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## We're getting ripped off, say student parks staff

**They're not entitled to holiday pay: Province**

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QUEEN'S PARK BUREAU

Nearly 3,400 Ontario students who spend their summers working in provincial parks say the government is ripping them off by \$400 to \$600 each by refusing to give them holiday pay – a move they say is an abuse of labour laws.

For years, high school, college and university summer students received an 8.16 per cent top-up in lieu of having a paid vacation and statutory holidays off – a practice the government says was a mistake and should never have occurred.

During bargaining talks last December with the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, the province told the union it would no longer pay the students the top-up amount.

Student protests took place at four provincial parks on the weekend – Algonquin, Pinery, Sibbald Point and Wheatley.

At three of the parks, students stopped cars and gave out information flyers. At Algonquin they stopped pedestrians near the park gates.

Without this money, argues Seneca College student Helena Whale, most park workers make less on a statutory holiday than employees at McDonald's.

"Any other employer in Ontario has to pay compensation for these holidays, except for the government," said Whale, a shift supervisor at Sibbald Point Provincial Park on Lake Simcoe.

"They've exempted themselves. You'd think the Ontario government would be willing to pay their students, the future of Ontario, more than that."

Students employed in the Ontario public service are not eligible to receive pay-in-lieu for vacation and holidays, said Ciaran Ganley, a spokesperson for the government services ministry.

The government pays 73 per cent of OPSEU-represented summer students \$11.10 an hour, he said, a higher rate than the \$9.50 minimum wage.

The Crown is exempt from certain sections of the Employment Standards Act because Crown employees, including the students, are otherwise covered by collective agreements and/or subject to the Public Service of Ontario Act, which provides them with a compensation package, Ganley said.

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