

## Sharing is caring



By Nate Smelle

IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS WE have seen picket signs popping up around Bancroft and the rest of the province. Whether held by members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) or Ontario Nurses Association (ONA) many of them are sending out the same message.

"We demand a fair contract," many of them read. "Fair wages for all," said another.

Some of them even go into greater detail professing how their CEO is slated to receive a six per cent increase while the workers are given a wage freeze.

It is interesting to see the backlash from the public when workers bond together to demand a more equitable distribution of the wealth. There are varying degrees of poverty, some far more extreme than others; but does this mean we ought to strip away the wages, rights and benefits of the working class women and men who have dedicated their lives to a profession they care about? Often the striking workers are told they should be grateful that they even have a job in such times of economic turmoil. In my opinion these types of comments do nothing but promote the apathy that helps hold down minimum wage workers from rising out of the cycle of poverty that more and more people are finding themselves in.

Is it reasonable to hold contempt for our fellow members of the middle class because they have a slightly better quality of life than the majority of our classmates? I don't think so.

If the workers who have attained a well paying job with decent benefits roll over every time the management tries to take back the advantages they have already earned through education, training and years of service, soon they too will be standing in that line looking for a minimum wage work with no medical or dental benefits, no pension, and no vacation.

Is this the type of occupation we would choose for our children, grandchildren and even for ourselves for that matter?

The members of OPSEU and ONA have both said enough is enough.

They recognize the income inequality that runs rampant in the private sector and want no part of it. If you visit one of these picket lines and talk to the individuals holding the signs they will give you a long list of reasons why they are standing out in the winter wind.

When I have taken the time to speak with these folks I have always left richer from the experience. One tidbit of wisdom that seems to rear its head at every demonstration I have visited from Maynooth to Manhattan is the inevitable discussion about income inequality. It is through this type of public dialogue that we will eventually push things forward in favour of the majority of us and for future generations.

The gap between the wealthiest and the poorest people on earth has never been wider. The problem is not that some of the working class have fair wages and decent health benefits, the problem is that 85 people on the planet hold more than 50 per cent of the planet's wealth. Before we can realize the changes necessary to improve the quality of life for the majority of us we also need to realize that we cannot solve our economic and ecological woes taking away from the middle class.

The only way we will ever put an end to poverty is to teach these 85 people that sharing is caring.