

# Pressure is mounting on the government

by Damian Wiechula, Bargaining Team (exclusive to *Local Picket Lines*)

Team members Ted Montgomery, Peter McKeracher and I held a news conference on Friday morning to announce that OPSEU was formally laying charges of bad-faith bargaining against the council and that Leah was writing directly to McGuinty to urge him to get the other side back to the table and to engage in serious negotiations.

The conference went extremely well, and the few hostile questions regarding our seeming lack of concern for students were deftly answered by Ted. (Why didn't we wait until the students had finished their year or why didn't we strike in October? In the first case we would have been out all summer (and there are summer students) and there would still have been a strike in September, and in both cases the strike would likely have been longer.... like a month).

Ted attended two conferences this weekend and got standing ovations at both and donations.

## **Pressure is building**

There are no talks scheduled, but pressure is building. Our students at George Brown College (GBC) are looking at getting financial compensation from the college and are firmly behind the teachers.

I noted in the *Star* the other day that even David Lindsay was calling on the government to invest extra money in the system and in an act of pure bravado (given his past role as adviser to Harris) complained that the system had been underfunded in the past!

## **Well positioned**

It's not surprising that we're not back at the table, but we're only one week into it, and I'm sure that bargaining will continue soon but with more money on the table. Past strikes held in October were longer, this one is likely to be shorter. If it finally boils down to an return-to-work/arbitration legislation, we are in a well researched, well documented position to argue our case.

## **Support on the stage**

On a kind of different note, last Saturday night I went to the SOLD OUT Billy Bragg concert at the "Opera House" on Queen St. East. During his show he told the audience "I want to talk to you about the number one issue in this province.... the OPSEU College Teacher's strike. They are on the sharp edge and are looking out for us, they deserve all our support."

The crowd went wild and cheered and got REALLY LOUD! He went on to praise public servants as "what holds us all together.." It was the loudest most raucous part of the concert. He then dedicated the song "There is Power in the Union" to the striking college teachers. The audience sang along like it was a National Anthem. The majority of the audience were young, maybe college age.

We believe our message on quality of education is striking a chord -- we just have to stay the course.

## An evening with Bob on CFRA

### A Sunday evening on CFRA

Jack and I were guests March 12 on the Gerry Cammy show, along with Algonquin President Bob Gillett and Students' Association President, Michael Barrett. The show consisted of a one hour round table followed by a one hour phone-in. However, commercial and news breaks reduced the actual air time.

Some of what Bob Gillett said was particularly interesting. He stated emphatically that the Colleges had plans for completing the winter semester. When I challenged him repeatedly to tell us what those plans were, he would only say they would be revealed March 20. He seemed to be trying to assure students they would complete their courses on the originally scheduled dates and would not be expected to attend weekend or evening classes. Without giving any detail, he hinted at "mixed evaluation", whatever that is.

For the first time, I heard Bob express concern about erosion of management rights. He suggested our desire for increased academic freedom would open the door to abuse by some teachers. When I replied that it sounds as if he doesn't trust his own faculty, his tepid response was, "That's what you say."

Bob agreed:

- The strike is not about salary
- The union has some reasonable points
- The problem is funding: "we cannot operate at a deficit"
- Our workload formula is 20 years old and needs revision but says it should be done "some other way"

Bob didn't want to be reminded that we've been trying to address quality of education for at least three years. He doesn't want to be reminded we headed off a strike in 2004 by agreeing to a task force to study workload in detail. He doesn't want to be reminded that management dismissed the results of the study the task force carried out and the extensive supplementary workload data our union compiled.

Michael Barrett agreed:

- Algonquin's teachers do a good job
- The priority was to get back to the table
- There were classrooms where students had no chairs
- Students would love to have more access to their teachers and to out of class help
- The problem is insufficient provincial funding

Michael was bitter about the fact we planned a strike for March: "You knew you were going on strike in September . . .". Of course we knew we might be going on strike in

March but the Colleges also knew that. If they had made a reasonable effort to negotiate, we wouldn't be on strike now.

When will negotiations resume? Talks broke off late March 6. Our Team was frustrated by management's complete unwillingness to bring anything positive to the table. Indeed, all management brought was a late proposal to remove the limits on the number of assignable sections – a demand we had already rejected and they had withdrawn.

Given management's intransigence and bad faith bargaining, our Team will need to assess when the time is right for a resumption of talks. The Team is very experienced; I trust their judgement.

### **Participation and morale**

I've spent some time on all the lines at Woodroffe where I've been thoroughly impressed by the spirit of our members. Despite frigid conditions and freezing rain early in the strike, I didn't hear anyone complain.

