

BCTF Courage and Determination an Example to Us All

BC Teachers have shown incredible courage and tenacity in their vigorous defense of their collective bargaining rights. They deserve to be congratulated and thanked by the hundreds of thousands of all organized workers in this Province. They also deserve the gratitude of British Columbians for maintaining high standards despite the devastating effects government policy over the past five years has had on the once high quality education in this province.

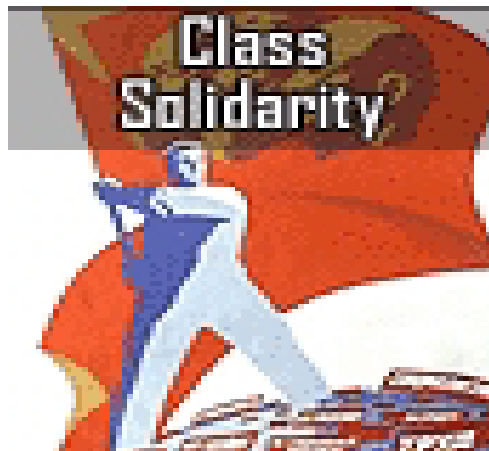
The BCTF is not alone in this battle, other public sector workers, members of CUPE, HEU, Operating Engineers have demonstrated immense solidarity with their sisters and brothers on the picket lines. They also deserve to be warmly congratulated and thanked. As well, the strong show of support from the many private sector unions has also added strength and support for the teachers. This government has managed to forge a unity in the labour movement not seen for many years although this certainly is not their intent.

These displays of solidarity and support are a clear indication that all workers, public and private understand the deep implications of the actions of this government. By using the courts to do their "dirty work" they had obviously hoped to shift the public's perception of this dispute from the huge political implications to be a simple legal issue. They have rigidly stuck to their position that this is an illegal strike and the teachers are breaking the law.

The destruction of unjust laws is part of the struggle for democracy. No one knows this better than the teachers' union of South Africa who in a letter of support to the October 17th rally in Victoria compared the BC Government's and Court actions to the laws that were in place under the Apartheid regime. Let's not forget that the government used legislation to disrupt the collective bargaining process before it had a chance to play itself out. No teacher had withdrawn from the classroom at the time Bill 12 was introduced.

Canadians have a long and proud history of fighting and defeating unjust laws from the days of Mackenzie and Papineau. Many labour leaders have defied unjust laws and have gone to prison for their actions. Resistance to the use of the full force of the state as an instrument of repression is not only right it is necessary and a duty of all democratically minded citizens.

The BCTF's position of flexibility represents the interests of the public and students. The Government's position of absolute repression is rigid and in opposition to the interests of the public and the students. The Liberals have painted themselves into a corner and have no room to move so any concession by them will be a victory. Getting back to the negotiating table right now has been the position of the teachers and is still their call and the appointment of Vince Ready to try and facilitate is welcome. It is a reasonable and just position and the public sees it that way as indicated by their continued high level of support.



The BCTF is not limited in their tactical planning to simply one option as is the government so in this respect they really have the moral high ground. The BC Federation of Labour has risen to the challenge of standing firmly behind the BCTF, in recognition that the government's attack is directed against the very essence of collective bargaining rights. All workers need to show and proclaim their continuing solidarity and support of the teachers. By so-doing they will be not only defending collective bargaining in BC and helping their own cause as well but they will be standing up in defense of our children's education and future. **The whole world's watching!**

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