

STAND WITH TEACHERS AND EDUCATION WORKERS

February 6, 2020

There are times in life when you have to stand up for what you believe in.

Across Ontario, teachers and education workers are doing just that – standing up to the bullies at Queen’s Park who want to undermine the quality of education in this province.

The Conservatives are imposing increased class size in Grades 4 through 12, resulting in poorer learning conditions, the loss of thousands of teaching positions, and a reduction in the programs available for current and future students. They want mandatory (for profit) e-learning to replace classroom teaching. And, they are cutting back on supports for students with special needs.

These are the issues at stake as teachers and education workers take job action. It is why they have given their unions strike votes of over 90%, and why there are participating in picket lines and rallies in extraordinary numbers. And while CUPE members were able to win back over a thousand jobs at the provincial table, they are still mobilizing for tough bargaining at the local level.

The **Conservative government is making deep cuts** to education and social services in order to pay for tax breaks for corporations and wealthy individuals. That agenda is guaranteed to lead to [turmoil and disruption](#) – and every community is being affected. So far, the Ford government is losing the battle for public opinion, and they are desperate to change that dynamic.

We saw that desperation when Conservative millionaires took out full page ads in four major GTA newspapers attacking teachers and teacher unions. The so-called “Vaughan Working Families”, a mysterious group with no contact information and no website, is bringing the tactics of Donald Trump to Ontario. Labour Council is working to uncover exactly who paid for these ads, and how they are connected to Stephen Lecce.

When they started this fight, Ford’s Conservatives didn’t anticipate that they would energize a whole new generation of labour and community activists. Last April students led one of the biggest school walkouts in the province’s history – over 100,000 students from more than 600 schools took part. Today, students are engaged across Toronto and York Region, from Etobicoke to Scarborough, from downtown Toronto to the northern reaches of York Region. The back page of Labour Council’s Winter 2020 Labour Action magazine includes a riveting poem, *If you cut us do we not bleed?* by a Grade 12 student and member of York Communities for Public Education.

Parents groups are also springing up and taking collective action. They know the effects of education cuts are bad for all students, and even more so for special needs students or children from marginalized communities. In media interviews parents are clear they understand education workers are a key line of defence against austerity, cuts and privatization of public education. They are setting up “solidarity camps” across the GTA for parents in need of child care on days that elementary schools are being struck. Students and parents will remember their power.

Teachers and education workers have been hitting the picket lines on cold winter days as well as working to rule and engaging limited withdrawal of service strikes, to draw attention to the key issues around student success. Veterans recall the Mike Harris era attacks, and newer education workers are gaining confidence in their collective power, especially as they see solidarity expressed by students, parents, and other workers and their unions. When everything is settled and classrooms are stable again, the lessons learned on the line will not be forgotten.

We have seen tremendous solidarity in our recent fights. Last year, education workers and other unions stood up to help protect Toronto's subways from being stolen by the provincial Conservatives. Now, our entire movement is actively supporting the fight for quality education by informing members, inviting teachers to their meetings, and joining picket lines. Everyone knows that if we let the Conservatives divide us, they will not only gut public education, they will go after other public services and other workers. The rewards they seek include a wealth transfer through tax cuts, profits from privatization, reducing the power of unions, and reducing the value of the public sector.

There is much at stake - let's stand together for publicly funded education.

On February 6, the Labour Council resolved to:

1. Call on affiliates to continue supporting education workers in every way possible, and urge their members to join education picket lines and rallies
2. Continue supporting educators, parents and students in Toronto; and in York Region through York Communities for Public Education
3. Work with Trustees and school boards in Toronto, York Region and across Ontario to resist education cuts
4. Urge affiliates to join the OFL's *The People vs. Conservative Cuts* Rally in Niagara Falls on February 22, 2020
5. Continue working with allies such as Press Progress to uncover the manipulation and dark money attempting to sway politics in Ontario.