

December 4, 2019

**Albertans Mobilize Vigorously Against Kenney Government's
Stepped Up Anti-Social Offensive**

Community Builders Stand Against Kenney's Wrecking

- Peggy Askin -



Ontario Educators Say No! to Government Dictate

- **Workers Hold One-Day Province-Wide Strike - Mira Katz**
- **Elementary Teachers on Phase One of Work-to-Rule**

British Columbia

- **UFCW and Taxi Associations Launch Legal Challenges Against Uber and Lyft - Anne Jamieson**

**Workers' Fight to Hold Quebec Government to Account for
Anti-Worker Measures**

- **Government's Unacceptable Position on Training Standards for Crane Operators - Pierre Chénier**
- **Changing the Reality on the Ground - Interview, François Patry, President, National Brotherhood of Carpenters, FTQ-Construction Local 9**

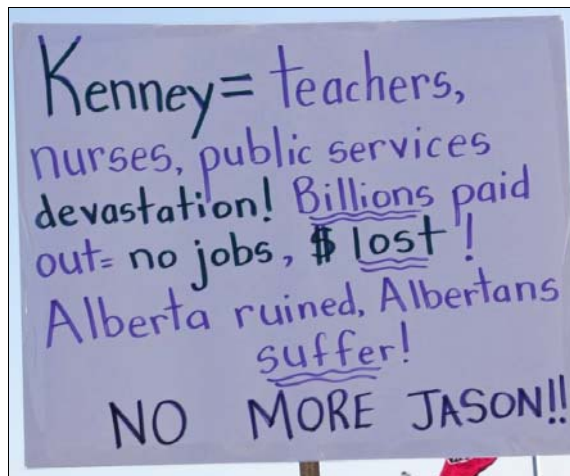
**Albertans Mobilize Vigorously Against Kenney Government's
Stepped Up Anti-Social Offensive**

Community Builders Stand Against Kenney's Wrecking

- Peggy Askin -



A militant rally organized by Alberta Forward in a Progressive Canada, CUPE Alberta and Support Our Students took place outside the Westin Airport Hotel in Calgary where the United Conservative Party (UCP) was holding its annual general meeting. About 1,500 people attended despite the bitter cold and isolated location. Teachers, students, and parents, nurses and other health care workers and professionals, seniors, and people from all walks of life and virtually every sector of the economy participated in the rally. They came, as one speaker said, as community builders, to oppose wrecking, to speak in their own names about the impact of the Kenney government's anti-social offensive, and to demand that all the anti-social measures be reversed. With signs and banner, chants and speeches, they expressed their determination to turn things around.



The rally showed that people do not accept the claim of the Kenney government that it has a "mandate," are not disoriented by the government's shock-and-awe tactics, and are vigorously and militantly defending their rights and the rights of all. For many, it was their first time participating in such an event, and the day was filled with the spirit that it is up to all of us, and together we will build the resistance.

In a very successful and innovative approach, the rally was organized with alternating open mic sessions, and marches circling the hotel. The first speaker was a teacher who set the tone for the rest of the day by speaking about how important it was to work together. A large contingent of teachers took part to say *No!* to planned layoffs taking place across the province, including 300 Calgary teachers on term contracts who will lose their jobs, and to affirm their fight for their working conditions that are student learning conditions.

Nurses were also out in force. The day before the rally, Alberta Health Services announced in a meeting with the United Nurses of Alberta leadership that at least 750 registered nurses will be laid off over several years in a massive "downsizing," eliminating over one million hours of care. Health care, education and other public sector workers from the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE) marched together. They too had received a letter stating that up to 6,000 jobs, many in health care will be eliminated or contracted

out.



Nurses, teachers, health and other public sector workers, students, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped recipients, and many concerned citizens spoke about how they will be affected by this anti-people offensive, and that it is up to all of us to build the resistance.

Teacher and rally organizer, Stephanie Quesnel, explained the impact of the cuts and how they will impact class size and specialized care, while cuts to health care will result in limited staffing, increased wait times, and decreased quality in care. "I hope [Kenney] realizes that it's not a minority, it's a huge majority, that are against these

cuts and this isn't what we voted for. If people voted for the UCP, this was not on the platform so it's coming as a surprise to many people," she said. "We've been awfully loud. If he isn't listening, then he isn't listening to a really large chunk of Albertans because there is a shift happening and they have to listen."

