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Romeo Dallaire inspires AMPA



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Retired General Romeo Dallaire reasons with AMPA 2005 delegates about humane options in international affairs.

A modest proposal to restructure D12



by Ahmed Abdolell

When I first ran for Executive Officer in 2000, I recall that one of the questions asked of me was, “What would you do to increase participation of the membership in union activities?” I don’t recall my answer at the time due to the fact that I was newly involved in the union and didn’t know how OSSTF worked nor all its structural strengths and weaknesses. Now, after several years of involvement in District 12 affairs in various committees, on the STBU executive for two years, and now back in the classroom, I believe that I can answer the question more thoughtfully.

Obstacles to active participation

The main obstacle to active participation in any union usually has to do with the fact that it has become alienated from those it represents owing to problems of organizational governance and relevance to its membership. In D12, this is largely due to financial constraints set by the inadequacy of our share of rebates from Provincial OSSTF. This situation arose from the whole amalgamation process forced by the Harris Tories of the consolidation of six former districts into one. The underfunding has led to the membership now being represented by less than half of the Executive Officers (EOs) that were in place under the old arrangement.

Responsibility and representation

However, if we shift things around a bit, we can greatly increase the number of EOs without spending another dime. Create eight new EO positions to be filled by in-the-classroom members who do not get full-time release. This used to happen in old Toronto, and it worked.

But this, in and of itself, is not enough. We need to encourage a broader cross-section of our membership to be involved and to be in leadership. New teachers who are simply trying to survive day to day find it very hard to make the time to go to after-school union meetings and functions. People who have families, especially with young children, have the same problem. And many others who would like to participate but have busy lives outside of teaching share this predicament.

So if we cut out all of these different people, we are left with a leadership body, through no fault of its own, which is missing some crucial representation of various sorts of mem-

bers.

Classroom Executive Officers

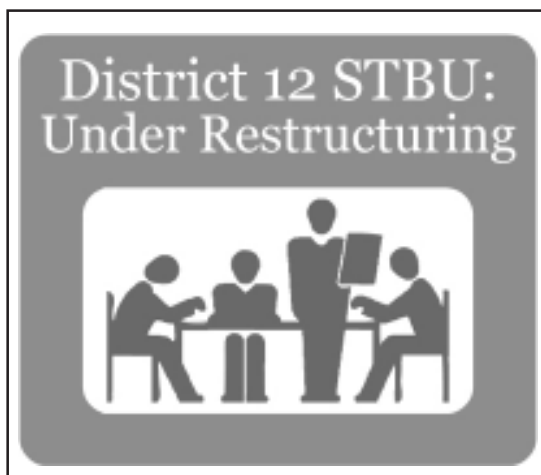
This difficulty can be remedied by holding EO meetings during the daytime where every EO is given time release for the day. This would allow all executive decisions to be made with the presence of a strong complement of EOs.

This will cost money, of course. How can we find this money? Perhaps we can cut down the number of full-time released EOs to eight (from its present 10), thus freeing up some \$150,000 to be used to accommodate the financial demands of the addition of in-class EOs.

Of course, we need to also clearly define the role of these new EOs. One of the major goals in this whole endeavour should be to relieve our full-time EOs of some of the very time-consuming duties that they presently have. To this

end, the classroom EOs (CEOs!) can take on the Executive Liaison positions to the various district committees—Politi-

continued on page 8, see “Finetuning”



D12 Voice: The Voice of Toronto OSSTF

D12 VOICE is an independent publication for the membership created and edited by members of the Editorial Board, as appointed by the Communications Committee. Its role is to promote discussion on educational issues, but it does not necessarily represent the policies of the District 12 STBU Executive or Provincial OSSTF. Decisions as to what will be published are under the control of the Editorial Board.

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Submissions from members – articles, letters or drawings – are always welcome. Letters should be not more than 200 words. Please send material electronically. As space is limited, not all material will appear. The D12 Editorial Board reserves the right to edit all submissions. Send e-mail to: dneelin@osstfd12.com

Students face new dangers under SSI



by Bill Kennedy

The *Student Success Initiative* (SSI), originally known as *Pathways to Success*, was set up in early 2003 purportedly to meet the educational requirements of those 70% of Ontario secondary school students not going to university. In practice, however, SSI became a scheme designed to enmesh local school boards even further into the financial and curricular clutches of the former Conservative provincial government. Then—and now under the present Liberal administration—SSI has had two primary objectives: to deliver curriculum on the cheap while maintaining the pretence of academic rigour; and to direct students into restrictive academic and occupational streams. The effect of these aims, if achieved, would be to diminish educational choice and quality for most students—whether destined for university or not.

