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Ontario October 8 Day of Action on Long-Term Care
All Out to Uphold the Rights of Seniors
and Their Caregivers

- Steve Rutchinski -



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- Steve Rutchinski -

The Ontario Day of Action on Long-Term Care (LTC) organized by the Ontario Health Coalition, frontline care and senior advocacy organizations is being held on Thursday, October 8 to demand improved care in LTC facilities and an end to for-profit privatized LTC. Nineteen cities have now announced a total of 21 events. In Toronto, the car cavalcade will start at 9:30 am at Queen's Park and an online press conference will be held at 9:45 am. For all other locations and start times see the Calendar of Events above.

Many things have been revealed about our society as a result of the COVID pandemic, things which make it impossible for any thinking person to want a return to the old normal. And as Canada moves into a second wave, one of the things that stands out is the irrationality of how this situation is being dealt with.

Who would ever imagine that the same for-profit LTC monopolies, responsible for so many deaths of seniors and frontline health care workers, would be rewarded with more money from the government, in our name, to fix things they haven't fixed in more than two decades?



Who would imagine that seven months into this pandemic, testing and tracking possible transmissions would be in such disarray; that health care workers still do not have adequate personal protective equipment; that schools would be reopened without measures taken for physical distancing in the classroom or the transportation of students to and from schools? Or that hospitals would be laying off nursing staff to balance their budgets!



To any thinking person this is irrationality! How is it that frontline health care workers who have given their all, become the target of orders-in-council and ministerial decrees overriding their rights and their collective agreements? How is it that migrant workers, foreign students and others are recognized as doing work that is essential to the functioning of Canadian society but are denied status and rights here? How is it that standards of care for seniors advocated by registered nurses and other frontline care givers are simply ignored; or that courts and quasi-judicial bodies can outright dismiss appeals by teachers' and educators' unions for governments to

implement in our schools the standards set by public health departments?

All of this is to keep working people from being involved in making the decisions that affect their

lives; to silence the repudiation of the neo-liberal, privatization and pay-the-rich schemes that disarmed society and set the stage for what is now taking place.

As the second wave unfolds, government authorities shamelessly blame the people for being too lax about maintaining safe "bubbles"; blame the youth for having parties and so on. Not one will acknowledge it might have something to do with people going back to work because to do so would be to acknowledge that contact at work may be a factor and that would open the door to compensation claims. Not one will acknowledge that getting to and from work on public transit might be a factor; that busing children to school by the "old normal" standards; or refusing to cap class sizes at reasonable numbers might be a factor.

Such measures all require public investment -- not handouts to the rich. They require mobilizing the active participation of the polity in solving these problems. But the public authority clearly has not put full weight of the society and its resources behind keeping people safe and sorting out the issues of safely starting up, within the conditions of a pandemic. The COVID pandemic has indeed revealed many things -- one of the most important being the need for a credible public authority.

***All Out for the Ontario Day of Action for Long-Term Care!
Fight for the Rights of Our Seniors and Frontline Caregivers!***



Ontario Hospitals Lay Off Staff

Astounding as it is, Ontario hospitals are actually laying off nursing staff to try to balance their budgets! This is taking place even while the Ontario government, through Bill 195, has overridden collective agreements of frontline health care workers, claiming that extraordinary circumstances call for extraordinary measures. Apparently that doesn't apply when it comes to adequate funding of hospitals. Here are but a few recent announcement of hospital layoffs:

Lakeridge Health with five hospitals in Durham Region (including Oshawa, Pickering and Whitby) informed the Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) on September 11 that it is cutting eight full-time and six part-time registered nurses from several of its units as it seeks to balance its budget. ONA President Vicki McKenna said, "It's truly outrageous that this is the route that management is taking to balance the budget and the residents of Durham Region, who rely on Lakeridge for their health-care needs, should be very alarmed."

Hamilton hospitals will be making \$42 million in cuts this year, with more expected, to meet provincial 2023 spending targets. "There is nothing left to trim," said Dave Murphy, President of CUPE Local 7800, which represents 3,500 staff at Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS). HHS has had an occupancy rate of over 100 per cent since August 2016.



