

'Your fight is our fight': Unions unite on strike action

By Anastasia Philopoulos

It was a clear message to West Quebec teachers: solidarity, support, but above all a pat on their weary backs.

"When was the last time someone told you they loved you? I love you," yelled Richard Goldfinch to a crowd of roughly 250 teachers gathered for a rally in Aylmer on Nov. 9. The President of the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers was one of several union leaders to speak to the group of Anglophone teachers who were on day one of a two-day Outaouais-wide strike. "We need every single teacher in the province to stand proud," Goldfinch continued. "To say to Mr. Coiteux [Chair of Quebec's Treasury Board] enough is enough....for one year, 65 times at the table now, and nothing has really moved."

On Nov. 9 and 10 public sector employees, including teachers, walked off the job across the Outaouais, joining striking workers in six different re-



Chelsea elementary teachers picketing on Monday, November 9 in Aylmer, where a union-organized rally followed.

gions across Quebec. The action is part of a series of rotating strikes organized by a coalition of Quebec unions, The Common Front, which represents 400,000

workers in healthcare, education, and government. The walkouts come after Quebec unions rejected the government's latest offer in contract negotiations on Friday, Nov. 6. One of the main issues was a different pay-freeze scenario - one that union representatives say barely differs from a previous offer. "Come

Anastasia Philopoulos photo on, we were not born yesterday," Goldfinch said of the offer.

In Aylmer, cars honked endlessly to show support while teachers picketed the former West Quebec School Board building on Principale street. Organized by the Western Quebec Teachers' Association (WQTA), the event saw union heads from

Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, and the Northwest Territories show up and speak to the energetic crowd.

Heather Smith, President of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, which encompasses the WQTA, called the bargaining process on the government's end chaotic and unacceptable. "Investing \$1 million in Bombarrier instead of public education shows what kinds of priorities this government has," Smith said, her comment followed by boos from the crowd. "An attack on your member organization is an attack on teachers across the country."

WQTA President Brian Smeltzer said he was pleased by the number of teachers and union heads who turned out for the event. He encouraged teachers to stand united and reminded them to brace for a possibly long haul. "Conserve that energy," Smeltzer said. "This is not a race, this is a marathon, and we intend to win this one."

Teachers were on strike without pay for the recent round of actions. If no progress is made at the bargaining table, further strike action is planned Quebec-wide for Dec 1 to 3.