January 22, 2020

Vigorous Defence of Education in Ontario

More Teachers and Education Workers Engage in Strike Action

- Laura Chesnik -

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More Teachers and Education Workers Engage in Strike Action

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Across the province on January 21, teachers and education workers employed in the publicly-funded
English Catholic school system issued their *No!* to the Ford government with strike action. This week as well, other secondary and elementary teachers and education workers also withdrew their services in selected school districts across Ontario as part of their unions' rotating strike actions. It is all part of their ongoing militant resistance to the Ontario government's neo-liberal wrecking in the education sector that is aimed at cutting investments in K-12 education and turning the delivery of public education into a scheme to enrich private business interests.

Two features of these actions are of importance:

1) The spirit of unity amongst the workers was very strong. This is significant as the government is banking on divisions between the unions to try to get one of them to agree to its anti-social provisions. The united actions, with people joining one another's picket lines, make it clear that the grassroots educators stand as one and see that they are fighting for the same thing.

2) The demands are directly targeting the Ford government, its MPPs and Premier Ford himself. The workers are demanding in a militant and spirited fashion that Ford cease and desist from his anti-social agenda. Even when he tried to sneak unnoticed into meetings held with selected representatives of the rich in Windsor-Essex on January 21 he was met with a united wall of determined educators, parents, students, nurses, auto workers, postal workers, city workers and many others. This unity in action is a critical factor for the advancement of the independent movement of the working people for investments in public services and social programs and respect for workers' rights.
Members of all education unions were joined by workers from other sectors at a January 21, 2020 protest rally outside a PC Party fundraiser in Amherstburg that Ford attended

Photos of January 20-22 Actions

Ottawa Catholic School Board

Ottawa-Carleton District School Board
Public Sector Workers in Quebec Present Their Concerns and Demands

Support the Nurses for Speaking Out About Deteriorating Conditions

- Pierre Chénier -

Disciplinary measures, including suspensions, continue to be taken by the authorities of the Integrated Health and Social Services Centres against nurses who speak out publicly against the deterioration of working conditions and patient care within their sector.
A few days before Christmas, a psychiatric nurse with the Integrated University Health and Social Services Centre-University Health Centre of the Eastern Townships was suspended without pay for a period of three weeks for speaking out on a social media platform against the deteriorating conditions in his department. The suspension was widely publicized and the nurse's colleagues and patients collected money to make up for his loss of income. His union, the Union of Care Professionals of the Eastern Townships (FIQ-SPSCE), which is part of the Quebec Inter-professional Health Federation (FIQ) filed a grievance against the suspension. The President of the FIQ sent a letter to the institution's management and to Quebec's Health Minister, requesting that such practices -- which nurses refer to as "omerta" (a mafia code of silence) in the health network -- be immediately ended and that measures be taken to significantly improve conditions in the health sector. In particular, the FIQ is recommending that health care professional-to-patient safety ratios be established immediately to improve those conditions.

It was recently revealed that shortly before the nurse was suspended, another nurse from the same institution had been suspended, without pay, for four weeks for speaking out on social media. According to news reports, the nurse requested that the suspension not be publicized. According to the FIQ, this is the first time that suspensions without pay have been implemented at the regional establishment. Neither of the nurses received any verbal or written warning, or other graduated measure in their file prior to their being suspended without pay.

It has also been revealed that the establishment's authorities require that, as a condition of employment, all new employees sign a form entitled "Agreement on Confidentiality, Information Security and the Maintaining a Healthy Work Environment."

According to the media, several of the document's clauses relate to patient record confidentiality, with articles taken from the Act Respecting Health Services and Social Services and the Act Respecting Access to Documents Held by Public Bodies and the Protection of Personal Information. One clause also requires that all new employees make the following commitment: "Not to disseminate to the media and social networks (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) any information that goes against the interests of the establishment, any confidential and sensitive information on the CIUSSS de l'Estrie-CHUS."

Management issued a press release in which it affirms that the form "is a tool of the establishment to make sure that employees are aware of the obligations coming from all sources." It states that "employees are completely free to express themselves publicly as long as the initiative is taken in full respect of patients, their families and colleagues."