Southlake Regional Health Centre in Newmarket will be laying off 97 registered nurses. This works out to be more than 176,000 hours of direct patient care lost to cuts according to a September 22 ONA news release. ONA Bargaining Unit President Jill Moore said: "Nurses are working short-

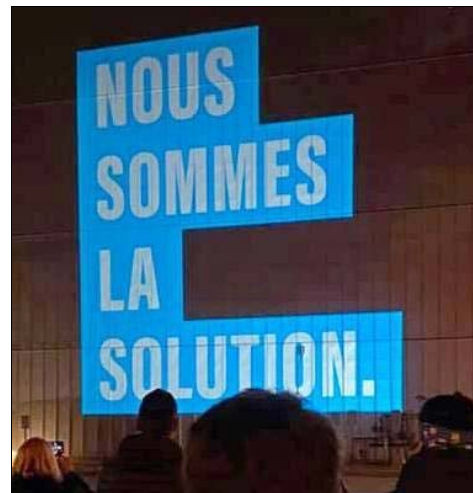
staffed, but one of our biggest concerns is surge capacity. When our patient numbers increase, as they typically do during a pandemic, we often do not have enough staff resources to provide quality patient care, let alone trying to serve a population that is growing by leaps and bounds. What is most distressing is that the employer has said that these 97 layoffs are the best-case scenario. I cannot imagine what more layoffs will do for patient care."

Ontario Health Coalition Executive Director Natalie Mehra said in an October 2 statement: "Hospitals are reporting across Ontario that they have been promised their extraordinary COVID-19 pandemic costs will be funded, but much of the money has not flowed. Local hospitals are reporting deficits, some have layoffs, some are drawing down their cash reserves." She added that "hospitals have closed down thousands of beds even while suffering increased overcrowding. [...] The Ontario Health Coalition is calling on the Ford government to fund public hospitals and flow the money to stabilize and build needed capacity."



Quebec Government's New Rules and Laws Said to Control COVID-19 A Stand Bound to Aggravate the Crisis

- Pierre Chénier -



On October 1, the Quebec government issued an Order-in-Council with new measures it says are aimed to stop the spread of COVID-19 in Quebec (see FYI). Recent data show outbreaks of COVID-19 across Quebec, with cases of infection on the increase in all regions. Hospitalizations and deaths are also increasing. The daily number of new reported cases has increased from 799 on September 28 to 1,191 on October 4. COVID-19 related hospitalizations went from 247 to 361 in the same period. Forty-four deaths were reported between September 28 and October 4. By comparison, the number of daily new infections was below 300 between June 1 and September 15.

The Quebec government says it is appealing to the "consciousness" and the "sense of responsibility" of Quebecers to implement the Order-in-Council and prevent further spread of the disease. But in the same breath the blame for the increasing cases is put on what it calls the laxity of an increased number of people, especially the youth holding parties.

The Order-in-Council introduces new police powers, yet Premier François Legault says there is no witch hunt intended. Public gatherings will be banned, while the government and ministers are granted impunity to do as they please, so long as it is done in the name of protecting "the health of

the population."

Furthermore these same Orders-in-Council, Ministerial Orders and Special Powers are being used to attack frontline health care workers, to silence their voice and dismiss their numerous proposals to alleviate and overcome the crisis. Far from heeding their voice and proposals, the state has granted itself the power to override their negotiated contracts so that their working conditions can be changed at will.

The already untenable working conditions, exacerbated by the pandemic, have resulted in massive resignations in health care and social services, making the fight against the pandemic even more difficult. In fact, the pandemic has been used to further the restructuring of the state, stepping up the anti-social offensive to destroy the institutions of civil society that created some space for the people to intervene, replacing them with the undisputed power of the ruling elite and government executives.



Meanwhile, COVID-19 testing and tracing are chaotic. Schools have been reopened without respect for the government's often repeated two-metre distancing guideline. The Superior Court just defeated the application of the Autonomous Teachers' Federation (FAE) for an interim injunction to force the Quebec government to inform the FAE and Quebeckers of its plan for accelerated COVID-19 testing in the school system. No such plan exists! And we are to believe that governments of police powers and deployment of police forces are going to solve the problems?

