

Canadian educators support Ontario construction workers' strike for wage increases and improved workplace safety

Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
22 May 2022

Are you an education worker or a striking construction worker in Ontario? Contact the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee at cersc.csppb@gmail.com to help build a rank-and-file committee at your workplace.

The Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (CERSC) unequivocally supports the residential construction workers now on strike in Ontario. Over 40,000 house frame builders, floor fitters, demolition workers, crane operators and other trades are waging a courageous struggle against the greed of the construction and real estate corporations who profit massively from their labor.

While all sections of the working class are exploited, overworked and underpaid, construction workers face especially hazardous work environments. Accidents can have life-threatening consequences, and COVID-19 has been allowed to run rampant on construction sites over the past two years. Ontario's Doug Ford-led Conservative government declared construction workers to be "essential," so they could be excluded from lockdowns and compelled to continue pumping out profits for building companies and property developers throughout the pandemic.

The strike, which began with a walkout by labourers on May 1, is the largest job action by Ontario construction workers in 20 years. It is a significant expression of growing class struggle across Canada and internationally. Workers are standing up and saying enough is enough.

In the last three years two historic trigger events have intensified the class struggle worldwide. The first is the COVID-19 pandemic, which has officially killed over

40,000 people in Canada and continues to spread uncontrollably across the globe. The second is the US/NATO-provoked war in Ukraine, which threatens to escalate into a world war. The war has fueled a spike in the prices of essential goods already underway, driving gasoline above \$2/litre and sending the cost of everything else, especially groceries, skyward.

While the working conditions of a teacher, school caretaker or administrator may appear quite different from those of a demolition worker, crane operator or pipefitter, the reality is that we face the same problems. These include staggering inflation made worse by decades of wage stagnation, no protection from the ongoing and worsening COVID-19 pandemic and increasing health and safety concerns.

Construction workers build the homes, condos and apartments that education workers live in. They build and repair the schools we work in. Education workers teach the children of construction workers. Our interests are the same, so it is critical to support each other in our struggles.

Education and construction workers also share the roadblock of unions, led by well-heeled union bureaucrats who do everything they can to smother our struggles. Regardless if it is CUPE, LiUNA, Unifor or the teachers unions, the character of the labor bureaucracy is the same. The unions are incapable of fighting for what workers need because they are fully integrated into the capitalist state and act as the labor police to discipline workers in the interests of capitalist profits rather than the interests of the rank-and-file.

The teacher and education unions forced us to work in unsafe schools during the pandemic so governments could compel parents to go to work in COVID-infested

factories, offices and job sites to churn out profits for big business. Whenever we tried to act collectively to oppose these life-threatening conditions, union bureaucrats concerned more with safeguarding their well-paid positions in the pro-employer “labour relations” system than protecting our health told us that any struggle would be “illegal.” During our last contract negotiations in Ontario, they agreed to a 1 percent pay cap that has left us suffering severe pay cuts as inflation runs rampant.

We decided to form the Cross-Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee to fight these betrayals. Our committee consists of teachers, education assistants, caretakers and parents who demand an end to the “profits before life” pandemic policy and fight for improved working conditions for all education workers. We believe that our goals can only be achieved through the mass mobilization of working people internationally to put an end to the domination of social and political life by the super-rich.

Construction workers, like we education workers, are eager to wage a unified struggle to secure a paycheck that goes above inflation. They are also prepared to fight to reverse decades of cuts in concession-filled contracts enabled by LiUNA and other unions. But the construction unions are doing all they can to sabotage the strike, refusing to call out all trades at once and even dividing members of the same union local by ordering some of them to remain on the job. Their plan is to limit the impact of the strike as much as possible. If they can’t force through concessionary contracts before then, they intend to enforce Ontario’s anti-worker labour laws under which workers lose the legal right to strike as of June 15 and all contract issues still in dispute are automatically submitted to binding arbitration. Government-appointed officials will then be empowered to dictate workers’ terms of employment. Workers won’t even get a chance to vote on their so-called “collective agreement.”

If construction workers are to prevail against the government-backed construction bosses, they must take their struggle into their own hands. They can do this by building rank-and-file strike committees, comprised of workers who are sick and tired of being exploited by the construction companies, aided and abetted by their union labor policemen. These committees will allow construction workers to overcome the trade-

jurisdictional divides promoted by the unions, formulate their own demands and build a unified struggle with other sections of the working class in opposition to the anti-worker corporate/government/union partnership.

Once rank-and-file committees are established across broad sections of the working class, we can unite our committees in a common struggle for decent-paying, secure jobs for all and safe workplaces. These committees will form the basis to unify workers’ struggles in Canada with those in the United States and around the world through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. The Cross Canada Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee stands in solidarity with construction workers in their struggle and we are excited to work together with them in building a genuine and winning movement *of and for* the working class.



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