TorStar On the Rampage ---Workers Fight For Equality

by Wesley Morgan

HAMILTON - TorStar, the corporation that owns the Toronto Star, controls virtually all southern Ontario newspaper media west of Toronto. A six month strike of 60 inserters, press operators, and pre-production staff working for a company owned by TorStar has been virtually silenced thanks to TorStar's reach.

Brabant Newspapers is owned by CityMedia Group, and publishes five local papers in the Hamilton area. On strike since last December, Brabant workers are fighting for pay equity. Twenty-six of the strikers are women, who earned a maximum of \$8.99/hour—about \$1.52 less than male counterparts.

The company hired strike breakers, and waited six months before closing the inserting operation in Brabant, firing all 26 women seeking pay equity, and threatening to fire any remaining strikers who did not surrender.

In June, ten of the fired women workers occupied TorStar CEO Rob Pritchard's Yonge Street offices, forcing him back to the table. TorStar returned to the table only to make a final offer with no improvements, without even allowing for the reinstatement of fired workers.

Throughout the TorStar media empire, in places like Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, and Guelph, not (cont'd on page 3)

WELFARE/ODSP: Special Diet Supplement Wrestle Continues with City and

by Jeff Shantz

TORONTO - As reported in the July issue of *Strike!* The Special Diet Campaign undertaken by *Ontario Coalition Against Poverty* (OCAP) and allies in the *Ontario Common Front* has been widely successful, helping hundreds of people access \$250/per month for improved nutrition. On August 7th, in Belleville, the Tenant Action Group (TAG), together with the Marsh Drive and North Park communities, organized a highly successful "hunger clinic" which signed up 124 for the supplement.

In early July Toronto's welfare administrators attempted to bring in mean-spirited changes to the special diet policy requiring all people receiving the supplement to re-apply for it on new municipal forms. In an overtly sexist move, nurse practitioners, dieticians and midwives would no longer be allowed to authorize the forms. Additionally, doctors would be asked to reveal specific underlying medical conditions for each

Provincial Liberals

applicant. As one CUPE worker in social services revealed to me, this was in violation of even the Province's welfare regulations, as well as basic health protection law which is supposed to protect doctorpatient confidentiality. These policies would have excluded about 1/3 of people currently receiving the allowance.

On July 21st, a public strategy meeting was held in Etobicoke, conducted in different languages (Somali, Spanish, English), with over 150 spirited participants. They voted overwhelmingly to directly confront the Mayor and occupy city hall until their demands were won.

In the face of this large and angry mobilization of people receiving the supplement --combined with

(cont'd on page 3)

Unity Makes Strength: Quebec Hotel Workers Mobilize and Win!

by Nicolas Phébus

MONTREAL - The first weeks of July were a time of intense mobilisation for some 4000 hotel workers in Montreal. On Friday July 8th, 3200 workers went on a 24h general strike and a mass rally of over 1000 supporters was held. Another 400 more workers were planning to join the strike called by the Confederation des syndicats nationaux, but a very last-minute tentative agreement was reached at the Sheraton. Clearly, not all bosses were of the same mood since the Omni management moved to lock out the workers (who retaliated with a 98% strike vote).

On Tuesday July 12th, a mass meeting of some 1500 union members backed the (unprecedented) vote for an unlimited general strike to start 3 days later if no deals were reached. But in the end, only the workers at the Plaza Metro Center struck, to kickstart stalled negotiations. All other hotels agreed on the tentative deal made at the Sheraton (with some minor differences).

The tentative agreement for which workers fought has a number of interesting features. First off, it means decent wage increases (11% over 3 years) but even more interestingly, the workers managed to abolish the "wage ladder". That is, after 30 days, every one working the same job gets the same pay. This is a good idea that runs against the whole logic of the 'labor market' and promotes equality among workers.

The CSN unions in the hotel industry are living proof that it is possible to organise in the service industry and to seriously improve working conditions through coordinated action. Unfortunately, the wisdom of the hotel workers —that unity makes strength—is not yet shared widely across other sectors. Still, there's some fighting inspiration here to offer to the majority of private sector workers who are not yet part of the "Labor Movement".

[A more detailed version of this article is available on the web at http://www.nefac.net]

STRIKE!

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for more info, or to contribute(!), contact:

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SAUGEEN SOLIDARITY!

The Ojibway people and in particular a group of women of Mishkeegogamang and Saugeen First Nations known as the *Northern Lights Anishnawbekwes* are organizing to oppose the appropriation of their lands by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and corporations such as Bowater and Buchanan.

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are needed to assist the people of these nations in building a strong and successful Native centered campaign to maintain control of their traditional lands.

