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**Proposal for Binding Arbitration in Ontario K-12 Education**  
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Ontario teachers and education workers who are members of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) are discussing a proposal from their union and the Ford government to go to binding interest arbitration to settle the impasse in negotiations. Voting on the proposal closes on September 27.

The union's main argument to its members has been that as a result of the Greenbelt scandal the government is on its back foot and has come to the table to agree to this process without any "poison pills" and that this is a way forward given these unique circumstances. In fact, since the proposal was released, the Greenbelt scandal has developed further. Following the resignation of

Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs Steve Clark on September 4, a second minister in the Ford cabinet resigned September 20 after revelations of his having misinformed the Integrity Commissioner about a trip he and Ford's director of housing policy took to Las Vegas that coincided with that of a real estate developer whose lands were removed from protection from development in the Greenbelt. The policy director has also resigned. Since then, on September 21, Premier Ford was forced to publicly announce that it was a mistake to have broken his promise not to open up the Greenbelt to development and said that he is reversing course.

On September 22, Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, became the third member of Ford's cabinet to resign, announcing he was stepping down from his cabinet duties "effective immediately," and would be resigning his seat in the coming days. He claimed his decision was a career move "completely unrelated" to "recent events." Ford has now lost three cabinet ministers and had to shuffle his cabinet twice in a matter of weeks.



Whatever one thinks of this scandal or of the proposal put to OSSTF members that they agree to go to binding arbitration, clearly the Ford government has shown that it is corrupt because of how its ministers and senior officials have conducted themselves and are now forced to resign. More revelations are sure to surface in the coming period. Ford's claim that it was a "mistake" to break a commitment he made not to open up protected Greenbelt lands for real estate development is to hide the corruption involved in the affair and to present it as an error in judgement.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The scandal reveals the way governments in the service of the rich act. Private interests have taken control of decision-making at every level. Seriously affecting public K-12 education, the Ford government's Bill 98, the *Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023* gives the Minister of Education control over the lands held by school boards and requires the minister's approval for land purchases or sales. This gives the minister direct control over real estate holdings in cities, towns, and villages across Ontario. It also gives the minister new powers to set provincial priorities in education that school boards are required to comply with or face penalties or dissolution.

The Minister of Education can now arbitrarily determine when curricula should be reviewed and require revisions to "meet labour market needs" without the involvement of educators. The act sets out changes in education that will have students able to leave school after grade 11 and enter the workforce to meet labour market needs. It also gives the minister direct control over other infrastructure acquisitions by school boards that it can use to dictate province-wide contracts for technology, which are, in turn, used to hand over public funds to tech giants.

Other ways the government is using K-12 education to direct public funds into private coffers includes requiring all students to take an online course to graduate. The overall degradation of conditions in public schools is another factor which encourages parents to opt to send their children to institutions which provide private education and for tutoring -- some of it funded by vouchers from the government. The media do not bring these matters to light because they do not discuss the working conditions of teachers and education staff and the plight of public education or its necessity in a modern society.

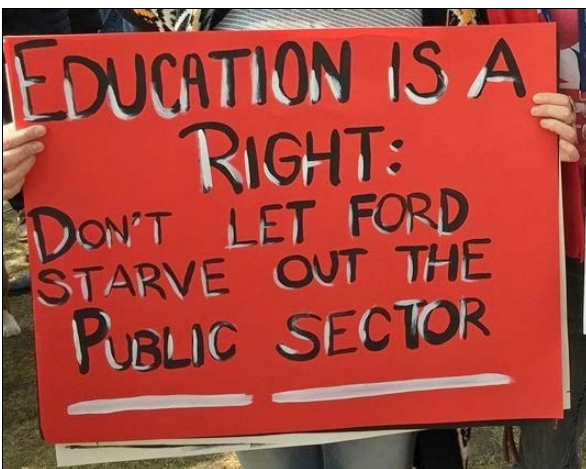
The teachers' and education workers' working conditions are the students' learning conditions. It is obvious that a society in transition as a result of the achievements of the scientific and technical revolution requires a system of education that meets its needs. That is not the point when the teachers oppose the changes being imposed. The need for changes is a fact BUT this does not mean that narrow private interests should be in charge of decision-making. It does not mean that the direction of the economy should serve narrow private interests for more and more profits, rather than nation-building. It does not mean that the dignity of labour must be trampled or that the working people from at home and abroad are disposable. It does not mean that young people with an inadequate education should be thrown into the labour market, to be replaced whenever they get injured or are not suitable to those who consider labour a cost of production, not a valuable asset as the human productive force that creates all the wealth societies depend on for their living.



