

OSSTF/FEESO President Ken Coran discusses member's participation in voluntary activities

February 25, 2013

Good morning everyone and thank you for coming out on a Monday morning. The news this somewhat anti-climactic after some of the news articles and news releases on the weekend and late Friday afternoon. Our intent today is to bring people up to speed with regards to rationale and as Lori says to answer some of the questions that we would anticipate coming. I think right now the main point I would like to raise is that this whole past year was unnecessary and we stated that right start the way the process was initiated comments made by the then Premier the then Minister of Education and some of the lawyers that were hired to do the bargaining process all led to a scenario and atmosphere of disrespect and that's certainly no way to begin any bargaining process.

So what we are entering into right now is I would say it's a new stage or a new phase of where these Labour relations are with the government and like to stress to you that that is in fact the case. This is the next stage. We certainly are nowhere near completion and there's a lot of work that still remains to be done. So before you can understand exactly rationale for changing things, it is necessary I believe do a little bit of a buildup as to where we are right now and how we got there. And you know the biggest events happened obviously when the bargaining process first began and it was not a part process was basically a dictatorial approach that we face a little over a year ago.

It was February 22nd in fact when we first met with three lawyers and basically we were told "this is what your collective agreement will look like – sign here", and that was certainly not an acceptable way to begin. We have stressed time and time again that we believe in the *Ontario Labour Relations Act* process, we respect the role of the Ontario Labour Relations Board, we respect the role of the trustees and those people that are duly elected at the local level to carry out local negotiations. So we got off on the wrong foot - nothing happened to correct that and in fact it got worse and worse with the introduction of Bill 115 and the subsequent passage of Bill 115 in the first part of September. Shortly right around that time period, what our organization did was we came up with an action plan and it was an action plan to address the anticipated passage of Bill 115 and it had three key principles and it's the first principle that leads us to where we are right now.

The first principle was our actions were designed to create an environment to bargain an acceptable deal and the keywords right there obviously "to bargain" an acceptable deal so what has happened? What did our organization do? What should the public be aware of? The public should be aware that all along through this whole controversial process, our 60,000 members – teachers, vocational teachers, and support staff members - not once took time away from the classroom and resources and services away from the students. That was never done. In fact, all the way through this we try to negotiate, to discuss with the government, and to discuss with local school boards an acceptable solution. So any actions we took from September 7th were actions that our members, our local leaders and our Provincial Executive felt were necessary to do what I mentioned – to create an atmosphere to bargain an acceptable deal.

So what did happen was we (a more notable event) we did delay taking strike votes in September, we did that once again to continued discussions. If we even go farther back than that - in April, May and June we discussed cost-saving measures with the government, alternative solutions to the way the situation could be dealt with. However we did take those strike votes by the end of September. We had an overwhelming majority of people that said they would be favour of supporting strike actions if that was deemed necessary. We held back on taking any strike actions to continue discussions with the government and school boards. And some

of the more important dates in that process was the weekend of November 9th, 10th and 11th when we did have serious discussions with the government. We were making progress and then all of a sudden on November 11th a lot of the positive discussions we were having suddenly terminated and we were told by the government at that time that ... “this process would not continue - to take your bargaining to the local level.” So, in fact we said “If that is the position of the government, we will start our strike. And our strike did start on November 11th. But it’s not a strike as I say, that took services away from students, it was called elective withdraw of administrative duties and so therefore some of the less known components of what teachers and support staff workers do - those were withdrawn. So no direct impact. Curriculum was continually delivered. Curriculum was prepared. Marking was done and the resource services that students need from our support staff were all maintained all the way through this.

So we took the government *at the time* their direction directly to the employers – and we went directly to the employers and we met with school boards the following weekend. And we were also making progress at *that time*. And in fact we were getting close to getting tentative agreements and in some cases we did get agreements. But what happened in the interim is some of the details that were negotiated suddenly became changed when the government got involved in some of these local negotiations and they definitely contravened what some of those important clauses were. We regarded that direct interference in the collective bargaining process. We told the government that and it was December 10th when we increased our strike actions. Once again stayed in the classroom, continued to deliver curriculum, continued to provide resource services, but we did withdraw from volunteer extracurricular activities.

