

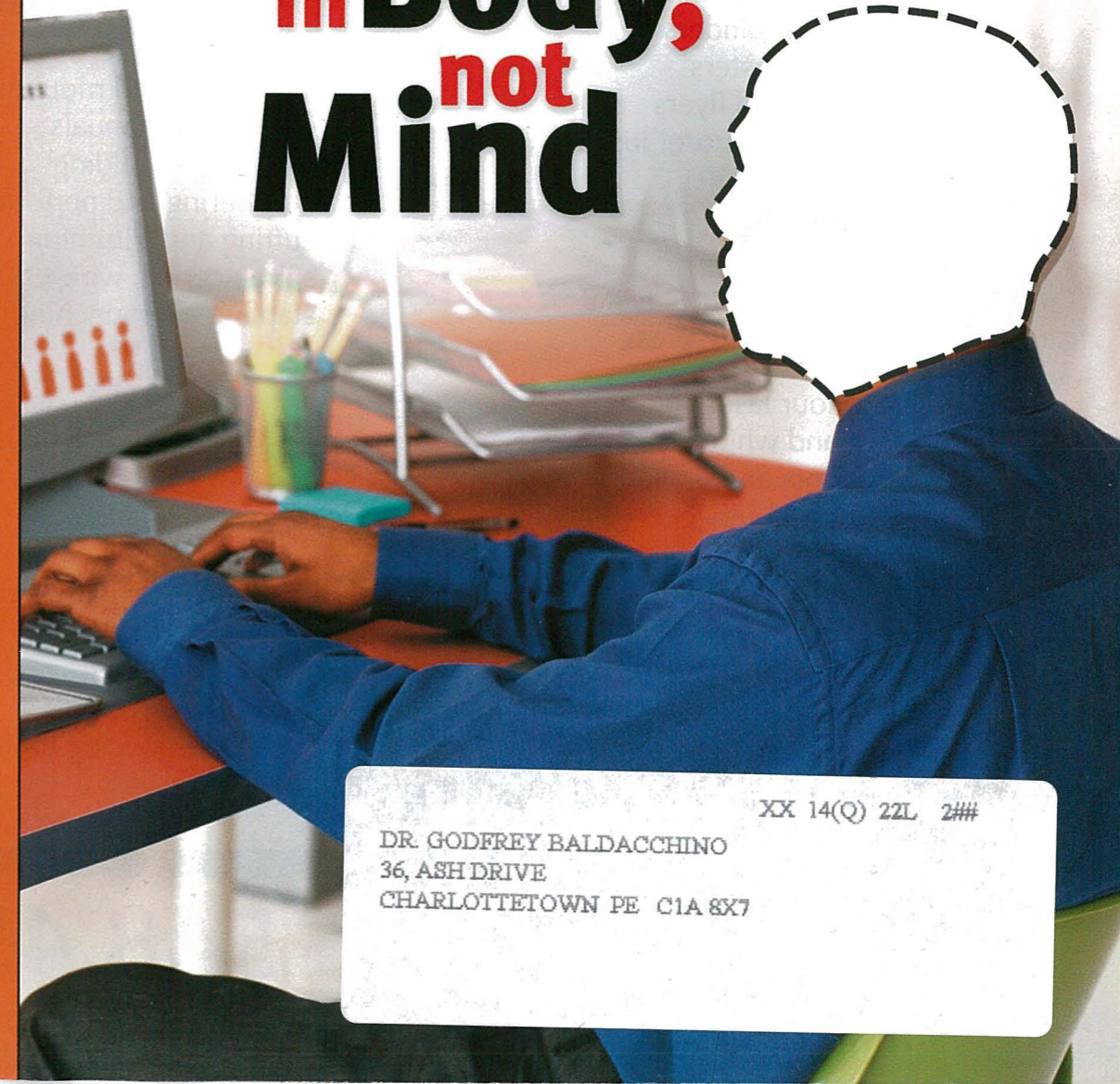


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## Presenteeism

### Present in Body, not Mind



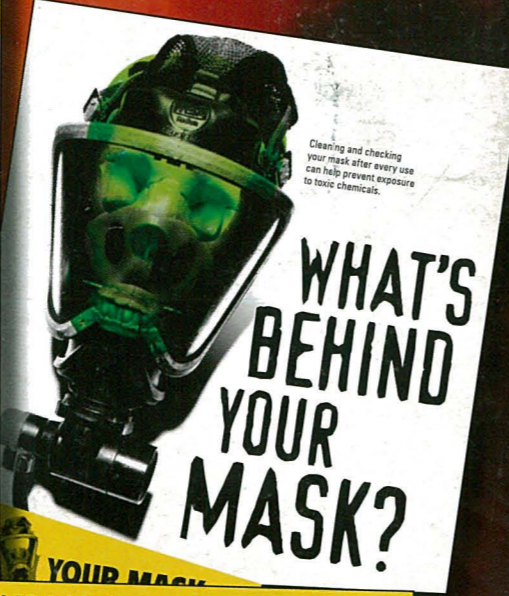
XX 14(Q) 22L 2##  
DR. GODFREY BALDACCHINO  
36, ASH DRIVE  
CHARLOTTETOWN PE C1A 8X7

# NEW CAMPAIGN AIMS TO REDUCE RISK OF OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE FOR FIREFIGHTERS

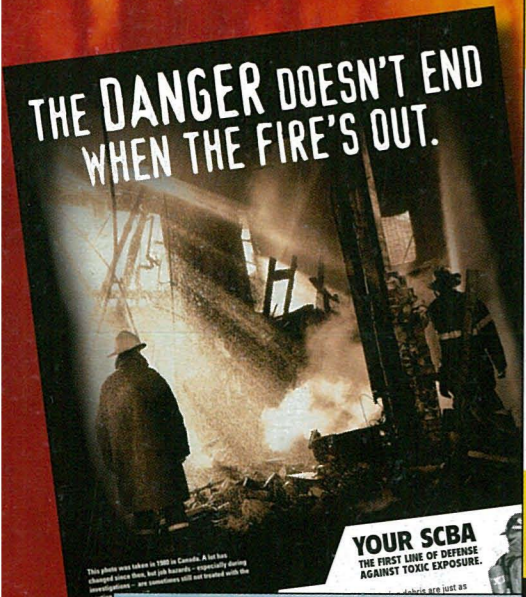
ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL.



**YOUR MASK**  
FIT IT. WEAR IT. CLEAN IT.



WHAT'S BEHIND YOUR MASK?  
Cleaning and checking your mask after every use can help prevent exposure to toxic chemicals.



THE DANGER DOESN'T END WHEN THE FIRE'S OUT.

