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Education Is a Right!

Discussion of the MLPC Platform

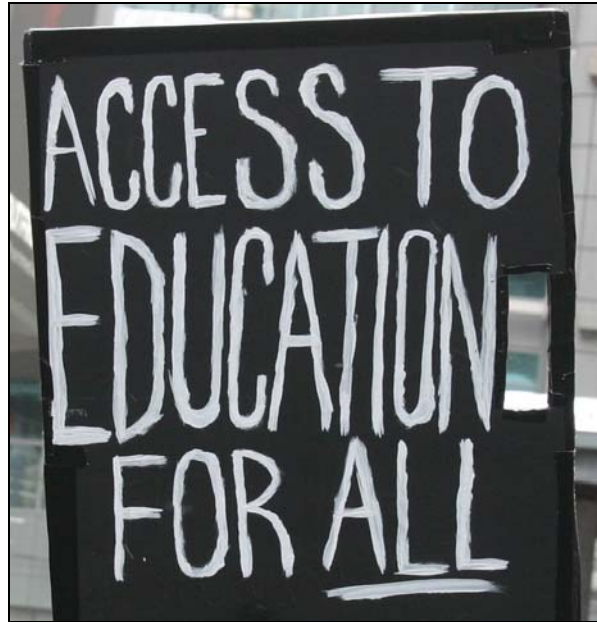


Education is a right. This is pretty much accepted by everyone in today's world but what does it mean? How is this right defined and how can it be enforced? One thing is for sure -- defining and enforcing this right are a necessity. Without providing the coming generations with an education commensurate with the level required by societies and the world today, how can we possibly bring into being the kind of future we want?

But who decides what is needed by societies today? Who decides the content and funding of education? What forms of social, political and other culture are the youth imbued with through the education system? What about settling scores with the old conscience of society such as the cruel discrimination in the case of Indigenous children and families and the systemic racism they face? Or the discriminatory ways in which children from immigrant families and other backgrounds are treated or how the Canadian economy exploits international students as cash cows -- to the tune of \$19 billion in the case of "visa students"? How does the education system assess and deal with the problems of adolescence and growing up and their many related matters?

Do these issues and how they are dealt with by governments at all levels support the educators, schools, communities, and most importantly the youth or are they used to divide us? Do they treat the youth as human beings with rights or just as categories of "things" to be targeted for reward or punishment and the consumption of "things" according to values nobody has discussed and decided for themselves?

An education system is financed to educate and train youth according to the needs of an economy. When that economy is in the hands of a tiny financial oligarchy, which is self-serving to the extreme, the direction of the economy and the education system is set according to the very narrow private aims of the oligarchs in control. How do we as educators and others concerned with education and the youth deal with this reality?



In the field of education, what governments see fit to provide is controlled by the narrow private aims of those who own and control the economy, and in particular the companies that produce and sell everything in the education market. This includes the necessary infrastructure, buildings, computers, furnishings, textbooks and equipment of all kinds. But the tentacles of these private interests reach well beyond this to what kind of workers they want produced for their labour market. The control of these powerful private interests extends to the curriculum, programming, demands for research and importantly the aim of the education system itself.



The aim of those who direct the education system from the top is to serve the private interests of those in control of the economy, the financial oligarchy. The aim coming from the top means that the educators and youth are put under tremendous pressure to obey and fit into this anti-social atmosphere of serving narrow private interests and their market including their labour market. They are forced to "fend for themselves" and "do whatever it takes" to secure a niche for themselves in the education system and labour market the financial oligarchs control.

However, try as they might, these narrow private interests do not and cannot control the people. Try

as they might, they cannot force the educators and support workers, parents and students to agree with them and willingly succumb. This is their problem and society's great asset. While getting an education is a source of constant worry for the younger generations because of the cost and the dog-eat-dog, everyone-fend-for-themselves culture, many youth are defying this dictate in order to build a bright future for themselves. While the degeneration of the system of education is increasingly stressful for teachers, education workers, principals and parents; they are courageously and with tremendous dedication and determination finding ways and means to say *No!* to the cutbacks, privatization, dictate and imposition of unacceptable aims and conditions. Even administrators, who are hired and pressured by those who have their fingers in the education pie to run schools, colleges and universities like private businesses whose main aim is to make money for all and sundry are speaking out despite threats of job loss and other forms of reprisal.

