

# The Rapaport Report

Volume 1, Number 8

April 2006

Special 2006 Convention Issue

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*It's not easy being green.*

Kermit the Frog

All previous issues of *The Rapaport Report* appeared after a regular meeting of the Executive Board. Convention happens once a year and we felt it fitting to bring out this special issue. This is a non-election, policy Convention. We offer a special welcome to Liquor Board Employee Division (LBED) delegates to their first OPSEU Convention.

This issue opens with a description/commentary on our new federal government, along with a quiz for OPSEU readers and historians. That is followed by an editorial on two issues coming up at Convention, one controversial, one not so controversial. Both involve mandating our union to take a side on huge concerns, one environmental, the other political/electoral.

There are three additional features in this issue of *The Rapaport Report*. **Maureen Wall** of Local 562 writes on the Mayworks Festival of Working People and the Arts. **Sister Wall** serves on the Mayworks Board of Directors. Repeat columnist **Gary Shaul** of Local 520 writes about Fair Vote Canada and the struggle to cure Canada's increasingly dysfunctional electoral system. **Brother Shaul** is running for a director's seat on the Ontario Division of Fair Vote Canada. The McGuinty Government is planning to shut down the Ontario Human Rights Commission. The third feature is the Toronto Labour Council statement calling on unions and community groups to oppose that move. Visit <http://www.opseu.org/campaign/ohrc/communitygroups.htm> for more information and details on what you can do.

## **The Common Sense Revolution Goes To Ottawa**

In late January, Canadians once again went to the polls and once again elected a minority government. This time, however, the Conservative Party is the government. Should we be alarmed? Yes. Should we be very alarmed? Yes again.

**Stephen Harper** and **Mike Harris** are political twins. They are both extremists in the efforts to cut taxes, reduce the size and presence of the public sector, weaken unions, etc.

Mr. Harper wants to align Canada more closely with American political institutions and American interests. He wants to line up alongside President **George W. Bush** and seek further integration with the American economy and American social policy.

Thankfully and sadly, this new government does not reflect the beliefs and ideas of Canadians. Why then did they win? I see two reasons. The Liberals were so tainted with corruption and complacency that it was difficult to give them even a minority government. And **Jack Layton's** NDP was unable to take advantage.

Public opinion polls and focus groups repeatedly show that on most political, economic and social beliefs, Canadians are closest to the NDP. I can never understand why NDP election results are not higher. That probably has much to do with access to the centres of real economic power in Canada and how public opinion is manipulated. It is also explained by the structure of our electoral system. We need changes. More on that later.

**John Baird**, **Tony Clement** and **Jim Flaherty** all served in the Harris cabinet and now serve in the Harper cabinet. I am most alarmed by Jim Flaherty's appointment as federal Finance Minister. In the Ontario Tory leadership races in 2002 and 2004, he proudly presented himself as the ideological heir to **Mike Harris**.

**A Common Sense Revolution Alumni quiz (Answers are on bottom/right of page 4)**

**Identify a) John Baird, b) Tony Clement and c) Jim Flaherty from the details below.**

- 1) He stated, "Call it tough love if you will. It will be illegal to live on the street, it will be illegal to live in public places ... and in the parks."
- 2) When the mother of a severely disabled five-year-old child was ejected from the legislature in 1995 for protesting the Harris government's cutbacks, he shouted "She's an OPSEU member" from his legislative seat as many as three times.
- 3) As a student conservative activist, he first attracted the attention of the media in 1985 when he invited Glenn Babb, apartheid South Africa's Ambassador to Canada, to speak at the University of Toronto to defend apartheid.

**Bonus question**

- 4) This CSR MPP told #2 above to "shut the \*\*\*\* up" during this incident.

The main goal of the **Stephen Harper** Tories is a majority government in the next election. Mr. Harper's job record includes a five year stint as Vice President and then

President of the National Citizens Coalition, the extreme right-wing group that brought us **Merv Lavigne** and the legal challenge to OPSEU political rights.

OPSEU knows how to fight Common Sense Revolutionaries. We were in the front line in the Harris opposition in Ontario for eight years. We can be part of a union/community opposition to the Harper government in the national arena.

Canada is becoming increasingly polarized between those who support a progressive, people-friendly program and those who support more affluence and tax-cuts for the rich. The Liberal Party cannot figure out where they stand on this national divide. As federal Finance Minister, **Paul Martin** made substantial cuts to Employment Insurance (EI) and social programs after 1993. When facing almost certain defeat in Parliament last year, **Paul Martin** rediscovers social programs as the pre-condition of support from the NDP. The performance of the **McGuinty** Government at Queens Park has been a disappointment.