**YOUR SCBA**  
THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE AGAINST TOXIC EXPOSURE.

YOU'RE NOT WEARING IT JUST FOR YOURSELF



HALF THE SIZE.

JUST AS TOXIC.

**YOUR SCBA**  
THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENSE AGAINST TOXIC EXPOSURE.

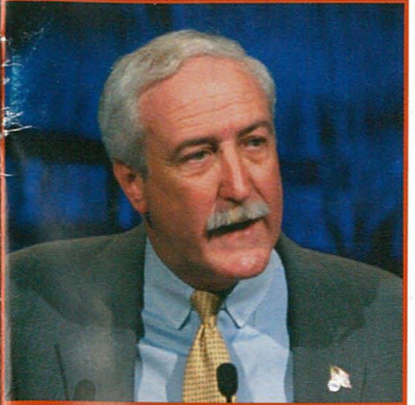
WHICH MASK WOULD YOU RATHER WEAR?



**YOUR MASK**  
FIT IT. WEAR IT. CLEAN IT.

These posters were developed to highlight important safety issues for firefighters. To find out more, please visit [wsib.on.ca](http://wsib.on.ca), [opffa.org](http://opffa.org), [torontofirefighters.org](http://torontofirefighters.org) or [prevent-it.ca](http://prevent-it.ca)

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Disaster Management  
NASA's Sean O'Keefe speaks

