

PAID ADVOCACY

# Want paid sick days?

## Join a union.



It's been a heck of a year; for many, it's been the worst year. But from the trials and tribulations of COVID-19, something beautiful has arisen all around us: pandemic solidarity.

Support our front-line heroes, end for-profit long-term care, shop local, legislate paid sick days. These are more than just slogans; they have become the rallying cries of the COVID generation. We've had our Aha Moment, and we're unified behind a common goal to help one another.

As President of OPSEU/SEFPO, I can assure you: pandemic solidarity looks a lot like union solidarity; fighting for better workplace health and safety, job security and respect for front-line heroes. These aren't new ideas.

But sometimes good ideas are just too obvious.

Take paid sick days. If decent wages, good working conditions and paid sick days were the norm, workers wouldn't need unions. Demand for union protection and support wouldn't be on the rise. But it is. OPSEU/SEFPO's phones are ringing off the hook.

It's no wonder the experts and academics agree we need paid sick days now. The idea that people would have to work while they're sick in order to pay their bills has become untenable and unpalatable for most Ontarians. It's time for the politicians at Queen's Park to read the room.

But with so much political waffling regarding paid sick leave, we can't hold our breath for the political process to unfold. We're in the midst of a pandemic and people need protection now.

So, if workers want paid sick days, it's time to join a union. Heck, join my union – our doors are always open. And if you believe in paid sick days, support unionization efforts and union drives.

Despite all the progress we've made in the past 100 years, workers still deserve better.

We know that politicians' promises are fleeting; no matter what they say today, they won't necessarily be singing the same tune a year from now. That's the name of the political game; promises made, promises broken and then we elect a new government, and it all starts again.

Collective Agreements on the other hand, last.

They are legal contracts between employers and workers, and unions give workers the collective power to negotiate what they need and want in their contract. Collective Agreements are like a foundation – we can always build on them, but no employer or politician can ignore or disregard them. They can't just flip the switch and walk away. That's just one of the benefits that unions provide for working people.

Unions are all about building collective power – about working people standing up for one another, and that's clearly more important now than ever. Because no government or employer will ever give working people something for nothing – not even something as

obvious as paid sick days during a global health crisis. We always pay for progress through our taxes or through pricing.

But that's why pandemic solidarity – like union solidarity – matters. Because we need to help one another, now and always, and unions are our best bet.

When you're sick, you shouldn't have to work – whether it's COVID-19 or not. And when you're at work, you shouldn't fear for your health and safety – whether it's COVID-19 or not.

We've had our Aha Moment. Now, it's time to organize. Join the movement.

Warren (Smokey) Thomas,  
OPSEU/SEFPO President



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