"Consciousness" and "responsibility" do not exist up in the air, Premier Legault. They are embodied in institutions, in processes that exist in real life and can be used to achieve the aims that society sets to uphold the well-being of all, especially in times of crisis. Orders-in-Council will not stop the spread of the disease. Police measures do not inculcate social consciousness. Taking up social responsibility and mobilizing people in their collectives and organizations can and this is what the workers and people have been doing since the very beginning of this crisis. This is what must be stepped up and these efforts must be supported by the state.



Citizen-Participation in the Fight Against the Pandemic

- Normand Chouinard -

At the moment there are tens of thousands of Quebec teachers fighting every day to guarantee their safety and that of their students, but the government prevents them from being able to decide how to proceed. There are tens of thousands of workers in the health care system who are putting their lives on the line to look after the population and find solutions to the crisis. The government responds with ministerial orders to keep control over the decisions. There are currently hundreds of thousands of industrial workers fighting to maintain the measures they have put in place to protect themselves, but management wants to keep decision-making in the hands of the monopolies. They are outright

blocking the workers and taking away their initiative. The great mass of youth want nothing more than to be responsible toward society, and once again they are being denied this right.

The crisis-ridden liberal democratic institutions have created a situation whereby governments and cartel parties in public office are there to block the activation of the human factor/social consciousness. They are not there to make sure measures are socially responsible. They decide nothing, are paralyzed by inaction and divorced from considering the sanctity of human life. Police powers will not solve the problem.

New social forms are required so that working people can resolve the situation in their favour: citizens' committees in neighbourhoods where people live and where they work to ensure that decisions are taken by the citizens themselves and they can work out what can be done to ensure their implementation.

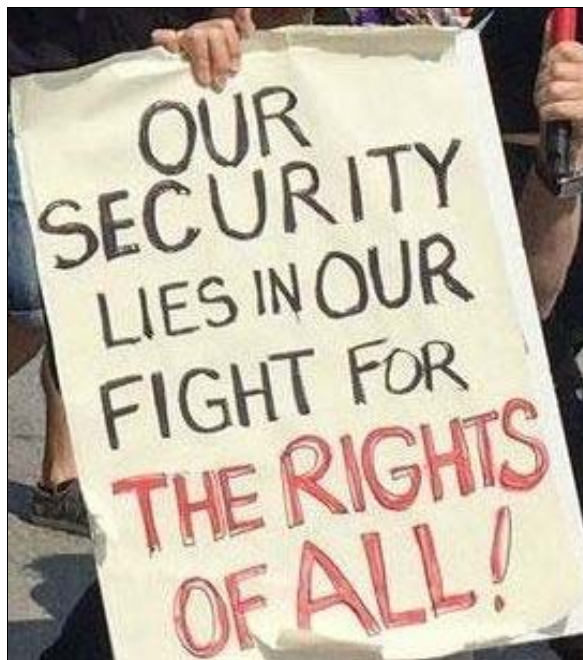
In seniors' homes, where possible, general assemblies with physical distancing should be held to mobilize older people in decision-making.

In workplaces, health and safety committees need to be expanded to promote discussion on what needs to be done at work and also in society. The people need governments which consider it their duty to make sure companies cooperate.

Youth are eager to be directly involved as volunteers in all kinds of ways, in their schools and neighbourhoods. They can be given responsibilities that instill in them in a practical way the importance of public safety.

Further measures in this direction can be elaborated. The people need governments which support such things and fund the process whereby different levels of the civil service are at the people's disposal to organize them. People need governments which act as facilitators of such Quebec-wide mobilization projects to fight the pandemic.

This is what the government should be doing instead of putting forward new police measures. If the government does not want to assist, then the working class, people and youth, have the responsibility to do it themselves.



