

“Education workers who fight for their fundamental rights and freedoms are on the right side of history”

Canadian teachers express solidarity with Ontario education support workers' struggle

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* has received letters from teachers across Canada expressing their solidarity with the Ontario education support workers' strike. On Friday, over 60,000 caretakers, education assistants, early childhood educators and administrative staff walked off the job to protest a draconian anti-strike law imposed by Ontario's hard-right Ford government and demand inflation-busting pay increases.

The letters were written prior to Monday's scuttling of the strike by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) without achieving any of the workers' wage and benefit demands, after Premier Doug Ford promised to rescind the strike ban and return to the collective bargaining process. Having secured the "right" of the union bureaucrats to negotiate sellout terms with Ford, CUPE succeeded in ordering all support staff back to work Tuesday without so much as a membership vote.

The letters underscore the fact that education workers enjoy mass support among teachers and the working class more broadly, which is precisely why CUPE called off the strike. The union bureaucracy was terrified that the strike could have triggered a general strike that would have escaped the control of the union apparatus and brought down the Ford government.

We encourage all education workers to contact the Ontario Education Workers Rank-and-File Committee at ontedrfc@gmail.com to build opposition to CUPE's scuttling of the strike and prepare to vote down the sellout agreement CUPE officials will cook up with Ford at the bargaining table.

Dear fellow education workers,

As a teacher, an education worker and a member of the Ontario Education Workers Rank-and-File Committee, I absolutely condemn the politically bankrupt strategy of the teacher unions to force their membership to scab on their colleagues in CUPE as they strike against the Ford government's attacks on public education and public education workers. The phony pretext that teachers have a "contractual obligation" to show up at work is a rotten betrayal of all workers and their families, who rely on public education. The fact that teachers have also been working without a contract since September 1st and that the CUPE education support staff contract will set a precedent for pattern bargaining across the industry exposes the bureaucracy's hypocritical posturing as they attempt to smother all independent political and social opposition to the social

counterrevolution being waged by the capitalist ruling elite worldwide, of which the Ford government is but one manifestation.

Teachers should reject this betrayal of their class interests and launch solidarity strikes to galvanize the struggle of their fellow colleagues and transform this courageous strike action into the spearhead of a mass movement of the working class to reverse the decades of attacks on public education, on health care, and on the social position of the working class as a whole, in Ontario, across Canada and across the world. In order to develop a winning strategy to guide this fight, I call on my fellow education workers to develop their own rank-and-file committees in every school and workplace to take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands and prevent the unions from leading this opening front in the class war to defeat at the hands of the Ford government and the repressive state apparatus. Workers must instead turn to their class brothers and sisters in every sector, from Go transit workers who are poised to strike on Monday to nurses overburdened by underfunded health care systems straining under the weight of the pandemic, to steel, rail and autoworkers who toil under unsafe conditions and who have also seen their wages swallowed up by spiralling inflation.

This mass movement must organize independently of all the major capitalist parties and the union bureaucracies with the perspective of mobilizing the entire working class around socialist demands and the call for a general strike to bring down the Ford government and link up with workers internationally to transform society to meet the needs of working people, not the profits of a parasitic capitalist oligarchy.

In solidarity,

Jake

Ken, a York Region teacher,

I am a high school teacher who works in a building that has over one thousand students and staff. My school cannot function without our educational assistants and custodial staff. My workplace is an important institution that serves our community. As I watch the education workers strike unfold in Ontario, I am filled with disbelief and disgust. We talk a lot about social justice, supporting one another, and grounding our work in caring for each other. These core principles are engraved all over the walls in my building. I am ashamed to say that right now these words and principles ring hollow with my union.

As my brothers and sisters from CUPE are vilified and are having their strike criminalized by the right-wing government of Doug Ford,

the OSSTF refuses to join the struggle and allow us to walk out in solidarity. Even worse, we are about to scab on our brothers and sisters by beginning synchronous online teaching as early as Tuesday. We are not currently under contract to teach remotely. We are under no obligation to undermine CUPE's strike by running online classes. How are we going to look our brothers and sisters in the eye after we betray their struggle? This is wrong on so many levels.

