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## Wage freeze dirty dealing

### Attempt to vilify loyal employees 'horrific,' says union president

By **SUSAN SHERRING**

If municipal politicians are really looking for ways to help solve the overwhelming budgetary problems facing the city, union officials say they're happy to help.

It's just that no one appears to be interested.

That's according to CUPE local 503 president Brian Madden.

"Our members work on the front lines. They provide the services to taxpayers.

"They're on 911, they're librarians, they plow the roads, they maintain the parks, deliver recreation, they're paramedics. We have a lot of expertise on ways to save the city money," Madden said.

The union says they have delivered an open invitation to councillors, but only a couple have come knocking. Maybe it's just a bit of miscommunication. Maybe the invite didn't get there.

"It's shocking quite frankly. They should be sitting down with the unions," he said.

Madden was speaking to the media after a city committee refused to open a debate on freezing city wages. It's not that they voted against freezing the wages, they just refused to discuss it.

That had Barrhaven Coun. Jan Harder, the impetus behind the motion to freeze wages, suggesting her colleagues were afraid to take the debate on.

"Why wouldn't the union at least be interested in sitting down and talking," she said.

Turns out that obvious sense of disappointment might be the only thing Harder and Madden have in common.

He, too, is feeling a sense of disappointment that his 6,000 strong membership are seeing negotiations take place in the media.

"It's quite the show, isn't it? I'm disappointed at the lack of leadership. I'm disappointed some of the councillors want to focus on this, instead of making this city work. Now they're using them as scapegoats. It angers me a lot. Our members are so community focused, they live in the community, they care about this community."

**'IT'S JUST WRONG'**

(I can vouch for that. As a director with the Nepean Minor Hockey Association, I've had contact with the likes of city staffers and Nepean hockey coaches Ryan Kelahar, John McNamee and Wayne Newell. Mike Flainek as well, but of course, he's no longer with the city -- reorganization forced him out.)

"For them to be vilified, it's horrific, it's just wrong," Madden said.

Sure is, Mr. Madden, but unfortunately, it's not unusual.

Alta Vista Coun. Peter Hume said he voted against opening up the debate because it shifted the focus away from the real problems. As well, he felt the call for the province to allow the wage freeze was an attempt to

use the province as the scapegoat.

Hume, like almost everyone else, believes the province would never agree to a wage freeze.

And like other astute politicians, he believes the real problem with the budget is with politicians, not with city staff.

CUPE 503 media relations guru Clarence Dungey said the city has "squandered money" in the past, and now, politicians are turning to staff to repair their errors.

"There are things that are just as questionable as hell, it's just the whole history of questionable spending," Dungey said.

Ironically, following the down and dirty dealing on the wage freeze, committee members went in camera to discuss the labour negotiations with the Amalgamated Transit Union, which represents OC Transpo employees.

Did the committee, chaired by Mayor Larry O'Brien, decide to aim for a 0% wage increase?

Of course not.

The Sun learned committee members agreed to aim for a three-year contract which would have increases that are no higher than 3%, 2% and 2%.

No vote was held by the committee, but the guidelines were set. Funny how things are different behind the glare of the media and inside a committee meeting where the public doesn't see where they really stand.

Isn't politics grand?