On the Picket Line  
A doctor's perspective

Gossiping  
Do's and don'ts

Staff Retreat  
Tips for success

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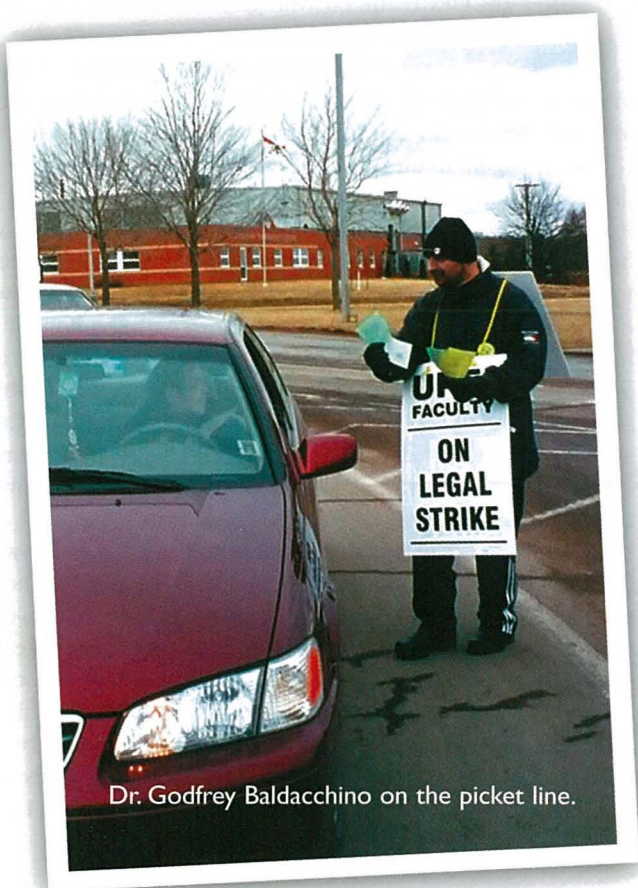
# Picket Line Labour

## On the Picket Line A Micro-View of Labour Relations

BY GODFREY BALDACCHINO, PHD

“One of the most contentious instruments available to trade unions is the right to strike. This is the legal withdrawal of labour, the equivalent of a lock-out by the employer.... Strikes and/or lock-outs hurt all sides and... should be strategies of the last resort. The threat of a strike or lock-out... is a powerful deterrent in itself—or should be. But it doesn't always work that way.”

**O**n March 21, 2006, I became a picketer. As a member of the faculty at the University of Prince Edward Island “on legal strike,” my colleagues and I were the objects of intense media interest. As local history buffs told



Dr. Godfrey Baldacchino on the picket line.

Photo courtesy of Margaret Mizzi.



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me, it was the first strike ever by a professional group in Canada's smallest province. But as the media blitz subsided and the strike wore on, opinions held by third parties started forming and becoming more articulate.

Some found our actions petty, unnecessary (especially on a small island that takes pride in how well people manage to get along), and even presumptuous ("a bunch of well-paid, under-worked professors who want to earn more and work less"). Others voiced their support with our stand for parity as the best safeguard for academic quality and competitiveness.

Faculty associations from other universities expressed their solidarity in words and deeds. Students walked the picket line with us. We distributed leaflets explaining our stand to passing traffic. We maintained high spirits and sought to share our sense of resolve. We argued our case on the local radio station and newspapers. Since we were heading inexorably toward the end of term, the pressure to reach a successful resolution was piling up. After an eventful 16 days, an agreement was finally struck, and students could breathe a sigh of relief.

Canada has the third most fractious industrial relations amongst the affluent and developed countries making up the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The country's strike rate—the number of days lost to labour disputes for every 1,000 employees—averaged at 180 days a year over 1995-2004. Only Iceland and Spain have fared worse. The OECD annual average over the same period is just 48 days lost per year.

These statistics invite critical reflection. Free marketers will complain that trade unions have too much power in this country; it should be easier for managers to hire and fire employees, improving the flexibility of the labour market and thus boosting both productivity and employment levels. They look to our big neighbour down south for inspiration. The less conservative argue that some managers and owners are simply intransigent: they refuse to honour contractual agreements, they try to avoid legitimate improvements in wages and conditions of employment, and even abuse opportunities for negotiation. In their case, the more union-friendly managers use Scandinavian countries, such as Norway and Sweden as role models.

One of the most contentious instruments available to trade unions is the right to strike. This is the legal withdrawal of labour, the equivalent of a lock-out by the employer, which is the legal withdrawal of capital. Strikes and/or lock-outs hurt all sides—workers, investors and clients—and therefore presumably, they should be strategies of the last resort. The threat of a strike or lock-out, the argument goes, is a powerful deterrent in itself—or should be. But it doesn't always work that way.

