



Information for OPSEU/SEFPO members in the Liquor Board Employees Division

Issue 64 December 2020

It's been a tense and tumultuous year. But even as the pandemic's second wave continues to grow, we wanted to bring you this short but important issue of The Echo. Stay tuned in 2021 for the next issue.

President's and First Vice-President/Treasurer's Message: Thank you for all that you've done this year

Friends,

Let us start this end-of-the-year message with the thing we'd most like to say to you all: thank you.

The strength of character you've all shown throughout the pandemic is inspiring.

You've been on the front lines during this pandemic, risking your own health and safety to ensure that alcohol is sold safely and responsibly in communities across the province.

And those risks are real -- let's never forget that more than 50 of your co-workers have contracted COVID-19 on the job. Thank goodness, none of have died. But we all know COVID-19 can do long-lasting damage – the risks of working during this pandemic are very real and very serious.

And yet despite these risks, and despite the often confusing and ever-changing public health rules and regulations, you continue to show up for work.

So again, on behalf of OPSEU/SEFPO's entire Executive Board: thank you.

We'd also like to thank everybody on your Divisional Executive, your provincial health and safety committee, and all of your local executives and health and safety committees.

We all know that your employer took its time treating the pandemic seriously. But with a tremendous show of strength and unyielding demands, your leaders and their support here in OPSEU/SEFPO forced the LCBO to get moving on health and safety basics like barriers and masks.

By the same token, it took tremendous solidarity to ensure that none of your co-workers have been laid off throughout the pandemic.

You never gave up. You never backed down. And with your union standing with you, you got what you needed.

Your success are OPSEU/SEFPO's successes – and so for that, we also want to thank you.

While 2020 will go down as one of the most unusual years in the history of the LCBO, we have to point out that some things didn't change much at all.

We're thinking mostly about the government's ongoing campaign to privatize your work by stealth.

Of course, they never use the term "privatization." But when you read between the lines of all the changes they're making by legislation and regulation, their intent is as clear as a bright winter's day: they want to give the private sector a bigger and bigger slice of alcohol sales – allowing more private retail stores, and now restaurants and bars, to take over more and more of your work.

We know that's a bad idea on a variety of fronts.

For one thing, it will inevitably cut into the sales at LCBO stores – that will lead to shift losses and, in some cases, outright store closures.

For another thing, those lost sales will all lead to less revenue and therefore smaller dividends for vital public services, which are always important and especially during this pandemic.

And lastly, privatizing alcohol sales is also a bad idea because it will lead to more under-aged drinking, more irresponsible drinking, and more drinking in general. Public health experts have been warning for years that privatization leads to more consumption, more consumption leads to more harm, and more harm leads to higher costs in health care, social services, and corrections.

In other words: at the same time that alcohol privatization is reducing the dividend the LCBO provides for public services, it's also increasing the demand for those public services. Talk about a lose-lose for Ontario.

So as this terrible year comes to a close and we start looking forward to the next, rest assured that you can count on your union to keep on fighting to Keep It Public. You – and everybody else in the province – deserve nothing less.

And in the meantime, we hope you and your loved ones have a safe, healthy, and happy holiday season. We hope you get a chance to rest and relax – you've earned it!

In solidarity,



Warren (Smokey) Thomas
OPSEU/SEFPO President



Eduardo (Eddy) Almeida
OPSEU/SEFPO First Vice-President/Treasurer



LBED Chair's Message:

When the going gets tough, the tough stick together

Hi everybody,

On behalf of everybody on the LBED Divisional Executive, I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you and your family the very best this holiday season.

We've faced many tough years together, but none quite as tough as 2020. Never before has working on the front lines felt quite as scary or as dangerous.

But I'm proud of the work that we've done serving our communities while fighting for the health and safety equipment and measures that we deserve.

With so much on the line, it isn't always easy to stay united. But as we continue to work through the second wave, and get ready for what's bound to be a difficult round of bargaining, our unity and solidarity have never been more important.

So I'd like to directly address an issue that has left some feeling left out and unseen: the Monday closures.

The Divex and I have been advocating since late May for the LCBO to return to normal operating hours and reopen on Mondays.

Why? For two reasons.

The first reason has to do with workload. When the Monday closures were announced in the early days of the pandemic, we understood from comments by Premier Ford, that the closure on Monday would allow for "deep cleaning" and give us a break from public exposure.

But as we all now know, it turned out the Employer decided not to schedule us at all and claimed it a day of rest. We've maintained all along this is not a day of rest and we are now doing seven days' worth of work in just six days.

It's not fair to those being scheduled. And it's certainly not fair to those not being scheduled. For that reason alone, we're fighting for Monday re-openings.

But there's another reason to fight, and it's even more important in the long run: the longer we stay closed on Mondays, the more we lose ground in our fight to "Keep it Public."

When our stores are dark on Mondays, private retailers are busily siphoning away public profits which are desperately needed during this global pandemic.

So it was for those two reasons that I asked President Thomas to write to the Finance Minister, requesting that the government direct the LCBO to reopen on Mondays.

It's important to remember that the Monday closures are far from the only hand-up private alcohol is being given.

The Premier and his Ministers are clearly under the influence of a number of powerful private-alcohol lobbyists working the halls of Queen's Park pushing tirelessly to increase their profits at the expense of the rest of us.

The government is yielding to the lobbyists, carving off small pieces of the LCBO's alcohol business and handing them over to the private sector.

Taken individually, none of these pieces seem very significant. But add them all together, and the losses to the LCBO and the people of the province are starting to add up quickly.

In the area of distribution, government has permitted the direct delivery of alcohol to consumers from breweries, wineries and distilleries.

In the area of price control, government has lowered the minimum paid for spirits by restaurants and bars, cutting directly into LCBO profits

And in the area of retail, government has continued the previous government's footsteps of expanding private retail. Along with expanding grocery store and "convenience outlets," the government has also:

- permitted bars and restaurants to sell alcohol – including mixed drinks that have been "securely closed" -- with takeout/delivery of food
- set delivery hours for alcohol from 9 am to 11 pm (previously the alcohol could only be delivered one hour following closing)
- temporarily allowed retail stores to sell alcohol two hours earlier at 7 a.m.
- allowed beer and wine baskets with food to be sold by online retailers such as flower shops

Expanded private retail is bad for the LCBO and the province in two ways.

In the short-term, it's bad for LCBO and the province when alcohol being sold by private retailers hasn't been distributed by the LCBO.

And in the long-term, private retail is bad for the LCBO and the province because it will inevitably lead to loss of business in our stores and our warehouses. Shifts will be cut in stores and warehouses. And some stores will start to disappear altogether.

Viewed together, it's easy to see that all of these small privatizations are turning into a very big problem.

But I want you all to know that your Divex and I are fighting against all of these changes for you. Both before and during the pandemic, we always put a priority on your health and safety, and on keeping your work from being privatized.

By standing strong together, we can keep our work safe and our jobs secure.

In solidarity,



Colleen MacLeod
LBED Chair



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Editorial Policy

Content comes from our base of activists, staff, other labour sources and our divisional executive.

Where an article has a byline, the views are those of the author and not necessarily the views of OPSEU/SEFPO or LBED.

While we welcome your contributions, we ask that they be constructive. All articles should be signed and include your local number. They should contribute positively to our division, union and its policies.

We encourage thoughtful discussion of all related issues and reserve the right to edit for libel, length, clarity and to reply to those that seem to reflect a misunderstanding of the union and its policies.

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