

IT'S TIME TO WALK



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School classes were cancelled and child care centres closed this week as public sector workers launched a series of [indefinite strikes across Quebec](#).

The buildup has been a long time coming. As far back as February 2022 Montreal's downtown was [filled with workers](#) from several unions, warning they were ready to launch a general strike unless the government made a "respectable" offer.

About half of Quebec's child care workforce is unionized. For educators working in the province's publicly managed child care sector this is their second work stoppage in three years. Rotating strikes in the fall of 2021 ended with [an agreement](#) that provided signing bonuses and wage increases between 12.5 and 18 per cent over three years.

Educators working in centres are not the only militants. In 2014, [14,000 family child care providers](#) struck to have their actual hours of work recognized.

Better pay and working conditions were not the sole demands. Job actions included calls to expand the public child care network and support educator recruitment. The province responded with a [\\$3 billion package of initiatives](#). Quebec is not without problems but when educators speak, their government is forced to listen.

Not so in the rest of the country, where the child care workforce can't negotiate. Low levels of unionization mean it must settle for 'consultations', often void of its representation. This process gave us last week's [announcement](#) in Ontario. The ministry tabled a minor wage package which ignores non-RECEs who provide 50 per cent of the care and, save for those working in for-profit programs, won't reach most qualified educators.

It's a gigantic insult, piled on top of the many that have come before. Will the response be the same? More cries of 'it's not enough' or another weekend demonstration? At the risk of sounding like an old fogey, let me tell you a story. In the late 1990s, when another public sector hating government took over Queen's Park, I was the director of the provincial advocacy association. We were dropped an envelope outlining the government's plan to convert funding for regulated child care to parent vouchers. It would end child care. Even the secret government document calculated at minimum, 50 per cent of centres would close.

Without union backing, centres across the province shut down, i.e., went on strike. It wasn't the only action, but it was the one that got attention. The voucher plan went away. The minister responsible, who was taunted by chants of "Ecker, Ecker child care wrecker!" wherever she went, would later tell an interviewer: "the daycare lobby was formidable."

People who choose to work in child care are very nice. The children and families in their care are their priority. But it's necessary to practice self-care to effectively care for others. Is it time to trade the talk, and walk?