

Ontario teachers require a socialist program to defeat austerity, defend public education

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For the first time in over two decades, 200,000 Ontario teachers and school support staff are united in a province-wide walkout.

Today's one-day strike is part of a global upsurge of the working class against capitalist austerity, social inequality and imperialist war. Teachers have been in the forefront of this growing counter-offensive. Since 2018, a wave of teachers' strikes has swept five continents, from the United States to Argentina and India.

This is because everywhere capitalist elites are determined to gut public education, as part of their drive to dismantle all public services and eviscerate the social rights of the working class so as to swell investor profit.

The establishment parties—most notably the Liberals, Conservatives, and NDP—are working in tandem to impose this class war agenda.

Behind a smokescreen of phony progressive rhetoric, the union- and NDP-supported minority Trudeau Liberal government is diverting tens of billions of dollars from health care to fund new fleets of warships and warplanes. Moreover, it is integrating Canada ever more fully into Washington's wars, "regime-change" operations and its "strategic competition" with nuclear-armed Russia and China, all with the aim of advancing Canadian imperialism's predatory commercial and strategic interests.

Meanwhile, a cabal of avowedly hard-right provincial governments in Ontario, Quebec and Alberta are spearheading a new austerity wave, targeting public services and the wages and jobs of the workers who administer them.

The Trump wannabe Ontario Premier Doug Ford is savaging public education. This attack includes: close to \$1 billion per annum in education spending cuts,

class size increases, the imposition of mandatory e-learning classes and the elimination of 10,000 teaching jobs. Quebec's CAQ government has just pushed through legislation (Bill 40) abolishing school boards so as to centralize power in the province's Education Ministry to force through spending cuts and attack seniority rights.

Teachers must recognize that their struggle is at heart a political struggle and this for two reasons.

First, the struggle to defend public education is a struggle over how society's resources are to be distributed. The claim that there is "no money" for essential public services is a lie. But to mobilize the necessary resources requires a systematic assault on the wealth of the capitalist elite and the reorganization of socioeconomic life in order to make fulfilling social needs, not private profit, the animating principle.

Second, big business is enforcing its class war agenda through its hirelings in government, and its courts and police.

Behind the sham contract negotiations, Ford and Education Minister Stephen Lecce are readying legislation to criminalize all teacher job-action. Already last November, the Conservatives rammed through Bill 124, which imposes real-dollar wage and benefit cuts on more than one million public sector workers each year for the next three years.

The unions' claim that a head-on clash between teachers and the Ford government can be avoided by rotating walkouts is a lie.

To prevail, teachers and their supporters must systematically broaden the struggle and mobilize the immense working-class opposition to Ford and the entire austerity agenda of the capitalist elite.

An unlimited province-wide teachers strike must become the catalyst for a political general strike to

bring down the hated Ford government, and for the independent political mobilization of the working class across Canada in the fight for workers' power.

This struggle must not be entrusted to the teachers' unions, the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), Unifor and their NDP allies. On the contrary, it will be mounted only if teachers, school support staff and other workers take the struggle into their own hands through the formation of action committees independent of, and in political opposition to, the pro-capitalist union apparatuses.

The teachers' unions have done everything to divide and demobilize teachers, with each pursuing its own bargaining and "mobilization" strategy. The contracts of teachers and support-staff workers expired almost six months ago, and last fall they voted massively for strike action. Yet today is the very first day that the unions have called any joint job action.

Like the OFL, they have issued no appeal for a common struggle to the hospital workers, college instructors, civil servants or any of the hundreds of thousands of other public sector workers targeted by Bill 124.

Most telling of all, the teachers' unions have maintained radio silence on the government's preparations to criminalize the teachers' and support-staff workers' struggle. Make no mistake, this is because they intend to invoke the government's adoption of a back-to-work law as the pretext for shutting down the teachers' struggle, just as unions across Canada have done for decades.

The upper-middle class layers who lead the unions and NDP are utterly opposed to the working class bringing down the Ford government, for it would undermine Canadian big business' "global competitive" position, destabilize capitalist rule and thereby threaten their own privileges. Their opposition is epitomized by the clock atop the front-page of the OFL website that counts down the days, hours and minutes to the election of a "progressive government" in 2022.

By "progressive government" they mean a pro-big business Liberal or NDP-led government, akin to the current federal Liberal government, or those that the unions supported for 15 years in Ontario under Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne, which imposed austerity, including pay cuts for teachers, while

slashing corporate taxes.

One of the essential characteristics of the global working-class counter-offensive—from the Yellow Vest movement in France and the wildcat strikes of the Matamoros autoworkers in Mexico to the US teacher strikes—is that it has developed outside and increasingly in conscious opposition to the corporatist unions and establishment "left" parties.

The other is its international character. Increasingly workers are recognizing that they constitute an international class involved in a global struggle against the transnational corporations that site production wherever returns are biggest, and against the imperialist powers, like Canada, that through aggression, intrigue and war secure markets, resources and positions of strategic advantage for big business.

These developments must become foundational to the strategy of the working class. Teachers and other workers need new organizations of struggle. Action committees, entirely independent of the unions, must be built to systematically mobilize the working class against the wide array of anti-working class measures introduced by Ford, prepare a general strike and defiance of any anti-strike law, and reach out to workers across Canada, in the US, Mexico and beyond.

Most importantly of all, the working class must constitute itself into an independent political force so it can impose its own solution to the crisis of global capitalism. This means building a revolutionary workers' party to prosecute the struggle for a workers' government and international socialism.

We urge teachers, students and other working people seeking to find a way to fight austerity, defend public education and other democratic rights, and oppose war to read the *World Socialist Web Site* and contact and join the Socialist Equality Party.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact