

OCAP set to fight Rob Ford: Levy

Poverty activists plan to be heard at final budget meeting

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Last Updated: February 1, 2011 7:57pm

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So it begins.

I'm talking about the threat of civil disobedience at City Hall.

The Poverty Pimps in search of a cause plan to attend next Thursday's final meeting on the 2011 budget to protest what they claim are proposed "deep" cuts that will impact most significantly on

the poor.

While they hope they'll be granted an audience, Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) head John Clarke would not rule out the idea of disrupting the meeting.

"They (the politicians) might describe it (our protest) as a disruption," he said Tuesday. "It will just be people needing to say something."

Clarke said he recognizes the city is operating in a "climate of austerity" but insists there have been some very "curious choices" when it comes to identifying "gravy." He refers specifically to the plan to cut a total of \$100,000 from the Tenant Defence Fund and from the grant given to the Federation of Metro Tenants Association (FMTA) — a group that has had an untendered contract with the city for 10 years and got \$446,760 in 2010.

OCAP is also upset with the city's plans to provide shelter beds for homeless clients in motels this year, to charge increased user fees and about the proposed cuts to some TTC bus routes, which are set to be revised at Wednesday's TTC meeting.

Although Clarke calls the measures proposed significant, he said this year is a "warm up" to cuts they anticipate will be far more serious in 2012.

"We might as well start with Rob Ford (now)," he said, noting their protest, which will include the participation of a variety of people in the "low-income community" who have mobilized themselves, is also a warm up for next year.

There's no doubt in my mind the radical-left members of the FMTA and their supporters — many of whom have tight ties to OCAP — will be doing whatever they can to convince any politician who will listen that if their money is cut, even by \$75,000 as is proposed, they will not have the resources they need to fight "abusive" landlords.

It's a pack of nonsense. Nevertheless it's clear the FMTA folk don't believe the Gravy Train applies to them.

That said, if the Feb. 10 protest is indeed a warm up, the invitation on the OCAP website to those who make their livelihood in the poverty industry sounds pretty confrontational.

Claiming the cops, once again, are getting "preferential treatment" this year, the OCAP website suggests Ford "blatantly lied" when he said there would be no service cuts.

"It is time to challenge this opening round of cuts that Ford plans to impose on us. The needs and demands of our communities are clear — we will accept NO cuts and we intend to fight for what we deserve. We say: Cut the cops, fund services!" the website proclaims.

Budget chief Mike Del Grande said the OCAP folk are allowed to show up to the budget committee meeting but are not permitted to disrupt it.

If they are disruptive and won't leave, he would not rule out calling the police to remove them.

"There's absolutely no room for anarchy (here) ... OCAP has to be respectful of the process," he said, "The mayor's indicated we're going to look at everything and everything means everything."

Deputy mayor Doug Holyday said he expects OCAP will be out in full force and they're going to see "quite a bit" of them this term.

"Now that there's been a change here and the government wants to be more accountable, they'll look on that as an attack," he said. "Nothing they do will surprise me and they'll be more active around here in the time to come."
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