

WAITING FOR ERNIE

BY ANDERS MILLER-GEORGE

WE ASSEMBLED EN MASSE TO MARK THE INVESTITURE OF A NEW PREMIER. WERE WE WAITING FOR ERNIE? A FAIR CONTRACT? A MIRACLE? ONE THING FOR SURE. WAITING FOR JUSTICE IS NOT HALF THE FUN. THIS ARTICLE IS DEDICATED TO JUSTINE SPAMOVITZ, WHO WANTED TO COVER THE EVENT FOR OPSEU LOCAL 527 BUT, DUE TO ILLNESS, COULDN'T BE THERE WITH US.

It's a clammy, unseasonably warm day for mid-April. Under a slate gray sky that threatens rain, we assemble in front of 361 University. The occasion? An OPSEU rally to mark the investiture of Ontario's new premier Ernie Eves at Queen's Park later in the day.

We arrive at 12:30 p.m. There are already at least a couple of thousand people there. A CTV van is parked close by; later, I would wonder what the hell those CTV people did all afternoon, for there wasn't a hint of insight in CTV's coverage of the event in the network's evening news broadcasts that evening.

I chat with colleagues I've not seen since the Strike began. We exchange insights, picket-tales and a few jokes. Voices drop a bit when we share the names of (and our disdain for) known strikebreakers (aka "creepy-crawlies") whom we'll have to work with again when this is all over. Finally, I declare: "Stop! I've just had lunch. I'm gonna make floor pizza if we don't change the subject!" Laughter.

I climb up on a bench to see if I can locate any Local 527 people (...*good name for a band!* - ed.) As I scan the crowd, my eyes encounter some very creative messages. Some are amusing:

2% IS A TYPE OF MILK - NOT AN OFFER!

POACH EGGS, NOT WILDLIFE!

Others cut to the chase more bluntly:

PUBLIC SERVANTS, NOT SLAVES!

ERNIE!

WE DON'T WANT YOUR PENSION - SO DON'T TOUCH OURS!

(cont'd. See **WAITING** on page 2)

IT'S A FACT: Dentists recommend that toothbrushes be kept at least six feet away from the toilet in order to avoid airborne particles resulting from the flush. It's true, it's more hygienic and it's a fact worth remembering!

BETWEEN THE LINES

BY MERRY-SPRING MEADOWS

PONDERING THE WIDE CRACKS MIKE HARRIS LEFT IN HIS WAKE, FEATURED COLUMNIST MERRY-SPRING MEADOWS SUGGESTS IT'S GOING TO TAKE A HELLUVA LOT MORE THAN PANCAKE MAKE-UP FOR THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT'S "FRIENDLY NEW FACE" TO WITHSTAND CLOSE AND SUSTAINED SCRUTINY.

Lights ... Action ... Camera! Welcome to office, Mr. Eves. Or should I say "Mr. Premier"? Not to put too fine a point on it, but it is well-known that fluorescent lights and broad daylight are the enemy of every vain person over 30. Well, now we can add "the glare of broadcast television light" to that list. But don't let me rain on anyone's parade, especially during what is certain to be the traditionally brief "honeymoon" period of a new political regime.

But from our standpoint out here on the streets, all we have to go by are the flashy headlines by local media scribes proclaiming how "Eves puts a friendly new face on cabinet" (*The Globe and Mail*, 16 April) And considering the wide cracks Mike Harris left in his wake, plastering on this 'new face' will take more than a little effort, more than cosmetic artistry.

Granted, Mr. Eves, you've made a bright start by placing women in a number of prominent cabinet roles in recognition of the fact that qualifications and ability are not dependent upon gender. It's a refreshing change to hear Ontario's new alpha-male declare that he "...simply chose the most qualified person for each job..." (*The Globe and Mail*, 16 April). Or might this be a cunning strategy to ensure steady access to make-up tips? I have no doubt that Ms. Witmer and Ms. Ecker will be only too pleased to share.

