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# Faculty union at Algonquin plans strike vote

## Workload remains principal unresolved issue from 2006 strike

By Ami Kingdon, with files from Zev Singer, The Ottawa Citizen December 16, 2009

Algonquin College's faculty union is planning a strike vote for Jan. 13 as negotiations have failed to settle lingering issues from a 2006 strike.

Rod Bain, an Algonquin professor who is on the bargaining team of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, said management walked away from the table Tuesday night. No further talks are scheduled before the strike vote.

Previous talks broke off on Nov. 12 when the College Compensation and Appointments Council, a province-wide body representing colleges' management, issued terms and conditions of employment to faculty -- effectively imposing a contract on the Ontario Public Service Employees Union.

Algonquin has 520 full-time and 190 "partial load" faculty who would be affected by a strike.

After a 17-day strike by Ontario college faculty in 2006, a task force was formed with representatives from union and colleges.

They were commissioned to produce a report with recommendations on outstanding bargaining issues, while the faculty returned to work.

The report was released in March 2009 and addressed work scheduling, class sizes, and evaluation methods, and was signed by the union, colleges, and provincial government, all of whom agreed to incorporate it in a new contract. But the parties began negotiating for that contract in June and haven't agreed on its terms.

The previous agreement expired in September.

The colleges council "signed off on all aspects of what the report came out with in terms of changes that were needed from both sides," Pat Kennedy, president of OPSEU Local 415 at Algonquin College, said earlier in the week. "When the team got to the bargaining table, after X number of days, management imposed conditions."

Bain said Tuesday night that the colleges did not move at all from their imposed conditions.

Rob Savage, spokesman for the council, said earlier in the week that his side "felt there wasn't any reason for faculty to wait for the benefits we were able to provide. We brought in a salary increase. There was no increase to workload."

Savage said the recession has imposed financial constraints that make union demands untenable.

"Workload is the principal issue," said OPSEU 415 vice-president Jack Wilson.

The most contentious part surrounds those professors with workloads that fluctuate greatly depending on whether their students are out on work placements or the like.

The colleges want the flexibility to ask faculty to work longer hours when students are not on placement to make up for less busy work periods when they are.

That flexibility would contravene current caps on how many hours faculty can work in a given period.

"Management said this was inefficient use of faculty," Wilson said.

He added that the union initially agreed to the flexibility clause, with safeguards, since it would only apply to about five per cent of faculty -- but safeguards were dropped under the new terms and conditions.

"They've gone beyond the notion of five per cent. They're saying it's 20 per cent. This is one in five faculty (at Algonquin)."

Savage did not comment on the details of the colleges' bargaining positions. "

The provincial government is forecasting a deficit for this fiscal year of \$24.7 billion. We introduced the contract based on what we were able to provide," he said.

Ontario colleges have the lowest per-student revenue in Canada, and most college funding comes from provincial block grants.

Gene Swimmer, a labour-relations expert at Carleton University said that the colleges' decision to impose terms on the workers drew a clear line in the sand.

"I think it's important for people to understand that if there is a strike, the strike was not necessarily caused by the union," he said.

He also said that while there is nothing immoral about it, imposing terms and conditions is usually done "to bring about a showdown.

They're saying the uncertainty associated with the process dragging on further, from their perspective, is worse than the alternative."