Members are resolved to ending the strike successfully but are realistic in understanding it may drag on for a while.

On the other side of this cheerful picture are those members who have not been participating. We'll all share the benefits of the strike outcome; we should all be part of the effort we need to make to achieve success. Although the Strike Committee has decided we should designate some members to call others who have not showed up, I believe a personal call from a colleague might prove more effective.

### **A typical day**

This is how one of my days went early in the strike.

3:30 – 5:00 a.m.: read and respond to overnight e-mail

5:00 – 5:30: update website

5:30 – 6:30: breakfast and get ready to leave for Woodroffe

6:30 – 7:00: more e-mail

7:30 – 9:50: picket duty, starting at Woodroffe main entrance then around Navaho to Tim Hortons

10:00 – 11:30: Strike Committee meeting, Summerhays Restaurant – review of strike progress and discussion of changes needed and new tactics

12:00 – 12:30 noon: lunch

12:30 – 1:15: e-mail correspondence, radio and print media interviews

1:15 – 1:45: TV interview

1:45 – 2:15: more media contacts, setting up radio studio show

2:15 – 3:00: nap

3:00 – 6:00: e-mail and phone correspondence, writing article for *Local Picket Lines*, website updates

6:00 – 7:45: family time and supper

7:45 – 9:00: e-mail correspondence

My family is very supportive. My wife was once an Algonquin faculty member, and our daughter is a part-time/sessional teacher at the College.

I miss my students and wonder how they're doing. Many of those in my aboriginal class come from James Bay Cree communities and have probably gone home.

# Join the Thursday rally in Toronto

By Wayne Wilson

We hope to have two busloads of Algonquin faculty join their provincial counterparts in a rally in Toronto.

**Departure and arrival:** Buses leave at 6:00 AM sharp, Thursday morning from Tim Horton's/ Navaho location. Returning approximately 8:00 PM but probably late.

**What to bring:** Make your own individual parking arrangements, bring a lunch, and beverages. Bring a cellphone and camera, if possible: cell to contact pickup and camera for historic photos.

**Rally leadership:** Rally Captain will be Commodore Pat Kennedy and his trusty lieutenant Jack Wilson (shades of Gilligan's Island, you be the judge).

**Four-shift credit!:** There is a four-shift credit for the day; that means one more shift and you get your week's pay.

**Reminder:** Only one pickup and drop off location, -- no pleading please -- at Tim Horton's/Navaho location only.

**Register today:** Please sign up with your picket captain

# About those class sizes: more responses from Navaho Central

By Dianna McAleer

## Can we talk about class sizes again?

So why are we college teachers so upset about ever-increasing class sizes? Why are larger classes a problem for college students?

We know that one of the strengths of a college education is that students learn the practical application of industry skills. A student learning how to start an IV line, bake bread, change brakes, locate a pressure point, or write a report needs to be evaluated on his

or her ability to perform the skill. The teachers I spoke with this morning told me that this is becoming impossible to do thoroughly and effectively.

Another traditional strength of a college education is the one-on-one approach to teaching that has always meant small class sizes and good teacher/student rapport.

**Here are some comments I heard this morning:**

The difference between having a small writing class of say 25 students, and having a class of 45 students, is the difference between learning about writing and learning how to write.

It used to be a pleasure turning a D student into a B student. We no longer have that luxury. The time just isn't there to help with individual coaching on any meaningful level.

Learning the students' names as soon as possible in order to treat them as individuals is an increasingly difficult task that can now take until week eight.

Academic dishonesty is definitely on the rise. There's not as much time to monitor student research, and weak students can take the easy way out if we aren't coaching them.

Younger students and non-academic students don't speak out and now it is more likely they will fall through the cracks.

I don't feel I have the time to put as much care into my teaching. There's no time to touch base with students, to have relationship-building conversations.

There is a craft involved in making students feel engaged and wanting the knowledge we have to give them. Good student/teacher relationships can't be built in large classes.

I've had to abandon valuable exercises because they can't be done in larger classes. Oral presentations are becoming very hard to manage.

My students are sitting on the floor to write exams!

**In conclusion**

Teachers at Ontario colleges are telling our bosses that we have reached a critical stage where meaningful evaluation of student success is becoming difficult, and in some cases impossible. We are constantly pressured to accept more students, pass more students. We need management to be honest about what a college education stands for. We need our leaders to stand behind us and respect the expertise they hired us for. If we tell them we need more one-on-one time with our 'clients' in order to deliver the service we promised. We need to know management is 'here to help'.

