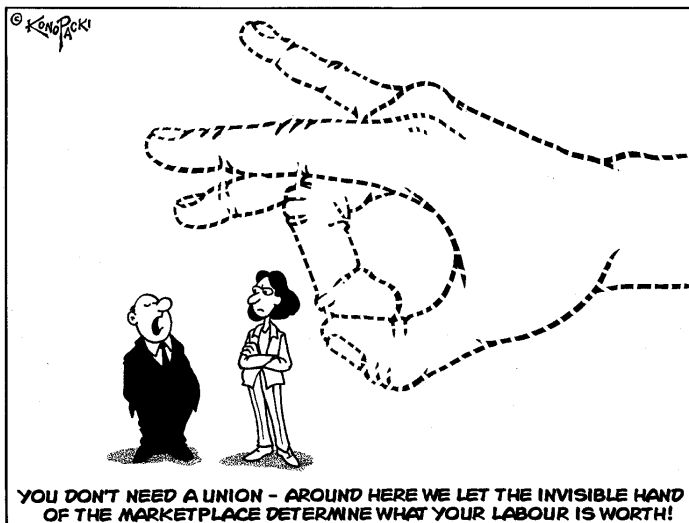


# Part-time college workers in Ontario are stripped of their dignity!

By Candy Lindsay, OPSEU Mobilizer, "I Believe in Fairness" Campaign

How can Canada claim to be a country of freedom or a place where its citizens have a right to freedom of choice? It is a shame that the federal government allows a provincial government – Ontario – to violate the standards of the International Labor Organization (ILO). As a member of the ILO, Canada is obligated to respect and promote the principles of its declaration, one of which is “freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining.”

The Government of Ontario is in gross violation of this standard. Part-time college workers in Ontario – and only in Ontario – do not have the choice to be part of a union. A formal complaint has been filed with the ILO but so far the supposedly “progressive” Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty has refused to amend the *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act* (passed in 1975) and give part-time college workers what is recognized worldwide as a fundamental human right, the right to bargain collectively as part of a union.



I am a part-time worker at an Ontario college. I am one of 16,000 part-time college workers in Ontario – we now outnumber full-time college workers and we have been denied the right to choose to belong to a union. Part-timers are simply a source of cheap labour. We receive less pay than full-time teachers or support staff, often for doing identical work. We have no job security. There is no seniority. Part-time teaching staff routinely do not have office space and have to meet with students in the hall. We do not receive a single benefit. To put it as succinctly as possible: part-time college workers in Ontario are stripped of our dignity.

## It was time for rebellion!

My first act of rebellion came in 2004, when two part-time co-workers and I went to the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) Local Support Staff president, Betty Cree, at Sir Sandford Fleming College. We wanted help. We had enough of the daily mistreatment which included working five hours a day and getting paid for two. Betty confronted management and shamed them into actually dealing with our sweatshop-like workplace. Betty didn't have to go to bat for us but she did and it resulted in some important changes.

My most important act of rebellion came this summer when I was hired as a mobilizer in the

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OPSEU “I Believe in Fairness” campaign. People were hired to conduct the campaign at every college in Ontario. It was such a great campaign! We all met at the beginning at OPSEU headquarters in Toronto, had weekly conference calls, and then met again at the end for a debriefing and to prepare the fall and winter campaign. What a great group!

Our jobs over the summer covered four areas. First, we set up meetings with MPPs to urge them to amend the *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act* in order to give part-timers the right to form a union. Second, we conducted a public education campaign. We set up display booths at summer events such as festivals and fairs and got people to sign postcards to their MPPs. The response at these events was always great. Third, we worked with college locals and with labour leaders throughout the community to be present at Labour Day activities. Finally, many of us worked with the college locals to organize “Welcome Back” activities, which were especially designed to highlight the plight of part-timers.

## OPSECAAT is born

This all culminated with the founding meeting of a part-time Ontario college workers association. In November, representatives from most of the colleges in the province – one part-time faculty and one part-time support staff from each college – met in Toronto in a highly-charged meeting to adopt a constitution and elect a first ad hoc executive. The new association is called the Organization of Part-time and Sessional Employees of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (OPSECAAT). What was particularly encouraging at this meeting was the talent, enthusiasm and commitment of delegates. This is a group and an executive that will not bother to ask Premier McGuinty or Training, Colleges and Universities Minister Bentley for permission before acting on behalf of part-timers in community colleges across Ontario.

Over the fall and winter, committees have been established on college campuses to do the local work, and be the local voice of OPSECAAT. In fact, even as you read this, we are in the final stages of the development of the organization. A membership drive is currently under way to sign up as many as

# I believe in **FAIRNESS** for part-time college workers!

possible of the 16,000 part-timers in Ontario colleges. We are realizing what was a dream for many of us only a short time ago. We are empowering 16,000 talented women and men across Ontario. We are doing this in spite of a government that has been the opposite of progressive when it comes to these people and their rights.

## Distinguished honour roll

I believe in solidarity – a commitment to the common good of all people. I want to thank Betty Cree, who in 2004 demonstrated her solidarity with me and other part-time workers at Sir Sandford Fleming College.

I also want to thank staff at OPSEU, especially Brenda Wall and Barbara Linds, for their devotion to the “I Believe in Fairness” campaign. I am grateful to Terri Hayes and Roger Couvrette of OPSECAAT for helping me write this article.

Finally, on behalf of all part-time college workers, I want to express gratitude to all of the union locals, both faculty and support staff. Without your support and involvement the success we have achieved would not have been possible, and without your encouragement the successes that we are sure to enjoy in the future would be an impossibility. ☺