Important Demands of Frontline Workers to Face Second Wave

- Interview, Marjolaine Aubé -

Marjolaine Aubé is President of the Union of Workers at the Integrated Health and Social Services Centre of Laval (CISSS de Laval-CSN). These workers include those who lived through the tragedy at the Sainte-Dorothée residential and long-term care centre (CHSLD) in Laval in which 101 residents died and many workers contracted COVID-19 during the first wave of the pandemic. The interview below focuses on the demands put forward by the union from the beginning of the outbreak

at the CHSLD, to defend the health and safety of patients and staff, to deal with the urgency of the situation and to ensure that such tragedies never happen again.



Workers' Forum: Can you tell us how many workers you represent and what work they do at the CISSS in Laval.

Marjolaine Aubé: I represent 4,200 members who are part of categories 2 and 3 at the CISSS of Laval. Category 2 includes orderlies, housekeeping staff, kitchen staff, specialized workers, what we call paratechnical staff. Category 3 includes office workers, involving administrative or computer work, etc. Our CISSS includes 29 establishments throughout the island of Laval. These are all the health and social services facilities in the network except for the university. We have a hospital site, CHSLDs, local community services centres (CLSCs), a youth centre, a readaptation centre for intellectual disabilities (CRDI) and a rehabilitation site.

WF: From the beginning of the pandemic, the union presented demands to deal with COVID-19. Can you tell us more?



MA: Our main demand at this time is to have the necessary equipment at the local level to protect us, namely the N95 mask. We need it for all the hot zones [where we are treating infected people] of our establishments. We made this demand with the other unions involved in the CISSS. The N95 is currently offered exclusively to those who work in areas such as intensive care or emergency. However, many studies have shown that airborne transmission of COVID-19 is also possible. This is especially the case if you put patients with COVID-19 in a common area. Our ventilation systems do not allow for proper removal of the virus particles.

We want to be properly equipped so that we don't get infected and our patients don't get infected. We also need fit testing, to ensure the masks fit properly, for everyone working in the hot zones, because there are several kinds of N95 masks. For the moment, the employer has said no to this demand. We have appealed to the Labour Standards, Pay Equity and Workplace Health and Safety Board (CNESST) to remedy this situation.

As for our other demands, they have been accepted by the employer and our work at this time is to ensure their full implementation. In all cases, when presenting our demands to the employer, we

have ensured that we also appealed to the Ministry of Health and Social Services.

Our first demand, on day one of the crisis, was for screening of all patients and employees in all our CHSLDs. At first the employer did not want to implement this measure. There was no screening if the person did not have symptoms of COVID-19 or had not traveled abroad. Staff had to work even if they had symptoms, and without protective equipment. We eventually prevailed, and it was when the screening was done that it was discovered that the CHSLD in Sainte-Dorothée was totally contaminated. Subsequently, in May, the Quebec government started implementing systematic screening of all employees, on a voluntary basis, in all CHSLDs in Quebec.

From the very beginning, we also demanded that the movement of personnel between establishments be stopped. We also demanded the cessation of movement between floors, so that no one would move from a cold zone [where residents are not infected by COVID-19] to a hot zone.

We also demanded that the employer provide full-time work in the position workers already occupied, so that they would not have a loss of income because of being limited to one workplace. It should be remembered that at the beginning, only 20 per cent of the orderlies were full-time. All the other positions were precarious. We have made significant gains in this regard, and we have also obtained a ban on the creation of flying squads for orderlies throughout Quebec. You can imagine how difficult it is for public health to investigate an outbreak if the worker was on a flying squad, how difficult it is to find out how the outbreak occurred, to trace the person's contacts, etc.



Workers at the CHSLD in Sainte-Dorothée hold memorial, July 15, 2020, for workers and residents who died of COVID-19 during the first wave of the pandemic.

As far as personal protective equipment (PPE) is concerned, we have achieved some things. For example, we requested pairing of workers. Now, if two people work together, when it is break time, one staff member ensures that the other safely removes their PPE. This applies to anyone who sets foot in a hot zone, including housekeeping staff, for example, not just nurses or orderlies.

