



The latest bargaining and mobilizing news for OPS members

Summary of tentative agreement reached with government by Central/Unified bargaining team

On October 6, 2015, Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President of OPSEU, announced that the Central/Unified bargaining team had reached a tentative agreement with the Ontario government. Ontario Public Service (OPS) workers have been without a collective agreement since December 31, 2014.

“While the previous round of bargaining had been difficult, this round was one of the toughest the OPS had ever faced,” admitted Thomas. “After we sent a vigorous message that we were here to bargain, the employer returned with a revised proposal. The team fought the employer’s draconian concessions and won some important gains.”

Central/Unified Chair Roxanne Barnes said the team fought long and hard to defeat most of the concessions, but noted that we at OPSEU have a lot of work ahead of us. “We must continue to be active, vocal and strong. We must continue to fight to stop the erosion of quality public services.”

The agreement is for three years, covering the period January 1, 2015, to December 31, 2017.

Wage adjustments (Unified agreement) include:

- 2015: no wage increase
- 2016: 1.4 per cent lump sum
- 2017: 1.4 per cent increase
- 2016-17: progression through the wage grid is frozen

Listed below are some of the concessions the Employer had demanded but which your bargaining team successfully defeated.

- A two-year extension of the wage freeze, which had already been in place for two years.
- A permanent expansion of the wage grid to 12 steps, along with a starting rate five per cent below the current rate. This would have affected both new workers and workers changing positions.
- Devastating concessions to our benefits plan. The tiered drug formulary would have reduced access to drug benefits and left it up to a third party to decide which tier your drug would fall under.

Further, your bargaining team successfully inserted anti-privatization language to improve job security and include a career transition allowance. It requires the Employer to work with the union before the government privatizes or divests itself of services it delivers.

While there are minor concessions in the agreement, they are minimal compared to the gains that were achieved. Further, your bargaining team was able to mitigate any concessions remaining on the table.

For example, with regard to termination pay, in the 2012-13 negotiations, termination pay was lost for new hires. In this round, the Employer had demanded the accrual of termination pay be capped as of December 31, 2015.

Your bargaining team was able to negotiate an extra year to accumulate termination pay. As such, when employees retire, termination pay will be based on their rate of pay as of December 31, 2016. If an employee has accrued termination pay (one week's pay per year of service, to a maximum of 26 weeks), they have not lost what they have accrued up to that date.

Another example is long-term insurance protection (LTIP). The Employer presented a laundry list of concessions to LTIP that would have gutted coverage. Your bargaining team was able to remove every single concession but for one. According to this provision, when a member on LTIP is eligible to retire with an unreduced pension (using factor 90 or the 60-20 provision), or has 30 years in the pension plan – whichever is later – they can retire or they can continue on LTIP. However, if they continue on LTIP, they must pay their share of the pension contributions.

A further example is mandatory rehabilitation. The Employer had demanded that workers on short-term and long-term sick leave participate in a return-to-work program, where recommended, by the insurance carrier. If workers refused to participate, their benefits would be terminated. Your bargaining team was able to remove this provision as it applied to workers on short-term sick leave. The team was also able to add a quick arbitration resolution process for anyone whose benefits are terminated.

In commenting on the tentative agreement, Thomas was quick to set the record straight on the government's "net-zero" stance. "Even as the Liberals were slashing public employees' pay, they were treating the biggest corporations to generous tax cuts. These cuts cost Ontario \$2.5 billion a year – more than the entire payroll of OPSEU-represented OPS employees.

"The concessions this employer has demanded are not about paying off the deficit. They are about transferring money from working people to big corporations and private investors."

This tentative agreement could not have been reached without the unwavering support of OPS members across the province. Thank you to our members, staff, the Executive Board and mobilizers for their hard work and commitment in getting our messages out and for fighting the good fight.

Thomas also praised members and local reps for their invaluable support, and all those involved in the negotiations, for helping to achieve the best possible agreement. "I couldn't be prouder to be part of a union that presents a united front in the face of bullying and scare tactics. The Employer was forced to back down when confronted with members' solidarity and resolve."

Your bargaining team achieved its tentative agreement on September 22. We did not disclose the settlement at the request of the Corrections team, which continues to bargain with the government. With Corrections bargaining dates not scheduled until November, it was decided to announce the tentative agreement without further delay.

Finally, two members of your bargaining team do not favour ratification of the tentative agreement. They are Dylan Lineger (Local 410) and Glenna Caldwell (Local 302).

Get Out and Vote!

All OPS members need to get out and vote. This is *your* collective agreement – this is *your* future. Information meetings will be held within each region of OPSEU between October 19 and 23. There may be additional meetings scheduled within your region or local over the next two weeks. They will be posted by notice locally. Voting will take place on October 27, 28 and 29. Make sure you check the [OPSEU website](#) for the times and places of information meetings and polling booths.

Authorized for distribution:



Roxanne Barnes, Chair
Central/Unified Team



Warren (Smokey) Thomas
President

**Keep
up the
good
work!**