The measures being taken to criminalize nurses and other health care workers for upholding their professional duty to defend the integrity of their working conditions are unacceptable. Making employment conditional on signing clauses which compromise one's conscience is equally unacceptable. More and more places are claiming that they are defending their "brand," their "reputation" and that when workers speak out about their working conditions it harms their reputation. This can only be for insidious purposes given that it is the employers which are primarily responsible for working conditions, not the workers who can only uphold what is already there. On
top of this, the employers act in a manner which undermines the unions. They tend to take on employees one-on-one and each employee is left to fend for themselves to deal with intimidation and their defence.

The anti-social restructuring of the health care system is systematically destroying the channels that allowed health workers to be represented by their unions. Establishment administrations are under the direct control of the Minister of Health and are subject to legal requirements to balance their budgets which require that they make cuts. Should they not do so they face the penalty of being dismissed by the Minister. With the centralization of powers in the hands of the Minister in the service of private interests, the former channels of communication and conflict resolution have been destroyed. Anarchy and violence in the form of abuses of all kinds are imposed on the health system. This leaves nurses and other health care personnel no other option than to act outside such channels, to which the authorities respond with repression. Nurses take no pleasure in holding hospital sit-ins or resorting to social media in exasperation, to speak out and break the silence on their conditions.

*Workers' Forum* condemns these repressive measures that are a product of the neo-liberal wrecking of the public health care system and calls on Canadians to unite with the workers to find solutions to improve working conditions and patient care, first and foremost by supporting their right to speak out. The nurses and others are clearly defending the public interest by doing so and must know they are supported in rejecting the unacceptable practice of being forced to sign loyalty oaths.

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**Interview, Jeff Begley, President, Federation of Health and Social Services (FSSS-CSN)**

*Workers' Forum*: The FSSS-CSN recently presented its sectoral demands for the renewal of the collective agreements of its members. What is their thrust?

*Jeff Begley*: We have demands in terms of work organization. Since the reform of the health care system carried out by the previous Liberal government, we have witnessed a fairly significant disorganization. With regard to work organization, a much more serious dialogue is needed than what has transpired in the past.

One of the symptoms of disorganization is the mandatory overtime that we are intent on ending.

We're tackling a situation where employers are demanding that workers increase their availability, even though this results in discouraging them. As a result of the creation of mega-establishments, the unions are now huge. There are regions where an establishment can cover hundreds of kilometres. Even within Montreal, the area can be spread out between Pointe-aux-Trembles to Maisonneuve-Rosemont hospital, which is a very wide area. There are employers who are
demanding that workers make themselves available everywhere, on different shifts. In 2020, it's amazing that someone can be made to work three shifts in rotation -- the day, evening and night shifts -- over a period of a few weeks, sometimes in various locations. It doesn't make sense. That's not the case everywhere, but there are places where employers continue to demand full availability on three shifts. It's very detrimental to one's physical and mental health. That has to be addressed. If you want to encourage people to work, you have to give them the opportunity to work in a stable environment, even if they are on the recall list. Enough jobs exist for that. The practice of workers being used as pawns that can be moved around at will must stop. It is necessary to ensure that there are enough workers on the floor, which is how we can ensure that mandatory overtime, amongst other problems, is eliminated.

Another very important point is the issue of health and safety at work. There are departments and places where over a quarter of the staff is on leave, either because they are sick or on compensation from the Labour Standards, Pay Equity and Workplace Health and Safety Board (CNESST). In many places, this is not the exception. If we could cut that in half, suddenly the problem of staff shortages would be greatly reduced.

At the sectoral table, we have a lot of health and safety demands. At the same time, we are asking the government and the CNESST to ensure that health and social services are recognized as a priority group by the CNESST. This is not the case at the moment although health and social services are one of the groups with the highest rate of accidents and occupational diseases. Being recognized as a priority group would mean that compulsory prevention committees would be established, with workers freed up full-time to do prevention. Problems must be eliminated at their source. The committees that currently exist in our sector are empty shells. There's no prevention and no results. We're intent on finding the cure. In addition, employers are systematically contesting workers' claims. It's one of our top priorities. If we fail to obtain priority group status with the CNESST, we're going to insist on incorporating all the elements specific to a priority group in the collective agreement.

