

November 4, 2013 - Vol. 2 No. 20

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Most Vulnerable Education Workers
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Government's Despicable Bullying of the Most
Vulnerable Education Workers Must Stop!

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Early in the afternoon on Monday, November 2 the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) announced that it had reached a tentative deal with the provincial government and the Council of

Trustee Associations for its 55,000 educational support staff who work for Ontario's various school boards. Shortly afterwards on the same day the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) announced that it had reached a tentative agreement for its teachers and occasional teachers as well and that it was instructing its members to end their work-to-rule action immediately.[1]

There are two remaining sections of education workers considered as "support staff" under the *School Boards Collective Bargaining Act* who still do not have a provincial tentative agreement, however, and require everyone's support. These are more than 15,000 education workers represented by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) and a smaller number represented by ETFO. These workers are employed in both the secondary and primary panels, as well as the administrative offices and plant facilities of Ontario's English and French public and Catholic school boards, providing vital services without which the system could not function nor ensure the needs of students are met, in particular youth with special needs. Support staff are generally the lowest paid section of education workers in the province with the most difficult working conditions. Like many who work in education, the majority are women. They constitute the most vulnerable section of education workers precisely because of their low pay and difficult working conditions.



Despite the deals announced between ETFO and CUPE, on November 2 the government announced that the school boards' associations could now go ahead and change employment terms. This means that local school boards are now in a position to start a process to implement the government's threat to dock education workers pay by 10 per cent. A similar move was carried out by the BC Liberals against striking teachers there when they started rotating strikes.

Now a section of education workers who have been screwed the most under previous imposed contracts is left standing without central contracts. Here is an example of how they have been screwed by the government, which in effect hurts the students in their care. In funding the province's school boards through the Grants for Students' Needs the government has typically permitted funds allocated for special education and early childhood education to be applied as each board saw fit. These are precisely the areas where most of these educational workers work. This method translated to allowing school boards to use these funding envelopes to fund other areas or to rig class sizes to minimize requirements for support staff while maximizing the number of "bums in seats."

The government claimed it was going to issue the permission to unilaterally alter employment terms in response to a request from the four provincial school boards' associations. However, the head of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA), Michael Barrett said that the boards under his jurisdiction were not planning to use that power at this time, despite the fact that the government had initially claimed it was the school boards which had requested that power. This raises the manner in which fraud, blackmail and outright bullying are the methods being used by public officials to coerce education workers to submit to the government's anti-social dictate of

"net-zero" contracts.

The clear intention of the government and school boards in issuing the threat was to try to force the unions representing teachers and education workers to submit. This is clear when one considers that according to the OSSTF, for almost a year the support staff they represent have only been allocated 12 days for negotiations by the government and school boards' association. Four of those only came after the government announced its arbitrary November 1 deadline for contracts to be in place before allowing boards to dock pay. This whole threat has nothing to do with ensuring the education system is functioning properly or facilitating negotiations or meeting the needs of the students, as the government and boards so self-servingly claimed.

Note

1. According to ETFO, the union's provincial executive will meet to approve the tentative agreement, followed by a meeting of all local presidents and chief negotiators to review the tentative agreement. This will then be followed by a province-wide ratification vote by members if the tentative agreement is approved by the executive.



Liberals' Disgraceful Mafia Tactics Against Education Workers

- Enver Villamizar -

The Minister of Education Elizabeth Sandals is quoted in the *Globe and Mail* as saying that the threat to give school boards permission to dock teachers and education workers pay if provincial agreements were not in place by November 1 helped focus the discussions. "I think they understood that we were actually serious," she said.

It is not legitimate in any way for a government and its ministers to act and speak like a mafia threatening public sector workers' livelihood in response to their determination to defend public education. The unions and their members know very well that the government is serious in its pursuit of austerity at the expense of public education and this is precisely why they refused to submit for an entire year. They have made it clear that they too are serious in ensuring that the education system is not undermined and that students' learning conditions are not attacked. For a government minister to state that a threat to dock pay from workers who are not only still doing their jobs, but in many cases also volunteer their personal time and money for the youth they teach and assist, somehow shows that the government is serious begs the question. What is the role of governments under the neo-liberal economic system when it is the unions that are serious about defending students' learning



conditions by defending their members' working conditions, while the government is only serious about threatening those who provide public services?

