



September 23, 2024

Broad Resistance to Anti-Social Offensive in Alberta
No! to the Use of Ministerial Powers
to Violate the Rights of Fort McMurray
Education Workers



Edmonton rally, September 21

- **No! to the Use of Ministerial Powers to Violate the Rights of Fort McMurray Education Workers**
 - **Anti-Worker Process of "Dispute Inquiry Board"**
 - **Education Workers Take New Approach**

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Education workers represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees held lively and militant rallies across the province on September 21. Rallies took place in Fort McMurray, Calgary, Edmonton, Drumheller, Okotoks and Leduc to protest the Danielle Smith government's violation of the right of the Fort McMurray education workers to withdraw their labour. The day before their strike was to

begin, they were blocked from doing so when the government imposed a Dispute Inquiry Board.



Edmonton September 21, 2024

"Despite being forced into the Dispute Inquiry Board (DIB) at Fort McMurray, we are standing strong, demanding fair wages and better working conditions for education workers who have gone nearly a decade without a real wage increase. Enough is enough! We won't stop fighting for our schools, our students, and our livelihoods," CUPE Alberta says.

In addition to the rallies, Fort McMurray education workers walked picket lines at their schools at the beginning and end of their workday in protest at the government's move, and were joined by members of other unions.



Picket in Fort McMurray, September 17

The government claims the DIB finds "agreeable solutions" to a dispute. The aim of a DIB has nothing to do with finding "agreeable solutions." The aim is to break the momentum towards strike action, to allow employers to recruit scab replacement workers and carry out intimidation tactics, and to give employers, or in this case the government itself, time to work to undermine the proposed strike and try to

destroy public opinion in support of the workers. In the face of these tactics, the Fort McMurray education workers are standing strong, and are receiving widespread support while the government is condemned for its abuse of power.

The only "agreeable solution" is to ensure the needs of the teachers, education workers, administrative staff, custodial and maintenance staff and other support staff are taken care of. Their working conditions are students' learning conditions.



"The education workers of Fort McMurray schools have already turned down offers that would hurt the quality of education for students across the district. We are strong and united like never before. The Smith government has obviously been rattled by our determination and solidarity," said CUPE 2545 President Lynn Fleet.

"Our members haven't had a true wage increase in nearly a decade. We are struggling to make ends meet; some of us are working two and three jobs. This round of bargaining was our opportunity to correct those wrongs," said Danielle Danis, President of CUPE 2559.

Rory Gill, President of CUPE Alberta concluded: "If the Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade were truly committed to reaching a fair deal, he would immediately remove the wage directive that is holding back education wages and keeping workers in poverty."

The government has tied the hands of school boards and all employers who are wholly or partially funded by the Alberta government with its secret mandates which dictate what settlements can be made. The "dispute" is entirely of the government's own making, as it has starved the education system which now has the lowest per capital spending per student in Canada, abused education workers and further eroded classroom funding through its many pay-the-rich schemes.

"It's deeply disingenuous for the government to appoint a Dispute Inquiry Board while simultaneously tying its hands and refusing to allow the board to offer fair wage increases. The government's actions speak louder than their empty words," Gill said.

All Out to Support the Education Workers in Alberta!

Anti-Worker Process of "Dispute Inquiry Board"

The Alberta government website claims that a Dispute Inquiry Board (DIB) is established "when parties need neutral third-party assistance to resolve a dispute. By appointing a DIB, both parties have the opportunity to explore all avenues open to them to clarify the issues and find an agreeable solution without resorting to a strike or lockout. The parties may request a DIB but in most cases it is the Minister who initiates the action."

The law governing DIBs, brought in at the height of the assault on the building trades workers in 1988, gives the Minister the authority to issue a Ministerial Directive to establish a DIB, appoint its member or members, and, if more than one person, appoint the Chair. Once a DIB is established, strikes and lockouts are prohibited until at least 10 days after the Minister serves a copy of the DIB's recommendations to the parties, or, if the Board conducts a vote, which it can, until 72 hours after the Board notifies the parties of the results of that vote.

While the Act refers to a 20 day period for the Board to "effect a settlement" or send its recommendations to the Minister, that period can be extended by the Minister without any limit.

If the parties do not accept the recommendations, they must conduct a vote on the recommendations within 10 days.

Education Workers Take New Approach

More than 10,000 education workers represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) served notice to bargain to 41 school districts on June 26. CUPE represents administrative staff, educational assistants, custodians, and construction and maintenance workers in the schools.

CUPE Alberta President Rory Gill stated that the locals are taking a new approach this time. "We're not going to let the province pick us apart one school district at a time. Our members are determined to get the respect they deserve," Gill said. The locals are working very closely together and are determined to stand together to put an end to poverty level wages and achieve their demands for compensation acceptable to them and which recognizes their work and important contribution to the education of our youth.

Education workers in Alberta make an appalling average of \$34,000 a year, with education assistants averaging \$27,000 a year. Most have had no wage increase for the past eight years. CUPE Alberta points out that since 2013, real wages in Alberta (weekly income accounting for inflation) has fallen by \$142 per week for educational services; by \$112 per week for health care and social assistance; and by \$67 for utilities workers.