



**STAND UP.  
STAND STRONG.  
STAND UNITED.**

# **COLLECTIVE ACTION, COLLECTIVE SUCCESS**

How the members of OSSTF/FEESO have fought together to protect and enhance public education and preserve workers' rights



OSSTF/FEESO has a proud history of collective action and political protest that has resulted in positive changes for all of our members. These collective actions have stopped governments from imposing changes on our members that would both harm our bargaining rights and the public education system overall.

Below is a summary of some of the actions that OSSTF/FEESO has taken during its over 90 year history. We have demonstrated that when we collectively stand up, stand strong and stand united, we can effect positive change that strengthens our rights as workers, and benefits the publically funded education system in our province- an education system that is recognized as one of the best in the world.

## 1975—The Right to Strike

- Prior to 1975, teachers did not have a legal right to go on strike and had to utilize other methods to achieve collective bargaining goals.
- In 1972 and 1973, there were mass resignations by teachers in many boards before the Christmas holidays to protest the government’s proposals in the *Reville Report*, which would further restrict the rights of teachers.
- In December of 1973, Bill 274 was introduced to nullify any mid-year resignations of any teachers. Bill 275, which would force compulsory arbitration and remove any ability to strike, was also introduced.
- In response to these Bills, a province-wide walkout by teachers took place on December 18, 1973. More than 20,000 people gathered at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto for a mass rally, which was followed by a march to Queen’s Park. Almost every school in the province was shut down
- The Bills died on the order paper, which led to the creation of Bill 100—*School Boards and Teachers Collective Negotiations Act*, This Bill was negotiated with the education unions over a period of two years and when it passed, it gave teachers the right to strike.

## 1985—Bill 65—Expanding OSSTF/FEESO

- Bill 65, introduced in April 1985, assisted workers in organizing and achieving their first collective agreements.
- In October 1985, the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) ruled against an OSSTF/FEESO application to represent secretaries in Oxford; the application was rejected because the OLRB said that OSSTF/FEESO did not have a mandate to organize workers other than teachers.
- OSSTF/FEESO undertook a determined expansion of our membership by bringing forward motions to AMPA that would allow for more concerted organizing campaigns.
- Because AMPA passed these motions, OSSTF/FEESO went back to the OLRB with an organizing mandate and has expanded the Federation’s membership base successfully since the late 1980s.



## 1989—Equal control over the Teachers' Pension Plan

- On April 1, 1989, 25,000 members gathered at Copps Coliseum in Hamilton to send a message to Premier David Peterson's Liberal government about its refusal to allow teachers to have a greater say in how their pension plan was run.
- Until then, the government had total control over the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) in terms of benefits, contributions and investment policy.
- Peterson said that teachers who were concerned about the pension plan were "just being silly."
- The pension and how it was managed was a major issue for teachers in the 1990 Ontario election, Bob Rae and the NDP won a majority government, and they upheld their election promise to establish a true equal pension partnership with teachers.

## 1993—The Social Contract

- Under Bob Rae and the NDP, the Social Contract initiative mandated 12 unpaid days for public sector workers, reopened their collective agreements, and called for wage freeze.
- Every employee was to take 1 unpaid day off per month, have their wages frozen until 1996, and be denied annual wage increment raises (i.e. moving up the grid based on experience).
- Unions only had three weeks to negotiate better conditions before the Social Contract legislation took effect. OSSTF/FEESO was able to negotiate a return to proper grid position in 1996 at the end of the social contract for most bargaining units; the only education or public sector union to successfully negotiate this provision.
- The Social Contract led to the NDP losing the support of the labour movement which then led to the eventual fall of the government in 1995.

## 1995 to 1998—Ontario Days of Action

- Over a period of three years, protests were led by labour organizations in a broader attempt to change the Harris Government's anti-labour views and reverse the changes made to labour legislation that allowed for scab replacement workers during strikes.
- There were a total of 11 Days of Action held across Ontario over a period of three years, including the Hamilton Day of Action with 120,000 people and Toronto with 250,000 people, the largest demonstration in Ontario's history,
- There were another 11 Days of Action held across Ontario in the cities of London, Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, Peterborough, Toronto, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, North Bay, Windsor, St. Catharines, and Kingston, which involved over one million people.
- The government viewed the Days of Action as illegal as it considered the protests by workers a strike.
- The Days of Action put worker rights and labour issues to the forefront of public attention and would lead to many other labour victories over the Harris Government's anti-labour agenda.



## 1997—Bill 160 and Bill 136 political protest

- Cynically named the *Education Quality Improvement Act*, Bill 160 mandated class size, had teacher teach 7 out of 8 classes, cut education worker jobs by over 15 per cent, and made “volunteering” for extra-curricular activities mandatory.
- Bill 136 was also introduced and opposed by OSSTF/FEESO; it reduced the number of school boards, and removed the right of school boards to levy taxes making education centrally funded by the province. Local control was taken away from school boards.
- From October 27 to November 7, 1997, teacher affiliate unions walked off the job as a political protest against the actions Mike Harris and his Progressive Conservative Government took.
- The Harris Government backed off on a number of aspects of Bill 160 and Bill 136, and some provisions that were to be legislated became items to be negotiated at the bargaining table.

## 2003—Ousting the Ontario Progressive Conservatives from power

- After almost nine years of Progressive Conservative rule under Mike Harris and Ernie Eves, the Tory government fell on Election Night, October 2, 2003.
- Education was seen as a top election issue with all three major parties pledging more money for education. However, PC Premier Eves pledged to ban any teacher strikes during the school year.
- McGuinty promised “to be the best education premier” and worked with OSSTF/FEESO as a key partner to remove Harris’ mandatory teacher testing policies, reinvested funds into education to create jobs, and worked to bring back respect to educators in the province.
- OSSTF/FEESO put together an election readiness plan that included a broader outreach to labour, and other coalition partners.
- This led to a Liberal majority, with the PCs relegated to the opposition benches after losing over half of its seats.

## 2007—Keeping the Conservatives out

- The Progressive Conservatives under their new leader, John Tory, were poised to defeat the majority government of the McGuinty Liberals.
- John Tory was seen as a popular leader. His main promise was to extend public education funding to private religious schools
- OSSTF/FEESO’s election readiness campaign “Make It Count,” focused on mobilizing members to vote, getting candidates to identify education as a priority and providing information to members of the public about education issues so that they could make an informed decision on Election Day.
- This election saw the greatest level of member involvement in an election to date
- With education established as a priority issue, the Liberals won a back to back majority government.

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