But here's a thought! Why not consult Leah Casselman? Now, there's a woman who knows a great deal about the importance of a good 'foundation'. After all, it's now common knowledge that you two are on a first name basis. Leah herself commented: "That's a start - Harris never knew my name..." (*The Toronto Star*, 16 April). And I know for a fact that the lovely Leah would be very willing to share her perspectives and suggestions on how to cover up those nasty cracks. And who knows, Mr. Eves, she may even lend you her compact!

(cont'd. See **MEADOWS** on page 2)

MEADOWS (cont'd from page 1)

But a few words of warning: Don't toy with Ms. Casselman or her 45,000 supporters' determination to win a fair contract. My stars! They might even overlook that little matter of a leaked memo that led to – guess what? – extensive FREE media coverage during a media blackout. “OPSEU strike likely to last 2-3 weeks: Memo” (*Toronto Star*, 11 April) Tsk-tsk! But I digress...

Mr. Eves, I would venture that the time has come to make good on your promise of being “...a politician who listens and acts...” (*The Globe and Mail*, 15 April).

We know you have a lot planned for Ontario, Mr. Premier. Oops! There, I've said it. And I guess it's true. You grabbed for the brass ring and got what you were after. But remember! You'll need a strong and focused workforce to make those plans happen. So, with all that money that's been saved on our salaries – “David Tsubouchi has said the government saves about \$7.6 million each day of the strike.” (*The Toronto Star*, 11 April) – maybe the time has come to put the cosmetics, not to mention the advertising budgets, aside and start bargaining fairly and in good faith.

Let's face it, Mr. Eves, your shiny new title of “Premier” implies “first”. And although a ceremony conferred that title upon you, it'll take a lot more to than that to earn the accolade of being ‘first’ as far as we're concerned.

(BETWEEN THE LINES looks at Toronto's daily media over the last few days, and is a regular feature of this publication.)

WAITING (cont'd from page 1)

One sign struck me as being particularly chilling:

I SPENT 30 MINUTES SUPERVISING A SEX OFFENDER LAST MONTH.

WHERE DID HE SPEND THE REST OF HIS TIME?

One in particular was rich in irony:

WE PROVIDE QUALITY SERVICE!

Before long, I spy our Local's two distinctive Big Yellow Banners. I make my way towards them through the noisy crowd. Finally, my ears single out the unmistakable voice and laughter of Maria D'Addona. Maria cracks wise about “...how hot it's getting down here!” The thought crosses my mind that being short as well as claustrophobic would be an impossible combination here today. Maria is in the company of several 527-ers. We exchange a few words, then I join our Local's prez Rod Sawyer who is struggling with strings to try to get the banner he and Fred Cane are bearing to fly right. Paul Foster and George Clare are close by carrying the other Banner. I get behind them and wait. And wait. And wait some more. My back begins to ache.

Buses from all over Ontario start arriving, unloading their human cargo in front of 361 University Ave. It was great to chat with other OPSEU members from as far away as

Timmins and Sudbury (2 buses each!), Pembroke (2 buses), Ottawa (6 buses!!!) and so on.

A long Chinese parade dragon wends its way through the crowd, giving me reason to wonder at the resourcefulness and ingenuity of some members. A group of Caribbean-Canadian women burst into a spontaneous call-and-response chant a few feet away. I wonder if this is the same crew Malcolm Horne encountered in the early days of the Strike; they sure seem to be having more fun than I am! Finally, after much milling and jostling, we begin to move forward up University Avenue. At regular intervals, we pass police standing watchfully on University island.

As we moved up towards the Legislative Building, a message percolates through the crowd: “When we get to the intersection of College and University, everybody sit down right there on the road! We will be on City property, not provincial, so the OPP won't be able to touch us, only the (friendlier) Toronto police force.”

