

# Guards protest prison privatization

By IRENE GENTLE  
The Champion

Corrections workers gathered outside Maplehurst Correctional Complex Tuesday to protest a plan by the Ontario government to privatize provincial jails.

Worker safety is at risk if the government doesn't change its tune, said Don Ford, a communications officer with the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU).

"We've been hitting at them pretty consistently since last November," he said. "Our folks are serious. They're not going to back down."

He said senior corrections officers have indicated they'd rather leave the field than work in a private system.

"We're hoping the government will see the light," he said.

NDP corrections critic Peter Kormos delivered a scathing address to the crowd, which at one point numbered between 50 and 70 workers from around the province.

## Safety the issue

Wearing his trademark tan cowboy boots and speaking into a megaphone, he said a private system will place money above people.

"They're not going to be asking the board of directors how many people did you rehabilitate and how many correctional officers did you protect from assault, or how many communities did you make safer," he said.

"Their bottom line is how much of a profit did you make."

He linked privatization of jails to the water situation in Walkerton, saying deaths could result.

"Cuts in privatization will cause death," said Mr. Kormos.

"Regrettably, Milton being as likely as any other."

Corrections Minister Rob Sampson came under particular fire from Mr. Kormos.

"Let's understand that in his previous life, Mr. Sampson was a corporate banker," he said.

"In the old days, crooks used to rob banks. Now they own them."

Liberal corrections critic Dave Levac took aim at Mr. Harris.

"Mr. Harris should be ashamed of himself, but we know that's very difficult to do in his case," he said.

He said history has shown there's a 50 per cent increase in violence toward correctional officers in private jails.

But that can be prevented, said Mr. Levac.

**"We've been hitting at them pretty consistently since last November. Our folks are serious. They're not going to back down."**

**DON FORD**

"If he's concerned about your safety, then Mr. Sampson, all you have to do is say no to privatizing jail systems," he said. "Mr. Sampson, you're wrong. Admit it. Say you're sorry."

## Issue a hot one

Protests taking place across the province are having an impact, said OPSEU President Leah Casselman.

"We have a government which is exposed, thanks to the Walkerton situation," she said.

"There's six people dead as a result of that. We don't want to see people dead in these facilities."

She urged correctional workers to keep the issue hot.

"This fight is far from over," said Ms Casselman.

"We've got them on the ropes. We just need to take them to the mat."

Privatization of Ontario jails is meant to begin next year in Penetanguishene.


There are no immediate plans to privatize others.



Photo by STEVE LeBLANC

Dave Levac, corrections critic for the provincial Liberals, speaks to Maplehurst employees during a protest at the local prison Tuesday.

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