This resistance, this refusal to give in, this spirit of saying *No!* when necessary, makes the unity in action among educators, support staff, students and parents life-giving and important. It makes the demands and claims of those who work and live in the field of education -- educators, students, parents and others -- life-giving and important.

The educators are professionals who have taken up a duty to society, to their students and to themselves. When they speak about their conditions of life and work and the problems in the field of education as a result of cutbacks and lack of funding or the self-seeking demands of the powerful private interests, their voices are worth more than gold. We should listen to them and support them when they fight to affirm their rights and speak in their own name.



We need a society that provides rights with a guarantee including the right to education because we need enlightened teachers, education workers, schools, colleges and universities to help raise our children and open a path forward for the progress of society.

(Photos: RU, C. Glover)

Laura Chesnik, MLPC Spokesperson on Education and Related Affairs

Laura Chesnik is the MLPC spokesperson on education and related matters. She is a teacher in Windsor, Ontario. She is a union activist, a mother, a sports coach, a worker politician and a champion of the rights of all to achieve security, prosperity and peace. She organizes Canadians to decide matters for themselves and speak in their own name. She takes initiatives with her colleagues and peers to smash the silence on the working conditions of educators and their striving to empower themselves so that the anti-social trend is ended. She collaborates with others to provide the information people need to draw warranted conclusions and take stands that favour them.



Laura works with others to provide forums for educators, support staff, students and parents to speak out and engage in discussion. Examples of these discussions on the topic of education and related affairs can be found at a podcast she co-hosts at <http://edisaright.ca/>. The discussions show what can be done nation-wide and in every sphere of endeavour to open a path for society's progress. The podcast stands in stark contrast to the crass electioneering and wasteful spending spree for votes and power engaged in by the parties which form a cartel party system and vie to form the next government to serve the narrow private interests of the financial oligarchy, which the people are striving to stop from running rampant.

Discussions help listeners sort through what is significant and what is not. Significant issues include who decides the content and direction of education and

the role it plays in society; how should the wages and working conditions of educators and support workers be decided; how do we as a society guarantee the right to education for all; and, how to solve the problems caused by the privatization of all aspects of education and the pressure this puts on everyone involved and society. Such discussions provide a means to unify those who are striving to end the anti-social offensive and turn things around in favour of the present and future generations. Join In!

Laura Chesnik is also the MLPC candidate in Windsor-Tecumseh. She can be reached by email at mlpc@cpcml.ca or by telephone at (519) 982-3708

BC Teachers Resist NDP Government's Demands for Concessions

- Barbara Biley -

Forty-three thousand BC public school teachers, members of the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) returned to their classrooms on September 3 without a collective agreement in place, as a result of unacceptable demands by the NDP government.

In February 2019, BCTF negotiators began bargaining with the provincial government and the BC Public School Employers' Association, representing the province's 60 school districts. The BCTF's goal was to negotiate a new collective agreement by June 30 when the old contract expired. The teachers are seeking acceptable salary increases. During the more than two decades long anti-social offensive waged by



BC Teachers Day of Action, February 27, 2012

Liberal and NDP provincial governments, BC teachers' salaries have fallen behind other provinces.

The teachers are also seeking improvements in working conditions, which are the learning conditions of their students. In 2016 following a long legal battle against the former BC Liberal government, the BCTF won a court case at the Supreme Court of Canada that restored provisions in the collective agreement related to class size, class composition and specialist teacher staffing ratios. The government had unilaterally and illegally eliminated those provisions in 2002, leading to 15 years of teacher layoffs, cuts to specialist teachers, increased class sizes and fewer supports for students with special needs. According to the BCTF not all the damage caused by years of cuts has been rectified so improvements in some key areas such as consistent provincial standards for class size and composition are needed. As of February 2019, more than 300 teacher positions were still unfilled in BC, which must be addressed during negotiations.