Vice President of AUPE Local 71 Bobby-Jo Borodey, said, "It doesn't matter what union you belong to, what group you are associated with, all that matters is that you are an Albertan and this government has waged war on the people of this province. Your fight is our fight. Our fight is your fight and, together, we will be stronger and together we will win."

Gil McGowan, President of the Alberta Federation of Labour, did not mince words. "People are losing their jobs. Instead of jobs they have given us the destruction of jobs. Everyone should be prepared to join us on the picket line. This is our moment to stand up and fight back and that is exactly what we intend to do," he said.

Barb Silva, representing Support Our Students Alberta, spoke with great conviction, saying, "This is a question of educational justice. Do not ask us to compromise, Jason Kenney. Don't ask us to negotiate on the backs of Alberta children. We see your plan. We know where you are taking Alberta education. We know Kenney wants to break unions, weaken public education and divide communities [...] Kenney wants you to see education as an individual commodity. We know it's a public common good. He wants to attack public education at every opportunity. We will meet him there every time to defend it. We are here today, public education proud. We are community builders not breakers. We support students, we support teachers, we support public education, and we will not stand by and let the government sell it to the highest bidder."

Peggy Askin, vice president of the Calgary chapter of the Congress of Union Retirees and former President of the Calgary and District Labour Council said, "The Kenney government has no mandate to carry out this brutal anti-social offensive. He does not act in our name when he swings his wrecking ball. We are here together speaking and marching for our rights, for the needs of human beings to come first. It is no accident that workers are writing 'UCP, United Corporate Puppets' on their signs, as that is whose interests this government serves. We are here together fighting for the Alberta that we stand for. It is the teachers, the health-care workers, the public-sector workers, all working people -- it's all of us who work to make this province function.

"We say Stop Paying the Rich and Increase Funding for Social Programs!

"We say *No!* to this dictate. We want a real say and we are empowering ourselves."

See also the article titled "Kenney Government's Despicable Attacks on Teachers" by Kevan Hunter



(Photos: WF)

Ontario Education Workers Hold One-Day Province-Wide Strike Educators Say No! to Government Dictate

- Mira Katz -



Teachers and education workers tell Education Minister, "No Education Cuts!"
Toronto, November 27, 2019.

On Wednesday, December 4, members of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) who work in K-12 and adult education in Ontario, will hold a province-wide one-day strike. In an act of solidarity, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) who also work in the system announced they would not cross the picket lines.



OSSTF represents high school teachers in public secondary schools across Ontario as well as educational support staff in many elementary and secondary schools and school board facilities across the province. This means that in addition to high schools being shut down by the strike, many elementary schools will also be shut as they are unable to function without the work of educational support staff, who in many ways keep the system from completely falling apart. Meanwhile CUPE represents custodians, secretarial staff and other educational support staff in many schools across the province and their refusal to cross the picket line brings more schools, including those in the Catholic and French publicly-funded system, into the strike as well.

After eight months of trying to get the Ford government to back down on its assault on education, especially its arbitrary change of class size averages and a requirement that students take e-learning courses to graduate, OSSTF has taken the step of letting the government know that *No Means No!* Meanwhile the government, through its Minister of Education Stephen Lecce, tries to present its modifications to its earlier dictate -- proposing to raise class size averages from 22 to 25 instead of 28, or requiring two instead of the previous four e-learning classes to graduate -- as evidence of its flexibility. The unions and the working people of Ontario are not buying it.

All along the line, the government and Minister Lecce have been attempting to disinform the public about the just demands and claims of the teachers in order to undermine the broad support that teachers and education workers have among the people. Still, upwards of 75 per cent of parents who responded to the Ford government consultations opposed increased class sizes and the reduction of individual attention for students.



Parents' groups have joined the fight, calling for parents to bring their kids to the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Toronto the night before the strike begins if a deal has not been reached between the parties, to make it clear that they stand with the educators.

