

College Part-Time Workers

An overview

Summer 2007

The Issue: Part-time college workers in Ontario are denied the right to bargain collectively by the provincial *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act (CCBA)*, which was passed in 1975. Ontario is the only province where part-time college workers are denied this right and we are even unique in Ontario, where part-time university, health care and liquor store workers, for example, have a right to and do join or form a union. There are typically 12,000 “regular” part-time workers and 5,000 students who are employed part-time through various programs in Ontario’s twenty-four community colleges. There are only 15,000 full-time college workers.

Some recent history:

In November 2006, delegates from all community colleges in Ontario met to form the Organization of Part-time and Sessional Employees of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (OPSECAAT) and adopted a constitution and elected an executive to fight for the rights of part-time college workers.

Also in November 2006, the International Labour Organization (ILO) rebuked the Ontario government and recommended that it rapidly “*take legislative measures, in consultation with the social partners, to ensure that academic and part-time support staff in colleges of applied arts and technology in Ontario fully enjoy the rights to organize and bargain collectively, as any other workers.*” So far, the government has not acted.

On June 8, 2007, in a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that collective bargaining is a right included in the freedom of association provision – section 2(d) – of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Court was ruling on legislation in British Columbia that cancelled various collective agreement provisions for health care workers; Ontario’s complete legal prohibition of any form of collective bargaining for part-time college workers – in the 1975 CCBA and related legislation – is an even more egregious violation of the Charter.

Our concerns include:

We met with the College Compensation and Appointments Council – which negotiates collective agreements with full-time faculty and support staff for all twenty-four community colleges – and we laid out six immediate demands, as follows:

- a protocol for hiring and retaining part-time and sessional workers in colleges in Ontario, including a policy for posting these positions;
- a process for dealing with the complaints and grievances of part-time college workers;
- standardized pay schedules and paybands across all colleges for part-time and sessional faculty and support staff;
- benefits for part-time and sessional college workers;
- a proposal for improving and standardizing working conditions for part-time and sessional workers in Ontario colleges;
- a multi-year plan for converting part-time and sessional workers to full-time workers at community colleges.

Quality of education is also of great concern to us as college workers. What is increasingly developing in our community college system in Ontario is a kind of turnstile syndrome. Part-time workers come in, get the training they need in a completely *ad hoc* fashion, become disheartened and discouraged because of abysmal working conditions, and leave. In comes the next unsuspecting crew.

The solutions are pretty straightforward.

First, **the government must amend the *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act and related legislation*** to allow part-time college workers the right to bargain collectively, “as any other workers,” as the ILO put it. Moreover, in the light of the Supreme Court decision of June 8, 2007, the Ontario government ultimately has no choice but to amend the offending legislation and recognize the right to bargain collectively of part-time college workers.

Second, **the government must stop underfunding colleges in Ontario**, especially since it is doing it on the backs of part-time workers. The Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario (ACAATO) environmental scan for 2006 points out that even after increases in funding by the Liberals, Ontario is still number nine out of the ten provinces in funding per full-time college student. Moreover, even in Ontario the college system is the “poor cousin” of the educational system. Colleges receive \$7,313 per full time student while the numbers for secondary schools and universities are, respectively, \$8,079 and \$11,784.

Part-time college workers know that the chronic underfunding of Ontario colleges is a result of a loophole in an Act that provides colleges with access to a pool of cheap labour that essentially subsidizes the college system. This must end. We know **Ontario can – and must – do better.**