Doug Ford and his education minister Stephen Lecce have trampled on the collective bargaining agreement by criminalizing CUPE's strike and invoking the notwithstanding clause. There should be no more negotiations with Queen's Park. The government has taken the gloves off and threatens fines of up to \$4K a day on workers who make \$39K a year. This has become a political crisis and a do-or-die situation for families across Ontario. The gravity of the situation must be understood by everyone. Education workers cannot lose this fight.

CUPE is first. Next is ETFO (Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario), OSSTF (Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation) and OECTA (Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association). After the government is done imposing severe wage-cutting contracts with education workers, they will move on to health care and then to workers in the private sector. No strikes will be allowed. Wages will be suppressed for all workers, and everyone will fall behind even more as rising fuel costs, food prices, and the cost of living makes life harder for Ontario's working class.

The Conservatives, and all political parties for that matter, have absolutely no respect for collective bargaining or the welfare of anyone in education despite their rhetoric of putting students first. This is the same government that continues to force us to toil in COVID-infested schools every day. How many of our coworkers and students are continuously sickened with no end in sight? Unions have been complicit in this policy of mass infection from day one.

Are we really going to wait our turn to bend the knee to a government that has next to no popular support and who represents a clear and present danger to all workers? Less than 18 percent of all eligible voters chose the Conservatives in the last election. All their bluster and threats come from a position of weakness. We should all be out on the street refusing to go back to work until this reactionary government is broken and toppled full stop!

Teachers stand with CUPE on principle. I dare say the majority wants to join the fight! Social media is on fire with rank-and-file workers demanding that their unions do more. Yet it seems like the union bureaucracy is deliberately trying to hold back the desires of their membership to join the fight by insisting that doing so would be illegal and that our careers could be in danger if we did.

I do not accept this logic at all. Under these extraordinary circumstances where the right of a worker to withhold his labor is being criminalized, workers have no choice but to fight tooth and nail. At one point in history, it was illegal to consider a woman a person. Same-sex marriage was illegal. A person of color would be breaking the law by drinking from the wrong water fountain. When laws are unjust, they must be broken. History is rich with examples of those who stood on the side of right, and those who sought to maintain the status quo. Education workers who fight for their fundamental rights and freedoms are on the right side of history. We cannot stand by and watch the brutal criminalization of CUPE workers by the hard-right government of Doug Ford in good conscience. We must act.

For all education workers in Ontario now is the time to unite with our brothers and sisters in CUPE. We need to break free from the collective bargaining system that is stacked against us, push aside the

union bureaucrats that refuse to join the strike, and close ranks with all education workers in Ontario. Only we have the power to change our situation and stop the unprecedented attacks criminalizing workers right to strike. By forming our own education workers rank-and-file committees, new organizations of struggle that refuse to be divided by school board and job title, we will honor the meaning of worker solidarity. Only in this way will the core principles of justice, caring for each other, and supporting one another that are written on the walls of every school become reality for education workers.

Solidarity from British Columbia!

Workers from all over the world are watching our class sisters and brothers in Ontario wage their struggle against the powers of capitalist reaction. The trade union bureaucrats are setting the stage for a cowardly capitulation. Their only concern is the preservation of the collective bargaining agreement. To this end they will sacrifice all the interests of the working class, including safe workplaces and wages that at the very least match the cost of inflation.

Despite the fact that the Ford government has signaled its intention to abandon the collective bargaining process unilaterally, the bureaucrats' behavior reveals their true fears: an abandonment of the collective bargaining agreement by the working class. This is behind their refusal to call for solidarity strikes.

We can't waste a moment's breath appealing to capitalist authorities of any kind, including the NDP and Liberal parties. They grandstand and engage in theatrics in times of sharpened class conflict, but always side with the preservation of the economic profit-making system and the capitalists. Our appeal must be directed at other workers. Workers are a class, with shared interests. We are perfectly able to voice and express our interests, but we lack the political vehicle. That vehicle, going forward, must be the creation of rank-and-file committees throughout the country. These committees, formed on the office and shop floors, are new organs of worker power, organizations of workers by workers. They will replace the decrepit, teetering union bureaucracy, institutions tied to the capitalist nation state, and give expression to our hopes of peace and prosperity and chart a path to victory.

Malcolm

Will, a teacher from BC:

Invoking the notwithstanding clause against our CUPE brothers and sisters in Ontario is an attack on all workers. As a teacher in BC, I support their fight for what they need and would support a general strike.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)