When it comes to global monopolies like U.S. Steel which run roughshod over communities and openly attack the province and its economic base, scam their way out of municipal taxes and retirees' pensions and benefits using court-sanctioned fraud, the same Ontario government and its ministers do not seem at all "serious" about acting to defend the public, the workers or the economy. Where is the threat to U.S. Steel to show that the government is serious about defending the rights of the people and their communities in places like Hamilton? On this there is only silence from the government, while it is the working people who speak out, showing that it is they who are serious about defending their country and the public interest. It is about time that the working people put themselves forward as the official opposition in order to ensure that one actually exists.



Statement from OSSTF President Paul Elliott on Support Staff Central Bargaining

- November 3, 2015 -

Yesterday, the Minister of Education gave consent to the Council of Trustees' Associations to unilaterally cut the pay of over 15,000 OSSTF/FEESO support staff members working in public and Catholic French and English school boards across the province. These are some of our lowest paid employees in the school system.

I want to put things into context for everyone today. The Ontario Government created and passed the legislation that has led to this long and cumbersome bargaining process. As per this new law, called the *School Boards Collective Bargaining Act*, we served notice to bargain for our support staff back in summer of 2014. Since that time we have had a total of 12 days of face-to-face bargaining at the central table. Four of those twelve days were last week AFTER the Minister of Education announced that November 1st would be the deadline for OSSTF/FEESO to get a deal or withdraw sanctions and keep bargaining. We have asked for multiple bargaining dates with the government and school boards, but have been given very few.

Frustrated with the lack of willingness to bargain, our members started a limited withdrawal of duties on October 5th. Our support staff members have only been involved in this job action for less than a month.

Let me tell you about who our support staff members are, because I am often frustrated that these members get left out by the politicians and the school board administrators when we talk about our publicly-funded education system. They are the ones keeping our schools safe and clean. They are the first voice you hear when you call a school. They are the one-on-one support for your children when they need special attention, whether it is in the kindergarten classroom through to our high schools and beyond. They support our teachers when it comes to implementing the curriculum and school programs. They fix and maintain the equipment that students use to support their learning. They keep your child's records organized. They provide language instruction to new Canadians.

Our support staff members perform so many other jobs in the education system, I could take hours to describe them all.

But what is most important to know about our support staff members, in the wake of the threat to

cut their pay in retaliation for less than a month of limited job sanctions, is that most of them are women and they are among the lowest paid workers in Ontario's publicly-funded education system.

It is beyond reasoning that a government would authorize this unprecedented action against these hard working support staff members instead of returning to the bargaining table. That is not fair and it is disrespectful.

OSSTF/FEESO remains committed to a negotiated agreement. The focus should be on a return to the bargaining table to address the outstanding issues and achieve a fair settlement.



Fraud About Transparency for Unions Hides Government Corruption

On November 2, just as the government announced it had reached tentative agreements with two more provincial education unions, head of the Treasury Board, Deb Matthews announced that the Liberal majority would support a motion put forward by the PCs that spuriously targets the unions. The motion proposes to have the Auditor General of Ontario audit the funds negotiated by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA) and the Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO) to offset the costs of the provincial-level negotiations which the government legislated last year. "We are supportive of having the Auditor General look at this," Matthews said.

The motion was tabled by PC MPP Lisa MacLeod at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and asks the Auditor General to determine where the government found the money for the payments and if they are "a fair and reasonable use of government resources." The Liberals' support for the motion means that it will pass.

The irony cannot be lost on many that the same Liberal government refuses to release information that the provincial Auditor General has specifically asked for to determine precisely how many hundreds of millions of dollars will be lost from provincial revenue when Hydro One is privatized. Thus the demand for "transparency" when it comes to the unions who are acting in the public interest to defend public education and their right to negotiate their members' wages and working conditions is used to try and present the unions as crooks. Meanwhile the government deliberately and openly hides how much it is going to hand over from the public purse to private interests in the sell-off of Hydro One.



Once again the Liberals and the PCs are uniting on an anti-worker basis, revealing what it is they have in common. This campaign is very similar to the manner in which the former Harper government passed the infamous Bill C-377 which imposes onerous and invasive accounting practices on unions that do not apply to anyone else, to try and prevent them from participating in politics. The same government used its majority to further politicize private interests by delivering whatever the monopolies demanded across the board. This included the slashing of environmental regulations, permitting rail monopolies to regulate themselves etc., etc. This attack on unions was also done in the name of "transparency" and "accountability" while the handing over of public authority to private interests was called "reducing red tape," or "improving competitiveness."

Clearly the Wynne government is singing from the same songbook as the Harperites. One wonders how soon it will be before the Trudeau government does the same -- all in the name of "fairness," "transparency" and "accountability" of course.



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