

February 25, 2020

Broad Opposition and Mass Actions Against the Anti-Social Offensive

New Brunswick

People Force Government to Back Down from Attacks on Health Care



Protest against overnight closings of hospital emergency rooms, Sackville, New Brunswick,
February 16, 2020 (B. Wark)

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People Force Government to Back Down from Attacks on Health Care

New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs announced on February 16, the suspension of a series of anti-social measures due to be implemented March 11. The most brutal and life-threatening measure was the permanent overnight closures of the emergency departments of six community hospitals, in Caraquet, Grand Falls, Perth-Andover, Sackville, Sainte-Anne-de-Kent, and Sussex. Residents of these communities needing emergency services from midnight to 8 o'clock in the morning would have to travel 45 minutes or more depending on the weather to bigger centres for services. In addition, 120 acute care beds in these hospitals would be transformed into long term care beds.

Immediately upon learning of these anti-social attacks on their health care, the people of New Brunswick sprung into action. They united as one declaring a definitive *No!* to the dismantling of their community hospitals and wrecking of emergency services. The mayors of the targeted communities, doctors, nurses, paramedics, and people whose lives have been saved because of immediate access to emergency services, spoke out loudly against this attack on the future of their communities. Instead of wrecking, they demand increased funding for health care services and improvement of the wages and working conditions of the public sector workers so as to guarantee recruitment and retention of health care workers.



Both the PCs currently in power and the Liberals before them have long declared that the mandate of the government of New Brunswick is to limit the wage increases of health care workers and public sector workers to below the cost of living. They currently are waging a war against nursing home workers to deprive them of any legal options to fight for improvement of their wages and working conditions, including strike action if necessary.

Working conditions throughout New Brunswick's health sector are deteriorating while governments pose the problem as a shortage of health care workers, not the conditions in which they work and deliver the services. Governments advocate an anti-social pay-the-rich economy as the only way to run the province at the expense of the rights and well-being of the people.

Paramedics exposed the fiction of the government that closing emergency departments overnight would be of little consequence to patients because they would just go to the emergency rooms in bigger centres. They wrote:

"Government's decision to close 6 emergency departments across the province will unnecessarily increase travel time to larger centres. This decision directly affects public safety in the event of an emergency. The major centres are already overcrowded. Having paramedics stuck in hospital hallways with patients waiting for hospital staff is already severely reducing ambulance availabilities for 911 calls. The public will now be forced to commute, in some areas over an hour, to

a facility for care. With these longer commutes, the potential for incidents will increase and will further deplete this province's valuable resources and put public safety at greater risk. Every emergency department and clinic plays a vital role in this province, even more so in rural New Brunswick. As the saying goes, this change will be nothing more than 'robbing Peter to pay Paul' and as history has shown, it never works.

[...]

"The solution for New Brunswick health care should never be the elimination of services! If we truly want to reform health care in New Brunswick, we need to look beyond shutting down emergency services like emergency departments. We need to invest in our people and focus on compensating and recruiting people for the exceptional service they provide everyday while still dealing with the repercussions of past government's decisions."

Congratulations to the people of New Brunswick who have shown in practice that they are committed to stepping up their fight against the anti-social offensive in the province. The people demand increased investments in social programs and to stop paying the rich!



People's Actions Force New Brunswick Premier to Retreat



Protest against planned Emergency Room closings, Stella-Maris-de-Kent hospital, February 17, 2020.

During his press conference on February 16, announcing the suspension of his recent anti-social measures to further wreck health care, Premier Higgs blamed a lack of proper communication for the massive opposition that erupted among people of all walks of life. In other words he has not abandoned the wrecking of health care, but will engage in anti-social propaganda in an attempt to destroy public opinion for increased investments in social programs and to stop paying the rich.

