

# Negotiations News

OPSEU



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Bargaining news for OPSEU members in CAAT Academic

#12 - Nov. 26, 2003

## Why a strike vote in February?

The faculty negotiating team has advised management and the College Relations Commission that it will be conducting a strike vote on February 17, 2004. If there is no settlement, a strike is planned for March 3, 2004.

Why this timing?

The key answers are tied to the provincial election.

In bargaining, management takes direction from the government as well as from the behind-the-scenes Presidents' steering committee.

It makes no sense to be in a strike position when there is no effective government in place. The new provincial government took office only at the end of October. A fall strike would have been unrealistic. That's one reason there have been no teacher strikes, work to rule or other job actions this fall. If there are to be such actions, they will be in the spring of 2004.

It will take time for the new minister to get a handle on the labour and academic situation in general in the colleges. It will take further time to understand the issues in our negotiations.

The union hopes that announcing a strike vote for February and a possible strike at the beginning of March will draw the government's attention to the seriousness of the situation. The March strike deadline

puts pressure on the parties – including the new government – to settle and also gives us time to reach a fair, negotiated deal.

There has been some concern raised about going too late in the spring semester, such that the colleges would simply give students their grades based on term work to that point. In part, this fear arises out of the strike of York University faculty. The Union team has certainly taken this factor into consideration. The college and York situations are really very distinct. York faculty opted to strike shortly before exams. We have ruled out that strategy. Many – if not most – York courses were year long, beginning in September. All but a few college courses start in January. This means that, unlike York, about half of the semester's curriculum will **not** have been covered by March 3. Colleges do not have the option of some 'advanced promotion' for students in articulated programs or in programs requiring certification. Further, many college programs are based on skills development rather than theory. It may be that make-up classes would be assigned after any strike has ended, but the situation where students would be graduated and/or released until the fall for the resumption of classes is not in any way realistic and would not be tolerable to this or any government.

## Strong case for college spending, despite deficit

The union is well aware that the government has found a significant budget deficit. We expected this would be the case. Every new provincial government has been in just that situation, so this was no surprise. We also know that a budget deficit does not eliminate

reasonable and necessary spending. Certainly, there is a compelling case for college spending: for salaries that do not fall behind secondary and elementary settlements, for workloads that protect quality education in the post-secondary

system, for collective agreements that attract high quality and committed faculty and staff. The value of the colleges in Ontario cannot be denied or overlooked. Even in a deficit, the government has to spend where necessary to protect and enhance these assets.

# Management's workload language would erode quality

Management continues to portray their workload proposal as a benign change or even an improvement. They would make everything in the formula optional except the cap on total annual teaching contact hours (TCH). They contend that this cap is all that's needed to protect faculty. They also contend that individual workload agreements will be "optional".

This defies the facts. The annual limit of 648 TCH can only be reached if one teaches the maximum 18 hours per week for the maximum 36 weeks. [Non-post-secondary numbers are 760 annual hours – 20 hours per week for 38 weeks]. The workload formula was constructed to protect quality through limiting class size and crediting total workload.

The goal of management's proposed concession is simple: get more work out of the teachers without paying overtime – more students in the classes, more

TCHs per week, more teaching weeks per year. The proposal removes credit for preparation, evaluation, and complementary functions.

Management says setting aside the workload formula would simply be an option for teachers. If this workload option is available to the colleges, they will use it. The pressures will be immense for teachers to enter into so-called optional agreements. Given the power structure of the colleges, the purported right to opt out of such workload agreements is a fairy tale.

Teachers are already overloaded. That is why workload has been such a high priority over the last several rounds of bargaining. Faculty bargain to improve our working conditions and to improve the quality of education we deliver. We do not bargain to move backwards and have our workload increased to the point where quality is just a thing of the past.

# Lost drug coverage is not 'convenient'

If you, your spouse, or dependant were afflicted by Parkinson's, or Alzheimer's, or rheumatoid arthritis, our current plan would cover any Health Canada approved drugs for these conditions. Why would you agree to reduce this coverage?

Management bills its drug card as being for the "convenience" of faculty. They say administrative staff, who had the drug card forced on them two years ago, are pleased with it. Maybe administrators don't mind the reduced coverage. They have no bargaining rights.

The proposed drug card would change our benefit plan dramatically. Currently, our plan covers prescription drugs as soon as they receive Health Canada approval. As we have demonstrated (see Negotiations News #8), this drug card will reduce our access to prescription drugs. The current list of approved drugs would be maintained, but new drugs would not be covered automatically. They would require approval by the insurance company, by no means a given. A drug may receive Health Canada approval but not be available because the insurance company decides it is not "cost effective" or does not "represent a significant breakthrough." Also, as a rule, the insurance company would only cover the cheapest generic substitute for many prescriptions. And not all

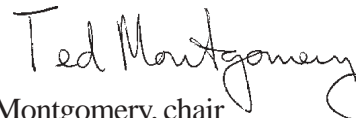
pharmacies would accept the card.

Why is management trying to force the drug card on faculty? It is not about convenience; it is about saving money by cutting our coverage.

The current faculty drug plan is a good one. It should be maintained. The faculty negotiating team believes that our members deserve coverage for all prescription drugs as they are introduced to the market. The loss of future coverage far outstrips the so-called convenience of presenting a drug card at the pharmacy. Faculty will never fall for this misleading presentation of 'convenience.'

To get in touch with the bargaining team, send a message to: [caata@opseu.org](mailto:caata@opseu.org)

On behalf of the Bargaining Team:



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# Excerpts from the Throne Speech: 'Excellence for all in public education'

The following are excerpts from the Throne Speech which inaugurated the new Liberal government's first sitting of the Legislature:

"Your new government's first and most important priority will always be excellence in public education.

"Its goal is to make Ontario's public education the world's best education....

"It will keep its commitment to bring stability and peace to a system that has been racked by turmoil for too long....

"Your new government will treat educators with the respect they deserve as the single most important influence, apart from family, in terms of shaping the future of our children and our province....

"Your new government believes that, for too long, [our education system] has been strewn with conflict, cuts, and chaos.

"It's time to begin to build a new path, with cooperation, creativity, and a genuine commitment to what's best for our [students]."

## The history of past faculty strikes

There have been two previous college faculty strikes – 1984 and 1989.

The first ended when then Minister Bette Stephenson brought down back-to-work legislation and established the Skolnik Commission to examine the contentious issues of workload and quality education.

In 1985, the government directed a negotiated resolution to the workload issues **and** provided the necessary funding to accommodate the settlement and thereby avoid another strike.

In 1989, the government was about to introduce legislation requiring a process of "final offer selection" to resolve the differences that brought about that strike. In light of this, the parties agreed to arbitration.

## Faculty bargaining team:

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