

Job action, union pressures are nothing new

by Mark Pavilons

Like clockwork, at the end of almost every union contract in this province, mayhem ensues.

It's mostly sabre rattling and it's mostly a show of strength.

Neither side wants to appear weak or a pushover. Both sides want to get their point across.

So it was during the recent threats by CUPE members ? education workers, janitorial staff and administration. In the settlement, it was a victory for everyone and mostly for the students and parents.

While the majority of contracts tend to get worked out (strikes are actually few and far between in Ontario), the rhetoric, misinformation and ?fake news??is always frustrating and unnerving.

Contracts for these workers, and those of teachers and TAs, which will be next up at the bargaining tables, expire every three years or so. That means there are intense negotiations during every term of every provincial government.

It's nothing new.

Education Minister and King-Vaughan MPP?Stephen Lecce, tried to nip things in the bud, getting an early start with negotiations this past summer. While it went to the 11th hour, agreements were reached.

Lecce, and the union reps, all said they wanted kids in the classrooms and wanted our school year to continue unhindered.

The recent contract talks, and those coming up for TAs, are different in that these group tend to be underpaid and under valued. They deserve any and all progress. They're not like teachers; they aren't paid in the summer and they're not in the same club. TAs, especially those who work with challenged children, are a godsend to parents and children alike.

The same can't be said for all of our teachers, who are among the highest paid in the world. In my opinion, and I will be labelled as a bit of a socialist, all civil servants should have a salary cap.

It's a well known fact that the majority of the annual budget of any government ??unicipal, regional, provincial or federal ??onsists of salaries.

People wonder why money is scarce to fund programs, infrastructure and the like. The fingers you should be pointing may just be in the wrong direction.

Again, I have to wonder how the highest paid civil servants on the planet have the gaul to continually ask for more.

A current rash of TV and radio ads claim the Province is slashing funding for health care, education, etc. That simply isn't true. It's recycled rhetoric and it's misleading. It's all a ploy to create sympathy for the civil servants, the unions and their bargaining units.

Let me cloud with issue with some facts.

Around this time of year in 2013, elementary and junior high school teachers in Ontario staged a one-day walkout in response to collective agreements imposed by the McGuinty government.

In December 2012, Toronto, Peel and Durham public elementary board employees walked off the job and shut down schools, joined by teachers at five other boards across Ontario: Greater Essex in the Windsor area, Lambton-Kent in Sarnia and Chatham, Waterloo, Grand Erie in Brantford and Near North in North Bay.

In April 2014, the former Liberal government passed Bill 122, the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act. This implemented a new two-tier negotiation system which involves provincial negotiations, between the government and the OSSTF, along with local negotiations, between local OSSTF and their employer, the school board.

Mayhem ensued through 2015 as more boards joined strike action across the province.

On May 25, 2015, the Ontario government passed back to work legislation to put an end to the strike in Durham, Rainbow and Peel District School Boards. The following day on May 26, the Ontario Labour Relations Board ruled the teachers strike was unlawful. Classes resumed in Durham, Rainbow and Peel May 27.

The Province then passed the Protecting the School Year Act, 2015, prohibiting another strike during the 2014-2015 school year.

This is just one tiny snippet of the methods behind the madness that is our collective bargaining system. Threats, intimidation and strikes, all to get the government's attention.

And, in the end, as it always is, teachers head back to the classroom, in a better position.

I don't know about you, but I don't have the benefit of salary and benefit negotiations every three years. I can't threaten to walk off the job. If I don't work, I don't get paid.

When many of these contracts are settled, the teachers often enjoy retroactive pay, some going back years.

So when the unions and teachers' federations point those nasty, crooked fingers at the Province, maybe they should look in the mirror. Collectively, they drain our system of more than half of its relative wealth.

They may be getting a good bang for their buck, but are we?

We shouldn't have to legislate proper behaviour. And we shouldn't have to bribe our civil servants to go to work and do their jobs.