The employer's initial proposals tabled in April ruled out any settlement by the end of June. According to former BCTF President, Glen Hansman, the government proposals would make class sizes larger in many provincial districts, "would remove each and every word of the class composition language" and "would take us backwards" resulting in cuts to teaching supports for students on Vancouver Island, the Fraser Valley and the Lower Mainland. Premier John Horgan responded that the proposals were meant to "modernize language not to take away rights that were hard fought for."

After the expiry of the old contract and with negotiations at an impasse, the Labour Relations Board appointed a mediator. Eight days of mediated negotiations took place in August. New BCTF President Teri Mooring stated beforehand, "So there is no reason why we can't get a deal in those eight days." However no progress was made so the mediator called for a "recess" until September 23. Mooring says a negotiated settlement can be reached and that no vote on job action has been authorized at this time. Local associations will be holding membership meetings during this period to take stock of the situation. She vowed, "Rolling back our restored [contract] language is not something we will entertain" and "concessions need to come off the table."



Barbara Biley is the MLPC candidate in the Vancouver Island riding of Courtenay-Alberni.

Oil Executives Spill All Over Alberta's Post-Secondary Education

- Dougald MacDonald -

Alberta's United Conservative Party (UCP) government on August 16, suddenly fired 43 board of governor (BoG) members of Alberta's universities, colleges, and technical schools who had not yet completed their terms. The government replaced them with its own favourites, including nine new BoG chairs. Most of the new appointees are energy executives from foreign oil monopolies. The Minister of Advanced Education claims those newly chosen, after the mass firings, were appointed

solely based on "merit."

The Minister makes clear that the new appointments reflect the UCP's conception of post-secondary education. The concept has nothing to do with creating critical thinkers or responsible citizens who participate in democracy and contribute to the betterment of society. Instead, its sole purpose is to provide training for future employees and research for corporations, funded by public money. The Minister said: "These new appointees will help our institutions build strong relationships with industry to ensure that we are getting better labour market outcomes."



The nine new UCP appointees to occupy BoG chairs will fill each institution's most powerful position. According to the University of Alberta website, "The conduct, management, and control of the University and all its property, revenue, business, and affairs are vested in the Board."

Four of the new BoG chairs, their corporate position and the post-secondary institution are: Kate Chisholm, University of Alberta, Senior VP for U.S.-controlled Capital Power; Geeta Sankappanavar, University of Calgary, President of Grafton Asset Management; Alex Pourbaix, Mount Royal University, CEO of foreign-controlled energy monopoly Cenovus; and Nancy Laird, Athabasca University, Senior VP for Encana Corporation.



All appointments were made without consulting a single student, faculty or support staff member, any other education worker or anyone active in post-secondary education or concerned with its direction. This raises once again the fundamental question: "Who decides?" Who decides what role our educational institutions play in society and their direction? What part should the students, faculty, support staff, education workers and others play in educational decision-making?

This latest fiasco clearly shows what it means when narrow private interests have control over the society's institutions such as government and continue to make the important decisions about post-secondary education and other crucial affairs that affect the lives of everyone. In opposition, many thousands of post-secondary education

workers and their allies are outraged and are firmly of the mind that "We decide!" Such a change in direction requires people becoming involved in politics and taking control of their lives and society. Empower yourself now!

Dougal MacDonald is the MLPC Candidate in Edmonton Strathcona.

Rally Opposes Alberta Government Interference in School Curriculum Renewal



About 350 people rallied on the steps of the Alberta Legislature on August 28, to protest government interference in the renewal of school curricula and the exclusion of Alberta teachers from any further involvement. Rally speakers included teachers, Indigenous educators and students, and the former Minister of Education.

On August 16, the government arbitrarily ended an almost three-year collaboration with teachers aimed at updating outdated curricula documents, e.g., the elementary science curriculum is 23 years old. A month previous, the government cancelled fall testing of the new K-4 draft, which hundreds of teachers had worked on. The Alberta Teachers' Association president explained the crucial role of teachers: "Teachers live the curriculum; they know what works and what doesn't work in today's diverse and complex classrooms. Ultimately, if a curriculum does not work for teachers and support student learning, it will fail and, for us, failure is not an option."