WF: Several unions have expressed concerns that seem to be emerging as a result of the sectoral approach of the government and the management negotiating committees. What's your take on this?

JB: Yes there are things that worry us.

We had thought that during the last local negotiation employers were beginning to understand that their demand for flexibility at all costs was detrimental. However, through the language they're using, the demand for flexibility keeps coming back.

In our sector, for example, less than 40 per cent of care attendants are full-time. We had asked that measures be put in place to convert part-time positions into full-time jobs. But that work has not been done everywhere or in the same way in all places. Furthermore, because of mandatory overtime, many have not applied for full-time positions. Employers claim they have done the necessary work but that people did not participate in the project. In fact, if people are reluctant to apply for full-time jobs, it's because of the mandatory overtime. This is the case for nurses, in particular, who say that if they remain part-time and are forced to do mandatory overtime, at least they'll not be forced to work all the terrible hours that full-time nurses are required to work.
I must point out that for us, things are still not entirely clear as to the intentions of the government and the management committees, when they raise the need for flexibility. It remains somewhat vague. But that's our concern.

In conclusion, I want to say that although money is important, if we get better wages but our conditions don't improve, we won't be able to attract people to come and work in our sector. Of course it's necessary to invest and improve wages substantially, but that alone is not enough.

Workers' Struggles Across the Country

Lockout of Co-op Refinery Workers in Regina

Several hundred workers rallied with locked out Co-op Refinery Complex workers on their picket line on January 20 and 21 in Regina. They came from as far away as Gander and Vancouver, and included members of the national executive of Unifor.

The mass action controlled all movement in and out of the refinery. Regina police responded by arresting 14 individuals including Unifor's National President and its Western Regional Director, claiming that an injunction naming Local 594, which imposed the condition that picketers could only stop trucks for 10 minutes, also applies to Unifor executives and members from other locals.

The more than 800 workers at the Co-op Refinery Complex (CRC) of the Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL) in Regina were locked out on December 5, 2019. The lockout was imposed by the company in response to the union's 48-hour strike notice issued on December 3, 2019. The workers, members of Unifor local 594, had been in negotiations, then mediation, for several months during which FCL, contrary to the commitment made in previous negotiations, insisted on replacing the existing defined benefit pension plan with an inferior plan. The workers justly stood firm in defence of their pension plan, a plan that had been agreed to as part of previous contract negotiations.

Throughout the lockout the company has issued media advisories, put up billboards, and made every effort to portray their position as "fair" and the workers' claims unreasonable. Their claim of "fairness" is based on the company's position that workers should have to "contribute" to their pension plan. The current, previously negotiated arrangement, is that the company funds the defined benefits plan. What is not mentioned in the context of "fairness" is that the amount that the company puts into the pension plan was negotiated in the past and forms part of the compensation package, along with wages, vacations, sick leave, etc. that the workers agreed to accept in exchange for their
labour which creates the company's wealth. FCL is appealing to 'public opinion' to recognize that
times have changed, fossil fuels are on the way out, that in order to be 'sustainable' the company will
deny the workers what is theirs by right as the producers of wealth in order that its profits continue
to increase.

Rally January 20, 2020 in Regina in support of Co-op Refinery workers.

The workers have responded with a resounding No! Throughout the lockout there have been actions
by workers in communities throughout Saskatchewan and as far west as Vancouver Island in support
of the refinery workers, including a boycott of Co-op retail outlets.

