cent increase, but entirely at management's discretion.

The OEB's incentive payments—formerly based on a complex assessment of personal performance that was largely distrusted by employees—will now be based entirely on meeting externally audited corporate goals. A component involving achievement of personal goals has been eliminated. Depending on their salary scale, employees will get 4.5 to 10.5 per cent of their salaries in incentive payments, provided corporate goals are met.

The OEB's policy on overtime—one-half hour's pay for every hour of overtime worked—is abolished. Employees will henceforth be paid time-and-a-half—double time on Sundays and statutory holidays. (Indeed, Management saw the wisdom of abolishing this policy before bargaining was over, and had already implemented it.)

OEB employees will now achieve four weeks of vacation allotment in their seventh year of employment (previously the ninth), and five weeks in their 15th year (previously the 16th). In addition, every employee gets seven days per year of floating personal leave days, an increase of five days for most employees.

The Society also achieved gains in health, dental, and vision benefits (with an end to the premium paid for vision-care); hours of work and alternative work arrangements;

pregnancy and parental leave top-ups; joint development of a gender-neutral job evaluation system; a layoff procedure, and more.

A dispute with OEB management over a pay equity plan posted last year has yet to be resolved; currently the Society is considering alternative ways to resolve the impasse.


"I'm very happy with this agreement," Zwarenstein told two very well-attended ratification meetings. "I'm hoping you'll agree with me, and cast your ballot to ratify it."

"For the bargaining team to get what they got for us, especially in this tough economic situation, they did one hell of a job," said member Stephen Shields.

In a communiqué, Zwarenstein also thanked the Society as a whole for the support it took to achieve his Local's first collective agreement.



OEB Local bargaining team member Edik Zwarenstein



The Bargaining Team of the Ontario Energy Board Local wishes to express their appreciation for the support of the Society Executive, the Board, Society Council and all the staff of the Society and the IFPTE for the tremendous support and advice we have received in many ways throughout the 13 months of negotiation. The OEB local has achieved a first collective agreement which is comparable with the rest of the energy industry. The agreement ... clarifies and improves many working conditions and benefits, and provides an effective grievance procedure. It would not have been possible without a determined

and involved membership, and the support we have received from all of you.

The settlement is subject to ratification by the members of the OEB Local. The results of the vote are expected to be announced on January 12th.

The Society's bargaining team consisted of **Edik Zwarenstein, Michael Bell, Karen Cormier, Renata Davidson,** and **Bev Jaffray**. Staff support was provided by IFPTE organizer **Anna Liu** and Society Staff Officers **Laura Brownell** and **Blaine Donais**.

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