



Museum board turns away its own employees

CMCC board hides behind hotel security, refuses to hear workers' concerns

OTTAWA—Striking employees from the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the War Museum travelled to Toronto yesterday, in an attempt to speak directly to members of the museums' Board of Trustees. They were turned away from the Royal York Hotel, where the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation's board members were meeting. Shortly after, they were escorted from the hotel's premises by security guards.

Employees at the two museums have been on strike since September 21, 2009. The 420 workers voted 92 per cent in favour of a strike at the end of August and talks first hit a standstill on September 18. Negotiations resumed briefly on October 7, but broke off after the Canadian Museum of Civilization Corporation refused to agree to protections against the contracting out of the workers' jobs. The workers are in the midst of their fifth week on the picket line.

Museum employees Denise Corbett, Audrey Vermette and Guy Gagnon travelled with PSAC Regional Executive Vice-President Maria Fitzpatrick to Toronto, in an effort to present the workers' concerns directly to the 11 members of the museums' Board of Trustees.

Last week, a lawyer acting for the CMCC sent a letter to Daniel Poulin, President of PSAC Local 70396, indicating that, "no individual Trustee will grant an audience to PSAC representatives nor will Trustees attend any other meeting or information session conducted by PSAC on these matters." The workers interpreted this as a "gag order" and decided to take their case directly to board members.

When the employees arrived at the hotel conference room where the board was meeting, they were confronted by CMCC senior management representatives, who informed them that the board had a "full agenda" and "didn't have time to meet with employees." When the employees indicated that their comments would not take more than two minutes, the managers responded by calling hotel security.

In response, the striking employees were joined by over a dozen PSAC activists from the Toronto area who proceeded to picket outside the Royal York Hotel in downtown Toronto for well over an hour, with no interference from the Toronto police despite efforts on the part of hotel security.

"Surely the members of the board of such a prominent Crown Corporation have a responsibility to receive information from and discuss issues with the museums' stakeholders, including the workers," said Maria Fitzpatrick. "The museum workers have indicated repeatedly that they are ready and willing to negotiate, providing the corporation agrees to protect their jobs from being sold to the lowest bidder. The CMCC is abdicating its responsibility to its employees and to the Canadian public by allowing this dispute to drag on for so long."

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For more information or to book interviews:

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