

The Part-Time Times

A newsletter for Ontario community college part-time and sessional employees and friends

Legislation on its way this spring, Minister hints



Part-timers at Queen's Park yesterday: Roger Couvrette, president, OPSECAAT; Candy Lindsay, vice-president, OPSECAAT; Shirley Wood, part-time faculty, Centennial College; J-L Roy, part-time faculty, Collège Boréal; Sabrina Girolamo, part-time faculty, Seneca College.

The Ontario government will introduce legislation this spring to create a process for college part-timers and sessionals to join a union and take part in collective bargaining, the Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities says.

"We're looking at introducing legislation sometime this spring," John Milloy told the *Toronto Star* yesterday. "We made a commitment to extend bargaining rights to part-time workers at community colleges and it does reflect a priority of the government.

"We've been consulting on how to do it, not whether to do it."

Milloy did not mention the timing of legislation during a Question Period grilling by NDP MPP Rosario Marchese yesterday (see sidebar on page 2).

Roger Couvrette, president of the organization of part-time and sessional college employees (OPSECAAT), watched the Queen's Park debate from the visitors' gallery.

"I'd have to say I wasn't all that impressed with the minister's answers," said Couvrette. "He completely dodged the question of why his government urged the Labour Relations Board not to order a quick vote.

"Thousands of us signed union cards based in part on the McGuinty government's publicly-stated support for bargaining rights for part-timers and sessionals," he said. "We should be voting right now."

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Couvrette said the government and the colleges could have asked the Labour Relations Board to hold the vote now but count the ballots after a new law is passed.

“Now, if a vote is held, many of the people who signed OPSEU union cards will have left the colleges and moved on to other jobs,” he said.

OPSEU President Warren (Smokey) Thomas said the union will continue to press the government to introduce legislation immediately.

“Obviously the top priority in any legislation is to make sure we are able to trigger a certification vote as soon as possible,” he said. “Part-timers and sessionals have waited too long already. They’re done waiting.”

Meanwhile, OPSEU’s application for certification is still alive at the Labour Board. While the Board declined to order a quick vote, it did not dismiss the application. A manager has been directed to assign a Labour Relations Officer to process the application.

For full information about the OPSEU drive to win union rights for part-timers and sessionals at Ontario’s community colleges, visit www.collegeworkers.org or call 1-866-811-7274.

The Part-Time Times is authorized for distribution by Roger Couvrette, president of the Organization of Part-Time and Sessional Employees of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (OPSECAAT), and Warren (Smokey) Thomas, president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union.

Grilling at Queen’s Park

Transcript from Question Period, April 22, 2008

Mr. Rosario Marchese: My question is to the Attorney General. On August 30, 2007, Minister Bentley, then Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, promised to extend collective bargaining rights to college part-time workers and sessionals. Why did the minister, now as the Attorney General, send his lawyer to the labour board last Thursday to argue against these very same workers for those rights?

Hon. Christopher Bentley: To the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Hon. John Milloy: I thank the member for his question. It gives me an opportunity to reiterate our government’s commitment to extend bargaining rights to part-time workers in Ontario’s colleges. The honourable member is well aware of that commitment and our work with Kevin Whitaker, who we commissioned to do a report on this. We thank Mr. Whitaker for his report, which was made public on February 1. We’ve had an opportunity to review his report and consult with stakeholders, and I hope to be reporting back to the Legislature in the near future.

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Thank you, Minister Bentley, for the answer. I would say that the report of the adviser, Mr. Whitaker, said this to you, government: “Part-time employees should be immediately granted the right to unionize.” That’s what he said on page 34 of this report. That was 82 days ago and you’re still studying the report, it seems. What we know is that the Ministry of the Attorney General argued strenuously against letting part-timers and sessionals have their say on union representation. That’s why the question was to Minister Bentley. Roger Couvrette, president of the provincial organization of part-timers, is here, with many others. He and the thousands and thousands of workers who have signed cards would really like to hear the minister’s response: Why did Minister Bentley promise to extend collective bargaining rights to college part-timers and sessionals in August and, by April, argue against these workers’ rights to good wages, benefits and stability?

Hon. John Milloy: As I said, we thank Mr. Whitaker for his report and I hope to be reporting back to the House in the near future on living up to the commitment that we made last August....