OSSTF in solidarity

by Angie Romo

OSSTF District 12 members can congratulate themselves for working hard to get rid of the Tories. But we did not do it by ourselves! Our networking with other organizations, like the Campaign for Public Education, and other unions, like CUPE and OPSEU, contributed to our success. Such coalitions will continue to be important as public unions organize to resist the growing threat to public service, community work, and organized labour.

Blame the worker!

Consider the situation facing workers at the Centre for Spanish-Speaking Peoples. Members of OPSEU Local 512, they have been on strike since December 1. They have been told that a contract is only possible if they accept a 30% wage cut offer and reduced benefits.

A combination of waste and mismanagement have put the Centre in such a desperate financial crisis that it can no longer pay its bills. The Board of Directors, who blame the strike on the “militancy” of the workers, hopes to dig itself out of the proverbial hole by reducing labour costs. It cannot lay off workers because it would then have to cut programs, and this would reduce funding. So the only hope is to starve the workers into submission.

Hispanic Toronto

These workers provide a valuable service to the Hispanic community in Toronto. Most of the workers are themselves immigrants and understand the needs of people newly arrived in Toronto from Latin America. Some of the workers are from the first wave of Spanish-speaking immigrants in the seventies, many fleeing repression from the army in Chile and Argentina. The Centre has a legal aid clinic as well as an AIDS clinic. It provides settlement services and support for battered women.

The Local 512 has been aware of the Centre’s financial situation for some time. It offered to “share” hours among workers rather than accept a lay-off. However, a pay cut of 30% is a sacrifice that members feel they should not be expected to make, particularly when those making the demand are responsible for the situation.

Supporting our friends

These workers, and the community they serve, have passed through our classrooms and continue to do so, both adults and children. We need to help them. OSSTF District 12 has contributed $300 towards the OPSEU Local 512 strike fund. In addition, $400 was collected from members at the STBU Council meeting held in December. Provincial OSSTF has also been asked to kick in.

If you would like to make a contribution, please contact Marg McPhail, Executive Officer, at the District office (393-8900) or by e-mail at mmcphail@osstfdist12.com.

News Shorts

PSSP settlement

After 520 days without much progress, District 12 PSSP (Professional Student Services Personnel) has signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the TDSB for a contract for 2002-2004, ratified on February 9 by 98% of the membership. (Negotiations for 2004-2006 begin, then, February 10?)

Congratulations to our colleagues! to the attendance counselors, psychologists, student program workers, youth counselors, audiologists, multilingual team leaders, speech pathologists, and others who are so important to our schools.

Killer coke!

At the December STBU Council meeting, councillors voted to boycott all Coca Cola products (including Minute Maid, Nestea, Fruitopia) at all D12 council meetings. D12 members are encouraged to do the same at their branch locations.

As President Doug Jolliffe explained, the boycott is part of a world-wide campaign against Coca Cola for its involvement in the brutal repression, including murder and torture, of trade union activists in Columbia. For more information, google “coke boycott” or go to killercoke.org.

Educating Paul Martin

Also in December, Branch Presidents passed a motion (Langen, Aslanidis) demanding of then PM-elect Paul Martin an independent inquiry into the Maher Arar affair.

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