

# Strike Theatre

## Preface by Andrew Hryhorowych

In the CUPE 3903 strike of 2008-9, the week of December 15-19 was declared a week of action. During that time, each day had a specific event that was meant to boost the profile of our fight. Each action was organized by two picket lines. The action on December 19<sup>th</sup> was a barbeque at Glendon picket marking the last day of picketing before our two week winter break. This event was intended as an opportunity to celebrate all that we had accomplished so far, and to raise our spirits for the struggle still to come. The Glendon picket line organized the barbeque while Pond Road organized the entertainment, which included this skit. It was performed that afternoon in the middle of a blizzard and again later that evening at a strike party. The performers all wore colourful, life-sized costumes.

The idea behind the skit was to poke fun at the sometimes ridiculous nature of the weekly strike General Membership Meetings. Although all such meetings are incredibly important, they also include moments that are ripe for lampooning. It was my intention as head writer to respect the importance of these meetings, and the process itself, while still being able to laugh at the occasional absurdity which would present itself. Many of the issues brought up in this play are based on actual debates that took place at GMMs.

Some of the perceived dynamics that existed within our union must be mentioned for the sake of the readers that were not a part of the strike. The most persistent dynamic was the perception of a divide in our union between the executive and the bargaining team. Although there are objections to this type of characterization from both camps, those who “supported” the executive were often characterized as the “radical activist vanguard,” while those who “supported” the bargaining team were frequently characterized as “conservative social democrats.” Although the play is clearly political, it was not my intention to overtly take one side; rather, it was my intention to gently poke some fun at each side, at the fact that there were perceived “sides” to begin with, and at the process itself. I am proud of the fact that, in the end, members of each “faction” claimed to thoroughly enjoy the play.

## “Actually, You’re Out of Order”

Written by Andrew Hryhorowych, Kevin McCain, and Aaron Papenhausen<sup>1</sup>

Characters: Whistle (the chair of the meeting), Gate, Pylon, Fire Barrel, BT member (also a pylon), an unseen audience member.

Whistle: I call the meeting to order. Welcome to the General Membership Meeting of the Canadian Union of Public Equipment 3903.5. Would someone like to read the equality statement?

Pylon: Union solidarity is based on the principle that union members are equal and deserve mutual respect at all levels. Any discrimination on the basis of function, paint job, or manufacturer hurts and thereby divides us.

Whistle: Thank you. I’d like to remind everyone that we will be using twinkling to show our appreciation instead of clapping.

Pylon: Point of information – how can we twinkle, none of us have hands!

Whistle: True, but without hands you can’t clap, either, so just do what you normally do. Now, the rationale for the agenda.

Gate: After the agenda is approved, we’ll have the approval of minutes from the previous GMM. Then the Executive will give a 15 minute presentation on the origins of neo-liberalism, giving context to our current battle. This will be followed by 10 minutes of questions. Next, the bargaining team will give a 5 minute update on negotiations, followed by a 15 minute question and answer period. We will then have 45 minutes for strike/bargaining strategy.

Whistle: Great, can I have a motion to approve the agenda?

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<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank Hilary Martin for helping us edit the play.

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Fire barrel: Here.

Gate: Seconded.

Whistle: Discussion?

Fire barrel: Yes, I'd like to limit all of the Executive's presentations to 30 seconds and extend the bargaining team's by 45 minutes. We need to know what's going on at the table!

Whistle: Would a BT member like to comment on the amount of time provided for the presentation?

BT member: Yes, 5 minutes will actually be more than enough time; the update is, basically, that there is no news. The employer refuses to bargain. So, the extra time isn't needed.

Fire barrel: But I think it's important that we hear from the bargaining team!

BT member: You will, we'll get to say everything that needs to be said. You'll also have plenty of time to ask questions.

Whistle: Ok... well, since the bargaining team doesn't need the extra time, I'll leave it as is. Is there any more discussion regarding the agenda?

Fire barrel: Yes, can we move the Executive's presentation to after the strike/bargaining strategy? I need to get home in time to watch Ugly Betty. It's the episode with a back-alley cameo by a fire barrel I know in New York. I have to watch it!

Whistle: I'm sure their presentation won't take too long.

Gate: Yes, we can keep it to under 10 minutes if it pleases the room.

Fire barrel: Nope, I want it moved.

Whistle: Would you care to motivate your suggestion?

Fire barrel: Sure. I want to vote on motions quickly so I can get out of here. So, everyone who feels the same way, vote with me.

Gate: There's no reason to do this, we'll be quick, and the information might be helpful.

Fire barrel: I don't care, I can't miss this show!

From the Audience: Get a VCR!

Whistle: You're out of order! OK, we'll vote on this before deciding on any other changes. All those in favour of moving the Executive's presentation to the end? All opposed? Abstentions? And the motion carries. Is there any other discussion about the agenda?

Pylon: Yes, I'd like to add a short speech about the strike. Perhaps we could put it after the approval of the minutes?

Whistle: Any other changes to the agenda? OK, all those in favour of the revised agenda? Opposed? Abstentions? The agenda is approved. Let's move on to the approval of last meeting's minutes, and the ten years of minutes recently uncovered in an archeological dig.

Gate: Since I was only able to read through the first 360 pages of the minutes, I'd like to suggest that they be tabled until the next GMM.

