

College faculty union taking province to court after task force on precarious work scrapped

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By [Isabel Teotonio](#) Education Reporter
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The union representing Ontario college faculty is taking the Progressive Conservative government to court after it terminated a task force that was trying to fix the growing problem of part-time and contract work.

The Ontario Public Service Employees Union says the College Task Force was a key part of the [arbitrator's decision last year](#), ending a bitter dispute between faculty members and Ontario's 24 colleges that culminated in a record-long, five-week strike.



Ontario Public Service Employees Union leader President Warren "Smokey" Thomas says the government has no right to change a collective agreement after it's been enforced. (Nathan Denette / THE CANADIAN PRESS FILE PHOTO)

OPSEU agreed in collective bargaining to refer key issues, such as job security, part-time work and contract work, to a task force, which was supported and funded by the then-Liberal government. That task force was underway when it was scrapped on June 29 by Premier Doug Ford during his first day in office.

“It’s an arbitrated collective agreement that the parties (OPSEU and the College Employer Council) are both living by,” says OPSEU President Warren “Smokey” Thomas. “The government has no right to change a collective agreement after it’s enforced.”

In an application filed Wednesday with the Superior Court of Justice, OPSEU argues, in part, that the government “substantially interfered” with its right to bargain collectively, which violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. A spokesperson for Merrilee Fullerton, the minister of training, colleges and universities, said she could not comment because the matter is before the courts.

Last October, 12,000 faculty members walked the picket lines, affecting as many as 500,000 students, but after the longest strike in their history, they were legislated back to work and referred to binding mediation-arbitration.

The College Task Force was set up, in part, to deal with unresolved issues from the bargaining process, such as academic freedom, collegial governance and the prevalence of precarious jobs. It had been meeting regularly and had just a few more meetings remaining when it was cancelled, says Thomas. Its recommendations were due later this year.

“They were doing fantastic work,” says Thomas, adding the task force included faculty, college representatives, students, and industry experts. “The work of the task force should not be lost, it was extremely valuable ... The simple solution would be for Doug Ford to say, ‘Hey, let the task force finish its work.’”

JP Hornick, who’s head of the faculty bargaining team for OPSEU and a co-applicant of the Charter challenge, said in a statement the province has “put quality education in jeopardy.”

“College faculty are not going to just let this go,” said Hornick. “We are determined to fix the college system, whatever it takes, however we believe that the collaborative, evidence-based process the task force established is the best way forward.”

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