

ENGINEERING RESISTANCE: ENERGY PROFESSIONALS AND THE 2005 STRIKE IN NEOLIBERAL ONTARIO

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ABSTRACT

In the summer of 2005, the Society of Energy Professionals Hydro One Local engaged in unprecedented strike action that lasted 105 days. This article documents the strike, and explores how and why it occurred, and with such significant support and participation from the 1000 members of a union that had no militant history. I trace the build-up, progression and resolution of the strike, drawing from Society materials, media reports and ethnographic observation, as well as the insights of elected leaders, staff representatives, and rank and file members of the Society collected through interviews and written questionnaires. I conclude that government policy and management behaviour caused worker anger but that union education, organization and democracy were integral to moving these “professional” workers into job action.

In the sweltering heat of the summer of 2005, hundreds of workers could be seen protesting at the Ontario legislature, appearing in television commercials, and picketing workplaces, fundraising dinners and golf tournaments across the province. These strategies are not uncommon for striking workers, but this particular group was the Hydro One Local of the Society of Energy Professionals, a 1000 member local with no history of strikes, militancy or union consciousness.

The purpose of this article is to document the strike and present reflections on how and why it occurred. To do so, I first outline the history and composition of what is now the Society of Energy Professionals, or “the Society,” and present an overview of the recent restructuring of Ontario’s energy sector to situate the union and strike historically. Then I highlight key events in the build-up to the strike, and trace its 105-day progression and resolution. I conclude by

synthesizing the key factors that caused these workers to participate and support unprecedented, union-based job action. Strategies for engaging and politicizing already represented but inactive professional-managerial workers are important for broad-based union renewal.

Much of the literature on professional worker militancy in Canada is now dated. There is some research on the job actions of nurses and teachers, on white-collar strikes and on the political action of professional-managerial workers (see, for example, Armstrong 1993, Briskin 2006, Coulter 1993, Glasbeek 1999, Jennings 1993, Kuehn 2006, McKercher and Mosco eds. 2007, Mironi 2008). Puaca (2008) considers the role of the Society of Women Engineers during the Cold War, but we know little about professional engineers and their workplace militancy, particularly in Canada.

To explore the Hydro One strike of energy professionals, the majority of whom are engineers, I enlist materials produced by the Society, media reports of the strike and the insights of elected leaders and union organizers collected through semi-structured interviews. I also incorporate the views of rank and file members of the Hydro One Local who were invited to share their thoughts in a voluntary e-mail questionnaire. I was completing ethnographic fieldwork on political workers and the production of neoliberal government inside the Ontario legislature when I first learned of and witnessed the Society's job action, so I also draw data from directly observing the strike.

By examining the data, it becomes clear that union education, local organization and direct, democratic worker engagement were integral to the collective decision to resist and strike. Both the mobilization process itself and the specific emphases used to engage the majority of workers, foster collective consciousness and inspire action were significant. Government energy policy and the management of Hydro One, Ontario's "largest electricity delivery company," in particular, were problematic for the energy professionals, but it was the comprehensive, participatory strategies pursued within the local to inform and involve members that fostered a widespread commitment to collectively resist through job action.

AN OLD ASSOCIATION, A NEW UNION: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY OF ENERGY PROFESSIONALS

The organization now known as the Society of Energy Professionals developed distinctly from the Power Workers Union (PWU) and Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) hydro locals. Within the male-dominated hydro industry, workers split into "professional" and "blue-collar" groups based on work performed; employees' perceptions of their roles, class, status and labour; and labour legislation. Many of the white-collar hydro workers were professional engineers, and thus identified as both members of a larger

engineering profession, and as part of Ontario Hydro. The roots of the Society are in a bargaining unit formed in 1944 that consisted entirely of professional engineers at Ontario Hydro. However, in 1944, Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO), a licensing and regulating body for engineering, surveyed its members to determine whether they would like to be represented by a trade union, employee association or professional engineers group. An overwhelming majority voted in favour of a professional engineers group and the Federation of Employee-Professional Engineers and Assistants was formed (Professional Engineers Ontario 1997). The professional engineers' group lobbied actively against compulsory collective bargaining for engineers, and in 1948, in an emerging Cold War culture within which labour gains were threatened across North America, the Ontario government revoked collective bargaining rights for engineers.

