

The most successful political party In Canada is a teachers' union

By John Hilton O'Brien, 29 October 2022

We have to congratulate them.

It's a fantastic run for a political party. Out of 129 seats, they ran 88 candidates and got 52 elected. For any party that isn't the federal Conservatives or Liberals, it is cause for ecstatic celebration. But it wasn't a political party getting those results.

You would be forgiven for thinking it was. They had a campaign plan, a manual for candidates, and an election platform, but it wasn't a party. It was the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) in the Ontario local school board elections that concluded on October 24.

The unions have taught us all a clear lesson here: If parents want their school board to represent their interests — rather than the interests of their unions — they need to act.

The OSSTF was going for control of Ontario's school boards, and succeeded to a large extent. The union now has a majority in two school districts — London and Waterloo. They have significant pluralities (more than 25%) in five others — Hastings and Prince Edward District, Hamilton, Toronto, Durham and the Upper Grand District School boards. And we're just talking about select Ontario school boards — unions swept some Catholic boards as well. The accumulated influence is staggering.

Even where they didn't run enough candidates to fully control a board, their success was so large as to put all the other trustees on notice. In Toronto, they ran only 13 candidates out of 22 seats, but elected 10 of those — an intimidating ratio of success. It is fair

to say the teachers' unions of Ontario have a lot more control over the educational establishment now. No local board will make any rulings or public pronouncements the union doesn't want.

It isn't just an Ontario issue, either. In the British Columbia elections just past, teachers' unions successfully intervened in elections and now control school boards. We can expect teachers' unions to intervene more and more in the future. It may not be as direct as it is in Ontario; unions like the Alberta Teachers' Association operate through groups beholden to them, but the effect is still the same.

If a teacher's union wants to funnel money towards many small labour-based groups that intervene in elections, they can.

In Ontario, donation records aren't really available to the general public — rather than having a searchable database, Elections Ontario insists you come to the office to leaf through paper copies.

The funding legislation may have a chilling effect for candidates who're not endorsed, but the unions have lawyers and activists who can work on this specifically. The OSSTF reported a \$4.8 million surplus in 2019. The money needed for a successful trustee election is a rounding error.

Bottom line: If you're a parent or teacher who doesn't want your local school board to push gender ideology or Critical Race Theory, you're out of luck. The unions are all about that and now your elected officials are too. If you wanted accountability in

education, school boards aren't going to deliver that. You have a government of union leaders, by union leaders and for union leaders.

Wishful thinking makes us imagine it can be someone else's problem.

"After all," we say, "I don't have children in school." But those children are the ones who will be taking care of us in our old age; their values and goals, even if different from yours, will govern your life in retirement.

There's a lot of power on the table, too. The Ontario Education budget alone is \$32 billion dollars. That's power. And the more power unions have, the more money will be spent on bureaucrats and union officials — and even less will make it to the front line. That's less money for the government services that you do use, and more debt for you to pay off.

People with school-age children sometimes try to wish the problem away as well. "After all, teachers are good people, they don't mean ill."

That's pretty much true, but the duty of union officials is to their organizations, not to parents and students or even to teachers. And they have natural human ambition, which is only satisfied by their organizations growing in power and wealth. The interests of the union are not the same as the interests of parents, students, or teachers, and the best wishes in the world won't make it so.

In places that allow educational pluralism, some parents imagine they can solve the problem through home education or choosing independent

schools. They ask, “why can’t we all just move away from public education?”

Sadly, it isn’t so simple. The vast majority of children are served by the public system. In smaller, rural centers, the public system is all that is available for logistical reasons. Even if school finance is successfully reformed, public education is here to stay because we need it. Reform won’t happen by abandoning it.

When we get past the wishful thinking, however, there's good news.

Organizations like ParentsVoice BC demonstrate parent groups with a real impact on elections. In Alberta, Parents for Choice in Education had success with training organizers and candidates for school board elections, although it has not made endorsements.

That being said, parents need to get cracking. Unions like OSSTF have election readiness committees just like a political party does. They're organizing for the next election today. Find candidates, learn to campaign, budget money for it, and find friends who will do it with you. Go and cut

your teeth as a team on a provincial campaign somewhere. This is what the union organizers are doing.

But don’t wait: Canada’s most successful electoral organizations right now are unions. You can beat them — but you have to get ahead of them.

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