

SUPPORT OUR TEACHERS: JOIN THE PICKET LINES TO ENFORCE THE LAW

A Socialist Solidarity leaflet

June 2014

The BC Teachers' Federation is the last union in BC that has not capitulated to three majority BC Liberal governments. Christy Clark has made sure that elected school trustees who stopped her from completely smashing teachers' control of the teaching profession in 2002 were removed from their positions in BC Public School Employers Association (BCPSEA) in 2013 so that she could ensure direct control of the bargaining process.

Every other union has been forced to accept Gordon Campbell's clawbacks but only two had their contracts illegally broken: teachers and hospital workers (HEU). When HEU won their court ruling in 2007 that found the government broke the law, the ministry of health was able to avoid completely restoring their contract by offering individual cash settlements to workers (and their descendants in some cases) instead..

Teachers want what every parent wants:

- >more time with fewer students in regular classes ("class size and composition")
- >smaller classes and more specialist teachers for needier students
(these demands were provided for in the stripped-out parts of the contract)
- >a decent raise in line with other public service professionals

Teachers also want what everyone wants:

that the government follow the law and restore the 2002 contract, or at least provide funds that restore the services that contract provided.

In 2005 the BCTF fought the BC Liberals like most union members wouldn't: teachers walked out in spite of a strike ban and stayed out for two weeks without strike pay and the BCTF was fined \$500 000.

In 2005 teachers did something almost everyone wanted: they won everything except for dropping the fine and restoring the contract.

Teachers won in 2005 because the public understood something that they forget at voting time: solidarity with BCTF held the government to account and won more for students than opposition politicians ever could.

The key to changing our province and our planet for the better is to support the people who create its wealth with their sweat and brain power. **Public schools ensure that** every child has the same opportunities to become a true individual in a safe, supportive space, and that the next generation of workers is prepared for labour, but also that **democracy has an anchor.**

Everyone learns from kindergarten to grade 12 that they are equal before the law, deserving the same dignity of work and leisure as anyone else, and worthy to be taught by trained professionals in modern, safe, comfortable buildings, paid for with steady and adequate funds.

Public schools grow the future of our world and that future belongs to all, not just the wealthy. Anything else and the one-percent will have rolled the world back a hundred years.

More on the back (at least two sides to every good story, right)

IF THE GOVERNMENT WON'T OBEY THE LAW, AND VOTERS DON'T REMOVE THE LAWBREAKERS, HOW CAN WORKERS ENFORCE THE LAW?

BC Liberals violated Charter rights of thousands of teachers and hospital workers in 2002. Voters have re-elected them three times in a row since then: 2005, 2009, and 2013. Each time, the BC NDP opposition moved further away from defending labour and closer to government's neoliberal agenda. Voters chose the party that had the better record of carrying out "business as usual."

Voters are mostly workers, though, and workers in BC seem to know that the real power is in the workplace. They look for the best-organized workers to initiate change. The April 2005 CUPE strike was a near general strike but was settled by a vote for a backroom deal by BCFed leader Jim Sinclair. The October 2005 BCTF strike would have also been joined by other workers if it had gone an extra week. It also ended with Sinclair's meddling. In each case, however, the effect of the strikes was to improve working, learning and service conditions across BC's education sector. Imagine what would have happened if a general strike had shut down the province like it was about to do in the Operation Solidarity days of October 1983. **The BCTF led that as well, refusing to be intimidated.**

Christy Clark knows that to defeat teachers is to break their resolve with confusion and humiliation. The spring 2014 lockout was a complicated restriction of the school workday. It was supposed to erode teachers' solidarity and expose BCTF members' willingness to keep working for 90% of their pay rather than strike. It was a provocation and the vote for a full walkout was the best vote ever. Now pickets have closed all public schools and the government thinks this is meaningless to parents as the school year is all but over. Many parents are outraged but just as many are looking at the looming summer and preparing children for holidays.

In fact, the last two weeks of school are crucial as teachers prepare for summer school and next September. These aspects of public education aren't "meaningless". Every union member needs to continue supporting the BCTF strike. BCPSEA continues to harass parents and teachers with essential service rulings that force students to write provincial exams behind picket lines, and more. Teachers are trying not to buckle as they wonder if negotiations with the employer are ever going to work.

**On every school picket shift, there's someone who says,
"We need a general strike now, because they won't listen to just us
anymore."**

This is very true and teachers must take the lead. The BCTF has done more than any group to deepen, improve, support and defend public schools. Parents want to support teachers but can't do it by electoral means.

Workers can enforce the law with massive acts of solidarity.

Teachers need daily picket line visits from unions and supporters. Union members can call for leaders to plan a day of action and more. Supporters can organize public rallies and occupy MLA offices and provincial buildings. That may be enough for teachers to get their "fair deal" contract, and their victory will be a victory for all workers.

No matter what happens with teachers, **workers need to build a network of activists** who will share the defeats and successes of labour everywhere. We need a tradition of class-struggle unionism to be built here so that public education and every industry will be defended for human need not corporate greed.