Minister of Education Adriana LaGrange claimed the government ended the collaboration with teachers because, "There are many partners within the education system that have a role in determining what Alberta students should learn. It is important that we open up the process so that more stakeholders are involved." This of course is code for turning decision-making over to powerful elements in the private sector.



To replace the teacher-government collaboration the United Conservative Party (UCP) hand-picked a 12-person review panel, which seems aimed at ensuring the new curricula are not "subversive." A former Edmonton school superintendent leads the panel. He is a fellow of the corporate-funded

Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS), a "think tank" promoting market-based principles of education, including charter schools, P3 schools, and privatization of the profitable aspects of education.

The rest of the members of the UCP review panel have never taught school. Fans of private, charter, and faith-based schools dominate. A U.S. educator who advocates "school choice," a neo-liberal euphemism encompassing school vouchers, charter schools, and private school scholarships, is also a member.

Further, while a major current priority in education is to implement recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in order to decolonize education, the UCP review panel does not include a single First Nations, Métis, or Inuit person. This is in stark contrast to the original consultation process which included a number of Indigenous teachers and educators.

The UCP Review Panel's main job appears to be to ensure that the new curricula fit with UCP ideology. The predictable scenario is that after the panel "cleanses" the curricula, the UCP will claim credit for all the hard work already done by the teachers and K-12 education experts over the past three years. Meanwhile the government and its functionaries will continue to push the reactionary neo-liberal education agenda as hard as they can. Already, it has dumped Bill 9 on teachers attacking their collective agreement and suggestions abound that government-controlled wages for education workers and cuts to overall education funding are imminent.

(Photos: RU)

The Just Demands of Université du Québec à Montréal Support Workers



As a result of their militant stand in defence of their just demands, support workers at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) managed to secure a new collective agreement which incorporated their demands to negotiate wages themselves. At a general membership meeting held on September 19, they voted 87 per cent in favour the tentative agreement reached earlier in the week between the UQAM administration and the Syndicat des employé(e)s de soutien de l'UQAM (SEUQAM), thereby ending their strike which began on September 3.

Wages was one of the main reasons they went on strike. UQAM had offered wage increases between 2019 and 2025 based on government wage policy (PSG). This refers to the wage increase rate in the public sector to be negotiated between the government and the sector's unions, which is not even known yet. Workers refused and demanded definite wage increases. The ratified agreement provides set wage increases for 2018 and 2019, and a guarantee of wage increases equal to or higher than what public sector workers will be able to negotiate with the government.

The union reports that workers were also able to negotiate improvements in clauses related to work-family balance, sick days and overtime pay.

"Our members are proud of having mobilized to get a guaranteed minimum wage increase threshold and to avoid being totally dependent on the PSG," said SEUQAM President Louisa Cordeiro.

Workers held several actions to push forward their just demands.



On September 12, over 2,000 people took to the streets of Montreal in support of their fight. As 2019 marks UQAM's 50th anniversary, the union used the occasion to organize the protest under the theme: "UQAM: 50 Years of Solidarity." They clearly pointed out that their working conditions have a direct impact on students' living and learning conditions, as well as on the entire academic community.

The action included a march that began at UQAM's Place Pasteur and continued along Ontario Street, ending on Fullum Street, where the offices of Quebec's Education Ministry are located. The protest brought together many workers from other unions who came out to march with them, as well as a significant number of students. "Support staff are indispensable. They require better working conditions to be able to provide us with better learning conditions," one student remarked. "The refusal of UQAM's administration and the Treasury Board to look at the reality and the justness of their demands is unacceptable." Many passers-by, supporting their demands, cheered them on.

SEUQAM President Louise Cordeira had this to say at the action: "We want to continue contributing to our institution's development. However, to be able to retain the members of various working groups, whether they be professionals, technicians, office workers or trades and services employees, they must be treated properly, which also means decent salaries."

(Photos: RU)