Teachers and education workers are demanding changes that serve the people at home and abroad to humanize the natural and social environment. Teachers and education workers are among the very best assets society has and they must be treated with dignity and given the full backing of the state to support the important work they do.

As for its corruption, the Ford government should not be permitted to get away with the claim that the corruption related to the Greenbelt Scandal -- the release of protected lands to real estate developers -- is an exception. Far from it, it is the rule. So too, it must not get away with trampling treaty rights of the Indigenous Peoples.

When it comes to considering what the government is doing in the field of education, it must not be given a pass based on this apparent about face whereby the Premier says that breaking his promise not to get rid of the Greenbelt was wrong. The only regret the Premier has is that he was caught. He cannot be given a pass for his years of destruction of the system of public education which he has continued from those who preceded him.



What is the need of the education unions to go to binding interest arbitration? They should stick to their demand that the government bargain in good faith and provide the teachers and education workers with the wages and working conditions they are demanding. That is the only way that they can empower themselves and keep the initiative in their own hands in the circumstances where the government is duplicitous about everything it does. The Greenbelt is but one example which shows governments taken over by narrow private interests are corrupt and not trustworthy. The government has everything to hide, while

teachers and education workers have much to gain by speaking with one voice for their demands for increased investments in public education. These are investments in the youth and the present and future of society.

By OSSTF members voting now to reject the proposal to submit to binding arbitration to settle their contracts, the message is delivered loud and clear that the government must negotiate properly, not dictate. It must respect teachers and education workers or face the consequences of their fury in the form of the withdrawal of their labour. The teachers and education workers need higher wages and remedial action to improve working conditions. A strong No vote to voluntary binding interest arbitration makes a statement that teachers and education workers want the government to sit down and negotiate in good faith all matters of concern to teachers and education workers and do so in a manner that benefits public education and those who provide it, not self-serving private interests.



## Greenbelt Scandal Deepens



On August 20, Ontario Integrity Commissioner, J. David Wake, concluded that Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs Steve Clark breached sections 2 and 3(2) of the *Integrity Act* and recommended to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario that he be reprimanded for his failure to comply with the Act. The ruling comes in response to Wake's investigation concerning the mandate given to Clark by Premier Ford to open up the Greenbelt for development after having spent four years saying he would not do that. In the summary of the report outlining his findings, Wake noted that the evidence he reviewed -- which included interviewing witnesses, reviewing maps, emails and text messages -- "paints a picture of a process marked by

misinterpretation, unnecessary hastiness and deception. It shows that Mr. Amato [Clark's chief of staff] advised Minister Clark to 'leave it with me' as he embarked on a chaotic and almost reckless process that I find led to an uninformed and opaque decision which resulted in the creation of an opportunity to further the private interests of some developers improperly." The Auditor General found that 83 per cent of the land removed is among the highest quality farmland in the province. About 400 acres of the removed sites are wetlands or woodlands.

In particular, the report found that the Housing and Municipal Affairs Minister's Chief of Staff, Ryan Amato, sent signals to certain developers that their Greenbelt holdings could be developed,

which amounted to insider information that they used to benefit themselves. Of the 15 properties that were removed from the Greenbelt for development, 14 involved Amato. His recommendations were accepted whole hog by the Ontario Cabinet after being submitted by Minister Clark.

