

# STRIKING TEACHERS IN QUEBEC DEFY TOUGH LAW

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**OTTAWA, Feb. 17**— Teachers in Quebec maintained their strike today in defiance of a stringent law enacted overnight empowering the provincial government to dismiss, fine, curtail seniority and deny the right of appeal under civil rights laws to absent teachers.

As most of Quebec's 71,000 teachers and most of the province's 1.2 million primary and secondary school students stayed out for the 21st day, the protest spread into the most serious social crisis faced by the government of Premier Rene Levesque since it came to power seven years ago.

Newspaper editorials, civil rights organizations and the Quebec bar association condemned Mr. Levesque's government for approving legislation that specifically exempts the striking teachers from the guarantees of due process and judicial appeal contained in the province's Charter of Human Rights.

Meanwhile, union leaders representing hospital workers and other public employees discussed plans to join in a one-day general strike, temporarily restoring the picket lines they abandoned last week in the face of threats of mass dismissals and fines.

Private-sector unions also considered participation in such a one day strike next week to demonstrate solidarity with the teachers and their contempt for the back-to-work law that labour leaders in Canada have attacked as repressive and antidemocratic.

School administrators, who under the new law are responsible for drawing up lists of absent teachers, have indicated they might refuse to take attendance.

Mr. Levesque's growing confrontation with the public employees began last summer, when, after failing to negotiate contracts, the government enacted laws imposing terms of employment. These laws extended contracts and prohibited strikes. For some employees they imposed wage rollbacks of 20 percent for the first four months of this year. The anger of many of the 300,000 provincial employees increased because in large measure they had served as the functionaries who shaped the grass-roots organizations of Mr. Levesque's Parti Quebecois.

After the party's victory in 1976, the public employees received large raises that, in the view of many of these workers, are now being taken back.

Mr. Levesque has insisted that cuts in salary and reorganized work schedules are necessary to trim half a billion dollars from the province's deficit. The teachers' union has agreed to forgo raises but wants the issue of job security and revisions in education submitted to mediation. Mr. Levesque has insisted that he cannot negotiate with illegally striking unions.

Wednesday night, after suspending the third reading of his tough bill in the hope of persuading the teachers to go back to work, he angrily rejected a plea for mediation made by Yves Charbonneau, the head of the teachers' union. "It's crazy as hell!" Mr. Levesque shouted as he talked to the union leader by telephone.

He then moved for approval of the bill and said he told the union leaders, "If you apply your strike mandates, we'll apply our law." He also said he was ready to submit his party's policies on the strike to an election. "We could go to the people, if we have to," Mr. Levesque said.

But in the face of today's widespread outcry against the new back-to-work legislation, the government appeared to be moderating its sense of urgency. Camille Laurin, the Minister of Education, said the law would be "progressively and moderately enforced."

He explained that for the time being only those provisions doubling the daily fines of illegally striking employees would be applied. These call for fines of up to \$100 a day for strikers, \$5,000 a day for labour leaders and \$50,000 a day for unions.

By late afternoon Mr. Levesque had apparently rejected the idea of holding new elections, asserting that he had said only that he was ready for elections "if need be" and that it seemed to him that "the need had diminished greatly."

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