In the 1950s, a voluntary representative bargaining association for engineers was formed. In 1961, a "Master Agreement" with Ontario Hydro was established, outside of the Ontario Labour Relations Act (OLRA). The agreement recognized the Society as the exclusive bargaining agent for various salary schedules and included provision for a grievance-arbitration procedure and arbitration for salary negotiations only. Ontario Hydro unilaterally terminated the Master Agreement in 1983. During this time the organization was first known as the Society of Ontario Hydro Professional Engineers and then became the Society of Ontario Hydro Professionals and Administration Employees when the unit was expanded beyond engineers to include many "professional" employees in the 1970s. Society representatives remember this latter move as contentious, particularly for some engineers who wished to be represented completely separately, even from other white-collar workers within Ontario Hydro.

A new Master Agreement was signed in 1983. It expanded the unit to include some trades and additional office workers, a move that was again resisted by some professional engineers who saw it as a "dilution" of the organization as a body of professionals. The Society then applied for certification under the OLRA in 1986 but the process was delayed, particularly because of the employer's contention that about 3000 of the Society's 7000 members were managers and thus ineligible for coverage under the OLRA. During the term the New Democratic Party government was formed in 1990 and following the appointment of a new President and CEO of Ontario Hydro, Marc Eliesen, voluntary recognition negotiations began. Society staff representative James Bell reports that a voluntary recognition agreement was reached in November 1991, ratified by about 90% of the proposed bargaining unit, and took effect on January 14, 1992. This agreement established mediation-arbitration for all collective bargaining disputes. Under this agreement, neither party could terminate the use of mediation-arbitration until the expiry of the collective agreement in effect on January 1, 2001.

Negotiations with Ontario Hydro in 1998 were linked to the Conservative government's energy restructuring, crucial sectoral changes I expand upon in the next section. These negotiations led to a mediated, two-year term settlement establishing the terms of transition from Ontario Hydro to successor companies, and the terms of the initial collective agreements between the Society and these successor companies. This settlement extended the use of mediation-arbitration to resolve collective bargaining disputes until the expiry of the collective agreement in effect on January 1, 2005.

Subsequent negotiations with the new Hydro One resulted in arbitrated collective agreements for January 1, 2001 - December 31, 2001, January 1, 2002 - December 31, 2002, and finally January 1, 2003 - March 31, 2005. According to Society representatives, during negotiations for the 2003-2005 agreement in the fall of 2002, Hydro One made it clear that it wished to terminate the use of mediation-arbitration. Immediately after the new agreement came into effect on January 1, 2003, Hydro One served the Society with written notice of the termination of mediation-arbitration. This set the stage for the strike that would occur in 2005.

The Society now represents 7000 workers and has collective agreements at Hydro One, Bruce Power, Inergi, Kinectrics, Nuclear Safety Solutions, Ontario Power Generation, Toronto Hydro, Vertex Customer Management, Brookfield Power Trust, Electrical Safety Authority, Independent Electricity System Operator and New Horizon System Solutions. The membership of the Society is largely composed of engineers but also includes scientists, finance specialists, administrators, information technology personnel and supervisors. Members are either hired with university degrees, or are members of the PWU who climb the ranks and are promoted into supervisory positions. The Society estimates that the numbers are about even for each group. Society members work in close-proximity with many members of CUPE and the PWU. According to the Society, the CUPE and PWU members are more "hands-on," while the Society members are more often in supervisory and planning capacities, seen as performing more professional, intellectual labour. Members of the "professional" and "working class" or "blue-collar" unions are both cordial and mocking of each other, depending on the personalities, place of work, situation and timing. Members of the Society recalled that their unit had crossed a PWU picket in the 1970s, and were very aware that the members of the PWU remembered this act as well.

Society representatives and members identify the PWU as the union preferred by successive governments and employer representatives, and believe it receives superior treatment in many arenas. It is important to note, then, that both division and collaboration mark the relationship among the different unions in Ontario's hydro system.

It is also important to recognize that the Society was primarily a servicing union during much the 1990s. Since the union had mediation-arbitration as its

dispute resolution framework, and had never considered a strike, no strike-related policies or structures existed. Participation in union meetings was low. Given its history, it is not surprising that the Society did not seek to be and was not seen as an explicitly political body or a proactive trade union. Some members felt that engineers did not need unions or that the Society was not a real union. Members said that prior to the strike they saw the Society as “weak,” “unobserved,” “not noticeable,” “a faceless presence in the background looking after our interests.” They understood themselves to be “professionals” and there was a widespread recognition of the need for voluntary overtime as part of their commitment. Members were hesitant to file grievances because they self-identified as dutiful professionals and were interested in individual career advancement and thus avoided conflicts.

