

The Part-Time Times

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

OPSEU challenges Algonquin College over freedom of speech

Part-timers post Charter of Rights and Freedoms at media event - Story page 2



Photo: Claude Lacelle, OPSEU Local 416

Roger Couvrette, president of the provincial organization of part-time and sessional college workers (OPSECAAT), posts the Charter of Rights and Freedoms at Algonquin College Tuesday as part-time organizer Caron Fitzpatrick looks on.



“The college has no right to stop workers from finding out about the organizing drive”

By Jack Wilson, OPSEU Local 415
Special to *The Part-Time Times*

The weather was cold and blustery but the reception was warm as part-time recruiters greeted staff and students at Algonquin College’s main campus in Ottawa Jan. 22.

The recruiters with their blue and white “It’s Time!” t-shirts overtop their parkas cheerfully provided members of the college community with pamphlets encouraging part-time employees to sign an OPSEU membership card.

“The morning session was excellent,” said Caron Fitzpatrick, a part-time teacher and one of the recruiters. “The response from students and staff was very positive.”

Parked nearby was the special “It’s Time!” van providing the recruiters with a place to warm up and prospective new members with a place to sign up and have a cup of coffee.

Roger Couvrette and Candy Lindsay from the provincial organization of part-time workers were on hand, too. In a press conference, Couvrette stated that at most colleges enlightened managers support the recruitment drive. “Good managers know that better jobs for part-timers and sessional workers improve recruitment and retention of these employees, and in turn, improve education quality for the students we all serve.”

Unfortunately at Algonquin, management has told OPSEU that it cannot put up posters or even talk

face-to-face about the union organizing drive in common areas on campus during breaks.

Holding up a copy of the Charter of Rights and freedoms, Couvrette said, “This blatant censorship of a legitimate and legal activity is an outrageous violation of the rights of staff at Algonquin. The college has no right to stop workers from finding out about the organizing drive.”

The OPSEU posters have also been removed from the respective office doors of both the faculty and support staff union locals – three times in the case of the latter.

Notwithstanding the attitude of management, recruiters are upbeat and enthusiastic. To date, some 250 part-time and sessional employees at the College have signed cards. Many of them echo the sentiment, “It’s about time.” Fitzpatrick commented, “There are many outstanding people who come and then they

leave after just one semester. We need to do something to keep these good people, otherwise it is the students who are suffering.”

A report on the morning media event was seen by some 200,000 viewers of Ottawa’s CJOH-TV on the stations noon-hour and six o’clock news programs.

“I was pleasantly surprised by the impact of the coverage,” said Couvrette. “I got calls from people in Ottawa – old friends I hadn’t heard from in ages – who were surprised and somewhat angry with the behaviour of management at Algonquin College towards its own workers.”



Photo: Claude Lacelle

Is that a chartered bus?

Fleming tries a professional approach

Union has good things to say about college management in Peterborough, Lindsay

When the “It’s time!” bus showed up at Fleming College in Peterborough Tuesday, it wasn’t to protest bad behaviour by management.

It was a noon-hour pizza party.

In stark contrast to Algonquin and a few other colleges, management at Fleming has taken a different approach altogether to the union’s organizing drive.

“Fleming has taken a very professional approach to our campaign to organize part-time and sessional employees,” said Betty Cree, president of OPSEU Local 351 at the college. “Fleming has not tried to interfere with the organizing drive or throw obstacles in our way, and we appreciate that a lot.”

Cree said the college’s attitude to the organizing drive is typical of its approach to labour relations generally.

“Fleming is an employer that tries to be a good employer,” she said. “Management here does consult with the union and does listen to our concerns. We are having some debates over budget cuts right now, but I believe our employer cares about treating people fairly.”

The OPSEU organizing drive aims to win union rights for over 12,500 part-time and sessional workers at 24 Ontario community colleges. While wages and working conditions for full-time unionized employees are the same across the province, those of non-union part-timers vary widely from college to college. Fleming may be the best employer of these workers, said Cree.

“At Fleming, both faculty and support staff have clearly defined pay scales,” she said. “Also, regular part-time support staff get paid for statutory holidays and are eligible to take paid sick days. If the college closes for some reason, like bad weather, part-time

support staff who are scheduled to work still get paid,” she said. “That’s not the case at some other colleges.”

OPSEU’s organizing drive has “brought out the bully” in some college managers, says Roger Couvrette, president of the provincial organization of part-timers and sessionals (OPSECAAT) and a

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– Local 351 president Betty Cree



driving force behind the union’s campaign.

“Some colleges are actively trying to prevent part-timers and sessionals from finding out about the union’s campaign,” said Couvrette, who visited Peterborough Wednesday to talk to workers and help out with the organizing drive. “I’m glad to see that none of that nonsense is happening at Fleming.”

After the pizza party, Couvrette co-hosted a news conference with Betty Cree and Gary Bonczak, president of OPSEU Local 352, the faculty local at Fleming. The news event led to coverage on three area radio stations and the Peterborough *Examiner* newspaper.

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 (OPSEU).