That is why I am supporting OPSEU affiliation to the NDP. We need a political program and home to take on **Stephen Harper**. The New Democratic Party provides us with a political home and voice for our beliefs and struggles.

Another Convention proposal that catches my attention is the resolution to make OPSEU green - more environmentally friendly. This coincides with naming **David Suzuki** the recipient of the Stanley Knowles Humanitarian Award. Visit [www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org). The Convention resolution includes the following components; to lead environment related campaigns connected with workplace issues, support community based environmental campaigns, implement a program to achieve the highest environmental standards in OPSEU facilities, work with existing labour initiatives to protect the environment and incorporate collective bargaining with environmental advocacy.



Convention, 2005 mandated the Executive Board to come up with this proposal. Convention, 2006 is being asked to adopt this proposal. Our children and our grandchildren are counting on us. Time is running out. Let's show **Kermit the Frog** that OPSEU is up to the challenge.

## Notices and Events Around OPSEU and Region 5

### John Stammers Family Fund

For the first time in three decades, a striking worker died as a result of a picket line incident in Toronto. **John Stammers** was an Accounting teacher at Centennial College. He died on March 25 during the CAAT-A strike. Local 558 established the John Stammers Family Fund. Donations can be made to

John Stammers Family fund  
c/o OPSEU Local 558  
P. O. Box 631, Station A  
Scarborough, Ontario, M1K 5E9

### Day of Mourning for Workers Who Died on the Job

This event is held every year. This year, Labour Council is holding the event at the site of the incident that cost **John Stammers** his life. It will be at 12 noon, on April 28<sup>th</sup> at Centennial College, 941 Progress Avenue, east of Markham Road.

### Labour Rallies for Political Action

Labour Council is holding workshops to train union activists to become more involved and more effective in the upcoming municipal elections in November. A political rally is being held in the afternoon of the same day. Speakers include **Zanana Akande**, **David Miller** and **Bob White**. The workshops start at 9:00. The rally starts at 1:00 PM. Both events will be held at the OFL Building at 15 Gervais Drive. Contact Labour Council at

416-441-3663 ext. 225. Region 5 picks up the \$25 registration fee.

### Region 5 Women's Caucus Picnic

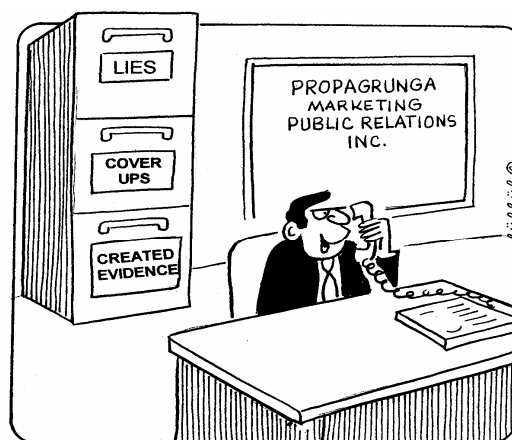
It's starting to warm up outside and the Region 5 Women's Caucus is organizing this year's picnic. It is scheduled for Saturday, July 15<sup>th</sup> at Wilket Creek Park. For more information contact **Gloria David**.

### Young Workers Committee (YWC)

The Region 5 YWC continues its series of seminars/discussions on key topics.

OPSEU Structure – Monday, May 1  
Human Rights – Monday, June 5

All events are at the membership centre, 31 Wellesley East at 5:45. Contact **Carl Mohan** to RSVP.



" Yes we provide the script for any campaign."

### Common Sense Revolution Alumni Quiz Answers

#### Quiz Answers

1) c; 2) a; 3) b  
4) Chris Stockwell

# Celebrate Our Community at Mayworks

## April 28 – May 7

*by Maureen Wall, Local 562 President and Mayworks Board member*

“For it is bread we fight for, but we fight for roses, too.” As we confront the continuing injustice in our workplaces and in our world, we look to music and art to express, relieve, and bring insight to our struggle. Every spring, Mayworks offers us a multi-media mix of events and celebratory workshops to restore our sense of hope and community. Now in its 21<sup>st</sup> year, Mayworks is Canada’s oldest labour arts festival.

There's something for everyone. Here's a small sample of events at this year's festival:

★ **Music for the Masses: A Mayworks Sing-a-Long!**

**Terry Downey** emcees a night of resistance music from around the world, featuring three-time Juno winner **Madagascar Slim** accompanying BC-born **Ndidi Onukwulu** singing powerful gospel-tinged blues. The line-up also includes alter-Latin group **Plan C**, Toronto hip hop/spoken word artist **Equinox 199**, and **Waleed Kush** with their soulful rhythms and lyrics that call for justice, equality and freedom.

