



OPSEU sues government over pay delay

OPSEU has given notice of a legal charge against the Ontario government over wages owing to 45,000 public servants since the eight-week strike this spring.

Both sides ratified an agreement which said members would see their increases “as soon as reasonably possible” after ratification, but the government says it can’t fix members’ pay until the pay of Oct. 10 – more than five months after the strike was settled.

“This is unconscionable,” said OPSEU President Leah Casselman. “People who lived on strike pay for eight weeks need the increase now, not in five months’ time.”

A grievance filed when it first became obvious that the government was dragging its heels prompted the government to issue cheques for **some** of the retroactive increases owing. They paid out a 3.5 per cent increase owed to everyone from Jan. 1 to July 7.

“But they still haven’t rolled that 3.5 per cent into the pay cheques on an on-going basis. And many of our members are owed special adjustments of much more than 3.5 per cent, and they haven’t seen a penny of it.” The grievance hearing started July 31, and is scheduled to

continue Aug. 30, with further days into the fall.

“This is taking far too long,” said Casselman. “If the government wanted to have this job done, it could have made it happen. Obviously, it chose not to. That’s why we are taking the unusual step of launching a law suit against the government,” she told a press conference at the Queen’s Park media studio..

“I’m here today to give the government notice of our intention to sue, which is the first step in the process under the Proceedings Against the Crown Act.

“Our suit says that the government has been negligent and incompetent in failing to implement the wage increases and retroactive payments in a timely fashion.

“We claim the government has acted in bad faith in the months after the strike was settled. We say the Crown has breached its public duty to pay public servants their legal entitlement in a timely manner.

“And we say all of this is treating government employees and their union with contempt.

“We are asking the courts to declare that the government has breached the memorandum of

settlement that ended our strike.

“We are asking for immediate implementation of the wage increases and the salary adjustments and payment of all retroactive money owing.

“We are also seeking punitive and exemplary damages for each OPSEU member who has been denied their proper pay to compensate for the aggravation that they have been subjected to. And of course we want interest on moneys owing as well.”

Casselman said the government was elected to manage the province and it can’t even manage its own payroll.

“Does anyone think that Chrysler, Ford or General Motors would try to keep their employees waiting for five months to come through with a negotiated pay raise? Of course not.

“However the government had no trouble paying their managers double time during our strike. Managers were cashing cheques for more than \$50,000 for the eight week period within days of our return to work. But they can’t manage to put through the increases for the people who do the real work on the front lines.

“I repeat. This is unconscionable.”

Check the web: www.opseu.org has the latest on everything.