

# We must protect collective bargaining and the right to strike

**The federal government overreacted in denying Canada Post employees a fundamental right when it intervened last month in the contract dispute between Canada Post and its unionized workers and ordered an end to rotating strikes.**

For some, this could be seen as the government protecting an essential service at a time of year when the flow of mail increases. But we see this as taking a popular and easy way out of a sticky situation, removing the most effective instrument available to unionized workers in pressuring the employer.

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers, well aware of public opinion when services are curtailed, acted responsibly by launching rotating walkouts in various locations instead of an all-out strike. The effect has been minimal and talks were continuing.

In previous decades, postal strikes had devastating impacts on the economy, but with the shift toward

email, this is no longer the case. Yes, a backlog of packages was building up and the delivery of mail has slowed, but, as such experts as Malcolm Bird, Political Science professor at the University of Winnipeg has noted, the rotating strikes amounted to an inconvenience for small businesses and customers ordering online, but “not the end of the world like it once was.”

The exploitation of workers that flows from the capitalist philosophy had to be tempered, and that is what led in the previous century to the creation of the trade-union movement. It fought many a battle, and lives were lost in order to get the right to organize and bargain collectively. The withdrawal of work, known as the strike, is the ultimate weapon.

With the growth of the public service in Canada, that right to organize and use the strike weapon was another hard-won battle, but considered as necessary as in the private

sector, even with greater job security, so state employees can effectively negotiate wages and working conditions. History has shown that employers who believe governments will impose back-to-work legislation, will use this as an undeclared bargaining tool because it gives the employer an unfair advantage. It distorts the power relationship, especially, as in the case of Canada Post, when technology is changing the nature of the business model.

The digital age is having a significant impact on a cherished public institution. Letter mail is declining between four and eight per cent a year, but the volume of parcels

delivered has increased by almost 70 per cent since 2011. Responding to public pressure, the Liberals wisely scrapped previous plans to replace home mail service with community mailboxes. Costs are high because Canada Post is a public service accorded to all Canadians including those in remote areas. These elements make it impossible for Canada Post, and its subsidiary, Purolator, to compete with private enterprise. Serving all Canadians is part of the socio-political fabric that must be considered when wages and working conditions are subject to negotiation. The back-to-work order interfered with this process.

## Letter to the Editor

### Psychologist finds November cover story simplistic

Dear Editor,  
I am a psychologist and a researcher focused on clinical work with Holocaust survivors and their descendants and on empirical research in this field. My papers have been published in many professional peer-reviewed journals.

The article by Irwin Block “Psychologist debunks myths on children of survivors” does not do justice to the subject. There are now hundreds of methodologically sound studies showing that the simple question of whether children of survivors have more psychiatric/psychological pathology or not, is not adequate to understand the impact of massive parental trauma on the children.

As a group, children of survivors do not show higher prevalence of clinical disorders, but there are many common characteristics among them that are different from their peers. Studies have shown various psychobiological findings including cellular and physiological trait variations not caused by changes in DNA, indicating changes in how genes are expressed (epigenetic changes). In those whose parents suffered from more pronounced and persistent post-traumatic reactions, it has also been shown that they have more physiological problems in middle age compared with peers.

Common psychological themes and concerns expressed by children of survivors are all the more telling because there are such vast differences among them such as the country where they grew up and the culture surrounding them.

Children responded differently even within the same family, but still, commonalities among many children of survivors are striking. This body of evidence has already inspired research and interventions with other trauma-exposed populations, as it has shown the serious impact of parental trauma on the well-being of children, even those born after the parental trauma.

That said, there is also evidence for the success, the high socio-economic achievements and the pro-social attitudes of children of Holocaust survivors as a group, as mentioned in your article. However, the simple dichotomy of whether there is pathology or not is now more nuanced, recognizing that there are multiple areas of functioning and that one can be impacted by parental trauma to varying degrees, more in some areas and less in others.

The older studies mentioned in your article were indeed criticized for methodological flaws. However, we see the influence of parental trauma on the children of survivors in much more recent multiple studies, which overcame these methodological issues. We now understand that the influence of parental trauma is often not manifested in what is considered clinical level pathology, but rather in the more subtle sphere of the private, subjective experience of individuals, the way they perceive, respond to and feel about big and small events in their lives. The functioning of individuals can be excellent in external measures of success, alongside poignant pain invisible in external measures, accessible only when looking at the subjective and intimate areas of the individual’s life and relationships.

We should acknowledge the complex, nuanced picture and recognize the multiple strengths and vulnerabilities that the legacy of the Holocaust left in the descendants of survivors.

The concept of historical trauma has been now recognized in other populations. The resilience of Holocaust survivors and their children is expressed in their capacity to move forward, function well despite the pain, nurture hope, strive for a better future, and raise the next generations with a profound sensitivity to our common humanity and to the suffering of the other.

— Irit Felsen, PhD, New York City

## Ban on religious symbols retrograde

François Legault’s first Inaugural Address as premier was both encouraging and disappointing. It called for “courage” to do to things differently, a repeat of the Coalition Avenir Québec’s electoral program, which gave the party a strong majority. We applaud his intention to make education a priority, increase budgets for teachers’ salaries and introduce pre-kindergarten classes throughout Quebec. How this will proceed, including overcoming widespread opposition to his plan to scrap school boards, remains to be seen. Where will he get the 5,000 additional pre-K teachers? What effect will this plan have on the present vast and affordable pre-school network? On seniors, we await concrete plans on creating

alternatives to the existing network of long-term care facilities.

Our greatest disappointment was the repeated pledge, bolstered by opinion surveys indicating broad support for a ban on the wearing of religious symbols by state employees including teachers, in positions of authority. This backward and unnecessary move runs counter to fundamental rights and freedoms. Certainly, it will be challenged in court. Even though a majority supports it, reflecting irrational fears and prejudices, we call on the Quebec government to demonstrate moral leadership and say no.

Democracy – the tyranny of the majority – must be tempered by fundamental values.

## Seeking women survivors of Auschwitz

Medical researchers are seeking information from female survivors of Auschwitz on the consequences of forced injections and ingestion of unknown substances in their food that are linked to subsequent amenorrhea and infertility.

Prof. Peggy Kleinplatz, of the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Medicine and Prof. Paul Weindling, who teaches the history of medicine at Oxford Brookes University UK, are seeking testimony from survivors and their children on this little known and unrecognized phenomenon.

These women immediately ceased

menstruation, some for months, some for years. Others were left permanently infertile.

Some reports suggest that the younger the adolescent girls at the time of arrival in Auschwitz, the greater the long-term impact upon their future reproduction.

“The long-term consequences of these routine medical interventions may affect the children and grandchildren of women who did survive.”

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