



OPSEU Ontario Public Service
Employees Union
SEFPO Syndicat des employés de la
fonction publique de l'Ontario

OPSEU Local 242
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Ravi Ramkissoonsingh, President

OPEN LETTER

Sean Kennedy
President, Niagara College Canada

December 16, 2021

RE: Working Conditions and Unilateral Imposition of Terms and Conditions of Employment

Dear Sean,

I hope that you are staying well during these challenging and stressful times.

I am writing to ask you to break your silence about the current contentious negotiations between CAAT-A faculty and the College Employer Council (CEC). As you are a college president, the CEC is supposed to receive direction from you and the other twenty-three college presidents; however, having known you for the past 15 years, I am having a difficult time understanding how you could be directing the CEC to be so dismissive of key faculty demands.

When the pandemic hit in March of 2020, Niagara College faculty – both full-time and partial-load – stood up and did whatever was necessary to enable our students to successfully complete the term. You applauded the efforts of faculty then and have done so since as the pandemic has raged on. Platitudes, on their own, only go so far though.

After the Winter Term of 2020 concluded, the College's treatment of faculty took a turn. Full-time professors were fought by the College at every step to get additional hours on their SWFs to pivot to emergency remote teaching. Several referred their SWFs to Workload Monitoring Group, where management minimized their need for extra time to properly support our students. The College's lawyer, who is also on the CEC's bargaining team, insulted and demeaned faculty at arbitrations.

Partial-load faculty members have had their own unique problems. Most were effectively laid off at the end of April 2020 for the next four months and, since that time, many have worked irregularly, been reduced to non-unionized part-time status (while still teaching similar numbers of students) with lower pay and no benefits, and others have lost work completely. The continued abuse and exploitation of contract faculty has continued at Niagara while the College has made \$70 million over the past six years.

Counsellors, after seeing two other colleges lay off and contract out counselling services in recent years, continue to be worried about that prospect at Niagara College. Indeed, they have seen a loss of their bargaining unit work which has saved the College some dollars but hasn't necessarily been beneficial to students.

Do you approve of how full-time and partial-load professors and instructors, and counsellors have been treated by this College?

As for librarians, we do not actually have any at a college that serves approximately 10,000 students and offers degrees, in addition to diplomas and graduate certificates. How does a post-secondary institution not have at least one academic librarian to support students?

During this round of bargaining, the CEC has ignored and dismissed the critical demands of faculty as we seek better working conditions and job security in order to support our students in the way they deserve to be supported. It has gotten to the point where the CEC has imposed terms and conditions of employment on faculty; this is a maneuver that is widely seen in the world of labour as the “nuclear option,” as it is rarely used and only by employers who are seen not to care about its effect on labour relations. The CEC may be the first employer in history to use this tactic twice as they did so back in 2009 and labour relations have never truly recovered from that.

As a college president who is directing the CEC, your current silence about all of this speaks volumes. As you well know, remaining silent means that you are both complicit with and approving of the CEC’s actions. Are you really against updating our 36 year-old workload formula by providing full-time faculty members with up to 1.8 extra minutes per student per week to better evaluate and support our students? Do you oppose additional preparation time for full-time faculty members for courses with an online component when the scholarly research and faculty’s own lived experiences support the need for this time? Are you really opposed to partial-load faculty members being able to bridge their benefits between contracts (at their own expense) if they have a written offer of employment in hand, especially when former Niagara College President Dan Patterson has been given his full salary and benefits for an additional two years following his retirement? Are you truly against better job security for precarious partial-load faculty who have contributed so much to this institution, and for counsellors, at a time when there is a mental health crisis for students in our college system? Are you not for subcommittees with “teeth” that would implement much needed change to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion and truly address Indigeneity and decolonization in the college system? Is it not time to take real action on these issues?

I implore you, as a respected leader in the Ontario public college system, to speak out and indicate what your opinion is about these critical matters. Faculty and students need to hear from you immediately. You can help end this labour dispute by directing the CEC to refer all outstanding matters to voluntary binding interest arbitration if going back to the bargaining table is not still an option. Will you do that? If not, you owe faculty and students an explanation as to why you won’t.

Silence should no longer be an option for you. I look forward to your public response to the questions I have posed here. Faculty and students deserve at least that much.

Thanks for your attention to this letter.

Sincerely,

Ravi Ramkissoonsingh
President, OPSEU Local 242
Faculty Union at Niagara College

CC: Wendy Wing, Chair, Niagara College Board of Governors