Malcolm Horne (of *DIARY OF A STRATEGIC PICKETER* fame) lived a different experience of this particular facet of the Rally. Malcolm writes: “Unlike Local 527, I was with the ‘Long March’ from 361 University and around along Dundas, up Bay Street, then along College. Everyone was very disciplined, staying in their lanes but making lots of noise. Police were stationed at the Pink Palace. In hindsight, it might have been fun to do a single circle around the building. I was stationed near the back, supposedly so the leaders at the front could tell more easily where the rear of the parade actually was. As it turned out, the mounted police followed the march, so it was pretty easy to tell where the end was. The Bay Street march comprised people from the southwestern and northern parts of the province. Many had never seen mounted police before stopping to take photos to show the folks back home. Even after their long bus-trips Toronto, they were still boisterous, very noisy and oh-so-happy to be there.”

Finally, we reach the intersection of University and College, a few hundred feet from the Pink Palace. Several women sit down on the pavement, while a few more call out to the rest of us: “Sit down! We're not doing anything wrong! Just sit down on the street!”

We are asked to stay put until Leah Casselman gets into the Legislature to “...talk to Ernie.” Leah is taken into the building by MPPs Peter Kormos (NDP) and Domenic D'Agnostino (Liberal). We stay put for over an hour, catching up with old friends and acquaintances from all over Ontario: Sue Morrison, a Regional Consultant from St. Catharines; Peter Engelbert, an archaeologist from Ottawa; retired steward Peter Carruthers; Stu Maloney from MNR in Peterborough; as well as remote Local 527 pickets such as Chris Junker-Andersen from Pickering and Paul King from Whitby. Everyone has interesting Strike tales to share. The unique ‘worm's eye view’ of the Legislature that we

get sitting on the hard cement intersection proves to be the icing on the cake (...*must have been some cake!* — *ed.*)

Torn from the pages of Malcolm Horne's diary is a different perspective on this part of the day: "It surprised police when we took control of the intersection. They were unprepared for that! Apparently, Leah Casselman was the first to sit down. When officers attempted to remove her, the one in charge ordered them not to. I guess he knew what he'd have to deal with had they manhandled or attempted to arrest her. Anyway, as soon as Leah sat down, trained participants and Marshals who had been informed of the plan shortly beforehand joined her, loudly urging others to park it, too. It all proved to be a real Local 527 homecoming! A number of out-of-towners got together with their Toronto colleagues, resulting in a nostalgic trip down Memory Lane. Many hadn't participated in an 'action' of this kind since the early 1970s!"

While Leah Casselman is inside waiting for Ernie, we all mill around killing time. The romantic in me would like to think that some of us "connected" – rather like Meg Ryan and Tom Hanks did in *Sleepless in Seattle*. But I doubt it. Everyone seemed to have bigger fish to fry on this day.

Many chose to pass on the intersection sit-down and headed straight up to the front of the Legislature. Around 3:30, the Marshals start herding them back to the intersection where a portable stage has been erected.

Finally, Leah emerges from the Pink Palace. She's met by an "Honour Guard" of uniformed Corrections Officers who escort her to the stage waving flags and cheering. Her speech is brief and to-the-point. She tells the crowd that she greeted the new premier as he emerged from his ceremonial investiture and that he'd acknowledged her by name. This, she points out, is more than Harris ever managed. "Mike never even recognized (as in "acknowledged") me!" Furthermore, Leah laughingly reports that, when former premier Mike Harris emerged and saw her there, he turned to his henchmen and asked: "Where do I go?" Ms. Casselman remembered her upbringing, she told the crowd, and bit her tongue! The crowd roars with laughter.

Minutes after Leah left the makeshift podium, we begin to disperse. I walk north along University with a friend. A helicopter circles overhead. We look up; it's CTV again, right on cue, missing the action. We pass four police on horseback standing side by side, waiting. We stop and snap a picture. Suddenly, it dawns on me what the CTV-News van in front of 361 University was waiting for: violence, maybe even bloodshed. My blood. Your blood.

