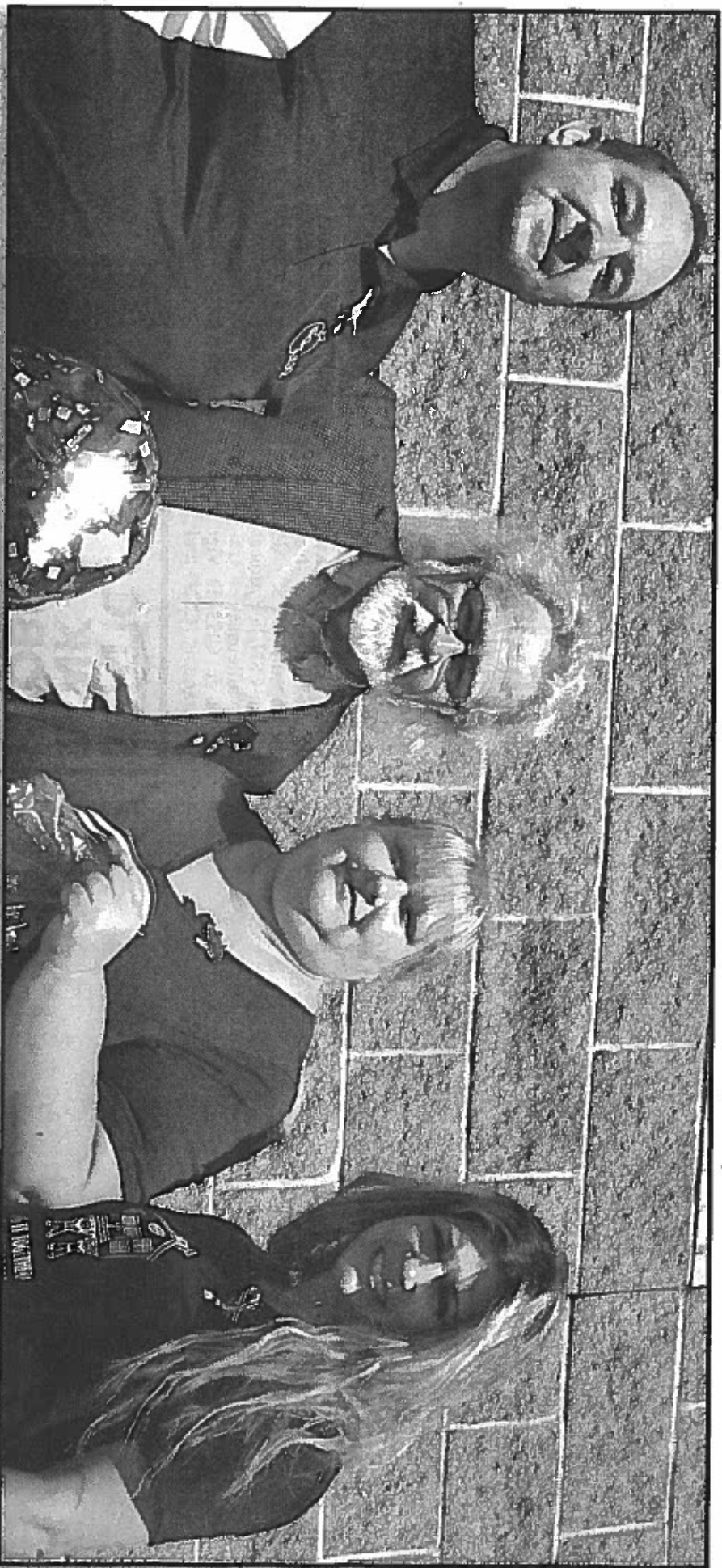


Ribbon campaign
Parents launch ribbon campaign in support of teachers



Western Quebec Teachers' Association (WQTA) President, Brian Smeltzer, Richard Goldfinch, Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers President, Rhonda Boucher, Elementary Parent Commissioner for the WQSB, Julie Montpeit, QPAT Executive Assistant.

PHOTO: LRC

Laurent Robillard-Cardinal

A new ribbon campaign in support of teachers in their effort to protest public school spending cuts and the pace of contract negotiations is rolling out in West Quebec. "I'm a parent commissioner, but I'm a parent first and if we don't come

out and support our teachers who else is going to come out and support them?" asked Rhonda Boucher, Elementary Parent Commissioner for the WQSB.