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pulp likely sourced from the Caribou Forest Management Unit subject to **blockades** by the Mishkeegogamang/ Saugeen First Nations." -- Rainforest Action Network

Our forests can't be duplicated.

CEP vs. TorStar (cont'd from page 1) to mention Toronto, there is good reason to be concerned. CityMedia reported that they squeezed an extra \$7.7 million from their workers in the first half of 2004 alone.

CEO Rob Pritchard recently gave himself a 13% raise, more than 3 times what the 60 workers, added together, are seeking per year. The union, the CEP (Communication, Energy, and Paperworkers Union), is calling for a boycott

of all TorStar products. If you would like to let TorStar and Brabant know how you feel about their attacks on workers and women, call:



Robert Prichard,

Torstar Corporate Office, One Yonge Street, Toronto, Canada, M5E 1P9; Telephone: (416) 869-4010; Fax: (416) 869-4183; Email: torstar@torstar.ca OR

Jagoda Pike; City Media; 44 Frid Street; Hamilton, ON, L8N 3G3; phone: 905-526-3431; Email: jpike@thespec.com

SPECIAL DIET

(cont'd from page 1)

demands from medical practitioners, especially nurses — the City was forced to retreat from these plans rather than face a publicly embarrassing occupation of City Hall and the prospect of legal action. While this obstacle was overcome, the City continues to arbitrarily deny many people for various dubious reasons. Forty-two families presented a united front on August 5th at the Mayor's Office to demand the funds be released. As reports of denials, of new "consent forms" and other b.s. from caseworkers come in from across the city, it's clear the fight continues.

Even more, we must win the real basis of the campaign, which is getting the benefit to everyone who receives welfare or disability payments.

The vast majority of people who need the special diet to get by are clearly not accessing it, if we consider that there are approximately 140 000 on social assistance or disability in Toronto, but only about 10,000 receiving the supplement (a 67% increase since the start of this campaign.) There are approximately 760 000 people in Ontario who rely on the Province's inadequate welfare and disability payments.

That is why OCAP argues the emphasis must be placed on building community movements that are capable of forcing the Liberal government to automatically give the \$250 special diet allowance to every person receiving social assistance in the province. This money must be made available without reference to medical examination since the links between the province's paltry social assistance rates and ill health are already clearly established.



SUPPORT THE TORONTO COALITION OF CONCERNED solidarity

Taxi
Drivers in the
city of Toronto have
come together to fight back
against the anti-driver, anti-immigrant
worker policies and laws that regulate their
workplace and create an immigrant job ghetto. The
Toronto Coalition of Concerned Taxi Drivers is made
up of independent drivers, Taxi Post, On-time Taxi,
The Taxi Association of Toronto, and the Ontario
Coalition Against Poverty.

The Coalition's goal is to put an end to the harassment of taxi drivers including police targeting of cabs, random checks, and excessive ticketing. Drivers face menacing work conditions and

harassment by the city and police. Drivers work 12 hours a day, 7 days a week and hardly make minimum wage because the city has been able to gouge drivers of any real income.

Targeting of drivers continues to snowball, and the stories speak volumes of injustice and racism. Recently, an Irani driver was stopped by police to be given a warning. Once the officer realized he was a Muslim, he was given a series of by-law infraction tickets and he now faces losing his license.

This man has no other way to make a living. Drivers and members of this coalition recently protested the unfair scooping of taxi fairs by limos in a rally at Queen's Park. Drivers were criminally charged after this demonstration. One driver was brutalized by police and is facing the loss of his license. Another driver was singled out as a taxi driver organizer by city bylaw officers and was handed a series of illegitimate fines.

Because of the conditions faced by drivers daily, they cannot face these attacks alone, without

and support. For many drivers, time to back in court means the loss of hard earned income. Taxi drivers have no aws that regulate their choice but to do things that make them easy police targets, just in order to make a living.

Taxi drivers have been made vulnerable and have been treated as second class citizens, because they are mainly an immigrant workforce. This workforce is also the second largest revenue source for the city of Toronto. These day-to-day realities demand support from activists and concerned people. The Toronto Coalition of Concerned Taxi Drivers and the efforts of immigrant workers demanding justice need our

solidarity.

To deal with the excessive tickets and criminal charges laid by abusive police, we are asking for support to carry this fight into the court rooms. This is a financial appeal to help taxi drivers create a Toronto Taxi Driver Defense Fund for drivers who have been targeted by the police. The defense fund is strictly for support of those drivers working actively with the Toronto Coalition of Concerned Taxi Drivers. To support our work donations can be made to the Ontario Coalition against Poverty.



please mark on your cheque that donation is for the "Taxi Drivers Defence Fund"

JUSTICE FOR DRIVERS!

For more information or to support the Toronto Taxi Defense Fund contact: 647-219-9187 / 416-721-5555

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