The refinery is continuing to operate with "replacement workers," management and scabs. The
company actually built a work camp for scabs months before the strike notice in preparation for the
lockout, so as to continue production. In a letter dated January 20, responding to a letter from the
National Farmers Union (NFU) appealing for a return to negotiations to settle the dispute, FCL
boasts that they implemented this plan as far back as October 2019. In their letter of January 17, the
National Farmers Union writes, "It is disturbing that a key issue in the dispute is whether workers
will be able to use the pensions previously agreed to through collective bargaining and earned during
their careers at the refinery, or if they will be forced to accept one that is less valuable. A roll-back in
pensions is an issue for the whole community: reneging on the pension promise is a way for
companies to transfer a portion of money earned by the workers into the company's assets. If Co-op
succeeds, other companies will be emboldened to seize their workers' pension funds." The
company's response, besides the claims that the pension fund must change and that the workers are
already highly paid, outlines what it calls the "business continuity plan." They say ":[...] we
understand the criticality of the CRC's fuel supply to the Western Canadian economy as a whole, and
to agricultural producers in particular. That is why the Board supported management's determination
to have an effective business continuity plan (BCP) in place to ensure safe and reliable fuel
production in the event of any potential interruption to production and supply."

The NFU noted that "It is also disturbing to learn that Co-op management had prepared for a lengthy
lock-out by building a work camp to house scabs, and has been spending resources on helicopter
flights to transport scabs across the picket line. Co-op management has apparently invested heavily
in measures designed to prolong the dispute." FCL responded that "Again, it is worth noting that the
CRC did not commence construction of business continuity facilities on-site until the final,
Unifor-driven break down of mediation in October." (WF emphasis.)

The fact that the employer had a plan in place to undermine the workers' struggle months in advance
of the strike notice only strengthens the determination of the Co-op Refinery workers to defend their
existing working conditions, particularly their pensions. This just stand deserves the support of all Canadian workers.

Strike Continues at Ledcor Technical Services Against Precarious Work

- Brian Sproule -

Telecommunications workers, members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 213, are continuing their strike against Ledcor Technical Services (LTS) in Port Coquitlam.

The workers walked off the job on September 30, 2019 following the mass layoff of 31 workers without cause or notice. They joined Local 213 in 2017 hoping to improve their working conditions, including an end to piece work and contracting out of their jobs as well as recognition of their seniority rights.

During the two years since the IBEW was certified as the bargaining agent, LTS has refused to sign
a first contract or agree to any of the workers' just demands. The regular work force has continued to
decline from 238 at the time of certification to barely half that number today.

On January 14, a team from the Workers' Centre of CPC(M-L) joined striking workers and Local
213 Retired Members' Committee in picketing Ledcor Group's head office in downtown Vancouver.
An article from the December 19, 2019 issue of *Workers' Forum* on the strike was distributed to the
other picketers.

The Workers' Centre was told that Telus, one of the other large corporations in the
telecommunications industry, is co-operating with Ledcor in hopes of breaking the strike, de-
unionizing the industry, and ensuring that all installation work is done by contractors designated as
self-employed and thus not subject to labour standards legislation regarding wages, overtime,
breaks, health and safety, compensation for on the job injuries, etc.

Besides picketing LTS and Ledcor head office the workers are sending out flying squads of picketers
armed with signs and bull horns when they learn of LTS contractors installing fibre optics.

Despite financial pressures and their small numbers the workers are determined to fight until they
win an acceptable first contract.

**About Ledcor**

Ledcor's website states "Ledcor is a diversified construction company, working to design, build,
transport, operate and maintain projects all over North America."

Leduc Construction was founded in 1947 by William (Bill) Lede. It began by building roads for the
oil industry near Leduc, Alberta.

Bill Lede died in a construction site accident in 1980. His sons Dave and Herb took over operating
the company. Dave Lede is chairman and CEO.

In 1982 the company was renamed Ledcor. *Wikipedia* says that Ledcor is "employee owned."
Headquarters are in Vancouver and San Diego, California with some 30 offices and about 7,000
employees across North America. The company net worth is about $1 billion.

There are 10 divisions:

- building
- oil and gas including pipeline construction
- forestry
- mining
- communications (Ledcor Technical Services)
- transportation including aviation and marine subsidiaries
- power
- properties (real estate and development)
- infrastructure
- environmental

*(Photos: IBEW Local 213)*
Montreal Airport Refuelers on Strike Against Substandard Conditions

The workers who refuel all the planes at Montreal's Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau and Mirabel airports have been on strike since December 31, 2019. These roughly 100 workers, who are members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW) Local 2301, refuel about 500 planes a day. Their collective agreement with their employer Swissport Canada Inc., expired in August 2019; negotiations for a new contract began May 23, 2019.

