

Ontario colleges looking to provoke province-wide strike: OPSEU

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TORONTO - The Council representing community colleges in Ontario is refusing to negotiate in good faith in a move that could adversely affect the school year for 200,000 full-time students, says the union representing 9,000 faculty members.

“Seldom in my experience as a labour activist have I witnessed such arbitrary, misleading and, frankly, undemocratic behaviour as exhibited by negotiators for community colleges,” said Ontario Public Service Employees Union president Warren (Smokey) Thomas.

“In light of the Colleges’ refusal to bargain in good faith the union will have no alternative but to go to our membership and seek a strike mandate. We do not wish to disrupt the school year, but this is a ham-fisted attack on educators the likes of which this province has never seen before.”

OPSEU negotiators say the faculty employer – the College Appointments and Compensation Council (“the Council”) – has reneged on promises made to improve quality of education for students. The Council had been a party to an independently-chaired workload task force that examined workloads, academic freedom and quality of education following a three-week strike of faculty in 2006. A unanimous report from the panel was released in March, 2009.

“If this so-called contract is rammed through like the Council says it will be, one in five faculty members in Ontario will experience an unprecedented increase in workload. This will have a profoundly-negative impact on the quality of education in Ontario at a time when the economy is suffering and we require a better educated workforce to meet global challenges,” said Ted Montgomery, chair of OPSEU’s bargaining team and president of Local 560 at Seneca College in Toronto.

Under the new Colleges Collective Bargaining Act (CCBA) the Council can take its contract offer to faculty for a vote. OPSEU negotiators invited the Council to do so, but their negotiators flatly refused.

“Their negotiators know their proposals would be turned down by a massive margin,” said Montgomery .

The union also strongly opposes the Council’s arbitrary decision to withdraw its participation in provincial joint management-labour committees that resolve member insurance claims, employer-employee relations and schedule grievance arbitrations, effectively shutting down the orderly resolution of operational differences.

“These acts have nothing to do with collective bargaining or the contract. It’s union-busting at its worst,” said Thomas.

OPSEU was looking to match recent wage settlements that other post-secondary educators have been offered and have accepted.