

*Press conference- January 31, 2007
Notes for Roger Couvrette, President
Organization of Part-time and Sessional Employees of the Colleges of Applied Arts and
Technology (OPSECAAT)*

Check against delivery

Thank you, Leah.

The first thing I would like to do on behalf of the *Organization of Part-time and Sessional Workers of the Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology* (OPSECAAT) is thank Leah and the *Ontario Public Service Employees Union* (OPSEU).

OPSEU's devotion to part-time college workers goes back a long way. It was formalized at an OPSEU convention in 2005 when delegates voted virtually unanimously to do everything in the power of the union to fight for part-time college workers and to have recognized by the Ontario government our right to bargain collectively.

Over the past months I have travelled to colleges across the province. It has made my heart sing to see part-time and full-time college workers working side by side – as brothers and sisters should – to gain the right to bargain collectively for part-time college workers.

It is a very exciting for me to participate in and help to lead this campaign.

We are in the process of organizing 17,000 workers. This is one of the largest labour organizing drives in recent Canadian history.

On January 19, OPSECAAT met with the *College Compensation and Appointments Council*, which negotiates collective agreements on behalf of the 24 community colleges in Ontario and reports to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. We laid out a series of demands. I shall list them here but would be pleased to answer any questions about them.

We want:

- 1. A protocol for hiring and retaining part-time and sessional workers in colleges in Ontario, including a policy for posting these positions.** Today part-time positions are rarely posted. The best way to describe how part-time positions are filled is the word ‘arbitrary.’ It depends literally upon the whims of management in the different school, institutes, and departments and the different colleges. You’ve heard of ‘best practices.’ Welcome to ‘worst practices,’ courtesy of the community college system. We want a province-wide protocol for posting and hiring part-time workers.
- 2. A process for dealing with the complaints and grievances of part-time college workers.** The need for such a process is self-evident.

- 3. Standardized pay across all colleges for part-time and sessional faculty and support staff.** Of course we want better pay. We receive a fraction of the pay of our full-time brothers and sisters. We are tired of being exploited as a source of cheap labour and being denied the right, by law, to defend ourselves from that exploitation. Moreover, we want pay equity: equal pay for the same work. Right now pay varies not only from college to college, but also in schools, institutes, and departments within colleges. It is institutional pay inequity, and it must end.
- 4. Research on benefits for part-time and sessional college workers.** Not all of the part-time workers in Ontario community colleges would want benefits, but we would appreciate the opportunity to choose. The colleges don't know how many of us might want benefits because they don't want us to have benefits.
- 5. A proposal for improving and standardizing working conditions for part-time and sessional workers in Ontario colleges.** Part-time workers have abysmal working conditions. We don't have offices or we share offices with up to a dozen other part-timers. We don't have phones or share them as well. A part-time teacher often meets with students in the hall, or, if the teacher's parking metre is out of time, running down the hall. It's shameful.
- 6. A multi-year plan for converting part-time and sessional workers to full-time workers at community colleges.** Part-time workers are usually not even 'internal'

candidates for the positions they hold. They are often booted out of their work when a full-time person takes their position. I say if a support staff worker is good enough to work part-time 24 hours a week, then he or she is good enough to work full-time at 35 hours a week. If a sessional teacher is good enough to teach seven courses in a term as a part-timer, then he is she is good enough to teach six courses a term as a full time teacher.

All of these demands have one thing in common. They should all be dealt with at the bargaining table.

The demand of both OPSECAAT and OPSEU that trumps all other demands is that the McGuinty government listen to the ILO, and amend the *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act* to recognize the right of part-time college workers to bargain collectively, “*as any other workers.*”

Too many governments over too many years have taken the low road on this issue. It’s time for one of them to discover – and take – the high road and do what is right.

I want to conclude by saying that I am ‘stoked’ – as my daughter would put it – by the membership drive that has been launched by OPSECAAT and OPSEU.

We will prevail. This membership drive will show that a strong majority of part-time college workers have decided that it is time to stand up – and fight for – their rights as workers.

We will prevail. Students deserve teachers who are treated with respect and dignity, have some job security, have access to professional development, and are paid in a fair and equitable fashion. It's a question of the quality of education.

We will prevail. This is an historical wrong that will ultimately be righted. While women fought for and gained the right to vote in 1916 in the Prairie Provinces, it took until 1940 for them to win that right in Quebec. But historical wrongs, while they may endure longer in some places, are ultimately righted.

Finally, we will prevail because I have seen the dedication of part-time college workers on this campaign, and I have seen the dedication of full-time college workers on this campaign, and I know that we cannot, this time, be stopped.

Part-time college workers deserve dignity and respect. We have a right as workers to defend ourselves from exploitation and the right to bargain collectively. We will prevail.

Thank you.