Fire barrel: Second!

Whistle: All in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries. Now, a short speech from the pylon.

Pylon: We, the pylons of CUPE 3903.5, have proudly played our part in this strike. Without our pivotal contribution, maintaining safe pickets would not be possible. Yet we do not feel this contribution is sufficiently recognized. As all are aware, we stand on the front lines all too often alone, isolated from the majority of picketers who march united behind us. Our task is, perhaps, the most dangerous. We are

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often hit by irate, irrational drivers, who would sooner sacrifice our bodies for their convenience. We are first to throw ourselves in front of cars that run our exit lanes. We do this work without hesitation, despite the fact that many of our sisters and brothers have already been lost to this violence. But what worries us most is that the violence we face is not only external, but also comes from inside. The very picketers we work so hard to protect often treat us with a level of disregard and disrespect that would be intolerable to our less committed sisters and brothers. We have already spoken of our isolation, but this is not all. Even those few who attempt to aid our efforts all too often cause as much harm as good. We are constantly dragged back and forth across the frozen asphalt. We are sometimes picked up, only to be thrown down again, crashing to a halt exposed before the very cars that want to crush us. This mistreatment must come to an end. Our commitment will not waver. But if we truly want to give power to the pickets, then we must begin by empowering the pylons.

Whistle: Thank you. The bargaining team will now present us with an update.

BT member: I think I more or less said everything when we were debating the agenda. The employer refuses to negotiate. We're waiting on them. That's about it. Are there any questions?... No?... Some of you sounded like you had a lot of concerns earlier.... No?... OK, I guess that's it.

Whistle: We've now reached the part of the agenda where we will discuss strike/bargaining strategy. People are welcome to introduce motions at this point.

Gate: BIRT' all gates are placed at least 15 meters away from the fire barrel at all times, due to the horrible stench of the smoke.

Fire barrel: Point of personal privilege! It's not my fault! Do you know the kind of shit they throw in me? Seriously, if I have one more Tim Horton's cup tossed inside of me while I'm burning, I'm going to lose it!

Gate: I'm sorry, but whether or not it's your fault, it's still difficult for us! I mean, is it not enough that cars clip us as they go by, that they sometimes ram into us, that we have strikers leaning on us all the time? The smell is just too much! And I'm not even mentioning the terrible cold!

Fire barrel: You think we have it easy?! First of all, don't talk about the cold! At the end of the day, you get rounded up and taken back to HQ. I have to stay outside overnight, when it's really cold! And if that's not bad enough, during the day I have a freakin' fire inside of me! I'm constantly overheating! All that fire melts the snow and ice around me, insuring that I'm always standing in mud. On top of that, I've had people come by and drill holes in me! That's right, I've experienced permanent structural damage at the hands of the very strikers we're helping! And if you think the smell's bad where you're standing, try having rusted nails, donut boxes, and coffee containers burned inside of you!

Pylon: May I have a point of order?

Whistle: You may.

Pylon: I believe this motion is out of order. As I mentioned earlier, we're all suffering terribly during this strike. To give special treatment to one group on the lines is inequitable.

Whistle: Actually, you're out of order.

Gate: My apologies, I didn't intend the motion in that light. I withdraw it.

Whistle: I recognize the next speaker. And keep in mind, we're running short on time.

Pylon: BIRT no information regarding strike strategy ever be presented at a GMM, since the employer is always among us.

Fire barrel: second!

Whistle: I'll take two for and two against the motion.

Pylon: I'd like to speak for this motion. The employer is everywhere and we wouldn't want information falling into their hands.

Gate: I'd also like to speak for this motion. If we talk about key dates where the administration might be strong or weak, they'll know that we know their strengths and weaknesses, and we don't want them to know that we know. So, I'd rather we not know, you know? They could use that knowledge against us! The administration can't find out what we're doing!

Whistle: Can I have two against? Anyone....? Is there no one against? In that case, I call the question. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion carries, unanimously. Are there any other motions?

Fire barrel: Whereas the members that were at the meeting before the meeting that was after the one that was on November the 20th or so, (or maybe it was the one after that) will recall the motion to table the discussion of the motion that came up at the meeting before the one I'm talking about (or maybe it was the one after that?) I move should now be discussed.

Pylon: point of order – that's out of order: there's already a motion on the floor that we table this discussion – that's what we're discussing.

Gate: I move we table this discussion about the tabling of the discussion until we get information from the executive and the secretary concerning if we are discussing what the motion was about or whether we are discussing the original motion to table the motion that was at the GMM that was before the meeting that was after the one that was on November the 20th or so, (or maybe the one after that). ---I mean the one where we had cookies---

Fire barrel: oh, the one with cookies....

Whistle: Until the executive is able to give the membership information, this motion is out of order.

Gate: Which one?

Whistle: Both of them. Now, are there any other motions?

Gate: BIRT' all fire barrels are required to burn incense to mask the smell of the smoke.

Fire barrel: Come on!

Gate: This helps everyone out – no inequity here!

Pylon: May I make a friendly amendment? BIRT' fire barrels burn whatever they'd like.

Gate: How is this friendly?!

Whistle: I have to agree, it's not friendly. However, due to our strict time limit, I have to call an end to this meeting. Meeting adjourned.

(Complaints all around)

END SCENE