

Essential services workers are ordered back on jobs

By FANNIE SUNSHINE
The Champion

Essential services workers at correctional facilities across the province were expected to go back on the job at press time last night.

Over the weekend, the Ontario Relations Board ordered all essential services workers back to work, although a deal between the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) and the government to end the two-week strike has yet to be made.

Correctional officers have been showing up for all shifts since OPSEU went on strike March 13, said union officials.

"Initially, the management of Maplehurst Correctional Complex locked out the essential workers and would not allow them to enter the prison," said Bill Gillies, president of OPSEU Local 234 (Maplehurst). "Under the Ministry of Labour order, the workers showed up for their shifts but management didn't allow them in. They're sitting in the lobby right now. It's absurd the workers aren't allowed in. It's quite obvious management wants to keep the essential workers out of the institution."

Jim Richards, vice-president of OPSEU Local 234, said Maplehurst management began

suspending the correctional officers several days after the strike began.

"Managers are running the jail right now. There are no correctional officers in there. All the workers have been showing up and being told they are not allowed inside."

But Fred Williams, superintendent of Maplehurst, told The Champion correctional officers have been reporting for duty but for various reasons refusing to perform their duties under the Essential Services Agreement.

"I haven't had too many workers showing up for all shifts. I can't go into detail about why they have been refusing to perform their duties, but many are citing health and safety concerns and they are allowed to refuse work under the Health and Safety Work Refusal Act."

Mr. Williams said the 43 managers at Maplehurst have taken over the care and control of inmates since the strike began.

"We are providing the basic services the inmates are guaranteed, such as health care, fresh air, nutrition, religious and spiritual care and the right to attend court. Visiting hours have been reduced but the inmates still receive visitation privileges."

The managers are doing everything in their power to control the

facility in an effective and professional way, he continued.

"They (inmates) understand what we expect of them and we have kept them from rioting and expressing anger. We have kept everything in an orderly way. We have accomplished that mainly through long hours and hard work. The inmates have been quite complimentary and they have been given what they are entitled to."

Deaf students could lose the semester

Pat Rowley, administrative assistant for Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf, said all councillors, maintenance workers, secretaries, kitchen staff and interpreters are on strike. Although valuable classroom time continues to be lost from the strike, Ms Rowley said it's too soon to see what impact the strike will have on students completing the school year.

"The students might lose a semester. The OAC students might be in jeopardy because they could lose the year. The students aren't getting any outside schooling."

At press time yesterday, OPSEU workers staged a rally outside the Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf to bring an update on the current situation regarding negotiations with union representatives and the government.