- Saturday April 29, 8 pm, Steelworkers Hall, 25 Cecil Street

- \$15 for individual tickets or buy a book of 10 tickets for \$100. Call 416-599-9096 or email [coordinator@mayworks.ca](mailto:coordinator@mayworks.ca) to book tickets.

★ **Future Workers of the World Unite! Family Funday**

Kids love Mayworks, too. At these workshops, artists will use music, movement and storytelling to teach children about the lives of working peoples from different regions of the world. The Funday includes **Taiko Talk**, a workshop with artist **Brenda Joy Lem**, a nutritious and free lunch for kids and their caregivers, **Once Upon an African Village**, a workshop with **Adwoa Bodo**, and a **Knitting Circle** for teens and up.

- Sunday April 30, 11:00 am - 1:30 pm, Steelworkers Hall, 25 Cecil Street - Free

★ **Working Images**, Mayworks annual exhibit of art by unionized and non-unionized workers, this year includes a playful photographic display of two friends who met walking the OPSEU picket lines, by **Irene Mihaljek** and **Kathryn Abercrombie**.

- Opening Reception 5:00 - 6:30, May 3. Exhibit is free and runs until Sunday, May 7 at Toronto City Hall Rotunda, 100 Queen Street West.

For the full details of the week's events, go to [www.mayworks.ca](http://www.mayworks.ca).

And look for the Mayworks display at Convention, where you can pick up this year's beautiful poster and a guide to the full program for April 28 – May 7.

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**TORONTO AND YORK REGION LABOUR COUNCIL****WORKERS RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS**

**T**he issue of human rights has been interwoven with workers struggles for centuries.

From slave revolts led by Spartacus against the Roman Empire, to the popular rebellions in medieval Europe, through the horrific legacy of slavery that underpinned the development of both South and North America, working people have been denied their full expression of human dignity for most of recorded history.

Upholding human rights was established as the legal responsibility of governments only in the past few decades. The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (1948) grew out of the world's revulsion over the Holocaust and the brutal realities of fascism and colonialism. It was an amazing document, given that much of what it outlined was far from reality in most of the signatory countries. Even today Section 31, which says "Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests", is routinely ignored by our own governments.

The long, wearisome campaign to transform that Declaration into law here in Canada was the result of the relentless effort of many unsung heroes. The establishment of Human Rights Commissions to allow individual women and men to gain redress for discrimination suffered in employment and other spheres of life was an important milestone in our collective history.

It comes as no surprise that conservative politicians have sought to limit the enforcement of human rights. It is, however, both surprising and disturbing that the McGuinty Liberal government is doing that as well.

On Feb. 20<sup>th</sup> of this year, it announced plans to dismantle Ontario's Human Rights Commission and move to a different model for handling complaints. They call it "direct access", but others call it a "no access model".

People would not have access to free investigation, mediation and legal representation through the HRC. Instead, they will have to do their own investigation and hire a lawyer to prepare and argue the case. Direct access will not speed up the process – it will just lead to a longer backlog like we now experience in the court system.

1. Labour Council join with the OFL, OPSEU and community groups in telling the McGuinty government to stop dismantling the Commission and work with the public for real improvement to human rights protection.
2. Labour Council work with its affiliates to create a deeper understanding of the importance of Human Rights legislation in the achievement of social justice in our society.

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## Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

By Gary Shaul, Local 520

Queens Park formed the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. Visit [http://www.democraticrenewal.gov.on.ca/english/news/20060323\\_nr.asp](http://www.democraticrenewal.gov.on.ca/english/news/20060323_nr.asp). The Assembly's mandate is to:

- 1) assess Ontario's current electoral system and other electoral systems;
- 2) recommend whether Ontario should keep the current system or adopt a new one.

The Assembly is to be composed of one member per riding (make sure your name's on the voters' list). If it recommends a change, it will be put to a referendum to be held during the mandate of the current government. The move was applauded by pro-democracy groups like Fair Vote Canada who are educating voters about the deficiencies and unfairness of the current system while advocating for a process that leads to a new model and a referendum. Visit [http://www.fairvotecanada.org/fvc/Current\\_News/#oca](http://www.fairvotecanada.org/fvc/Current_News/#oca).

