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January 25, 2008

When asked to think about what I would like to write about in conjunction with what we have been discussing in class my mind wandered to the topic of professional “sick days.” Stemming from the conversation we had on “equality,” combined with the idea of “professional integrity” and “ethics,” I became interested in the subject.

Currently, the BCTF allows for multiple sick days to be taken in a given year without penalty. Understandably, in today’s culture of air-borne illnesses and poor driving habits, sickness and accidents are bound to occur, which makes these sick days a great idea. Not only do they allow ailing teachers to heal and recover without fear of losing their job, they also allow a teacher to avoid coming back too soon and delaying the healing process. Being used in such a way as this I support the idea of sick days. However, there is another side to the situation that is not as enjoyable.

Knowing some people in my life who have never once missed a day of work – either by virtue of unfailing-commitment to their job or sheer luck in avoiding ailments – I wonder how the sick days help *them*. As is the case with most unionized jobs that allow for sick days, there is no reward for **not** using them. If you come to the end of your career, nearing retirement, and you saved up five-hundred sick days to that point, you did so in vain. You do not receive a payout for these banked days, which means that individuals who **did** use their sick days, will have worked less – in some cases MUCH less than you – and be retiring at the same point, with the same compensation. How is this “equal?”

I suppose that the argument could be made that it is “equal” because the teacher that never missed a day has their health and the one who did miss has legitimate health concerns, but

from my experience and observations this system is abused to gross extents. Because you do not need a doctor's note to miss work, it is assumed that if you call in "sick," you are being honest, and are *honestly* sick. Unfortunately, not only can "sick" become a rather subjective analysis of many things, (ie. "I'm *sick* with a headache," or "I'm *sick* with a hangover") but "sick" can also become a code word for "not coming in to work." Those teachers who take sick days to spend them on a vacation, gardening their yard, or to catch-up on marking assignments and tests they did not make time for during their allotted work time directly abuse the system and the protection for which such allotments of leave time are given.

So, how do I suggest monitoring and running a system of professionals such as "teachers" when something controversial like "sick days" comes into play? I suggest two alternatives, both of which are sensitive to the needs of the ailing teachers **and** the teachers in perfect health. The first option I suggest is to scrap the title of "sick day," and change it to "flex day." Every member of the Teacher's Federation should then be allotted a certain number of "flex days" each year, to be used in whatever way they see fit. This does not in any way belittle the people who have legitimate health concerns and need to miss days of work to cope, nor does it cause abusers of the current system to remain abusers – they can now take legitimate days off to garden. This would also seem fair to those people who do not get sick and do not want to abuse the system – they can schedule in family time, or a holiday, or whatever and be permitted to miss work and not be penalized.

My other suggestion would be to alter the 90 year retirement rule, (you can retire when your combined age and years teaching total 90) and make it so it is now *day-specific*. What I suggest is taking each 192 day school year and base the whole time as "1 year," and do this until the time of retirement. This means that the person who has complete 10 years of sick-leave-free

service has done 1920 days, and a total of 10 years. The person who has taken 10 sick days each year over the same 10 years has only served 1820 – they now have to work an extra 100 days to receive the same standing as the person who has served the whole 10 years in full. I believe this solution would work because logically it makes sense. If you are on a contract to work “1 year,” why not change that to work “192 days.” This is easy to monitor, and does not give room for abuse – you are either there or not there each day. No one is punished for not going to work and those do not take days of leave will see the fruit of their labour sooner.