Through our work, we helped establish a joint post-pandemic committee in June that includes representatives from our three unions, as well as management representatives from several facilities, so that everyone can talk to each other. Our demands, with the exception of the one on safety equipment, were accepted in July. The decisions began to be implemented. It takes time, there are a lot of levels of decision-making, a complicated hierarchy. But we can say that we now have a plan at the local level. It is not yet fully implemented but we are moving forward.

To get there, we have made more than 150 public interventions in the media to get people to listen to us. We have also asked for help from the Ministry. Certainly the tone has changed in our CISSS because of this work.

Right now, there are outbreaks of COVID-19 everywhere, including Laval. We are in the second wave. Everyone must take the necessary precautions, including wearing masks. Those who refuse to wear a mask risk having themselves or those they are in contact with becoming our patients. We don't want to relive the crisis of the first wave. That's why we have put forward all these demands and are working to ensure that they are thoroughly implemented.

(Translated from original french by Workers' Forum.)



For Your Information

New Order-in-Council and Use of Police Forces in Quebec

As COVID-19 cases surge in Quebec and the death toll climbs again, the Quebec government has responded with a new Order-in-Council, announced on September 30 and that went into force on October 1.[1] It is based on the previous orders which give full power to the government or the Minister of Health and Social Services to order any measure deemed necessary in the name of protecting the health of the population. The orders also provide full impunity to the government and the Minister in exercising these powers.

Measures prescribed depend on the COVID-19 infection rate. Quebec is divided into 18 areas[2] for this purpose with each assigned a corresponding "alert" level, ranging from one to a maximum of four. As of October 1, Montreal, Laval, Montérégie, Chaudière-Appalaches, the Quebec City region and Lanaudière are partially or fully at level four.

Some of the major measures in force in level four areas include:

- No visitors in private homes and cottages, except in the case of people living alone who can have one visitor (e.g., caregivers or tradespeople performing work can enter private homes, one at a time).
- Activities organized in a public place are prohibited, except for places of worship and funerals, where a limit of 25 people is in force and a register of attendees must be kept.
- Demonstrations are permitted but wearing a mask or face covering is mandatory at all times.
- Travel outside Quebec is not recommended. Travel within Quebec between zones with different alert levels is also discouraged, except for essential travel: students, workers, children of divorced parents with shared custody and freight transportation. The rules applying to residents of an area with a given alert level remain in force when in other areas.
- Public meeting rooms, as well as auditoriums, cinemas, theatres and museums are closed. Libraries other than those in educational institutions are closed, except lending desks.
- Restaurants are closed except for delivery, takeout and drive-through orders while bars, pubs, taverns and casinos are closed. For microbreweries and distilleries, consumption of food or beverages on the premises is barred.

Containment measures are less restrictive in level three, two and one alert areas.

Use of Police Forces to Implement the Decree

In announcing the Order-in-Council at a September 30 press conference, Premier François Legault together with Public Security Minister and Deputy Premier Genevieve Guilbault explained that the new restrictions contained in the Order-in-Council are in force for 28 days, starting at midnight October 1. However, no end date was specified for the Order-in-Council and the exceptional powers it grants to the government and Minister of Health and Social Services.

Regarding private homes, Legault said "police will be able to obtain a telewarrant quickly, from a judge, right away" to allow them to enter a home. If a violation is observed, people will be asked to comply, in which case the objective of the regulation will be achieved. Tickets of up to \$1,000 can be issued "on the spot" for non-compliance.

Regarding outside gatherings, Legault said that "From midnight [October 1] all gatherings will be banned. So what we have asked the police to do is first to disperse the people, invite them to leave. Then, if there are people who refuse to cooperate, well, they will also be likely to receive a ticket."

Regarding demonstrations, he said: "For protests [...] wearing a mask will now be mandatory. Those who refuse to follow this rule can also get a ticket of \$1,000. Officers will be able to act quickly by giving tickets on the spot."

Notes

1. To read the Government of Quebec's Order-in-Council 1020-2020, September 30, 2020, [click here](#).
2. For the map of COVID-19 alert levels by region, [click here](#).



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