However, both the agenda of the union and the involvement and perceptions of rank and file Society members began to change in the late 1990s and early 2000s in response to the restructuring of the energy sector. This political economic context laid the foundation for subsequent union action.

ENERGY RESTRUCTURING IN ONTARIO: FACES OF NEOLIBERALISM

The Conservative government of Mike Harris and later Ernie Eves favoured deregulation and privatization of public assets and services as part of its allegiance to an agenda known as neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a project of “marketization” and involves politics, economics and culture. It is about applying the policies and values of the corporate boardroom to all facets of life. Competition and individualism are pursued as ideas and as tangible agendas. Public services and assets are identified as commodities that can be privatized, delivered by for-profit companies and deregulated. Neoliberalism has been pursued in different forms in many countries since the 1970s in Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship, including in Canada under Mulroney, Chrétien, Martin and Harper.

Under the neoliberal rubric, large hydro systems have been privatized and electricity markets deregulated around the world. Conservatives regarded Ontario Hydro as a public asset that could be broken apart and sold to energy capitalists. In 1999, the Ontario Competition Act took effect, breaking Ontario Hydro into Ontario Power Generation (OPG), Ontario Hydro Services Company (OHSC - now Hydro One Inc.), the Independent Market Operator (IMO - now the Independent Electricity System Operator) and the Electrical Safety Authority (ESA). The ultimate goal was the privatization of Ontario’s hydro generation (OPG) and transmission grid (Hydro One) and the deregulation of the electricity market so for-profit providers could charge self-determined prices for power.

The following few years were tumultuous as people fought the neoliberal restructuring agenda. Power costs increased for Ontario citizens and prompted

anger, as did increasing concerns about the reliability of for-profit power. Trade unions, the NDP, citizens' and environmental groups and the newly formed Ontario Electricity Coalition resisted the privatization politically. CUPE and the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers' Union (CEP) sued the Ontario government to stop the privatization with partial success. In 2002, the provincial government cancelled plans to fully privatize Hydro One after a judge ruled that the government lacked the authority to do so. The Conservative government was forced to announce that it would remain a majority shareholder, although Hydro One is no longer a crown corporation, but rather a shared ownership, corporate holding company run as a commercial entity (Hydro One 2008).

Hydro One CEO Eleanor Clitheroe was fired in 2002 and replaced by Tom Parkinson in April 2003. He was the CEO throughout the 2005 strike. Parkinson had been the CEO of private energy companies in the United States and Australia. Hydro One boasts that it is the largest electricity provider in Ontario, accounting for 96% of transmission and holding \$12.79 billion in total assets (Hydro One 2008).

Neither the Society nor the PWU joined the Ontario Electricity Coalition, a broad-based network consisting of social justice groups, the NDP, and, primarily, trade unions united in opposition to privatization and deregulation, and in favour of "truly accountable, publicly owned, environmentally responsible electrical utilities" (Ontario Electricity Coalition 2003). In fact, the PWU did not resist privatization, despite CUPE's leadership role in opposing energy restructuring, and the PWU local president became a vice-president at Ontario Power Generation (Swift and Stewart 2005). In 2003, both the PWU and the Society negotiated equity stakes in the newly privatized Bruce Power, a major energy generator in Ontario, with the PWU holding 4% and the Society 1.2% (Ontario Electricity Coalition 2003).

At the same time, the Society's members support public power because they have evaluated the international data, and have determined that public power is the most reliable, safe and inexpensive. Society representatives insist that they were opposed to the privatization agenda from the outset but upon seeing sector restructuring as inevitable, sought to focus on minimizing the damage to their members.

When the Liberal Party of Ontario formed government in 2003 and introduced Bill 100, *the Ontario Electricity Restructuring Act*, the Society began lobbying for amendments in a proactive campaign. On October 13, 2004, the Society held a lobby day at the Ontario legislature during which more than forty members stressed the need to have energy in public hands and to halt plans to contract generation out to private companies. The Society's media release quoted its president, Andrew Müller: "The government's plan to contract for expensive and unreliable sources of power will increase consumer electricity rates dramatically and force electricity-reliant industries to move production out of

Ontario...Bill 100 will significantly undermine Ontario's publicly owned and operated power system and create a new one based on a model that has failed in many other jurisdictions" (Society of Energy Professionals, 2004). The Society also issued an open letter to the Premier in a national paper and launched television ads denouncing Bill 100.

