

# Imposed contracts 'demoralizing', says teachers' union president

By **DOMINIK KUREK**  
Metroland Media Group

Approximately 5,000 Halton public high school and elementary teachers and education support workers returned to classes on Monday with contracts imposed on them.

Education Minister Laurel Broten announced last Thursday that the provincial government will be using its powers through the controversial Bill 115 (Putting Students First Act) to impose contracts on public school teachers across Ontario.

Broten will also repeal Bill 115, saying it has now served its purpose. She admitted the bill has led to labour strife, including public elementary teachers holding one-day rotating strikes. Elementary and secondary school teachers have also boycotted extracurricular activities.

"We're removing that barrier and we're very, very hopeful we'll see the return of extracurricular activities," Broten said at a news conference at Queen's Park.

The bill affects approximately 120,000 members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) across the province. The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) negotiated a contract with the Province last summer, while the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) members have been given a deadline of Jan. 14 to ratify a contract that was hammered out during 30 hours of negotiations over the holidays. CUPE represents approximately 55,000 school support workers in Ontario.

The contracts imposed on ETFO and OSSTF members will mirror the deal negotiated by OECTA.

The contracts will freeze wages for most teachers, but will allow younger teachers to continue moving up the salary grid (re-

flecting gains in years of service and qualifications). The contracts will cut sick days from 20 to 10 and end the banking of unused sick days, which could be cashed-out at retirement.

Both the ETFO and OSSTF provincial presidents have responded unfavourably to the imposed contracts.

Locally, the message was no different. "It's demoralizing to all education workers, not only teachers," said Debbie Majka, president of the OSSTF District 20 (Halton) Office Clerical and Technical bargaining unit, in response to Broten's announcement. "It's unfair that she is legislating goodwill by imposing contracts and indicating her intent to repeal the bill. The only true repeal of the bill is restoration of our collective bargaining rights under the Labour Relations Act. That's what we want. We want our collective bargaining rights back. We don't want to have contracts imposed on us."

Majka said goodwill cannot be legislated through imposed contracts.

"We're extremely disappointed the minister decided to go that way," said Marg Macfarlane, ETFO Halton president. "Sam (Hammond, ETFO president) offered an alternative to immediately imposing contracts, that would allow us to work with the new premier and to hopefully come to a mutually agreeable place as opposed to going this way where things are imposed and certainly people aren't going to be happy about that."

With contracts in place, the unions will no longer be in a legal strike position. It is unknown at this time how either union will respond.

Macfarlane said both the ETFO and OSSTF are holding provincial meetings on Jan. 9 to discuss the situation. Furthermore, the unions are still waiting to get the full details of the contracts.

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**Q:** What is the difference between a nursing home and a retirement home?

**A:** Long Term Care (LTC) or Nursing homes are mostly for seniors who have significant health care issues and generally require higher care levels than retirement homes. They are partially funded by the government and offer a range of accommodations from ward to private rooms. Applications for LTC need to be submitted through Community Care Access Centres (CCAC).

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**Q:** Can you please explain the benefits of a spousal RRSP?

**A:** If you have a spouse (married or common-law) you can contribute to a spousal RRSP. Use of a spousal RRSP is a method of income sharing at retirement. The idea is to build two pools of savings, one for each spouse that will produce similar income streams at retirement. The taxes paid on the two incomes will likely be less than those paid if the income were to be taxed in the hands of one spouse in a higher tax bracket. The more income that can be generated by the spouse in the lower tax bracket, the better the tax savings. Income sharing is particularly beneficial when one spouse will have substantial income from pensions and other sources, and the other spouse will have little or none. Some people are concerned that it might be risky to invest in a spousal RRSP. What if we divorce, or if my spouse dies? In most situations, if you divorce, RRSP's and pensions will be split. If one spouse dies, RRSP's can be transferred tax-free to the remaining spouse provided that the spouse was named beneficiary of the RRSP plan. Depending on your situation, a spousal RRSP can be an effective way to reduce the amount of tax you pay in retirement. Call me today and I can help you decide if a spousal RRSP is right for your family.

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Golf is a great activity especially if you choose to walk the course. Gardening and cutting grass are active exercise as well, and you'll also feel good about getting things done! These are all low cost, easy to access and fun!

Remember with our hot summer, wear lots of sunscreen, bug spray, hats, and drink lots of water. Beware of heat stroke and sunburns.

Finally, it doesn't have to be painful especially as you get started. Start slow, remember to warm up, cool down and stretch. Talk to your physiotherapist for more details and enjoy!

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