I'm so glad we disappointed them all! I'm so glad we're better than that.

(ANDERS MILLER-GEORGE is the collaborative pseudonym of three Local 527 operatives reporting for *TIMES ON THE LINES*)

STRATEGICALLY STRONG

- Diary of a Striker (Part 3) -

BY MALCOLM HORNE

STRATEGIC PICKETING MAKES THE VERY MOST OF OUR REDUCED NUMBERS IN THE CURRENT OPSEU STRIKE. IN PART 3 OF HIS DIARY, MALCOLM HORNE SHARES MORE HARD-LEARNED LESSONS AS WELL AS A FEW PITHY FASHION INSIGHTS! NOT SINCE *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS* HAS ONE MAN WALKED THROUGH SO MANY ADVENTURES. UNLIKE GULLIVER, MALCOLM EMERGES UNSCATHED THOUGH NOT UNTOUCHED BY ALL THE FINE FOLK HE ENCOUNTERS ALONG THE WAY. READ ON!

Monday 8 April —505 University until 7:45 to prevent the line-crossing happening there. Then the Ontario Heritage Foundation by 8:00 for a similar effort. Uneventful overall.

Four members of Local 568, led by Sean Fraser and assisted by a volunteer from the Ontario Pension Trust (not OPS and not on strike) were holding the door against an equal number of strikebreakers (... *'creepy-crawlies' surely!* — *ed.*) and managers. Our group held the door until 10:00. We started by enforcing a half-hour wait for all OPS workers; due to some confusion, we somehow ended up not allowing any strikebreakers into the building. Imagine that! Ultimately, almost all strikebreakers were prevented from entering until 1:00 despite complaints and threats that police would be called. Reinforcements from other locals arrived around 10:00 to keep things going until 1:00. Led by a local street person, they provided a gauntlet of 'verbal advice' for the linecrossers as they were allowed to enter.

TUESDAY 9 APRIL — 720 Bay all morning. Big line – two to three hundred at its peak. Lots of drums, noise, and a cookie visit by some AMAPCEOs from up the street. When I first arrived, Marylou Jorgensen-Bacher, who had found a large number of pennies (21 in all), was busy convincing everyone that this just had to be a good omen. A brief shower inspired some members to model their rainwear. Winner of the Most Striking Poncho Award (... *very punny!* —*ed.*) was Kelly O'Connell in a smart little blue Maid of the Mist number! A few strikebreakers had to wait over two hours (...*stop! I'm going to cry!* — *ed.*). The police arrived and escorted them into the building; nobody interfered. Some OPSEU brass rushed up from Strike HQ and entered into a half-hour discussion with the police. As I left, the sun broke through the clouds. MaryLou was right about that omen!

(cont'd. See **DIARY** on page 4)

IT'S A FACT: No piece of paper may be folded in half more than seven times.

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DIARY (cont'd from page 3)

Wednesday 10 April — 40 St. Clair West (Environment and Shared Services) at 7:00. On the way, I met Rod Sawyer carrying signs. A few pickets already there when we arrived; a small lineup had already formed. This location has serious problems with strikebreakers. Also, this building has many private sector users. More complicated than 400 University! Several dental/medical offices and a travel agency inside. What attitude! Folks used to breezing in without checks; strikebreakers shoving their way in. Also, a rather unpleasant group of managers.

We kept a line-up going, delaying managers and AMAPCEOs for 10 minutes and holding strikebreakers for up to 30! This building already had an injunction to allow anybody to cross after a 10-minute delay. Management called in security to escort people in. The strikebreakers who had been waiting for about half-an-hour were told by two guards to enter. Then two strikebreakers who hadn't waited at all entered. So a couple more veteran strikebreakers decided to force their way in and the guards helped them! Commotion. Finally, about 15 of us rushed to the doors and formed a double human layer, linking arms and singing *Solidarity Forever*. A police officer arrived, told us we were trespassing and ordered us off the property. He seemed uncertain and there was some argument, so we didn't go right away. We moved to the sidewalk and formed a very dense line.