These efforts demonstrated an increasing politicization of the Society's actions and occurred as the members of the Society were engaging in discussions about their own contract, its relationship to government energy policy, and the future of their workforce.

THE 2005 STRIKE

When the elected-leadership of the Society assessed the history and the present state of the energy sector and Hydro One, they knew that 2005 negotiations would be more difficult than previous rounds. Hydro One was unique among the successor companies because its management had failed to reach a two-party settlement with the Society since the company's creation in 1999. Hydro One had, however, reached a series of two-party settlements without concessions in negotiations with the PWU. Human resources and labour relations consultants had been hired by Hydro One and had remained in place when Clitheroe was fired and Parkinson hired as CEO. The employer had also terminated mediation-arbitration resolution mechanisms in 2003. Society representatives reflected upon this history and identified an increasingly clear targeting of the Society by Hydro One CEOs as a union that could be weakened, decertified, or taken-over by the PWU.

Elected leaders like local vice-president Keith Rattai and Society staff representatives felt that in this context and given the lack of political militancy exhibited by the Society historically, detrimental concessions would be proposed by the employer, and members would have to be involved and engaged in an unprecedented way to defend themselves. Thus, to facilitate preparations the Society hired organizers from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and Hotel Employees-Restaurant Employees (HERE) in 2003. Organizers like Michelle Duncan would go to the different workplaces and talk directly to members on their breaks. Substantial email communication took place as well, both between members and union representatives, and through a listserv. New staff learned very quickly that the members of the Society were very partial to email, even for discussions with co-workers in the same facility, and this mode of communication became pivotal in the strike, both as a rapid mode of information sharing and dispersal within the union, and because of an email sent by the employer.

In the fall of 2004 a contract committee was established to begin to involve members, and about ninety of the approximately 1000 members

participated. The members would break into groups with those they knew to discuss contract issues. These members then took the information back to their workplaces and returned with feedback from their co-workers on the ground. Spouses were invited to the meetings as it was understood that workers are not often autonomous beings, but are interwoven with partners and families, emotionally and financially. Rattai and others laudably recognized that if negotiations were unsuccessful and a strike considered, broad support from members, but also their families, would be necessary.

The union developed its first strike policies, procedures and manual, drawing from other unions, but, with the involvement of members, tailoring examples collected to the specificities of their “professional” local. This collaborative process was seen as key for involving members, promoting union ideas without implanting a rigid template, and recognizing that members saw their work as distinct. Member-driven, voluntary sub-committees were developed once people became involved in the contract committee because the number of involved members began to grow. Members saw their intellectual labour being valued in a union context and wanted to contribute. Throughout the process, the members insisted on conscientious, meticulous, thorough research, believing that quantitative data and facts would be indisputable in discussions with management, and powerful in public awareness campaigns. The union also ensured that its financial preparations were sound, prepared drafts of potential messaging and solidified its media lists and communication tools.

The Society began negotiations with Hydro One in January of 2005 as the contract was due to expire on March 31. When the PWU settled with Hydro One in advance of their contract expiration (also March 31) without concessions, members of the Society concluded that they would be targeted for cutbacks and would be unfairly singled out by management. The union thus began a campaign based on the idea of “respect” for energy professionals.

When the communications blackout was lifted in February at the request of the union, the key employer demands were widely circulated and the pivotal issue of the strike was exposed. Management was proposing to extend base hours from 35 to 40 hours a week without additional compensation, reduce benefits and seek additional freedom to contract out work. However, a proposal for a two-tier wage structure with new hires being paid a lower salary than those already working was the issue that most offended the Society’s membership. Members felt this was disrespectful to new hires, particularly young engineers being hired right out of university, an insult to them as professionals, and an insult to engineering as a profession. This fueled both their anger and their sense of solidarity. These were workers who prided themselves on being dedicated, dutiful professionals, and they saw this as an unprovoked attack from management.

Consequently, the campaign emphasis about respect was changed to “fairness” to capture the basic ethical feelings of the members. Materials were produced by the union, but organizers also saw members with their own home-made and laminated materials, including buttons and lanyards with photos of the CEO, Tom Parkinson, and personal messages related to the negotiations. It was public knowledge that Parkinson had a salary increase of 35% the previous year, and members saw this as particularly potent when the Society was being asked to accept lower salaries for new hires.