That was 44 school days ago, when that step was taken. It was a step that a lot of members criticized and a lot of members herald as an action that would hopefully get some results from the government. So what happened in the interim? We all know that it was the festive season. We made it very apparent to all that our actions were not designed to hurt community events, and were not designed to interfere with charitable organizations. So even though those could be deemed voluntary, and *are* in fact voluntary, those actions continued to take place. We were not trying to hurt the public by any means nor to hurt some of our charitable organizations and people that worked very closely in the education sector. All of those continued. Once again the classroom experience continued.

Shortly before the festive season break the *then* Ministry of Education did contact me on December 21st encouraging our organization to get back to the local bargaining table. When I explained to the Minister of Education *at the time* that that was not likely, it’s difficult to bring all of the players to the table especially before January 1st which was the defined deadline that she had set for imposing working conditions and I want to make it clear what we have been subjected to are “imposed working conditions” – it’s not a collective agreement. On January 3rd the government did in fact impose these working conditions. It took us out of a legal strike position however our members still felt very very strongly with regards to the fact their democratic rights had been taken away, that they did not have the opportunity to collectively bargain and that in fact they didn’t have the opportunity to vote on the collective agreement that they did not realize. These were, as I say, “imposed working conditions.”

So what has changed from that point to this point? We all know a new leader of the Liberal party was selected, we have a new Premier, we have a new Cabinet, and what we have seen is a shift to the way business used to be done. There is a willingness on the government’s part to collaborate to reengage in a collective bargaining process that is understood, that is fair, and that is transparent. It would be one that will take place at the local level and also take place at a central table. With that change in direction the people that will be involved in that process are no longer the lawyers that started things off badly. The people that will be involved are

those with labour relations background, there will be people with a strong connection to the education sector so they will know the implications of things and it is a genuine willingness that has been determined by us to reengage. And as I say, to establish a process to bargain locally and that bargaining locally should start very soon and it's a process to address issues that previously did not get the attention that they should have through the central table discussions. So it is a genesis, it's a change, it's a metamorphosis, it's going back to the way business used to be done and because of that we have been consulting with our local leaders. These are 150 democratically elected local leaders that represent the members that are in the classrooms, that are in the schools and that are in different worksites. So we have brought those 150 local leaders in over the past month and a half we brought them in four times it's almost finally we've biweekly meeting that we now have with these people so that we hear directly from those grassroots members as to what it is they want, how it is they feel, and then decide on actions accordingly and we have stated time and time again in the press that what we are doing is obviously continually monitoring the situation or analyzing the data. We're looking for changes and when we see that those changes are significant enough, then perhaps we will take different actions as well.

So, our last meeting was the previous Friday and with those 150 local, democratically elected leaders we discussed the scenario, we discussed the changes with them, we discussed commitments that the government had made to us recently and it was decided to suspend the political protest with regards to volunteer extracurricular activities. Now does that mean everyone will do that? I want to make it *very clear* that is not likely to be the case. You are probably aware that a significant portion of our membership is very upset right now even with this change in direction.

I can relate back to what happened in the late 1990s - early 2000s when there was a suspension of voluntary extracurricular activities. Roughly 20% of the people that used to be very involved never came back and 20% of the people never wanted to suspend the extracurricular activities in the first place but it was that silent majority, it was that 60% that was looking for something concrete to result from the actions they have taken. It is that 60% right now that is waiting to see concrete results and to get concrete results what we have right now is the willingness of the government to collaborate and to reengage and to begin local bargaining and we also have a commitment that whatever happens at the central table discussions, *those* results would be implemented at the local level.

So we are hoping and we anticipate that some of these discussions at the central table will begin this week and as time goes on, more and more concrete details will be realized. So what we're all looking for is this a development of a progressive Ontario. One that understands what the citizens of this province expect from a government which is their democratic rights, fairness and respect and we are in a short-term situation right now where we want to have this government - this *new* government has the Premier stated in the throne speech, we want this new government to show us that in fact that is the case – that there will be fairness, that there will be respected and that will be there will be a guarantee that democratic rights will be protected. And we believe that right now that is the case. We understand the fiscal realities that the Premier has stated but way back as far as last April, we had other off-setting measures that we believed would address the fiscal problem and yet changed in some of the ways the impose working conditions, what they actually state. So I am going to stop there probably better to take questions but I want to make it very clear not all of our members, based on where we are right now-today- are going to return the extracurriculars. That's an individual decision and we respect our individual members' decisions and will protect them on a going forward basis.