The picket line was dense, so I moved to the back door. Similar showdowns. We picketed the parking lot entrances; nasty remarks from some elderly individuals. You'd think older people would be supportive given how this government has knocked out their social supports (...*stupidity knows no age!* — ed.) At 10:00, we dissolved the lines.

We marched down St. Clair to the Ontario Savings Office, set up a 150-member information picket and made one hell of a lot of noise for Global TV. Then I was off home.

Thursday 11 April — 900 Bay (MacDonald Block). Walked the line for an hour, then went and assisted in handing out the arrival-time slips to managers, AMAPCEO folks and others. A flood of people arrived between 8:30-9:00! It takes a lot of experience and coordination (...*not to mention management skills!* — ed.) to get this process running smoothly. Nobody complains; everybody just takes their slip and gets in line.

Problems later at 99 Wellesley (Whitney Block). Some of Ernie Eves' boys shoved their way through the line without showing ID and without waiting to go in. This news reached the mass picket at 900 Bay at about 9:00. Gary Shaul spoke to the crowd and then led about 200 members to 99 Wellesley. We completely jammed up the sidewalk and filled in the two walks leading to the doors with layers of pickets. We were at the bottom of the steps; security

guards with batons were at the top looking more than tense. We made a lot of noise while Gary went in several times to talk to the Premier's Office staff. They've been told that they have to respect our lines.

Back to 900 Bay at 10:00 to hear the an excellent speech by Leah Casselman as well as several addresses by representatives from various trade unions to mark *Sisters in Solidarity Day*. The crowd responded enthusiastically. The media were in attendance. Leah announced that the essential services staff at 361 University (Provincial Courthouse, the court reporters and clerks) had instituted a work refusal. Management was holding back overtime due and not making any deductions, claiming they were unable to figure it all out (...*tacit admissions of incapability? Whoa!* — ed.) They had walked out and were standing outside the Courthouse; Leah asked us to march down and join them.

The usual 52 Division police team escorted several hundred of us! A group of court staff, along with what appeared to be several lawyers, were there. Lots of chanting, noise-making. Then, Leah spoke to us (and the media) about the plight of court workers, many unclassified, some for as long as 13 years; about how these workers don't know until the Monday of any given week how many hours they will work that week (sometimes, as few as 12). Several got up and spoke about their difficulties. Then we formed a mass picket line that was still going very strong when I left. On my way out I noticed that the same police that escorted our march were lounging around enjoying the sun!

Friday 12 April — Today the strategic pickets returned "home" to 400 University for some entertainment and refreshments. We did the Standard Picket Shuffle (...*sounds like a great new dance step!* — ed.) for a couple of hours; then came the Fashion Show. This was something else altogether! I can't cite everybody's names, but I can say that their costumes and/or performances were simply remarkable, flamboyant and sometimes erotic (...*What! Surely not in Ontari-ari-ario!* — ed.) Costumes were creative and had obviously required considerable effort. Everyone was great. Local 527 Secretary (acting) Paul deRege as a clown was too much! The catwalk sashaying was awesome; the rails running down the steps were put to remarkably good use (...*stop! My imagination is overheating!* — ed.) on a par with anything I've seen in a club! Oops, did I say that? (...*hmm! Now we know!* — ed.) We laughed ourselves silly. After weeks of picketing, people clearly have few inhibitions about public performance (...*stop right there! This is getting kinda porny!* — ed.) Following the fashion show, we were served some very tasty wraps by AMAPCEO (...*had those wraps been worn by any "fashion models"?* Just wondering... — ed.) A few AMAPCEO folks joined us and I caught up with what is going on "inside" (not much, it seems)!