The union communicated to members through email, newsletters, web sites, meetings and work-place discussions. Members wrote to the union themselves in unprecedented numbers. Discontent spread quickly, and the emphasis on fairness for energy professionals effectively captured the workers’ sentiments and served as an engine for further member engagement. When a strike vote was held during the last week of March, 98% of the membership across the province walked-in their ballots for the first time in the history of the Society, and gave the union an astounding 97% strike mandate.

Following the March 31 deadline, negotiations continued. Hydro One began threatening the union with a lockout in April and Parkinson himself sent a long email to every member of the Society outlining his concerns and feelings. The members found his email insulting and offensive, and replied to him directly, to other members and to the union. The union received 300 emails in response to Parkinson’s message, the vast majority of which expressed anger and disgust at his words and tone and emphasized their support for the Society.

A final offer vote, which had been forced by the employer in advance of the April 27 strike deadline, was held across the province with the media in attendance, including at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Toronto located next to the Hydro One headquarters on Bay Street. In collaboration with organizers, young female workers had organized a caucus for the younger members, many of whom had signed contracts with Hydro One months before and were to start mid-summer, but who were not yet actually working. Some members, but particularly these young workers, wore “No” T-shirts to the vote, and 95% of the membership did reject the employer’s final offer.

Seeking to educate the public and reaffirm the union’s pride in its members’ contributions, Müller and Rattai emphasized the importance of Society members’ labour within the hydro system during media interviews. Ontario had seen a crippling cross-province power outage in the summer of 2003, and memories of this were fresh. Hydro One management and Dwight Duncan, then Liberal Minister of Energy, were quoted speaking about contingency plans, with Duncan claiming that a few hundred managers could “fill the void” in the event of a strike or lock-out (Brennan 2005).

The union organized small actions once the final-offer vote had been rejected, starting with afternoon educational pickets at the Hydro One

headquarters and other sites around the province to give workers who had never engaged in job action before some experience, without establishing full picket lines immediately. Members were also asked to take half a day to meet with their local MPP, a strategy designed to foster political engagement among members slowly and comfortably, but also to move the focus to the Liberal government, who were ultimately responsible for the oversight of Hydro One. Meetings were also set up with city councilors and Toronto Mayor David Miller, and the union took three prominent scientists to Duncan's office to share their blackout risk analysis with the Minister.

Throughout this time, negotiations did not occur, despite union requests and the Minister encouraging both sides to get back to the table. But dialogue was continuing and growing within the Society, particularly through small group meetings with workers and union organizers, and discussions on the listserv. Individual members continuously contacted the union leadership with their views in a way not expected by organizers and representatives. On June 1, the first picket line was organized in Barrie, a key hydro control centre for the Ontario grid and workplace for 200 Society members. Those seeking to enter were delayed by half an hour. Seeing the line and delays, management began using buses and helicopters to move operators into the facility, an act that triggered additional picket lines across the province. Pickets continued to expand at hydro workplaces across Ontario until they were erected at 100 job sites. In early July, a court injunction halted picketing at all generation stations, even though these pickets had already been limited by an earlier injunction.

Petitions were developed and disseminated, and extensive dialogue among members continued, particularly around strategy and whether to begin to target the Liberal government further. Organiser Michelle Duncan and local vice-president Rattai explained that the desire to escalate and diversify actions was member-driven, and came from workers of all ages. Workers would send motivating emails to the listserv, encouraging their co-workers, and sharing their reflections on the strike as not being about themselves personally, but about the youth, and the future. Workers began self-organizing into political action teams that would circulate the Premier's and Energy Minister's itineraries, and then follow the politicians in order to picket summer events of all kinds, wherever they were. About 200 Society members interrupted the Premier's speech at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. A 100-member protest and smaller sit-in at the Toronto Board of Trade led to the removal of Müller from the property. The Society also tried using international political pressure, contacting US Senators about the domino-effect risk to the hydro system if an outage were to occur in Ontario because Society members were not at work. Society members even began to share their newfound picketing expertise with locked out workers at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Organizers report that members were surprised to find some of the journalists and other media workers seated, and

that the engineers had encouraged marching at the CBC picket whenever they visited.

As the summer progressed, the Society's members remained engaged, but there were few signs of progress in settling the strike. Many of the newly hired scheduled to start on August 1st were fired, as were long-serving employees who took a leadership role in the cross-province pickets. The Society led the Toronto Labour Day Parade in early September, and workers who had been fired, proposed and then wore T-shirts that read, "fired." Young engineers of both genders and from various ethnic backgrounds were prominent in the contingent, even though they had been terminated and many of them did not know if they would be re-hired. In fact, the whole group was very visible as 800 members were present, most of whom had driven in from all corners of the province to participate.

