

# OPSEU offers tidbits in strike's shadow

By RUTHANNE URQUHART  
Ottawa Sun

The union representing 48,000 Ontario civil servants cut its wage hike demands in half yesterday as a provincewide strike looms.

The Ontario Public Service Employees Union will raise picket lines around government buildings shortly after midnight tonight, unless a last-minute contract deal can be struck today.

Services that could be affected include the courts, prisons, OHIP wel-

fare, the Children's Aid Society and detention centres around Ottawa.

"We still hope to get a settlement before the deadline — there was some movement at the table today from our side," said OPSEU spokesman Pierre Florea.

## 'Very fair position'

The union's latest wage demand now ranges from 8% to 9.5% over two years, down from the 12% to 20% that negotiators have been seeking since November.

"We have changed our demands,"

OPSEU president Leah Casselman said. "We have a very fair and reasonable position on the table."

Management board spokesman Hillary Staath countered that OPSEU's wage demands actually range from 8.2% to 15% — once a \$1,000 signing bonus tabled yesterday and new seniority pay hike demands are folded into the mix.

Despite movement on the wage front, major contract disputes continue to separate the two sides.

Key union demands include:

- A no-job loss guarantee;

- Early retirement extended for up to six more years;

- Changes to make it easier for "unclassified" contract staff to become full-time workers.

Meanwhile, nearly 100 jail guards at eight different correctional facilities called in sick yesterday for a second straight day, forcing prisons to use supervisors in their place.

Roger Kirkey, president of Local 411 which represents guards at the Regional Detention Centre, said management has been "putting people out on the street who haven't

even finished their sentence yet, so they can reduce the numbers and prolong the strike."

But jail superintendent John Hutton denied the allegations, adding a walkout wouldn't cause major disruptions at the Innes Rd. facility.

"The agreement between the union and the management board (at the RDC) provides for essential and emergency services," said Hutton. — With files from Jason Cumming, James Wallace and CP

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