

CUPE 855 members strike to stop attacks on public services and workers

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Lindsay, Ont. – Municipal workers at the City of Kawartha Lakes, represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), are set to go on strike at 12:01 am, Monday, February 4, to stop their employer's repeated attacks on public services and on the 400 workers who provide municipal services.

"We are taking a stand to stop this employer from completely dismantling public services and crushing the pride and spirit of municipal employees," said Lyn Edwards, president of CUPE 855. "We've been bargaining for months and yet the City came back with nothing substantial to address serious issues that affect our work and our working conditions."

The City's contracting out agenda and management tactics that demoralize the workforce have led to this strike. Outstanding issues include:

- Attacks on public services – management's determination to continue and expand the contracting out of public services to private, profit-seeking companies;
- Discriminating against older workers by taking away their benefits when they work past the age of 65;
- Targeting occupational groups where women workers are in the majority, by eliminating flexible working hours that have been in place for 16 years, preventing workers from balancing their work/family life obligations;
- Denying overtime to winter maintenance workers who are asked to start work before 7:00 am to clear and keep the roads safe;
- Perpetuating the wage gap that holds back Kawartha Lakes workers, who earn significantly less than their counterparts in Peterborough.

A survey released by the employer a week before the strike deadline, conducted by Brock University, placed Kawartha Lakes employees among the least satisfied groups of workers ever evaluated in the history of the university's workplace surveys. "The City, including council, wants the unrestricted ability to contract out public services, while perpetuating management practices and unhealthy working conditions that demoralize workers," said Edwards. "They're also demanding other concessions, including an attack on older workers by taking away their benefits – enough is enough. We are united and will not tolerate these attacks that undermine the quality of public services."

The striking municipal workers provide municipal services, including roads maintenance, snow removal, parks, water and waste treatment, landfill, accounting, administrative, library, customer service, by-law enforcement, social services and others.

"We are asking residents to help us protect public services by calling the Mayor and councillors, to tell them to stop attacking workers and dismantling public services," added Edwards. "This strike is really about the future of public services in Kawartha Lakes."

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