Conundrums and mayhem

In the beginning, SSI was to sort students into three “destination pathways”: university, college/apprenticeship, and workplace. This was essentially a reinforcement of the old Tory practice of streaming students into academic, applied, and essential tracks.

SSI streams were to flow into elementary and secondary schools gathered inside school boards in regional areas called “clusters.” Each of these was to house students from one of the three destination pathways. The initial inspiration for clusters came from Harvard academic Michael Porter’s studies on economic competitiveness in which educational institutions and students are adjuncts to the wants of an ever-changing free market.

Recently SSI’s proponents, facing opposition, have been revamping the cluster system. It is now mutating into a “magnet” type of school network. In this model, individual schools scattered across boards of education are to devote their resources as exclusively as possible to a particular program – fine art, dramatic arts, auto mechanics, and ESL are among the proposed offerings. The purpose here is to bulk up or at least maintain programs of these types in schools already specialising in them.

Under this new cost-cutting order of things, second- and third-tier programs in non-specialising schools—along with the staff delivering them—are to wither away gradually. Eventually, a system will evolve with certain schools and their specialised course selections emerging as much sought-after educational hubs. Others, however, will be consigned to serving up curricular leftovers nobody else wants to teach or take.

Whether pursued with clusters or magnets, SSI’s aims remain the same: to stream students and to “rationalise” curriculum.

New dangers for at-risk students

Under SSI, principal-CEOs are to run schools in site-based style. These principals will be encouraged to form partnerships with educational, community and profit-seeking business organisations to top up curriculum and, where possible, fill in funding and employee gaps. This dovetails with the general public-private partnership (P3) movement established under the Tories and still being considered by the Liberals for hospitals and other government institutions. In an SSI world, the Learning Partnership (LP), from whom OSSTF and OECTA have policies of disassociation, would continue to be in the P3 vanguard.

The SSI curriculum itself is to be competency- rather than subject-oriented. Students are to be deemed as human capital to cater to specific “market niches.” As such, only their bare-bones literacy and numeracy skills need to be addressed, with a leavening of anti-racism initiatives and “parental partnerships” thrown in to add softer touches to the SSI’s harsh business of curricular reductionism.

For SSI adherents, competencies have another advantage over subjects: ease of measurability. Core English and

mathematics skills can be easily tied to standardised, competency-based EQAO examinations. Instead of the broadest possible range of educational and socio-economic indicators, the much narrower criteria of EQAO test scores, credit accumulation statistics, dropout rates and the like will ultimately come to define at-risk students and diminish their educational and career prospects—and all under the guise of “raising the academic bar.”

Alternatives to SSI’s Tory legacies

Implementation of SSI threatens to bring about a profound and harmful restructuring of public education. SSI’s streaming, curricular dumbing-down and subject-destroying elements—Tory legacies which the Liberals have yet to eschew—must be jettisoned. As well, the large sums of money now flowing into SSI in often unfocused fashion should, among other things, be targeted instead to reduce class size, renew the physical plant of schools and cultivate genuine vocational courses geared toward the pursuit of skilled crafts rather than toward mere obedience on the job and satisfying momentary market desires. All this would be good not only for OSSTF members, but also for public education in general.



Is the Ontario Ministry of Education taking a page out of Texas SSI?

Dallaire challenges us to uphold our values



by Sufiya Mary Reid

Lt. General (Retired) Romeo Dallaire was invited to address AMPA. Dallaire is famous for leading the U.N. peacekeeping force in Rwanda in 1994 that was powerless to stop the genocide, and his pleas to the U.N. for reinforcements were unanswered. At AMPA, speaking in both English and French, Dallaire put the case for moving international cooperation to the main stream.

Are all humans human?

He pointed out that massive efforts were made in Yugoslavia to prevent genocide, yet no one responded to the Rwandan crisis. Conclusion? Europeans matter; Africans don't. Dallaire said we are more racist than the colonialists.

New world disorder

Eighty percent of humanity is falling deeper into mud, blood, and the suffering of indignity Dallaire said. The black-and-white old world order in which the West faced the Soviet Bloc is over. Simple classic warfare in which two armies face each other, such as Operation Desert Storm against Iraq in 1991, is now the exception, he argued.

