



Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario/
Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'élémentaire de l'Ontario
480 University Avenue, Suite 1000, Toronto, Ontario, M5G 1V2
Telephone: 416-962-3836 Toll-free: 1-888-838-3836
Fax: 416-642-2424
Website: www.etfo.ca

**ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' FEDERATION OF ONTARIO
NIAGARA TEACHER LOCAL
PROVINCIAL TAKEOVER
BULLETIN #6**

December 10, 2008

WHAT IS OPSBA AND WHY DID THEY REJECT THE OFFER

If you have not seen the current video on the ETFO website, please stop reading this bulletin and take five minutes to watch it. The homepage is located at www.etfo.ca. After having reviewed the video, you will agree that ETFO proposed a reasonable four-year settlement. It is a deal that is well within the financial parameters demanded by the government, in this economic climate. You will also likely find yourself somewhat bewildered, as we are, by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) rejection of that offer.

In the video President Clegg states: "You should know that OPSBA is a voluntary association of school boards without any legal responsibilities for collective bargaining." Many members who have already viewed the video are perplexed by OPSBA's role and rightfully wonder exactly who these people are and who they claim to represent.

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association is comprised of representatives from the public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario. It is a voluntary association that has no legal responsibilities for bargaining. Its membership in any given year does not necessarily have every single Ontario board as a member. Who chose the members of the OPSBA negotiating team can only be answered by OPSBA. Their 'negotiating team' included individuals who are also representatives of the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC). This is another organization that has no legitimate right to being a signatory in any negotiations with ETFO. Principals are not our employers. We have no idea why an OPC representative was listed for signing on a Provincial Discussion Table (PDT) memorandum.

For only the second time in history have provincial framework talks been arranged by a Minister of Education. ETFO accepted the invitation from Minister Wynne to come to the 'table', as we had previously done with Minister Kennedy. The purpose of this PDT was similar to the previous round. A Minister of Education wanted to try and reach an understanding on some key issues that might form the nucleus of a collective agreement for all public elementary teachers. Once central issues were resolved then locals could continue to bargain local issues and with the knowledge of how much money was still left. The other party invited back to the talks was the voluntary organization OPSBA.

Many members mistakenly believe ETFO was bargaining with the government. We were not. So why was ETFO bargaining with a voluntary organization that has no legal bargaining authority? We had no choice. If ETFO refused to bargain with OPSBA then the government could choose not to forward funds to the individual boards.

Since last spring, OPSBA has made it clear to your negotiators that their priority is to redefine the parameters of your previously negotiated working conditions. Additionally, OPSBA has insisted up to last Friday that any additional improvements negotiated for preparation time must be subject to the direction of principals and cannot solely be the decision of the teacher.

During the Minister's extension, OPSBA tried to introduce language that would overturn arbitrations that ETFO has been awarded over the last four years, regarding supervision and preparation time. At no point has OPSBA adhered to the understanding that they were not to attempt to negotiate away gains from previous settlements. OPSBA proposes language that they know ETFO can't agree to accept. They persist because their fellow trustee associations successfully convinced the three other affiliates to sign their PDT agreements in return for that 3% salary funding offer from the government. But the other affiliates have not faced an association that wants to reverse contractual language, either.

All the government has ever really wanted is a quick deal that would ensure negotiations were completed well before the next election. To make negotiations disappear really fast, the government has relied on the 1% evaporating funds strategy but paid little regard to the strips OPSBA insists it must have. The pressure on ETFO to capitulate and give up its goals to obtain an extra 1% of salary has become and remains the focus in the media.

Protecting the improvements to your working conditions that took over twenty years to negotiate has become the measure of our collective integrity as a union. It would have been easy to sign a deal well before the first arbitrary deadline date but you would sadly have seen thousands of elementary teachers lose their jobs over the next four years. Under a storm of media criticism, we found a way back to the table bringing with us a deal to save jobs.

By midnight Sunday, November 30th, ETFO had secured the government's blessings on a financial proposal that ETFO could table before OPSBA. Our numbers met the Minister's financial parameters. We realize that last fact has confused many members, who believe that because the government was ok with ETFO's numbers, therefore, ETFO must be bargaining with the government. Please understand, last Friday, ETFO did not walk away from the PDT table. ETFO surprised Ontario with our offer to finance improved working conditions and save jobs by accepting a 0% salary increase in the fourth year of an agreement. The boards stood to gain \$800 million dollars in financing, but OPSBA, the boards' voluntary association refused to sign our offer. We were in shock as we believe were the Minister and her team of facilitators. The government was prepared to accept the deal if OPSBA said yes. It is important for you to know that OPSBA's claim that there is a \$260 million dollar shortfall in this contract is inaccurate and that ETFO has not turned our back on a PDT, as OPSBA claims on its website. As we go to press OPSBA has called a press conference.

Stay tuned!

David Clegg, ETFO
Provincial President
1-888-838-3836

Sharon Aloian, ETFO
Local President
Niagara Teacher Local
905-892-2917

Dave Kendall, ETFO
Provincial Chief Negotiator
1-888-838-3836