On December 28, 2019, the workers who voted on a tentative deal rejected it by 90 per cent. This followed an earlier vote of 99 per cent in favour of a strike mandate.

Swissport International AG is one of the world's largest airport ground services and air cargo handling monopolies. Swissport was subcontracted for refueling services by the Canadian Consortium of Air Carriers (of which Air Canada is a member) in 2015. The consortium favoured Swissport over U.S.-based CAFAS which had been the subcontracted refueler for many years.

Subcontracting of ground services and other services is common practice. Service providers compete to be the lowest bidder and the air carriers see this as a great advantage for them, profit-wise. As well, subcontracting enables them to deny any social responsibility to the workers providing the services and to the public.

The strike at the Montreal airports raises the issue of "contract flipping," which is becoming more and more common at Canadian airports. It is a major tool used by employers to wipe out union rights and impose lower wages and working conditions to increase their private profit. When contracts are "flipped" to a new service provider, workers must re-apply for their jobs. The new employer is not bound to recognize seniority or the workers' union, nor is it required to maintain the wages or benefits previously won by the workers who are forced to start from scratch. It is one of the ways in which workers are pushed into precariousness with pay that is close to minimum wage with few, if any, benefits.

The airport workers who are affected by this contract flipping deliver a crucial service that impacts
the safety of airline passengers, other workers and the general public. They refuel planes, often in extreme hot or cold temperatures, on airport grounds that are more and more clogged with planes and heavy equipment, while exposed to loud noise and other hazardous conditions. Airport workers in Montreal, as well as Toronto Pearson Airport workers, are waging a determined fight against this practice.

The flipping of the contract between CAFAS and Swissport led to a straight loss of wages of about 33 per cent, a reduction from $24 an hour to about $16 an hour. Their paid vacation time dropped from five to two weeks. They lost their company pension plan and most of their benefits. Most importantly, because of the untenable working conditions, there is a huge staff turnover. This in turn affects safety of the workers, passengers, crew and the general public because companies then rapidly hire new workers who receive minimal training. Accidents on the tarmac are on the increase.

With their strike, airport workers are saying that "Enough is Enough!" They are going public with their demands and their experience. On January 15 they held a rally in front of the Swissport Main Office in Montreal which was attended by the striking workers, other workers and union representatives. They presented their demands for a significant improvement in their wages and working conditions so as to stop staff turnover. They demanded adequate training for all employees. They demanded that Transport Canada and the federal government intervene to stop the reckless contract flipping by amending the Canada Labour Code so that union rights are maintained when a new employer is awarded a contract, and that already negotiated wages and working conditions are maintained with the new employer. They demanded that the Labour Code forbid the use of scabs in labour disputes. They opposed the current trend of the monopolies, with the assistance of the government, to make airports a paradigm of precariousness and substandard conditions. Several of the unions that participated offered financial support and pledged funds from their locals to help the workers win this fight.

The practice of Transport Canada of turning a blind eye to the wrecking of working conditions and safety standards in Canadian airports is "explained" with the self-serving argument that airport governance changed in Canada in the 1990s so that airports are no longer owned and operated by the federal government. As far as the Montreal airports are concerned, Transport Canada retains ownership but an independent entity has been created to operate them.

Transport Canada has reduced itself to being a mere observer of deregulated airport authorities and carriers, as is the case with the railways, rather than a public authority that upholds standards and regulations. According to Transport Canada, contract flipping by the airport authority and the carriers to impose substandard conditions and jeopardize safety is a purely private business matter. The only responsibility that Transport Canada acknowledges is to rubber stamp the reports that they produce. This is putting airport workers and all Canadians at risk and must not pass.

The strike of the airport workers in Montreal is courageous. It is a fight for their rights and for the rights and safety of all. It must be vigorously supported by all workers.

Website: www.cpcml.ca   Email: office@cpcml.ca