He noted that classic peacekeeping has been working in Cyprus. There they need a referee and are not killing each other. But since 1989 such missions have usually failed. In the case of Rwanda, for example, Dallaire was sent there simply to observe and report. He was powerless to prevent the slaughter.

Surveying the world situation, he commented that many countries are imploding. Their problems are complex with deep roots. Conflicts and humanitarian crises go together. For example, ethnic cleansing is common.

The weapons used are often low tech, but still the devastation is great. Civilians are being used as tools of war and may even be killed by their own side. Children are used as soldiers.

He noted that the West has often contributed by putting dictators in power and even trained them. The leaders of warring factions are not dummies, he said: They were educated at the world's most famous universities. They know how to manipulate power.

Responsibility to protect

Dallaire reminded us that the U.N. now recognizes

that it has a responsibility to protect. The implication is that the "international community" can interfere in internal affairs.

In military interventions, we can be part of the problem. He reported that if "our" security is not at stake, we often pull out after suffering a few casualties. Dallaire was clear that if you use force in international interventions, there will be casualties. He asked if we were prepared to go beyond our borders.

Go to the source of the rage

From pure self-interest, he argued, we in the West should recognize that we are all vulnerable to the 80% getting more enraged.

Dallaire said Canada has a choice. He questioned: Do we hope that no one will hurt Canada? He pointed out that the Canadian government has reduced its defence budget because of the ubiquitous presence of U.S. forces. He counterposed two courses of governmental policy: to try to build a wall round North America or do to go to the source of the rage.

Dallaire contends that Canadians believe fundamentally in human rights.

He recalled scenes of Canadians risking their lives to help people dying and expressions of Canadians wanting to help. He urged that just taking care of ourselves is not enough.

He believes Canada can lead the middle powers. He feels that Canada can advance the plight of humanity and, as he put it, help people move from the mud to a level of decency.

He concluded that Canada needs generals who not only can fight and protect but also can resolve conflicts. He argued that we need to rebuild our diplomatic corps and devote 0.7% of GDP to help humanity. We, in his words, have to make it a mainstream effort.

The AMPA delegates greeted Romeo Dallaire's presentation with an enthusiastic standing ovation. Since speaking at AMPA, Dallaire has been appointed to the Senate.



Dallaire on a peacekeeping mission in Rwanda, 1994

Congratulations to:

Roger Langen for winning the James Forster Human Rights Award, and Earl Burt, elected OTF Governor at AMPA.

AMPA 2005



Teach difference, not indifference



by Mike Peterson

There's an episode of *Law and Order* where cops at the 31st precinct set up a colleague to be killed on duty because he was gay. They did this by "going slow" when asked by the dispatcher to respond to the foot patrolman's call for help. Later, when questioned by detectives Briscoe and Logan, the cops quoted the Bible on homosexuality, while claiming they didn't know the dead cop was gay.

As teachers, we may or may not have an idea of who in our class is gay or lesbian. But we know all about the hatred that they face. You can't walk two steps in the hallways on some days without hearing putdowns having to do with actions being "gay," or clothing being "gay." Imagine for a moment if instead of references to "gay," you as a teacher heard "Jewish." Would you keep walking? By ignoring a putdown linked to sexual orientation, you are, by default, condoning it.

Confronting religious prejudice

Don't walk by. Dispel some of the myths that surround gays and lesbians. A lot of mainstream youth that I have met have been told to take their ancient religious texts literally, especially when it comes to gay difference. Point out to them that today we live under the rule of law and that, under those laws, all people have the same rights no matter what a particular religion may prescribe. Teachers, especially in a public education system, must not hesitate to challenge religious doctrines. We respect the Christian, Jewish and Muslim students who are in our classes, but religious language cannot trump the laws of a democratic society.

Public education is the basis of our society and must serve everyone. Ideas that contradict our values as members of Canadian society cannot have trajectory. Our task is to prepare young people to be lifelong learners in a changing, complex society. The multiple ethnicities and beliefs in that society are our strength as a nation. We must not undermine that strength by failing to stand up for people who are especially vulnerable.

Consider TV sexuality show host, Sue Johansen. She has taught tolerance towards gay and lesbian youth for years. I remember when she was a public health nurse for the North York Board of Education. She came to Victoria Park Secondary School when I was student there over 20 years ago to answer questions we had about sex. In her bold and frank manner, she asked us what we would do if we found out that one of our friends was gay. One boy said that he wouldn't bend over in the shower to pick up a bar of soap if that student was near. Johansen replied that his answer sug-

gested that all homosexuals were rapists. "And that's simply not true," she said. I was impressed. But that feeling amongst teenage boys about gay friends being a sexual threat has not gone away.