# Gillett sighting in Pembroke

by Shawn Pentecost

It was cold and wet for all three shifts. Picketers are doing their best despite the weather.

Earlier on Monday, we found out from a student that the college is going to hold a course off campus today at a local high school. We will be picketing in front of the school before the class and then at the school board during the class. It is important for people to know that allowing the college to use their space will only prolong the strike.

Bob stopped by the campus yesterday. He tried to use any door to avoid the picket line. Unfortunately, those doors were locked so he had to cross the picket line. He stayed 20 minutes then left through a back door. Two hour car ride (each way), twenty minutes inside, perhaps a phone call would have been better.

Today is an exciting day. The morning people are going on a field trip to Fellowes High School, then to the Renfrew County School Board (to picket). The evening group will be supported by union leaders representing faculty from local schools. These leaders will be encouraging their members not to cross our picket line. As for the mid-day people, we will walk and wave.

Thought of the day from a passerby: “Get back to work you bastards”. We waved and told him to have a nice day. The teacher in me wanted ask him to spell it.

## Concern for the Navaho picketers

by Ian McVittie

I read with interest a note (*Local Picket Lines* March 8th) from “pedometer-packing picketer” who walked five miles in four hours and burned 714 calories. According to my calculations, this is the equivalent of 8.04672 kilometers.

I am worried that our Navaho Central colleagues are not getting the exercise they need. At the Chances R site today, I walked 8.23 kilometers in 4 hours and 46 seconds. My average speed was 2.1 kilometers an hour and maximum speed was 5.7 km/hr, apparently accomplished by running to the Portable toilet. These figures are accurate to 9 feet with a 3D GPS reading of eight satellites. How do we explain the difference between the Navaho Central 8.0 kilometers and the Chances R 8.2 kilometers? Tim Horton’s?

By the way I can send you a satellite picture of the different picket sites if you are interested.

(Editor’s note: Early confusion – indeed continuing confusion – about the Navaho site names abounds. Ian’s site is, in our view, Navaho Central (geographically speaking) whereas the Tim-bit-too site by the Residence is Navaho East, the one to which we believe our letter writer is referring. And the A-Building parking lot is Little Navaho. Not that any of this really matters, we suppose, since many of the Navaho picketers migrate from site to site during their pickets.)

## Class sizes: more responses from Navaho East

By Madeleine Whitfield

### **Class Size Effect**

Since class size has been such a contentious issue this time, many of the people huddled in Timmy's hoping for the rain to stop were asked how large classes have affected them. Nearly every person had a different answer, some to be expected, some surprising. Teachers who are teaching practical classes in which students' work has to be checked such as Applied Museum Studies, cooking classes, computer courses, and so on, noted that they just can't get round to all the students in the time they have available to check on individual work. Here are some other problems:

- Classes are so big, it's impossible for a teacher to get to know all students' names.
- Cooking labs were designed to accommodate 18 students and class sizes are in the 26 range.
- Oral presentations require many weeks to complete when there are big classes cutting down on teaching time for theory classes, which then become more perfunctory.
- Marking becomes truly onerous for writing courses such as report writing. Classes of 40 or more in which each person has to write several reports of several pages, require more evaluation time than is allowed for on the SWFs. This is not recognized.
- Large classes affect the types of assignments given.
- Courses that need academic writing cannot be adequately covered with large classes; consequently, people must do their assignments in groups. This is not satisfactory when it is the individual who should be evaluated.
- Part time teachers, who are not paid for marking, often do not give assignments that require a lot of marking time. This creates an uneven level of preparedness in students going through to a second semester that depends on work done in the first.
- Line ups of students at the end of classes cut into the following class time so some students can't get seen.
- Students needing private meetings with a teacher sometimes take up most of the day, so no other work can get done.

This large amount of information was gathered from just a small group of people. What would be the answers if all staff were asked this question?

### **If the college management was a food, what food would it be?**

These were some of the answers:

- Sloppy Joes
- Tripe
- Clean-out-the-fridge soup
- Moldy cheese
- Roast suckling pig
- And the best one of all—anything that's past its "best by" date!

Doesn't leave much room for wondering what some people's opinion is of the current management style!

Why not have a contest for best answer to this one: if the college as a whole was a food, what would it be? Winner of the best name chosen gets a free coffee and donut!

### **Those Brinks trucks**

There seem to be a lot of Brinks trucks going in and out. Has anybody counted them? Is the gold being moved?

**Question for today**

How did Jack and Doug keep their cool during their radio interview on CFRA on Sunday when some of the misleading statements and half truths were trotted out? And how did Doug keep his cool with Steven Madeley, again of CRFA, this morning? Kudos, guys!