On August 23, the Ontario Provincial Police referred its investigation into the land swaps -- in which 2,995 hectares of land across the 15 sites removed from the Greenbelt were replaced with about 3,804 hectares elsewhere, including about 971 hectares that were already protected, according to the Auditor General -- to the RCMP. The RCMP says it will evaluate the information to assess whether to launch an investigation or not.

On August 28, the Chiefs of Ontario unanimously passed a resolution at an emergency meeting opposing the so-called Greenbelt land swap and also called for Minister Clark to resign. The majority of the land removed from the Greenbelt is covered by multiple treaties with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the 1923 Williams Treaties, to which seven other First Nations are party, according to a previous report on the issue by the Ontario Auditor General. Rights under those treaties include harvesting rights in certain areas, such as rights to hunt, fish, trap and gather.

Ontario Regional Chief Glen Hare, who is from the M'Chigeeng First Nation on Manitoulin Island, said First Nations were not adequately consulted on the Greenbelt changes, despite the changes directly affecting their treaty and constitutionally protected rights. "Planning decisions related to housing are foundational to how we live and live together," Hare said at a news conference following the meeting. "This requires all governments to work together in respect to treaty relationships and obligations." Chief Laurie Carr of the Hiawatha First Nation, one of the signatories to the Williams Treaties, said removing land from the Greenbelt "directly interferes" with those rights. Chief Taynar Simpson of the Alderville First Nation, another signatory to the Williams Treaties, said the Greenbelt removals would damage water systems and wetlands that supply groundwater, reduce flood risks, and improve climate resilience.



On September 4, Labour Day, Minister Clark resigned his cabinet position. On September 5, Ford announced a review of all Greenbelt lands including the parcels that were removed. On September 20, Ford's Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery, Kaleed Rasheed, resigned after it was revealed that he gave the Integrity Commissioner incorrect dates about a trip to Las Vegas he took at the same time a close friend who is also a real estate developer and who owned land removed from the Greenbelt did. Rasheed initially gave dates about his trip to the Commissioner that made it appear as if they did not take the trip at the same time. A spokesperson for the former minister, prior to his resignation, said this was done mistakenly. Addressing the public on September 21, Ford also called it a mistake to have opened the protected lands for real estate development, but did not explain what the mistake was or why he decided to break the clear commitment he made not to develop them.



# Elementary Teachers' Federation Reaches Tentative Agreement for Education Workers

On September 22 the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) announced that it had reached a tentative central agreement for its 3,500 education worker members with the Council of Trustees' Associations representing school boards and the Ontario government.

ETFO bargains at two central tables: the Teacher/Occasional Teacher Central Table (on behalf of approximately 80,000 teachers) and the Education Worker Central Table (on behalf of approximately 3,500 designated early childhood educators, education support personnel, and professional support personnel). The tentative central agreement reached is for ETFO's 3,500 education workers. An agreement has not yet been reached for ETFO's 80,000 teacher and occasional teacher members. Strike votes for teachers are being held in the coming weeks across the province.

ETFO President Karen Brown said, "After a prolonged and difficult bargaining process, we are pleased to be able to bring forward a tentative central agreement to our education worker members that addresses their key bargaining goals. As we have been reminding the Ford government all along, tentative agreements are possible when all parties are genuinely engaged and when you give the legal bargaining process a chance."



Details of the agreement will be shared with ETFO education worker members after a meeting is held with their local presidents and chief negotiators. A ratification vote is being scheduled; details of the vote will be shared with members once they are confirmed.

"With the assistance of the conciliator appointed by the Minister of Labour, we will continue to work to reach an agreement that is fair for our teacher and occasional teacher members," added Brown. "We are focused on getting government cuts off the table and on improving members' working conditions and students' learning conditions."



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