Laura Chesnik, Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada spokesperson on education and related matters, and an elementary teacher in Ontario, stated in an interview with *Workers Forum*: "Everyone who is able should join the picket lines. Educators in

Ontario are making it clear that they will not accept government dictate and that *No Means No!*

"Like educators across Canada, those who work to provide the younger generation with an education will not accept being relegated to becoming robots or police in the classroom with no say over the direction of the system and their wages and working conditions. The government's arbitrary changes to class sizes and e-learning as well as attempts to undermine educators' professional judgment in the classroom are destructive. They are aimed at hiding that this government, like those before it, is using its control over the public treasury to pay the rich and sees education as a cost rather than a

value which is the basis for a prosperous and sustainable economy. This is a fight for empowerment by those who deliver vital public services asserting their right to have a say over the education they deliver and the economy as a whole. This is why parents and students are standing alongside educators in Ontario as they also want a say.

"The government's only option at this point is to either back down and drop these changes or to double down and try and criminalize educators who refuse to submit. If the government chooses the latter it will only place the democratic institutions in Canada into a deeper crisis of legitimacy and may well backfire as education workers refuse to back down. Dalton McGuinty's own former constituency assistant during the Bill 115 debacle, John Fraser, who is currently interim Ontario Liberal Leader, said as much in testimony in committee. He appealed to the government to learn from the former Liberal government's experience and to back down on using dictate to get what it wants. Fraser speaks for that section of the ruling class that wants a government that gets education workers to agree to attacks on education voluntarily, and sees Ford as too much of a bull in a China shop. Whatever the case may be, education workers are more and more speaking for themselves and making it clear that they will not accept being disrespected and they want a say."



(Photos and cartoon: WF, OSSTF)

Elementary Teachers on Phase One of Work-to-Rule



On November 14, 2019, EFTO announces a series of meetings in preparation for a work-to-rule beginning November 26, 2019.

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) commenced Phase 1 of a work-to-rule on November 26 in the face of the Ford government's refusal to bargain in good faith. ETFO represents 83,000 elementary school teachers, occasional teachers and other educational professionals who work in the province's public elementary schools. ETFO members have gone more than three months without a contract.

ETFO president Sam Hammond stated that the teachers and other education professionals have been forced to take strike action because the Ford government has refused to address their concerns, while at the same time engaging in a disinformation campaign to break their unity and the broad support they have from Ontarians.

Hammond pointed out the Education Minister Stephen Lecce has been misleading the public by saying that there are only a few bargaining issues outstanding when this is not the case. Large class sizes, the shortage of supports for students with special needs, rising school-based violence and the attempt by the government to bypass a 2012 regulation to hire teachers on the basis of qualifications and experience, are all unresolved issues in these negotiations.

Hammond noted that the Ford government has wasted more than \$230 million in penalties to cancel renewable energy projects, while at the same time demanding up to \$150 million in cuts to elementary education. That is unacceptable, Hammond said.

During phase one of the work-to-rule the teachers will teach their students but will not participate in any School Board related activity including filling in report cards, attending school board mandated meetings, and other administrative functions including curriculum committee meetings. They will, however, continue to participate in extracurricular activities such as supervising student clubs.

According to ETFO, the work-to-rule will continue until the labour dispute is satisfactorily resolved or the ETFO Provincial Executive deems that further actions are required. *Workers' Forum* stands with the teachers and education workers of Ontario.

(Photo: ETFO)

British Columbia

UFCW and Taxi Associations Launch Legal Challenges Against Uber and Lyft

- Anne Jamieson -

Uber and Lyft are huge multinational ride-hailing corporations that have applied to the Passenger Transportation Board (PTB) for licences to operate in British Columbia. Uber, founded in 2009 in the U.S., has grown to global proportions. Its business model is described in *Alberta Worker* as "intended to wreck, not coexist with, the existing taxi industry. It is designed to prey on unemployed and under-employed workers, drive down the living standards of all workers and the service standards of a regulated industry, and seize value and remove it from the local economy."^[1]

With the goal of curtailing the exploitative practices of these two corporations, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) and the Vancouver Taxi Association (VTA) have filed legal applications to the BC Labour Relations Board (LRB) and to the Passenger Transportation Board (PTB), to force Uber and Lyft to adhere to the same regulations as other taxi companies in BC. Taxi associations in other parts of the province have taken similar actions.