After a full summer of political action, and little sign that negotiations would be resuming despite the appointment of a mediator in late July, the Society assessed research data and opted to make television commercials featuring the young workers who had been fired and targeting the Liberal government and its power to end the strike. In a media launch held at Queen's Park, the commercials, which depicted the young, ethnically diverse and very articulate engineers, were shown for journalists, and the Society announced that these commercials were scheduled to appear on OMNI, a multicultural television channel. Very shortly thereafter, the Society was informed that Parkinson had finally agreed to arbitration, the approach recommended by the mediator. This indicated that the political action of the Society had finally caused the Liberal government to step in, instructing Parkinson to accept arbitration and end the strike. In the settlement, base hours were not changed, and while two-tier pensions were established, the two-tier wage proposal was defeated.

A large membership meeting was held at the Royal York, a unionized Toronto hotel, and virtually all of the 1000 members from across the province attended. The members celebrated, and in a display that moved many to tears, the young workers gave flowers to the older members who had been fired during the strike. This display of solidarity was seen as a powerful culmination to a strike that had largely been driven by cross-generational solidarity and a sense of the need to protect shared work, and future workers.

ASSESSING THE STRIKE

Without question, the strike by the Society of Energy Professionals was a remarkable case of worker militancy, by any standard. The engagement of so many workers for so long, in very hot weather, in many physical sites, and in diverse ways is noteworthy, but even more so because this was a group of workers that had little experience with political or strike action, and no history of

union consciousness. The restructuring of the energy sector changed the work terrain for workers in the hydro system, breaking a unified public system into many components with different management regimes, thereby eroding the membership of the Society, and “marketizing” the rules of work within the system. This neoliberal climate materially changed the reality of work and management in Ontario’s hydro sector, and was bolstered by a broader cultural campaign stressing competition and individualism. Management also targeted the Society in explicit and more subtle ways, changing members’ views of Hydro One as an organization, and their place within it as workers.

These developments could have been merely tolerated by the Society members and leadership, or turned into individual problems about which to complain, but not collectively resist. However, the staff and leaders of the Society did not simply accept the inevitability of the devaluation of their members, but instead opted to resist through the collective bargaining process and political action. The staff and leaders of the Society created the conditions within which worker anger could be shared, mobilized and organized, but also within which members could take leadership roles, become involved in different ways, and influence the strategy of the entire local. And the degree to which members took hold of the opportunity and steered it off in new directions surprised even the staff and leaders. Clearly, the collaborative approach to political action taken within the Society was key to getting and gaining the involvement of hundreds of members who saw themselves as professionals with skills and intelligence, who then transferred their knowledge, time and energy into job action once they were asked to do so. They realized that they could contribute as unionists and co-workers in defense of their profession and were motivated by the pursuit of “fairness.”

Since the strike, a number of things have changed for the Society and its members. In the months and years that followed, members felt that they were still being devalued but through smaller scale, daily strategies that have caused them to feel as though they have less control over their work. Contract negotiations since 2005 have progressed without strikes, however. Parkinson resigned in late 2006 and the replacement CEO, Laura Formosa, uses a very different tone in dealing with the Society, according to Bell. The current collective agreement extends to 2013 and a Memorandum of Agreement signed in the spring of 2007 resolved many outstanding union concerns.

Members say they feel more solidarity with the broader labour movement and other workers, and demonstrate this in a range ways including providing picket support for UNITE-HERE, the Toronto Police Association, and other unions; sending monetary donations to striking locals; and participating in many labour conventions and events. Some members saw the parallel between their struggle against two-tier wages in 2005 and the recent management proposals for two-tier wages that were accepted by the United Auto Workers in

the United States, and recognize this as a recurring management strategy for workers of all kinds. Although contingents are smaller, the Society continues to participate in Labour Day with a post-strike high of many hundreds in 2007.

Not surprisingly, a smaller number of dedicated activists form the core of current political action strategies, but many members agree that the strike solidified their role as a “trade union” or even a “blue-collar union,” whether they are pleased with this result or not. Whether the politicization seen in the 2005 strike will translate into ongoing and increased political engagement by Society members, effective resistance to management demands, and an enduring union-consciousness is yet to be seen, but without question the strike was a powerful display of collective action by “professionals” and one that can inform broader strategies and projects for union renewal.

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