

Ontario education worker urges workers across Canada to support the Quebec public sector workers' struggle

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The following statement was issued by a participant in the November 2022 “illegal” strike of Ontario education support-staff workers and is a leader of the Ontario Education Workers Rank-and-File Committee (OEWRFC). The OEWRFC was established during the 2022-23 contract struggle by 55,000 education support workers and 200,000 teachers to organize a rebellion of rank-and-file education workers against the union apparatuses, which connived with the right-wing government led by Premier Doug Ford to enforce concessions-filled contracts. You can contact the committee by emailing ontedrhc@gmail.com.

The Ontario Education Workers Rank-and-file Committee stands in solidarity with the public sector workers in Quebec and calls on all workers to support them.

In defending health care, education and other vital public services and opposing the austerity program implemented by Francois Legault and his right-wing Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) government, the Quebec workers are waging a struggle on behalf of all working people. They must also wage a fight against the union bureaucracy, which is allied with Legault and acts as the police force of the capitalist state by demobilizing the public sector workers' struggle. The union bureaucracy is determined to defend the capitalist system and our exploitation which produces the wealth of society and business profits.

Quebec workers must learn the lessons from other struggles across Canada, such as the Ontario education workers' strike in November of 2022 against the ultra-right Ford regime. Ford tried to trample over workers' democratic rights by using the anti-democratic “Notwithstanding” clause in the constitution to pre-

emptively ban our strike and impose a savage pro-government contract. Workers courageously resisted this onslaught on democratic rights by walking out in defiance of Ford's strike ban. But we were ultimately betrayed by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and Ontario Federation of Labour.

After the first day of the strike, which was a Friday, the union bureaucrats got a small glimpse of the social power of the working class and were scared to death of losing control of the situation. Over the following weekend, they begged the Ford government to rescind the strike ban and “come back to the table,” warning him of an explosive confrontation with the working class that could threaten to bring down his government. The entire union bureaucracy in the public and private sector led by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) was mobilized with the encouragement of the New Democratic Party and the NDP-supported federal Trudeau Liberal government to lobby the Ford government to repeal his draconian law.

Facing mounting calls among workers for a general strike, Ford and his hated side-kick Education Minister Stephen Lecce were persuaded by the union bureaucrats to announce that they would repeal the strike ban and return to the “bargaining table.” In exchange, CUPE and its Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU), at the encouragement and with the full support of all the unions immediately scuttled the strike. OSBCU President Laura Walton, who because of growing workers anger had made all sorts of promises of “open negotiations” and “rank-and-file” input, ordered workers to immediately return to work without a vote, a tentative agreement or any of the demands being met.

Once negotiations resumed behind closed doors, CUPE began making concession after concession. The sellout culminated in a rotten contract with real-terms pay cuts. For services rendered to the ruling elite in selling out workers, Walton was promoted by her fellow bureaucrats to the position of president of the Ontario Federation of Labour one year later. We encourage workers to review the *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage of the 2022 Ontario education workers' struggle carefully, including several statements and resolutions issued by our committee.

After the tentative agreement was announced, the OSBCU went on a propaganda campaign of lies and distortions to manipulate workers to agree to the deal against their interests. Well-paid CUPE national bureaucrats and their lawyers were brought in to lie and intimidate workers, warning them that if they rejected their sellout proposal they would be on their own and there would be no guarantee of getting a "better deal."

The union bureaucracy was determined to enforce yet another pro-government sellout deal after three decades of wage reductions and attacks on working conditions. Their determination flowed from the fact that the agreement upheld the collective bargaining system from which the bureaucracy draws its privileges.

The union bureaucracy in no way represents workers. They are organizations that depend entirely on the legal framework of the capitalist state and derive their privileges from the status quo and their collaboration with the government, whether it be led by Trudeau at the federal level, Ford in Ontario, or Legault in Quebec. They want to keep workers divided by region, language, and profession so they remain isolated in their struggles against the ruling class. My union, CUPE, also is the bargaining representative for tens of thousands of Quebec public sector workers. But the bureaucracy has maintained a deafening silence on your fight, even though the issues we face are fundamentally the same.

The assault on the public sector and its workers must also be seen in its international context. There's an explosive movement of strikes all over the world, and it is just the beginning.

Workers around the world are determined to fight to reverse poverty wages and ever-deteriorating working conditions and put an end to imperialist war.

The government is cutting public services,

impoverishing workers and stripping our democratic rights to pay for wars abroad, which include the Gaza genocide in the Middle East and the NATO-provoked war against Russia in Ukraine. These conflicts also includes provocations against China in the Indo-Pacific.

Wars do not benefit workers, we are always the ones paying for them with our lives and worsening living conditions. The international working class in Russia, Ukraine, China, the Middle East and throughout the world are our allies in the struggle against the assault on public services and the promotion of militarism and war, which are rooted in the death agony of capitalism.

We must wage a conscious political struggle against capitalism and its institutions. Rank-and-file Committees that are independent of all bourgeois parties and the union bureaucracy must be organized in every workplace. A committee of a handful of members is a great start towards building an organization that actually represents the independent interests of the entire working class.

The Quebec Public Sector Workers Rank-and-File Coordinating Committee is leading the way in establishing rank-and-file committees in all public sector workplaces to fight for real wage increases and improvements to working conditions, and mobilize support from workers across Canada and beyond. The full social power of the working class cannot be expressed without unifying all sections of workers in a counter-offensive against austerity, anti-strike laws, ever mounting social inequality, and for the socialist reorganization of society in Quebec, Canada and globally.



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