Legal Challenge by UFCW

On November 27, UFCW Local 1518 filed an application to the Labour Relations Board in Vancouver to have the LRB declare that drivers of Lyft and Uber are employees under the terms of the *BC Labour Relations Code* and thus have rights to protections under the Code like other workers in BC. (Uber and Lyft claim that their drivers are not employees, but are self-employed). UFCW further declared that Lyft and Uber are violating sections of the Code by requiring drivers to enter into an agreement to not be considered employees; and by requiring drivers to agree "that all claims regarding an alleged employment relationship between the company and a driver be governed by

commercial arbitration." This, the UFCW points out, is an attempt to "contract out of the protections of the Code."

Legal Challenge by Vancouver Taxi Association

For their part, the VTA filed an application on November 28 to the PTB in Victoria, stating that in view of the illegal conditions Uber and Lyft are imposing on their potential drivers, the PTB should not process the applications of these ride-hailing companies until the matter has been resolved. In the meantime, the VTA states that it does not oppose the PTB issuing ride-hailing licences to other applicants in December, as "none of the other applicants are imposing conditions on their drivers that interfere with their ability to collectively protect themselves from exploitative terms and conditions of employment."

In September, the VTA filed a judicial review against the PTB over its decisions to exempt ride-hailing companies from regulations that restrict existing taxi companies: the PTB decisions sought to ensure that ride-hailing companies would not face restrictions on fleet size, would not have a price cap, and could operate within larger regional boundaries than existing taxi companies.

The situation facing taxi drivers will worsen if Uber and Lyft are not curtailed.

Workers' Forum interviewed Kulwant Sahota, a spokesperson for the Vancouver Taxi Association. He pointed out that the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia has an agreement with Uber and Lyft by which it intends to charge them a small fraction of the price to insure their vehicles as compared to what companies like Yellow Cab have to pay in insurance. They would pay just 19 cents per kilometre, whereas an operator of a regular taxicab must pay \$40,000 per year for insurance. He said that VTA is not against other local ride-hailing companies, which could complement the present taxi companies by operating in peak hours. This would benefit everyone in the Lower Mainland, he added -- riders and drivers alike, as long as the same regulations apply to all with respect to fares, numbers of vehicles in the fleet, and the cost of insurance.

Sahota said he has been driving for Yellow Cab for 25 years, 17 of those on night shift. He said he felt happy about the successful struggle of the transit workers recently, and noted that some transit workers also drive taxis part-time.

He explained that if Uber and Lyft are allowed licences in BC under their own terms, the conditions for existing taxi drivers in Vancouver, as well as for those in ride-hailing companies, would become intolerable. If licences are to be issued to those companies, he said, it must be under the same terms under which present taxi companies are required to operate. Other local ride-hailing companies that have applied for licences from the PTB have agreed to abide by these same regulations. "Why should Uber and Lyft be exempt?" he asked. He pointed out that Uber "operates all over the world and has billions of dollars at its disposal. Thus if it is not restricted to a price cap, it will offer a much lower fare price and will wipe out all the existing taxi companies in the city. They would then charge whatever they want for fares, and they could pay drivers whatever they want."

As noted in *Alberta Worker*, the Uber model is about seizing value from the workers who produce it and from their communities. Wherever Uber operates, it results in part-time precarious work, wages far below what has been established as the Canadian standard of wages, no predictable income, no regular hours of work, no benefits, pensions, or workers' compensation board coverage. It is the neo-liberal way, which is given deceptive names like "the sharing economy."

The Need to Restrict Monopoly Right and Defend the Rights of All

Numerous organizations in BC are opposing the invasion by these giant ride-hailing corporations into the economy of this province. The provincial government and municipal councils need to be reminded that they are duty bound to protect workers and people from the destructive practices of

these monopolies, and not collude with them. The working class and its allies in all sectors need to support the challenges by UFCW and the taxi associations to restrict the right of Uber and Lyft to act illegally to disrupt the taxi industry in BC. An injury to one is an injury to all! Support the legal challenges against Uber and Lyft, and work to develop the workers' movement into an effective opposition to the neo-liberal wrecking by corporations like these!

