**It’s time for teachers, education workers, parents and older students to really engage in this election.**

**Nigel Barriffe**

I think most of us teachers, school board workers, parents and older students – if we have our ear to the ground in this election – know that Kathleen Wynne has an “austerity” agenda waiting for us, if her government wins a majority this time around.

“Austerity is alive and well in Ontario when it comes to public education”, says Ontario secondary teachers’ president Paul Elliott. Wynne’s last budget, he argues, “does nothing to restore the shortfall created by inadequate funding through the Grants for Student Needs (GSNs) announced in March.”

He’s talking about the annual grants that fund all Ontario public schools. For Elliott, this means that “the compensation cuts imposed in 2013 have been unilaterally extended by the government well beyond the end of the agreed-upon two-year term. By keeping our members frozen on the pay grid, the government is setting the stage for unnecessary conflict between OSSTF/FEESO and local school boards in September.”

Not restoring last year’s shortfall also means more cutbacks across the entire provincial school system this year.

Remember that Wynne has made no serious promises for education in this campaign, even as an election ploy.

*Bill 1l5* was just a prelude to what we can expect from the Liberals.

And now we have Tim Hudak’s promise of 100,000 job cuts from the province’s public sector workforce. His cuts are going to hammer the public school system, along with health and social services.

The *Globe and Mail* recently worked out the numbers.[[1]](#footnote-1) After we take into account all those who will be spared the chopping block, that leaves us with a little less than 650,000 public sector employees as the target for those 100,000 job cuts – a 15% cut to be carried out in two years. About two-thirds of those people work in education.

The *Globe’s* editors write: “The public school boards employ 266,000 people, about half of them are teachers. The province’s universities, colleges and trade schools employ another 140,000. Most of the remaining people work in health and social services. There are more than 110,000 of them, even after subtracting cut-exempt doctors and nurses.” 15% of all these people will be let go.

It’s more than double the Mike Harris cuts, and we know where that got us.

This slash-and-burn agenda makes no sense. It’s just a vicious assault on the lives of working people, who have managed to build themselves a decent union.

Cuts this size not only remove needed services and personal income we need to keep our economy alive, Hudak thinks he’s fixing a budget crisis that’s not even there. As even the *Globe* understands we don’t have a budget crisis; “the province’s debt-GDP ratio is barely rising.”

His so-called fix is as foolish as it is cynical.

Those of us who are engaged in the public schools have to get the message out to our communities about the assault that is coming down on public education.

The ONDP is the only party that offers us any hope at all. It was the only party to stand up against *Bill 115,* and it did that with commitment. Peter Tabuns, the party’s education critic, stood by our teacher and education worker unions every inch of the way, in the Legislature and at all their major rallies and at their press conferences. He even attended Education Ministry press conferences to give education employees his support.

The ONDP needs to work on putting out substantial education reforms. But the good news is that the party is open to committed teachers, education workers, parents and older students, community and labour activists who want to build those reforms. We’ll have to work at it, but it’s there for us. And there is no better time to start than in this election.

Our futures and the futures of the students we care for are on the line.

1. *Globe and Mail*, editorial, “Election by 100,000 job cuts,” May 13, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)