

OPSCAAT Exists

*Roger Couvrette – President, OPSECAAT
OPSEU Convention
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Sisters. Brothers.

OPSECAAT exists.

OPSECAAT exists because of Leah Casselman.

OPSECAAT exists because of the OPSEU Executive Board, and the CAAT Academic and Support Staff executives. Special thanks to the steering committee members, Mary Ann White, Fernand Begin, Jean Fordyce, Betty Cree and executive board member Doris Middleton.

OPSECAAT exists because of Barb Linds and working with her a small army of dedicated OPSEU staff.

OPSECAAT exists because of the solidarity of our 15,000 CAAT full-time brothers and sisters in faculty and support staff locals in colleges across Ontario who have worked shoulder to shoulder with us over the last year.

OPSECAAT exists because of the delegates to the 2005 OPSEU convention – right in this room – who moved a resolution that “OPSEU will devote the necessary resources to a long-term organizing campaign (which) will have as its goal to bring these workers into OPSEU and the labour movement and to extend to part-time college workers the bargaining rights enjoyed by all other workers.”

OPSECAAT exists to right an historical wrong.

In 1975, the provincial *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act* denied part-time college workers the right to bargain collectively. It may not have mattered much then but, boy, does it matter today.

The legislation paved the way for the massive use of cheap labour in our community colleges.

Chronically underfunded, colleges now drive truckload after truckload of thousands and thousands of part-time workers onto college campuses each and every day. Today there are 17,000 women and men who work part-time in colleges.

Ontario is ninth out of the ten provinces in funding per full-time college student. How does the government get away with that? Just do the math. Ontario underfunds college education on my back, and on the backs of part-time workers who are singled out as a source of disposable cheap labour.

Meanwhile, there are 15,000 full-time workers in Ontario community colleges, members of OPSEU CAAT Academic and Support Staff, who find their own power to bargain collectively increasingly undermined by the presence of a small army of disposable and very vulnerable part-time workers.

Let's paint the picture.

Les travailleurs à temps partiel des collèges n'ont aucune sécurité d'emploi. En fait, nous avons plutôt de l'insécurité d'emploi, laquelle revient toutes les 16 semaines.

Nous n'avons aucune procédure de plainte – nous vivons dans un environnement de travail où tout est à prendre ou à laisser. Nous n'avons pas d'avantages sociaux. Nous travaillons souvent dans des conditions épouvantables. On nous paie une fraction dérisoire de ce que nos homologues à temps plein reçoivent.

Tandis que les travailleurs à temps partiel des collèges se voient refuser le droit de se protéger contre l'exploitation – d'après une loi ! – les autres travailleurs à temps partiel en Ontario – dans les universités, les magasins d'alcools, nos hôpitaux – peuvent se joindre à un syndicat et ils le font.

Les travailleurs à temps partiel des collèges de toutes les autres provinces ont le droit d'adhérer à un syndicat, et tous le font.

Let me conclude my remarks.

I would ask all the delegates who were at the 2005 OPSEU convention that launched OPSECAAT to please stand. Please stand up. And remain standing please. I'm just about done.

I would ask you to freeze-frame this moment. Freeze it in your mind and remember this exact moment, this very second.

Because with your support, I make the following commitment: re-elected president of OPSECAAT today, I will come back to an OPSEU convention and I will say these two words to you:

OPSECAAT won.

OPSECAAT won because of the work begun by Leah and then continued by Smokey.

OPSECAAT won because of the solidarity of our 15,000 CAAT full-time brothers and sisters.

OPSECAAT won and we righted an historical wrong.

OPSECAAT won and we will be joining our CAAT Academic and Support Staff sisters and brothers at the bargaining table.

OPSECAAT won thanks to the men and women standing before us today.

Freeze this moment now in your minds!

I make this commitment to you: Re-elected, I will return and I will ask each and every one of you to stand.

To stand proudly. To stand in solidarity. To stand knowing full well that without you and your unqualified support, I would never, ever, have been in a position to utter these two wonderful, wonderful words to you:

You won.