Note

1. "Restrict the Monopoly Uber! Defend the Rights of All Workers! Our Security Lies in the Defence of the Rights of All," *Alberta Worker*, February 10, 2016.



Workers' Fight to Hold Quebec Government to Account for Anti-Worker Measures

Government's Unacceptable Position on Training Standards for Crane Operators

- Pierre Chénier -

In a recent meeting with the leadership of the Union of Crane Operators, Jean Boulet, Labour Minister in the Legault government, said he is "comfortable" with the recommendations of the Committee of Experts set up by his government which endorses the decision of the government and the Quebec Construction Commission (CCQ) to reduce the training that is required to become a crane operator.[1]

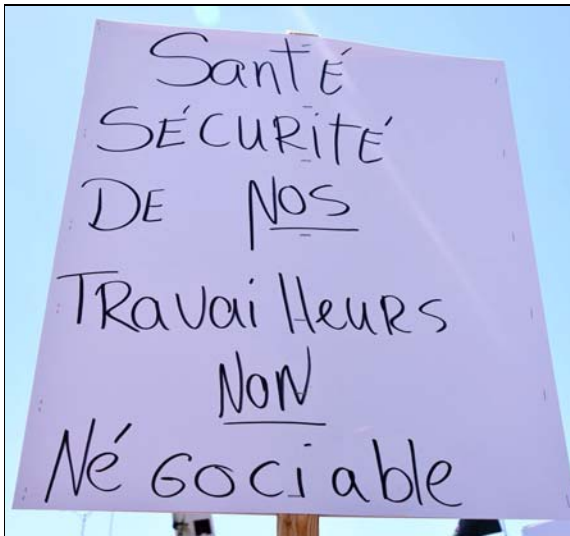
The Minister is comfortable, but the crane operators and construction workers who work in dangerous and difficult conditions are, to say the least, not comfortable with the government's stand. They have been fighting for almost a year now against this lowering of training standards. The facts are not consistent with the minister's position either. The Diploma of Vocational Studies (DEP) was introduced in 1997 because of the large number of accidents, including several fatalities, which were related to crane operation. Statistics show that since the introduction of the compulsory DEP training for crane operators, fatal accidents involving crane operation have dropped by 66 per cent.



Crane operators report that last September alone there were three accidents in Quebec involving the toppling of cranes, one of which could have caused fatalities. In this last accident, four workers had to go to the hospital for nervous shock. In all three cases, crane operators who investigated the accidents report that the crane operator involved did not have the DEP.

The position of the Minister of Labour is irrational and arrogant. It is a position of prejudice, in defence of narrow private interest, and it is also an irresponsible political stance that is a continuation of the efforts of successive governments to smash the crane operators' union and the construction unions in general. According to the government and the CCQ, the presence of a strong and combative crane operators' union is not in the interest of construction workers and the public. This is allegedly a problem, a situation of "control" by a particular group that prevents workers' access to the construction trades through opposition to deregulation of the sector. The Charbonneau

Commission was very clear on this point when it equated the collective organized struggle of construction workers with mafia-like activities because they undermine free competition between workers on building sites and the realization of private profit by the employers.



What must prevail? The health and safety of construction workers and the public, or the shenanigans of cartel political parties and state agencies like the CCQ who are serving narrow private interest and anti-worker fanaticism? Having crane operators who are appropriately trained and whose organizations defend the interests and rights of both the workers and the public and can authoritatively say *No Means No!* when it comes to safety is an asset for workers and society.

Workers' Forum recently spoke with the director of the Union of Crane Operators, Evans Dupuis, who spoke eloquently about the role of the crane operator in the construction sector.

He said, among other things: "The crane operator's job is vital to the safety of other construction workers. All crane operators work with other workers. There is always someone ahead of the crane and other workers in the area. The slightest bad movement, a sudden movement, can endanger the workers and the public. It's a job of precision, it's a job of stress. The crane operator must live with this. He must be competent and well trained. The other worker must have confidence in the crane operator. If he asks the crane operator to bring a load an inch from him and the operation is not done carefully and safely, the worker will no longer want to work with the crane operator because it is too dangerous for his security. The bond of trust will be broken and the bond of trust is vital for the safety of all. Lowering security standards is absolutely contraindicated. "

The Minister of Labour and the Quebec government must withdraw the new regulations that lower training and safety standards on construction sites.