Turn the situation around. If a boy talks with disgust about a student he supposes is gay, ask him to consider if that individual is thinking about him and his sexual orientation. The answer usually comes back: "No, because I'm normal." I try then to tell him that for that other boy, being gay is normal. If I can gain his confidence a little bit, I ask him if he remembers ever being anything other than who he is. Of course, he says no. "It's the same thing with that boy," I say. "He never remembers being anything but gay."

The price that you as a teacher pay for sticking up for gay or lesbian youth can be high. Students may try to bait you, thinking that you too may be gay. Your individual voice is powerful. The "group" that we as adults model is something that children equate with a kind of selfish regard, and so they make the assumption that no one can be in the group if they happen to have "other" characteristics. You don't have to be gay or lesbian to assert an adult attitude of inclusion to help gay or lesbian students. As educators, we are particularly responsible for fighting for tolerance and acceptance in our society

The cost of inaction

There is a dire need for educative action. The statistics on young people who are gay or lesbian are staggering and disturbing. Such students are twice as likely to get into trouble with the law; twice as likely to abuse alcohol or get hooked on other drugs; twice as likely to be a victim of physical violence; twice as likely to end up homeless. They are often thrown out on the street by their parents.

In the television story, the cops from the 31st precinct were acquitted. We can expect more from ourselves. The Board expects more from us as well. They have adopted a policy to protect GLQBT (gay, lesbian, queer, bisexual, transgendered) students from harassment. In this language, they are ahead of other boards. Clearly, the TDSB has made the human rights of all students a priority. If you have an administrator who believes otherwise, as if there are no gay or lesbian students at your school, you can still take action. You will be supported, and someone's child, among so many others who need this, will have been defended.



The Safe Space Door Hanger is available from the D12 office. More resources are available at the D12 website: www.osstfd12.com under the Gay Straight Alliance Committee.

Resolving conflict in the workplace

by Tom Purcell

If you have ever been directly involved in or been a witness to a workplace conflict, then you can appreciate how much time and energy can be consumed by such a dispute. As a teacher, I know that we all face ever increasing demands on our time and resources in the day-to-day execution of our duties. A conflict with a colleague is an additional burden that can leave us feeling stressed out, physically, mentally and emotionally. When we feel this way, our ability, and even our desire to resolve the conflict, decreases.

A workplace dispute also has the tendency to take on a life of its own. The longer a dispute lasts—combined with a high degree of emotional investment—can result in the participants becoming even more entrenched in their respective position. Throw a few rumours into the mix, add some gossip, enlist the support of a few colleagues, and what began as a difference of opinion or personality conflict can easily escalate into a full-blown dispute. The result is a workplace that has become divisive, acrimonious and, generally, uncomfortable for all involved. The original cause of the conflict tends to become obscured under a layer of subsequent words and deeds.

A realistic approach

Realistically, not every workplace conflict can be resolved amicably, but the majority can. One essential condition for successful dispute resolution is the voluntary desire on both sides of a conflict to engage in solution seeking. If such a desire exists, then a solution to the dispute might be found. Another essential factor is the understanding by both parties that they can freely express their thoughts and feelings on the matter without fear of being attacked or criticized. In many cases, simply sitting down at a mutually agreed upon time and place without time restrictions or distractions and entering into a rational dialogue with the other party can clear the air. However, there are times when the more effective course of action might be soliciting the assistance of a neutral third party. The person chosen can be anyone so long as both parties have confidence in the person's ability to be impartial and fair. Often the branch president can fill this role.

If this method is not acceptable to both parties, then there exists the option of either or both to contact a member of the bargaining unit executive, who will, in turn, refer the party to the services provided by a member of the Provincial Mediation Council. These individuals are trained in the mediation process and can consult with professional mediators if need be. A mediator is trained to handle an emo-

tionally charged situation, address power imbalances, gender, age and cultural differences, as well as guide the participants through a full exploration of the issues toward a mutually satisfactory resolution. It is important to note that the process and outcome of a mediation session are strictly confidential.

Limits to mediation

There are some situations where mediation is not appropriate, i.e. issues involving the Ontario Labour Relations Act, the Collective Agreement, a grievance, the College of Teachers, or any external legal proceeding.