Along with other parents, Mrs. Boucher is introducing the ribbon campaign across the

region in hope of getting residents talking about the current situation in the public education field. "People have ribbons for different causes and when someone wears a ribbon people often ask them what it represents.

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This is why we opted for a ribbon campaign," she told the *Post*. "By distributing the white and blue ribbons, the colours of the Québec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT), parents are sending a clear message to the Minister of Treasury Board, Martin Coiteux, that it's not only the teachers' fight, but the fight of every parent that has a child in the Education System."

The ribbons will be distributed during upcoming events and Mrs. Boucher encourages parents to get involved.

"Parents are the ones in the schools, we know what's going on. We see the amazing work teachers are doing. It's not a 9-to-5 job, it's constant work. We must come out and support them as we are unhappy with what the government is offering them. Our teachers are our children's heroes. They are the ones who form them into the adults they are going to be," argued Mrs. Boucher. "Teachers make all the difference in the classroom. Nothing has a greater effect on students' success than their teachers' dedication, love and inspiration. The community must stand together to defend our children's education system by standing strong in support of our teachers. We cannot put our students first by putting our teachers last."

The WQSB's ribbon campaign will run

parallel to several different campaigns, but according to QPAT President Richard Goldfinch, "they will all come together to say to the minister that the cuts make absolutely no sense. You're cutting at the exact time we need more. The English education system integrates special need students more than any other school boards and for us to work with these students we need the support we have been getting, plus more," he told the *Post*.

According to Mr. Goldfinch, many teachers are already overworked and many face exhaustion as the system is bursting at the seams. "Many are already asking for 80% contracts because they can't keep up. Teachers want to teach, but there's all this extra work to keep schools running. I defy you to find a teacher working 80% and not putting in 110%!"

Teachers working the minimum should be easier to come across now as many of them are taking part in the work-to-rule campaign and are trying to only work their 32 hours of paid work. Even if teachers should technically be spending less time with students, Mr. Goldfinch argues that "80-85% of parents support us and our work-to-rule campaign because they understand they we are defending their children."

Many parents also understand the government's position of balancing the

budget and reducing the province's debt. According to the Ministry of Finance, the gross debt stood at \$206,185 million on March 31, 2015, equivalent to 54.9% of GDP. Mr. Goldfinch also understands the importance of reducing the debt, but he's asking the provincial Liberal government to take their foot off the accelerator for a moment.

"We are not against balancing the budget, but do we need to do it so fast? Do the students need to be put in jeopardy for a budget line? The Québec public system education is one of the best in the world, why are we cutting away at it?" said Goldfinch. "We must say to Mr. Coiteux (Chair of the Treasury Board) and to Mr. (Philippe) Couillard (Premier of Québec), please you can't look at education as a budget line. What you need to be seeing is a huge wealth of resources because this is our future and it's an investment in the future."

Teachers and many parents are trying to make that point, but by using the ribbon campaign they are bringing their preoccupations into the classroom. According to Mr. Goldfinch students are already confronted. "Our we there to inculcate? No. We try not to bring it into the classroom, but students want to know what's going on because there is turbulence and students want to understand

what's going on. For us not to tell them anything is really an unhealthy situation," indicated Mr. Goldfinch.

However, if children ask teachers what's going on they will likely only get one side of the story. Not so said QPAT's president. "There are clearly getting information from all sides. If you just stop and look at much of what lacks in the classroom, that's a government decision. I want to have more things in my classroom, cannot afford it, is that any less of a hostage taking then us saying to our students this is why we are doing what we are doing, to make your classroom better. We are fighting for you, I don't see that as hostage taking at all," he said.

To that Brian Smeltzer, Western Québec Teachers' Association (WQTA) President, added "I would say that teaching is the only profession where we, the employees, are taking stuff from our home and bringing it to their workplace to be used in their work environment. How many teachers are paying out of their own pocket and doing regularly trips to the store to get supplies to do an activity? Our teachers' work environment is the student's learning environment and that's something we need to maintain. We need to get people to understand that, hence the ribbon campaign."