These efforts have sprouted into a growing, multi-partisan movement across Canada to get rid of the antiquated "first-past-the-post" (FPTP) voting system that predates the telephone. FPTP produces "phony" majorities and grants total power to the party who can win a majority of seats even with less than 50% of the popular vote.

This has led to the malaise and cynicism of voters in Ontario. Most votes are wasted in the current electoral process. So, why bother? For example, if I vote NDP in a riding that has been solidly Conservative or Liberal for decades, my vote has absolutely no impact on the outcome of the election.

Another problem with our FPTP voting system is that women and other equity-seeking groups are disproportionately underrepresented in legislatures across the country. A new system could address this imbalance.

FPTP also causes voters to vote against governments (lesser of two or three evil voting) rather than voting for the party that most closely represents their interests. FPTP has pushed OPSEU to consider and at times implement "strategic voting" where we provided support to more than one party in order to bounce the Harris government from power.

OPSEU and the labour movement need to become engaged in the process. We should put forward ideas about the kind of changes that are needed.

There are a number of different options for electoral reform. Proportional representation would be the fairest. Under PR, the proportion of the popular vote that a party gets in an election would be roughly equivalent to the number of seats they get. There are many types of PR being used around the world and that can be the subject of another article.

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## Calendar of Events

OPSEU Executive Board Meeting – April 19<sup>th</sup>

OPSEU Convention – April 20-22

Greater Toronto Area Council (GTAC) Meeting – Wed, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 5:30, 31 Wellesley

Day of Mourning for Workers Who Died on the Job – April 28, 12:00, 941 Progress Ave

Mayworks – April 28<sup>th</sup> – May 7<sup>th</sup>

Region 5 Young Workers Committee - Monday, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 5:45 PM, 31 Wellesley

Region 5 Women's Caucus – Tuesday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5:30, 31 Wellesley

Labour Council Membership Meeting – Thursday, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 PM, OFL Building

Labour Council Political Conference and Rally, Saturday, May 6<sup>th</sup>, OFL Building

Region 5 Weekend Union School – June 3-4

Region 5 Party at 31 Wellesley – June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 31 Wellesley East

Region 5 Young Workers Committee - Monday, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 5:45 PM, 31 Wellesley

Workers of Colour/Aboriginal Workers Conference – Saturday, June 17<sup>th</sup>, OFL Building

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## Region 5/OPSEU Contact Information

**Nancy Pridham**, Regional Vice President - [nancypridham@look.ca](mailto:nancypridham@look.ca)

**Peggy Maybury**, Executive Board Member - [pegmaybury@hotmail.com](mailto:pegmaybury@hotmail.com)

**David Rapaport**, Executive Board Member – [drapaport@opseu.org](mailto:drapaport@opseu.org)

**Yvonne Bobb**, Region 5 Member, Provincial Woman's Committee - [ybobbl@sympatico.ca](mailto:ybobbl@sympatico.ca)

**Cecil Beckford**, Region 5 Member, Provincial Human Rights Committee

OPSEU representative on Labour Council Executive - [ceceilb@rom.on.ca](mailto:ceceilb@rom.on.ca)

**Carl Mohan**, Region 5 Member, Provincial Youth Committee -

[cmohan@opseu541.org](mailto:cmohan@opseu541.org)

**Bob Taylor**, President, Greater Toronto Area Council (GTAC) - 416-482-6680

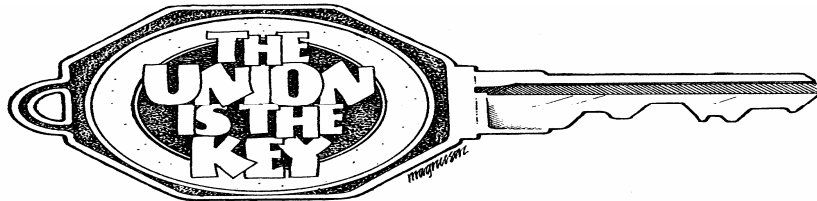
**Gloria David**, Contact, Region 5 Women's Caucus - 416-314-6484.

**Tony Carneiro**, Chair, Region 5 Retirees Group - 416-787-7033

**Toronto and York Region Labour Council** – 416-441-3663

**OPSEU Direct** – 416-443-8888

**OPSEU web site** – [www.opseu.org](http://www.opseu.org)



*The Rapaport Report* is the newsletter of David Rapaport, Region 5 Executive Board Member of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, OPSEU. I am responsible for the contents of the newsletter. If you have complaints, comments, praise or criticism, please get in touch with me. I would like to hear from you. I can be reached at 416-651-1659 or at [drapaport@opseu.org](mailto:drapaport@opseu.org).