

the
part-time times
 News for part-time and sessional workers and friends at Ontario community colleges



They know how to show support: George Brown College part-time workers (from left to right) Loai, Irene, Sushil, Nathalie, Guriqbal and Shasa pose on the final day of voting for part-time support staff at Ontario colleges.

Historic vote wraps up

The last vote dropped into a Labour Board ballot box on Tuesday.

Oct. 27 was the final day of an historic vote for part-time support staff at all 24 Ontario community colleges. The vote, ordered by the Ontario Labour Relations Board, gave part-timers their say on whether they want OPSEU as their union.

More than 1,500 workers voted from the first day to the last. By all reports the vote was an overwhelming YES.

“In my conversations with part-timers on different campuses I really didn’t come across people who were negative,” said Nelson Ross Laguna, an OPSEU Campaigns Officer who spent three weeks talking to part-timers about the vote.

“The people we spoke to were eager to hear about the vote and they wanted to know more about joining the union and about collective bargaining.

“They were enthusiastic.”

OPSEU President Warren (Smokey) Thomas congratulated the workers who voted and the union organizers who got out the vote.

“There is no power greater than workers who are united towards a common purpose,” he said. “Your commitment to winning justice for college part-timers is an inspiration to us all, and I know that you will succeed.”



OPSEU Campaigns Officer Nelson Ross Laguna

The next challenge: getting the votes counted

The next challenge in the part-time support campaign is to get the ballot boxes opened and the votes counted. The ballot boxes are sealed because college lawyers have served notice that they are challenging the union's application.

"The *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act* (CCBA) requires the union to demonstrate that 35 per cent of workers in the bargaining unit at the time of the

application have signed union cards and want a vote to be held," says OPSEU Organizer Connie Huziak. "The colleges seem to believe that we did not reach that level and that therefore the vote should not count.

"This is a strange thing to say given that college management was encouraging part-timers to vote, but in the end it won't matter," she said. "We did meet the

threshold and we will be able to demonstrate that before the Labour Relations Board."

The union is working to get a hearing at the Labour Board as soon as possible.



Joining OPSEU the right move for the times

With Ontario facing a \$24.7 billion budget deficit, applying to join OPSEU has been a good move for all college part-timers and sessionals, the president of the union says.

"With the deficit as big as it is, it is reasonable to assume that the Ontario government will be looking for places to cut costs," said Warren (Smokey) Thomas. "It's always a good idea to have union representation, but in a time of cutbacks it's even more important."

The Dalton McGuinty government will not be able to legislate wage cuts for unionized workers as the Bob Rae

government did in 1993, he said. In 2007, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell was wrong to tear up the collective agreements of health workers in that province. Since then, collective bargaining has been recognized as a protected right under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

"It's a simple fact that unionized workers have more protection from attacks on their wages than non-union

workers do," said Thomas.

Under Section 15 of the CCBA, when a group of workers files an application to have a union represent them, the employer can't reduce their wages without the union's consent. Improvements to wages and working conditions may still occur.

For Thomas's latest commentary on the Ontario deficit,



OPSEU President Warren (Smokey) Thomas

visit <http://www.opseu.org/presidentsmessage/oct-23-2009.htm>.



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