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When a legal strike is declared, most eyes turn to the negotiations between the representatives of workers and owners; or to the (often frantic) attempts at mediation or conciliation. Meanwhile, for those not directly involved in this often protracted battle of wits, stamina, resolve and strategic positioning, another drama unfolds on the picket line. Interesting things happen, and opinions gel, harden and get confronted.

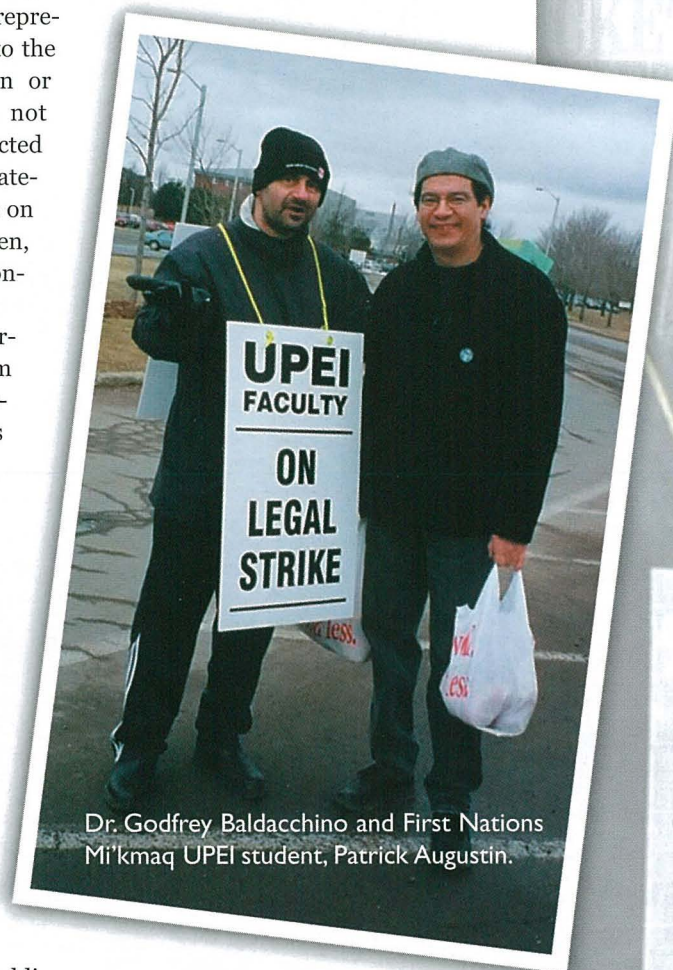
Strikes are formative, even transformative events. Vladimir Lenin saw them as “schools of war,” revealing to workers the basic wickedness of a heartless capitalist system. Less dramatically, strikes compel workers to “walk a picket line” at the entry of the workplace, a fuzzy boundary that workers patrol for mainly two reasons: to prevent, disrupt or discourage other workers from entering their same workplace (and possibly taking over their jobs), but also to engage with the public in a media campaign.

The role of public opinion in a strike is probably grossly underestimated. In high-profile job actions (as involved the NHL, Telus, CBC and Truckers at the Port of Vancouver in recent years) much may be determined by the sway of public opinion in favour or against the strikers. This is where the communicative aspects of the picket line are drawn to centre stage.

It is easy to assume that it is now business as usual, as if my strike never happened. Wrong. I met many of my colleagues on the picket-line for the first time and made new friends; I discovered the power and pride of solidarity, and I appreciate my job much more. I am more than ever persuaded that the world is made of people who turn up, and who stand up to be counted. Moreover, I now know that an effective propaganda campaign is crucial in a job action situation. The whole point of a strike is that, through the hardship and disturbance it causes, considerable pressure is brought to bear on both workers and owners to abandon “non-negotiable” positions and move to some acceptable agreement—preferably one where both sides can claim victory. A well-organized strike action can galvanize public sympathy and exacerbate a particular set of negotiated outcomes. **vw**

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**Dr. Godfrey Baldacchino** is Canada Research Chair (Island Studies) at the University of Prince Edward Island. His research interests include labour relations.



Dr. Godfrey Baldacchino and First Nations Mi'kmaq UPEI student, Patrick Augustin.