The Premier announced he will visit the communities targeted for closure of their emergency departments in April and May. He committed to a provincial health-care summit in June that will

have, in his words, the "goal of developing a strategy to ensure a sustainable and reliable public health care system for the future." The findings from the consultations and the summit will be released this fall.

The Premier warned the people that the same irrational anti-social arguments, which led to the proposed wrecking measures, would guide the consultations and the summit. Higgs said, "An aging demographic coupled with a growing labour force shortage is hampering our ability to provide the right care, in the right place, at the right time. But we need people in this province to be part of the solution and that must start with hearing from the people most impacted."

People Are Having Nothing of the Pathetic Arguments of the Premier

Immediately following the Premier's announcement of an anti-social propaganda tour and summit, people in the six targeted communities organized mass demonstrations to demand an end to the anti-social restructuring of health care, not its postponement. People wore signs reading "Health Care Cuts Kill!" and chanted "rural lives matter." They spoke of the need for a new direction for their rural communities where the poverty level is high, wages and working conditions are deteriorating and local populations are indeed aging as young people leave in search of a better life. The communities need comprehensive health care services, including 24/7 emergency care and seniors' care. Improvements must not take away from acute hospital care, as the premier proposed, but be seen as wide-ranging increased investments in social programs and public services to guarantee the rights and well-being of the people.

The people expressed pride and relief that their organized actions led to the suspension of the closures of their emergency services and vowed to continue speaking out for a pro-social humane solution to the crisis in health care.



Alberta United Nurses of Alberta Holds Actions Across Alberta

- Peggy Askin -



Calgary, February 13, 2020

From the Peace Country in the north to Bow Island in the south, United Nurses of Alberta (UNA) organized more than 33 information walks in 25 communities at health care work sites and MLAs' offices across the province on February 13. Nurses were joined by their co-workers from the Alberta Union of Public Employees (AUPE), the Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA) and Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). Active and retired workers from many sectors joined the nurses and other health care workers, including railway workers, steelworkers, and school board workers. Together they delivered a strong message, "Forward Together," *No!* to rollbacks, wages freezes and cuts, and *No!* to privatization. The workers made it clear that they are united in fighting against the Kenney agenda of wrecking health care and handing over even more of the health system to control by private interests.

February 13 was the 32nd anniversary of the end of the 19-day strike of Alberta nurses in 1988, in which nurses resisted demands for huge rollbacks and concessions from the Alberta government, defied every injunction and back to work order, and returned to work with their contract intact. The anniversary was marked with information walks and events in Bonnyville, Bow Island, Calgary, Camrose, Drayton Valley, Edmonton, Edson, Fairview, Fort McMurray, High River, Hinton, Jasper, Lac La Biche, Leduc, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Olds, Oyen, Peace River, Red Deer, St. Albert, Spirit River, Stony Plain, Vegreville, and Vermilion.

Speaking at the picket at the Foothills Medical Centre in Calgary, UNA Secretary-Treasurer Karen Craik said they were there to let the Alberta government know that "Health care workers like nurses are the heart of Alberta's health care system...and that the cuts to health care will hurt safe patient care in Alberta." "Don't let the government take the heart out of health care," she said.



Collective agreements for health care and government services workers expire March 31 and nurses and other health care workers and provincial government workers are facing outrageous demands from the government to cut wages and premiums and deteriorate working conditions at a time when the existing conditions are unsustainable. At the end of the four-year contract, the workers would have received zero wage increases for seven years, a cut in real wages of at least 15 per cent based on the average rates of inflation.

Nurses have been threatened with the loss of an "estimated" 500 full-time equivalent registered nursing jobs over the next three years, affecting about 750 nurses. AUPE members are threatened with contracting out of up to 3,000 jobs in hospital laundries, food services and environmental services. HSAA has been told the government is looking for private monopolies to take over public medical lab services.