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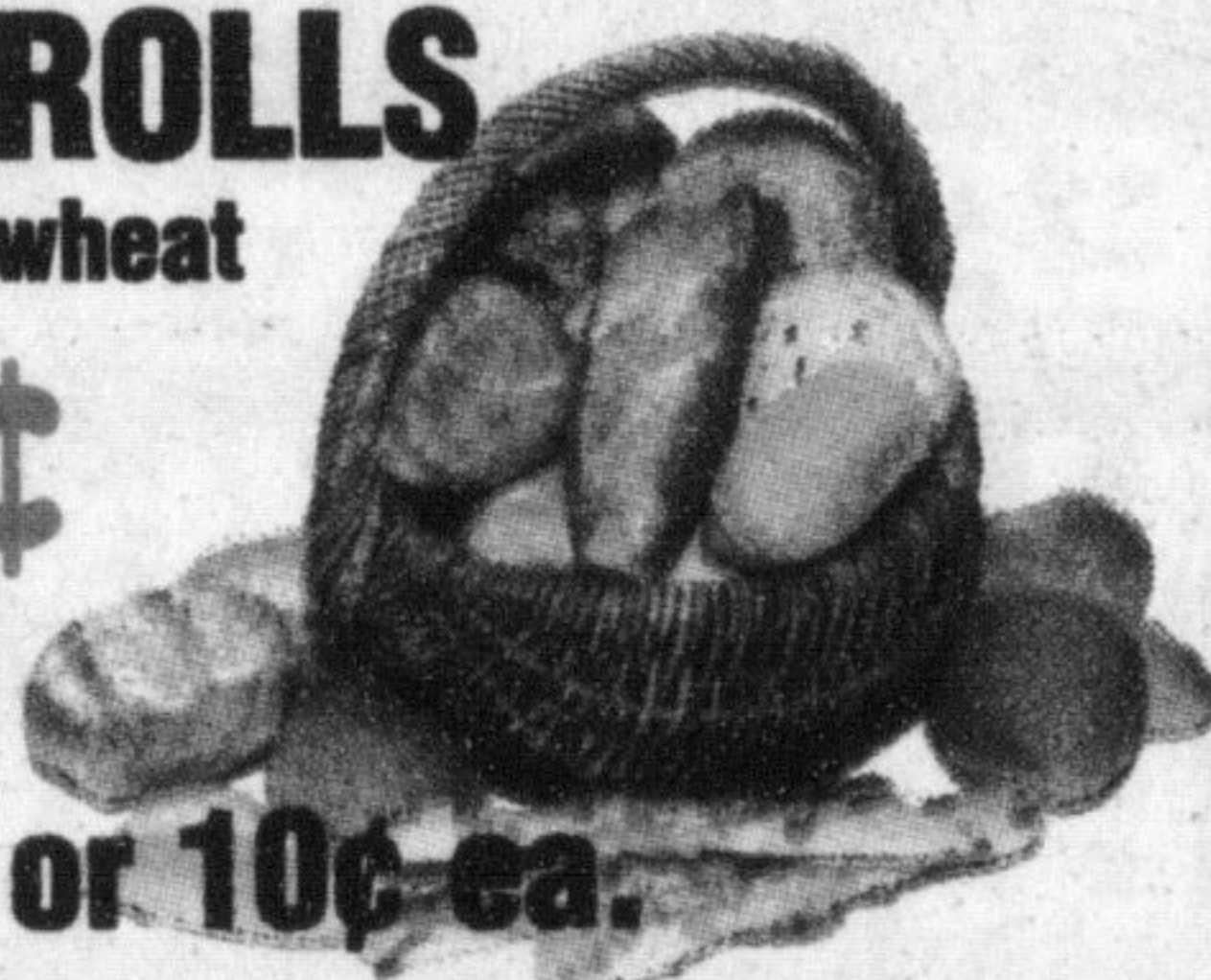
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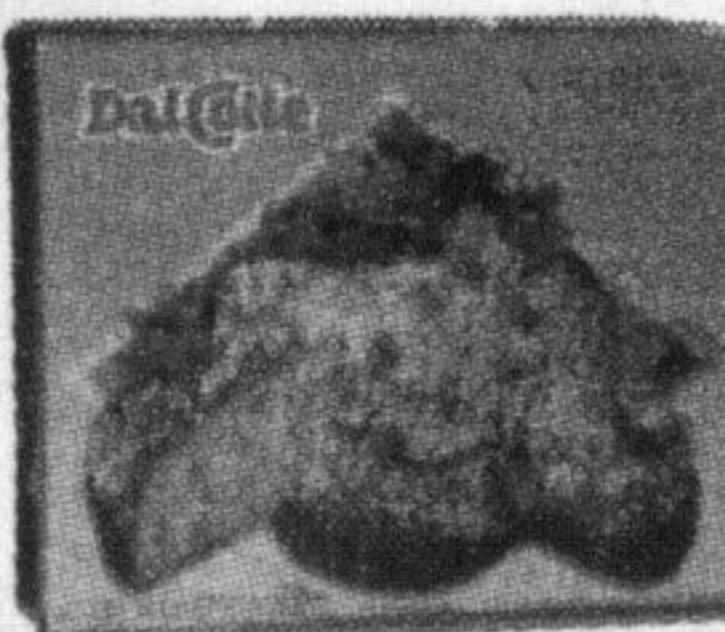
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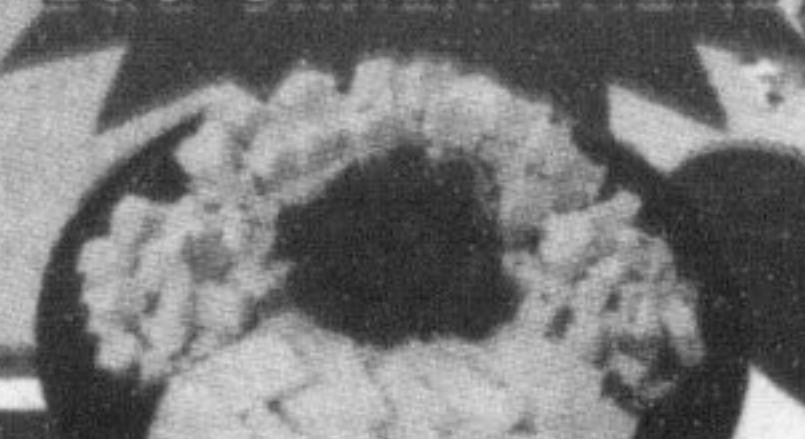
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