Note

1. In April of 2018 the former Quebec Liberal government unilaterally imposed new regulations governing the training of crane operators in Quebec. That decision overturned existing standards and the training requirements for new crane operators necessary to ensure not only their safety but also the safety of other construction workers and the public at large. The new regulations abolished the mandatory requirement that a crane operator have completed the 870-hour Diploma of Vocational Studies (DEP) training in a professional institution before being able to work as an operator. The DEP is now optional. The new required training is just a 150-hour training provided directly on the worksite by the employer. The regulations now only require a mere 80-hour course for boom trucks with a maximum capacity of 30 tonnes, after which a worker becomes a qualified driver. It is precisely this type of crane that tips over the most and causes the most damage.

The crane operators and their union have resolutely fought, and are still waging a fierce battle against this attack on the safety of construction workers and the public. It's within this context that the government established the Committee of Independent Experts in September of 2018, with a mandate to assess the security aspect of the new regulations. In its report issued in March of 2019, the committee said that the DEP remains the reference standard for the training of crane operators, however it has accepted that it become optional. As an alternative, it proposed a three-week initial training period and that on-site training be maintained.



Changing the Reality on the Ground

- Interview, François Patry, President, National Brotherhood of Carpenters, FTQ-Construction Local 9 -



Demonstration at Quebec National Assembly to demand pro-worker reform to the Act respecting occupational health and safety, November 27, 2019.

Workers' Forum: The Quebec government announced a reform of the *Act respecting occupational health and safety* to be introduced in the winter of 2020.[1] How does the issue of the reforming of the Act pose itself in relation to the health and safety conditions in the workplaces which also affect the health and safety of the public?

François Patry: We will be very vigilant on this when they introduce the bill. The question we will ask is if we can make use of the Act to improve the health and safety conditions on construction sites. Prevention is the key factor in dealing with accidents and fatalities on construction sites. We need prevention, which means that organizations on the ground take charge of prevention. The question is, as an organization, do I have a role to play that is important, or is it just a matter of being a member of some committee?

Prevention means identifying the dangers in order to eliminate them. It means planning the equipment and the methods of work, and workers and employers sitting together to look at how we are going to do the job in order to eliminate the danger. Prevention must be integrated into the organization of the work on the sites.

The construction sector is very dangerous. We have a lot of accidents. We represent five per cent of the Quebec workforce and we have 25 per cent of all fatal accidents year after year. This is unacceptable. We are facing this situation not because it is unavoidable, that this is the way things are and will always be in construction. There are reasons why these accidents occur.

In order to eliminate the causes of these accidents we need to have support mechanisms for the workers. One of the important mechanisms is the prevention representative. We have prevention programs on construction sites. We have a Safety Code for construction work that outlines solutions to the problems we have identified, ways to make sure that employers use safe work methods and equipment so as to have control over the dangers that exist on construction sites.

The problem is that employers always do the minimum when it comes to prevention. They cling to minimums, even if we know that it will not solve the problem, in order to create the illusion that problems are being solved. So then when there is an accident, it is the worker who is blamed.

To change this, it is necessary to have a prevention representative on construction sites, a worker representative appointed by the workers who enforces existing programs and is trained by the trade unions, protected by law so that he does not lose his job, and paid by the employers. Prevention programs often look good, but that is just on paper. The problem is that the programs that exist are not being implemented on job sites. Even the employers' supervisors, superintendents and project managers often do not know about the prevention programs.



A kind of pattern has emerged where employers are doing the minimum, using methods that have been established because the work is done faster. These methods are considered to be cost-effective but they create a lot of problems. Employers are counting on the fact that they will not be caught by the inspectors from the Labour Standards, Pay Equity and Workplace Health and Safety Board (CNESST). However, CNESST is reducing the number of inspectors more and more. It requires that the inspectors do more and more paperwork, which means inspectors spend more time in the office and less time on construction sites.