But the government's plan to hold "negotiations" with loaded guns pointed at the workers is not succeeding. All the negotiating committees for government services and health care have given a resounding *No!* to the vicious attacks on the wages, benefits and working conditions contained in the proposals tabled by the provincial government and Alberta Health Services. They have answered with one voice that they will stand together in defence of the right to health care and the rights of the staff who deliver care and services. This blatant attempt to steal from the workers even more of the added value they create, and to degrade services in order to fill the coffers of the global health care monopolies and other parasites must not stand!

Fairview



Camrose



Edmonton



Jasper



Red Deer



Calgary



Lethbridge



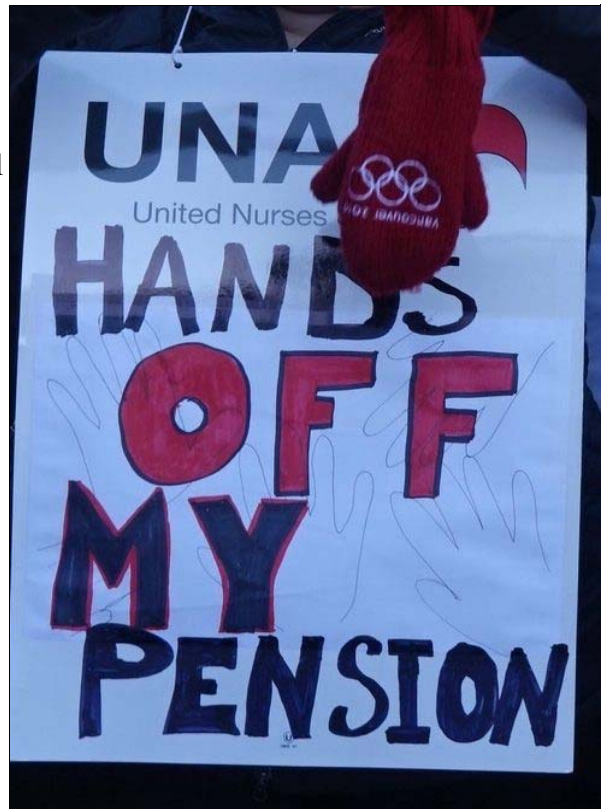
(Photos: WF, UNA)

Legalized Theft of Pension Funds Must Not Stand!

- Peggy Morton -

The Alberta Federation of Labour has released a report, "Don't You Dare!" demanding that the Kenney government reverse the changes to public sector pensions made in Bill 22, the *Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act* that established government control of public sector pensions through executive or police powers. More than 350,000 active and retired workers are affected by the changes. The report can be found [here](#).

Bill 22 put the Alberta Teachers Retirement Fund under control of the Alberta Investment Management Corporation (AIMCo). All public sector pension boards have been deprived of their ability to select a pension administrator, and will all be managed by AIMCo, which means that pension boards have no say on how the pension funds are managed. Cabinet can veto any appointments made by unions and public sector employers to the pension boards. As for direct control over AIMCo decisions, the legislation under which AIMCo operates requires it to comply with directives from the Minister. Through these changes the Kenney government has seized control of \$115 billion in pension funds which belong to workers employed by the Alberta government, Alberta Health Services, school boards, municipalities, post-secondary colleges and universities, and other public sector employers.



The AFL report explains that Bill 22 made drastic changes to pension member protections, in particular for the rights of part-time, non-unionized employees to participate in the pension plans. Of great concern is that Bill 22 removed successor rights provisions which allowed pension plan members to stay in the plans if their work was contracted out or privatized. The Kenney government has announced it is looking at privatizing public medical labs, contracting out hospital environmental, food and laundry services, moving surgical procedures to private clinics, and who knows what else. Under Bill 22, the workers could be deprived of their pensions and right to security in retirement.

Together, these changes amount to legalized theft of the pensions of public sector workers through the use of executive police powers. Not only can the Kenney government use these provisions to deprive workers of pensions, but it allows wholesale government dictate over investments decisions.

