

# "I'M NOT A MAGICIAN; I CAN'T MAKE MORE WITH LESS." Big rally by teachers against Quebec demands

More than hundred teachers protested at the old Aylmer Academy building on rue Principale, across from Galeries Aylmer, November 9 to show their displeasure with the latest provincial contract offer. The large rally was organized by the Western Quebec Teachers' Association (WQTA).

On November 6, Quebec's treasury board offered to lift its wage freeze and increase the total wage offer from 3% to 5.3% over the contract's five-year life. The treasury board said the new offer injects an extra \$1.7 billion to the amounts already discussed, \$550 million of which is for "wage relativity."

Richard Goldfinch, Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT) President, lambasted the offer during the rally. "We need every single teacher to stand proud(ly) and to say to Mr. Coiteux (the Treasury Board president),

enough is enough. If any of you want to pull off a magic trick, show him that you have nothing up your sleeve, and then suggest that 0,0,1,1,1 is the same as 0,1,1,1,0 (the annual salary increase percentage)! Come on! If there is anyone on this planet who believes there's a difference between those two figures, then I have a bridge in Brooklyn for sale at a really good price," said Mr. Goldfinch to a cheering crowd.

Although Goldfinch dismissed the "new" offer, the dim light at the end of the tunnel is that teachers are continuing to negotiate. "For a year, we've been at the table 65 times and nothing has really moved. Yes, their onerous demands have started to drop away. We went to them originally and we said, "we need help!" Our system is stumbling because of the incessant cuts, and what did they come back with? Class-size ratio increase, special needs coding removed, 35 instead

of 32 hours in the building... what kind of help is that?"

Negotiations will continue this month, but teachers will maintain their work-to-rule campaign. "We will do what we need to do," said Mr. Goldfinch; "there's nothing (new) in the offer at all, so we will keep at it. Our negotiators are back at the table this week and next week. Teachers have never left the table."

Several strike days are scheduled for teachers and the Common Front representing 400,000 public servants. This past September, the WQTA voted 96.7% in favour of the six-day strike mandate proposed by the Common Front. This movement groups several unions across Québec, including the CSQ, which is working closely with the Fédération des syndicats de l'enseignement (FSE) and QPAT. WQTA is a local QPAT branch. (LRC)