A mediated outcome, contrary to popular belief, does not always lead to warm hugs and handshakes, or the beginning of a life-long friendship. An effective conflict resolution is simply an agreement made between the parties, whatever form it may take. It results in an end to the conflict and an easier work environment for everyone.



There is a better way: conflict resolution through mediation.

Tom Purcell is a classroom teacher at Drewry Secondary School. He holds a Certificate in Dispute Resolution from York University.

Letter to the Editor

Re: *Tamara Massey's article, "Walking the tightrope: refusing download", March 2005 issue*

From my perspective as a classroom teacher of 21 years, I felt I had to comment on the March 2005 article, *Walking the tightrope*. I suspect the author may not have had the experience of sharing the OSSTF affiliation with her administrators that we once had. Had she a greater sense of history she would have better appreciated the cynical move by the Harris government to remove administrators from the federation.

I caution anyone who deliberately or inadvertently supports a schism between teachers and administrators. This endangers a lot of good will that exists between those still in the classroom and those who once were in the classroom. It is the thin end of a wedge which could some day see administrations consisting of managers who are without teaching credentials or teaching experience. Administrators are not the enemy of classroom teachers, just the opposite.

David Caruana, Vice Principal, Agincourt C.I.

Editorial Board seeks: tall, dark and witty!

At this time of year, all District 12 members are encouraged to apply for positions on the Communications Committee. Okay, so you don't have to be tall or dark. But, witty? If you think you are, that's good enough for us.

What is the Editorial Board?

The Board is made up of District 12 members who volunteer their time. The committee comprises 10 members from D12 who hail from different schools across the Board, as well as one Executive Liaison appointed by the D12 Executive.

We have been called a lot of things, but the way we like to think of ourselves is as eclectic, visionary, and provocative. Who wouldn't want to be a part of that kind of team?

What is the time commitment?

All members are expected to attend an Editorial Board meeting once a month for the entire school year. This meeting lasts between three to four hours. An Editorial Board member is no longer in good standing if they miss more than three meetings. Members will also spend time writing articles, reporting on events, and helping out with production.

Who should apply?

Members who are willing writers, artists, editors, and who have a way with computers should definitely get in touch. For those who want to be involved in order to shape the intellectual debate in our union, then WE WANT YOU too.

How do I apply?

Submit a statement of no more than 300 words explaining why you think you'd make a great contribution to *D12 Voice*. The statement should outline your past experience on any publications you may have worked on and your past union experience. Most importantly, the statement should articulate what vision you have for *D12 Voice* and how you think you could best contribute to shaping the future of this grassroots publication.

When is the deadline for applications?

The deadline for applications is May 30, 2005. Email statements to: dneelin@osstfd12.com.

Deadline for Articles

D12 Voice welcomes submissions from members. The deadline for the next issue is May 9, 2005. Articles should be emailed to: dneelin@osstfd12.com

Finetuning STBU needed

continued from page 2

cal Action, Human Rights, Communications, Status of Women, Gay/Straight Alliance, New Teachers, PD, etc.

And finally, another very time- and energy-consuming aspect to how the district is run is the annual elections. For a district our size and the amount of work that is put into running the elections, let alone the electioneering that goes on—not to mention politicking—elections should take place every two years rather than dragging the STBU through the present annual ordeal.

This whole concept will, of course, require much finetuning of STBU and District constitutions at the May AGM, not to mention the careful attention and adjustment that will have to be applied to the annual budget.

But if, in principle at least, we can agree that it is important to embark on this path for the good of District 12's future, then we can take a major step towards (1) advancing member identification with and participation in the union and in the democratic process, (2) increasing the number of elected leadership positions which helps in relieving EO workload, (3) allowing for an in-the-classroom voice to be present, heard, and counted at District 12 decision making, (4) broadening the leadership base to include certain groups of members that have traditionally not been able to participate, and (5) providing some stability with two-year terms of office which could hopefully help to focus debate and discussion in the district away from the ever-looming elections and the concomitant electioneering.

Upcoming...

The District 12 Office is located at 1482 Bathurst St., just north of St. Clair and Bathurst. Unless otherwise noted, meetings listed below are at the D12 Office, and begin at 4:30 p.m. For more information call, 416-393-8900.

Status of Women Awards Dinner

Thursday, April 21

STBU Council

Thursday, April 28

Political Action Committee

Monday, May 2

Communications Committee

Monday, May 9

Human Rights Committee

Status of Women Committee

Thursday, May 12

Gay/Straight Alliance Committee

Monday, May 16