The report outlines signs that the UCP government is considering using Albertans' pension money to invest in oil and gas projects that are having trouble finding private investors, and that workers are saying to Jason Kenney, "Don't you dare use our pension funds to further your political agenda!"

Barely a month after Bill 22 received Royal Assent, AIMCo and the private equity corporation KKR, said to be one of the largest U.S. buyout companies, announced they had acquired a 65 per cent stake in the Coastal GasLink natural-gas pipeline from TC Energy Corp. Alberta public sector workers' pension funds are being used for a pipeline crossing unceded Wet'suet'en territory without the consent of the hereditary chiefs who are the Indigenous title holders. This is unconscionable!

The Kenney government does not recognize that workers have any rights as human beings or because of their contribution to the economy. He is engaging in legalized theft of what belongs to the workers by right in order to dictate which private interests have access to the pension funds. Many are expressing concern that this will lead to increasingly risky ventures and bailouts being propped up with public sector pension funds, putting the security of workers in retirement at risk. It goes without saying that such decisions will be made without regard for the need to address climate

change, take care of Mother Earth, and uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples.



These actions show criminal disregard for the workers, the socialized economy and for the natural environment. They continue to tie the Alberta economy to the U.S. war machine and economy and an unsustainable dependence on oil and gas extraction. A new direction for the economy is needed. Pension funds come from the social wealth that workers produce but do not control. It is this lack of control by the workers, who are the producers, over what is produced and how it is produced that is at the heart of the problem. The social wealth produced by workers must be reinvested in a socially responsible manner to build a diverse economy that has an

internal self-reliant strength and trades with others for mutual benefit and development. Such an economy must have the aim to guarantee the rights and well-being of all, and humanize the social and natural environment.

In a modern Canada pensions are a right that belongs to workers by virtue of their contributions to the economy, and all people have a right to pensions which provide security in retirement by virtue of being human. Governments have a social responsibility to guarantee pensions and security in retirement. To defend the pensions we have is to defend the rights of all!

Repeal Bill 22!

Who Decides? We Decide!

Defend the Pensions We Have -- Fight for Pensions for All!



Coming Event: March for What Matters

The callout for the March for What Matters, taking place across Alberta February 27-29 states in part, "This is an opportunity for individuals across all public sector professions to unite together against the Premier's relentless and ruthless sweeping cuts to what Albertans need most. Take a stand against the privatization of Alberta's public services.

"Since this government took office unemployment has increased while the quality of public services in our province has decreased, and a number of our public services have made steady moves towards privatization or being eliminated entirely.

"Please join us as we march from the Edmonton Convention Center to the front of the Legislature Building and make our voices heard. After our work day finishes, let's stand alongside fellow Albertans to stand up for what is right: **EQUITABLE** access to **QUALITY** public services."

Wear Red, Share Your Voice!

Thursday, February 27

Edmonton

**March from Edmonton Convention Centre
to the Alberta Legislature**

3:30-4:00 pm

Rally at the Legislature

4:00-5:00 pm

Facebook

Saturday, February 29

Alberta-wide Protest - Wear Red, Share Your Voice

Calgary

Focus on Education

11:00 am

Western Canada High School - 641 17 Ave SW

Focus on Healthcare

12:15 pm

Sheldon Chumir Urgent Care, 1213 4 St SW

Rally at City Hall

1:30 pm

800 Macleod Trail SE

Information booths at City Hall from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 pm

Facebook

Red Deer

1:00 pm

City Hall, 4919 - 48th Avenue

Facebook

Grande Prairie

12:00-1:30 pm

Location TBA

Facebook

Lethbridge

11:30 am - 2:00 pm

Location TBA

Facebook

Fort MacMurray

Noon

Location TBA

Facebook

Banff/Canmore

Noon

Location TBA

Facebook

Medicine Hat

Noon

Location TBA

Facebook

Slave Lake, Ponoka, and other Alberta Towns

Noon

City Hall

Facebook



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