We need prevention representatives on construction sites who are accountable to the workers. If she or he does not do their job, they will be replaced by the union. The employer does not have a say in it. The accident prevention representative is independent of the employer. The only thing the employer would do is pay her or his wages.

That is why, even if we were to be given new programs in the Act, new committees, although they have their place, without the prevention representatives to bring them to life, the situation will not change.

In addition, not all employers are covered by the mechanism calling for joint health and safety committees because such committees are only required when an employer has at least 10 workers on the job site. But 90 per cent of construction employers do not have 10 workers. So in the end these are bogus committees. It's like a beautiful showcase created to say that 'we have worksite committees,' 'we have prevention programs,' so the fact that there are still accidents means that accidents are unavoidable and must be accepted.

It is true that we must have access to all the mechanisms that are currently in the Act, those that exist but are not being implemented. It is necessary to claim all the mechanisms of prevention but, unlike the present situation, there must be enforcement. The prevention representative is essential for enforcing them.

In addition, prevention representatives must be appointed on a yearly basis because construction sites are often very small and workers go from contract to contract. We should actually have flying squads of prevention representatives who do not change according to the contracts and who go from site to site in a given region.

Prevention representatives would enforce the law and regulations. They would go around the sites

and talk to the workers. They would participate in accident investigations. At the moment, we are not entitled to do investigations; we are not even informed when there is an accident. We sometimes learn about it a few days later, especially on very large sites. If we have a prevention representative, she or he will participate in the investigations and at the conclusion of an investigation if she or he disagrees with the conclusions of the report, she or he can register their dissent. That opinion will stay on the record and can be used to prevent further accidents.

WF: How do you organize to defend workers on construction sites?

FP: We have union representatives in each region. At Local 9 we have 23 representatives who go to construction sites, do labour relations and prevention. But there are so many sites to cover. If they denounce an employer for failing health and safety, it is easy for the employer to say that he will solve the problem in the next few days, but by then the representative is already somewhere else. Prevention representatives on the sites would be able to do the follow-up. We must change the way of thinking, so that employers cannot plead innocence, cannot think that they can act without being accountable. We must make a change in the way all sites operate.

In addition, with things like Bill 152 passed in 2018 by the Quebec government, it is increasingly difficult for union representatives to intervene on construction sites.[2] Today, as soon as we intervene to change things, even on matters of health and safety, when we denounce something, the employers say that we are threatening them. They threaten to bring in the Quebec Construction Commission that will declare that there has been a slowdown in the work and that this is a violation of that legislation. Yes, we may have carried out a slowdown but such an action is allowed by the *Act respecting occupational health and safety*.

Our work is more difficult as far as dealing with the employers are concerned. It is also more difficult at the level of the CNESST and it is actually very difficult to make them come to the sites when workers exercise their right of refusal. The CNESST has adopted the philosophy that these matters are not important, they do not have to come to construction sites, they will just make a call to the employer. That's not what the law says. The law says that if we were not able to reach an agreement with the employer and have phoned the CNEEST to ask for it to intervene, they must come to the site, take the names of each worker, ask them why they stopped working. They also have to assess the danger that is at the source of the refusal to work, and talk to the employer and the union and determine whether they accept the corrective action taken by the employer, so that the work can actually resume.

We continue our work, we fight, we support each other, but it's more difficult to intervene now.

Notes

1. Adopted in 1979, the *Act respecting occupational health and safety* provides for four prevention mechanisms. It is estimated that these mechanisms are applied to only about 12 per cent of workers. These mechanisms are the prevention program, the health program, the employer-worker joint health/safety committee and the prevention representative.

2. Bill 152, *An Act to Amend Various Labour-related Legislative Provisions Mainly to Give Effect to Certain Charbonneau Commission Recommendations* was passed in May 2018 by the Quebec government. It criminalizes construction workers who defend their rights, especially on construction sites, accusing them of intimidation or threats "that are reasonably likely to cause an obstruction to or a slowdown or stoppage of activities on a job site."

(Translated from the original french by Workers' Forum. Photos: Métallos, FTQ-Construction Local 9)

