

UNITED WE STAND

Local 109 sets the record straight

It's time to set the record straight on the current dispute between striking Ontario college support staff workers and the College Employer Council (CEC), the management bargaining agent for all 24 Ontario colleges, say the president of Local 109.

"There's been a lot of inaccurate and misleading information put out to the public in the 13 days since the strike began," said Marg Rae, Local 109 President and member of OPSEU's support staff bargaining team. "Although it is not typical to release this information publicly, I feel it is necessary since our members are unfairly being portrayed in a very negative light by CEC and college management. Despite the heavy-handed and never-ending spin from management, this strike is not about money. Yes, our members – the lowest paid employees in the college system -- are seeking a modest wage increase to keep pace with the cost of living, but our first and foremost concern is the erosion of good, full-time jobs in the college system, and the erosion of good jobs in workplaces all across Ontario."

"In June, management tabled a set of demands that we feel could be used by the colleges to create hundreds of part-time and temporary contract jobs rather than full-time positions. Part-time workers make considerably less money, receive no benefits, and have no right to file grievances if they feel they are unfairly treated or dismissed." While the Local recognizes the need for some short-term workers in the system, colleges are increasingly using continuous renewal of part-time contracts for permanently needed

work as a way to avoid creating good full-time jobs. Using more part-time and temporary workers means a significant cost savings for the colleges, at the expense of unemployed or underemployed area residents who would benefit from having good, full-time jobs, she said.

College officials maintain that full-time jobs have been created. That's true. However, those numbers are meaningless unless viewed in the context of the number of new, part-time hires. The colleges hired 298 new full-time staff and 667 part-timers in 2008/09. In 2009/10, the last year for which data is available, 79 new full-time staff were added: colleges hired 337 part-time staff. Full and part-time staff as of 2009/10 total 6,830 and 9,447 respectively. In short, there has been a 4.9% increase of full time jobs in the colleges vs. an 8.91% increase in part time jobs. This data comes directly from the CEC. As the numbers plainly indicate, part-time hires are rapidly outpacing the number of full-time hires. Given the financial incentive for colleges from using lower-paid workers, the union fears this trend will continue to the point where few new positions will be full-time, said Rae.

Why is this bad for our communities, workers and their families? In recent years, more and more employers are cutting full-time jobs in favour of part-time and temporary work. We live in a consumer-based economy, where consumer spending drives jobs and prosperity. Full-time workers, in general, have more disposable income than lower-paid, part-time or temporary workers do.

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Weather Forecast for Wednesday, September 14



Cloudy periods
High: 20°C
Low: 10°C
Wind: W 20km/hr
POP: 30%

LONDON



Mainly sunny
High: 20°C
Low: 11°C
Wind: W 20km/hr
POP: 30%

ST. THOMAS



Mainly sunny
High: 20°C
Low: 12°C
Wind: W 15km/hr
POP: 20%

SIMCOE



Cloudy periods
High: 20°C
Low: 10°C
Wind: W 15km/hr
POP: 20%

WOODSTOCK

Local 109 sets the record straight (continued from page 1)

More part-time workers mean fewer people with less money to spend on local goods and services. This is likely to impact area businesses, especially small businesses that make up 98% of Ontario companies. Short-term contracts and lack of job security mean more people may have to resort to unemployment insurance and social assistance more often, since they may experience frequent periods of unemployment. Students don't spend time and money pursuing postsecondary education to graduate to a series of low-wage, part-time or temporary jobs. Students want good jobs with good pay wages and benefits. Even Premier Dalton McGuinty recognizes this. At the recent unveiling of his re-election platform, the Premier noted the creation of more highly skilled, high wage jobs is critical to making Ontario more prosperous and globally competitive. We are determined to maintain an Ontario where young people can find good, full-time employment.

Rae called on students and the public to help get both parties back to the bargaining table. "We're disappointed that, so far, management refuses to meet with us. Management says it cares about the students and so do we. We know this strike is causing significant disruption in the colleges. If we all truly care about our students, surely we can sit down and reach a fair agreement everyone can live with."

The colleges have asked for a number of concessions we feel would directly threaten the future creation of good, full-time jobs and instead encourage colleges to hire and/or replace full-time positions with part-time or temporary ones. In the last contract, the union agreed to allow colleges to hire workers for special projects for short periods because management presented it as a professional development opportunity for our staff. Instead, colleges have largely ignored current staff when filling these jobs and have hired primarily from outside. This was not the intent of the original agreement. We feel this provision has been abused and want this clause rescinded. Although many previous contracts contain a provision where the colleges pledge to create full-time instead of part-time jobs when possible, colleges have largely ignored this and continue to create part-time and temporary positions in record numbers. Part-time and temporary workers now outnumber full-time staff. Colleges also want to extend the use of temporary workers currently employed during the summer. Many of these temporary workers are students. We rejected using them year round to do our work (we prefer colleges create full-time positions if they truly need full-time help), but would

be open to having them start earlier in the year, providing they were paid a fair wage for their work. Currently, these workers earn the current student minimum wage. Such low pay is unfair to these workers, many of whom are trying to earn money to return to school.

OPSEU originally asked for a 3% wage increase in each year of a two-year contract. The Consumer Price Index is currently 2.7%. Management's offer of 1.5%, 1.5% and 1.75% in each year of a proposed three-year agreement doesn't allow our members to keep pace with inflation and the rising costs of gas, hydro, groceries and other necessities. According to the Ministry of Labour, the current three-year average wage increase in the education sector in Ontario is 2%. While management withdrew its original demand to hire new staff at reduced wages and benefits, it still wants to extend the probationary period of new staff to one year from the current six months. This would give colleges the opportunity to release any employee within the one year, and the employee will not have rights to union representation for dismissal, layoffs, or reassignments since OPSEU cannot file grievances for probationary employees. This sounds to us like a strategy for creating more disposable positions. The six-month probationary period has been in effect for more than 40 years and management has yet to present a solid case as to why this needs to be changed.

Management demands also include proposed major changes to employees' working hours, which would give colleges the right, in principle, to schedule people to work 24/7. Once workers were assigned to new hours, they would have no right to change them if personal or family circumstances made those hours untenable. This could play havoc with members who require day care or members who care for elderly relatives. We instead suggested this matter be referred to a joint management-union committee to establish some rules about how this would work. We said we were not prepared to have this in our collective agreement at this time until some rules are established. Management said no.

In addition, the union proposed changes to the arbitration process that could potentially save colleges thousands of dollars a year. Management wanted to tie this gift to one of its concessions.

This newsletter is published by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) Local 109, proudly representing support staff at Fanshawe College, and expresses the views of the Local.