

**Remarks by Ted Montgomery, chair, OPSEU college faculty bargaining team  
Yonge-Dundas Square, Toronto, March 16, 2006**

I want to welcome you all. This is the largest gathering of college faculty that's ever been held in Ontario.

I cannot tell you how proud I am to be among you today. Though I'm deeply saddened that we've been driven to this action by a management group committed to a shallow, dangerous, and self-serving agenda, I'm overwhelmingly heartened by your commitment to the cause of quality education in Ontario's colleges. Our efforts to get the government to listen to our calls for action on the issues of quality have finally been heard. It remains to be seen what the content of the discussions with the minister will be, but finally we have someone who's willing to listen.

This government listened to the voices saying that there was trouble in the post-secondary sector. The government responded by appointing Bob Rae to verify what the college and university faculty knew all along was happening – that there had been a decade of damage, a decade of quality decline. This government listened to the findings of the Rae study and it added some funding to the post-secondary sector – \$6.2 billion over five years.

But college students have yet to see the benefits of any of those quality improvements. None of that investment has been delivered to the college students. We now know that the Accountability Agreements in two colleges, claiming to be partially earmarked to hire 30 new faculty in each college – Mohawk and Cambrian – actually resulted in hiring only **four** additions to complement. The other hires have been replacement hires – hires already funded by the existing base funding.

In other words, this year's students have been denied the benefit that should have accrued from the additional funding.

We will not let that happen again! The message that I will deliver to Minister Bentley on your behalf is that college students deserve the quality that Rae said Ontario needs, that Premier McGuinty called for in his May 13, 2005 address in announcing additional funding. He said, and I quote: "By quality, we mean more faculty at colleges and universities to accommodate higher enrollments and help students succeed, more faculty time for students."

We can deliver that quality. It's what we want to do. It's why we are on strike.

To date, college management has stonewalled with an offer that, by their own admission, does nothing for quality. They mounted a campaign, spearheaded by Mike Harris' former chief aide and his election organizer, David Lindsay, to portray faculty as greedy and underworked. It's a lie. Their campaign is a miserable failure. The media and the public, as you will hear today, and have heard already, know what our strike is about: It's about quality education in Ontario.

In my very rare moments of discouragement, I think of you all, and I am reminded of some lyrics from the 1960s – words that actually go back to 1945: "We shall overcome!" I've sung it in the shower, and I know its certain and its fundamental truth. It was tobacco factory workers in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1945, who first sang this song. Our struggles are quite different, but they are no less principled. Seeing you all here today, I know that we shall overcome.

You are my heroes. And I want to point out 24 specific heroes:

- Kaia Beaudry, from Confederation college, who's leading the strike there;
- Jim Pardy from the Sault;
- John Closs from Cambrian College;

- J.P. Belanger from Collège Boréal;
- Lad Shaba, all the way from Northern College;
- Peggy Morrison, who leads the strike at Canadore;
- Doug Brandy from Algonquin;
- Fernand Begin from La Cité;
- Graeme Aubert of St. Lawrence College;
- Bernie Belanger from Loyalist;
- Gary Bonczak from the Sir Sandford Fleming faculty union;
- Debbie Rautins from Durham College;
- Dave Duncan from Georgian;
- and here in Toronto, Eileen Burrows from Centennial – a long-time and fabulous president.
- Tom Tomassi from George Brown College;
- At my own college, Seneca, **Larry Olivo** is leading our strike.
- Maureen Wall from Humber;
- Doug Law from Sheridan College;
- Fred Deys from Mohawk College;
- Sherri Rosen from Niagara;
- Walter Boettger from Conestoga;
- Paddy Musson, from London, from Fanshawe College;
- Ray Wreford from Lambton;
- and at St. Clair, Bernie Nawrocki, who leads the strike there.

They are not at alone. Faculty at every one of the 24 colleges have proven their courage, their dedication, and their devotion to the principle that a college education must be a thing of value. We will not stand by while reckless and wrong-headed managers continue to erode quality in Ontario colleges. While those representatives of college management have deliberately and willfully worked hard to mislead the public about our issues, and concerns, we have not wavered. We will not be cowed. We will not be bullied. When they lie to the media, that this is all about salary, and about the conduct of our negotiating team, they must live with the shame of that lie for the rest of their careers. We, we all, each and every one of us, will live proudly with the knowledge that we stood up for quality in Ontario's colleges. We took a stand for students in the face of false and spiteful accusations.

We will not abandon our principles. College management this week announced their astoundingly nebulous, and decidedly nefarious, so-called "Semester Completion Strategy." There is no real strategy. This scheme is really the proof of the need for our strike. It's the demonstration that they have no understanding of quality.

Already, several college managers are backing off this foolish plan and saying what they really mean is that they will have plans in place once faculty return. But not all managers are so enlightened. There are those college presidents who are quite prepared to go ahead with a variety of hare-brained schemes that will do enormous damage to the value of college diplomas, certificates, and degrees for decades. To them, the very idea of quality is a foreign concept. We've heard the plans in Ottawa for managers teaching. In Toronto, for support staff teaching. Robots teaching! Sardine-can packers teaching! Nobody at all teaching!

You can find these kind of places on the Internet, I looked them up. Rochville University advertises “no studies, no attendance, no waiting, no exams, no entry fees, just diplomas.”

Bedford University says, and I quote: “Add Bachelor’s, Master’s, or Doctorate degrees to your resumé in just seven days and open avenues to promotion and better jobs.”

That’s what they would turn us into with such hare-brained schemes.

I call on the premier of this province and his government not to stand idly by while college presidents turn Ontario’s colleges into diploma mills. Ontario, and Ontarians, deserve better. They deserve real teachers teaching real courses.

The teachers that our students want are us. The teachers that our students deserve are us. The quality of education they deserve can be delivered by us. Give us the tools, give us the time, give us the respect that we have earned, and give our students respect and give them the quality of education that they deserve. And do it now.

Let me close with a letter from today’s Toronto *Star* Metro edition. It’s from a student. It reads:

“Meet teachers’ demands. As a student I would like to voice my support and trust in the teachers for taking upon themselves to fight for better conditions for their students. I would like to encourage college managers that instead of looking for ways to turn us against our teachers, they should find a way to meet our teachers’ demands so this strike can end as soon as possible.”

This student has it bang-on, succinct, to-the-point, and absolutely accurate. It’s time for the government to act. Let’s hope this ends soon.

With your support and continued efforts, we are almost there. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.