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Scrap Ford not sex ed

by Carolyn Egan

When Rehtaeh Parsons's father Glen Canning spoke out after reading the revised sex ed curriculum in Ontario, he said: "I really wish there was something like that in Nova Scotia 10 years ago. Because if there was—and if consent and empathy and respect were being taught in schools in Nova Scotia—I honestly believe that I would still have my daughter with me today." Rehtaeh was 17 years old when she committed suicide after being sexually assaulted by four teenage boys at a party. Pictures were then spread on the internet, which led to continued harassment and bullying.

Doug Ford's Progressive Conservative government is pandering to the most regressive elements in our society that are intent on rolling back all the gains that we have made through decades of struggle. It was homophobic, misogynist, anti-choice forces that helped win him the leadership of the party, and they are demanding their payback.

Campaign Life, and other groups that have fought consistently to turn back the clock on those seeking to make their own determination on whether to continue a pregnancy, were elated when Ford became the Premier with a majority government. They have a strategy of step-by-step



overturning sexual and reproductive rights, as has been done by their counterparts in the United States. Ford said that he will take away the right to be free from abuse entering an abortion facility, impose parental consent for teens and no longer require physicians to refer those seeking an abortion.

So many have fought against the systemic violence against women, trans and LGBTQ people, very often of colour, and although a sex education curriculum is not going to be a panacea for all that we face, it was a progressive step forward. Teaching consent, respect and an end to bigotry and harassment speaks to a gaping wound in our society that everyone who has ever been subjected to this type of violence and harassment knows only too well. The numbers who have

been scarred by this are way larger than many would imagine, and that is why the outcry has been so strong.

Our society is riddled with systemic violence and disrespect. You need only look at the anti-Black racism and Islamophobia which communities are fighting. Keeping young people sexually safe with the ability and confidence to control their own lives must be a priority of the educational system. The fact that scrapping the new sex ed was one of the first steps taken by the new government makes very clear its ideological stance against the women's, LGBTQ and other progressive movements which have been fighting for meaningful reforms.

The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, which has a majority of women members, has

spoken out strongly against the Tory government's move to bring back the previous curriculum. It is 20 years old and is sadly lacking in many of the elements that students need most to deal with their lives. The fact that teachers are taking a stand in support of their students and most parents is very important. They are the ones required to teach the curriculum and are in day to day contact with students who in many cases turn to them with problems that they are confronting.

The teachers' unions have often been in the vanguard of fight-backs against regressive forces, as we have seen in Chicago and most recently in West Virginia and Arkansas, where they took strike action to demand more resources for their students. The teachers played a very important role in the struggle against funding cuts under the previous Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris.

Community groups are also gathering to plan a strong campaign against this regressive move. People from many backgrounds have spoken out against it, and there's been some indication that the government is feeling the heat. Let's keep up the pressure and fight alongside those in other movements like the Fight for \$15 and Fairness, to make the Tories back off all their attacks. In unity there is strength.

Keep fighting for \$15

The Tory government has said it wants to roll back gains made by workers under bill 148. These include equal pay provisions for part time workers, emergency leave days, fair scheduling provisions, rules making it easier to join a union and a raise in the minimum wage to \$15 and hour. More than two thirds of Ontarians approve of the \$15 minimum wage raise which is supposed to come into effect on January 1, 2019.

This will be a key fight against the right wing agenda. Ford shied away from attacking the minimum

wage increase during the campaign because of its popularity but other provisions will certainly

be on the chopping block.

Within a week of the Tory victory, thousands of people marched

from the ministry of labour to Queens park demanding that the Ford and company keep their hands off bill 148.

Ford likes to say he is for the little guy, but any attempt to roll back workers rights will prove that he is only looking out for the rich.

Over the next few months there will be a need for all of us to take to the streets to stop the Tories from attacking workers rights. The Fight for \$15 and Fairness campaign is leading this charge. Please join the campaign at: 15andfairness.org



Stop Tory Racism

One of the first things that Doug Ford did after being sworn in as Premier was to rejig his cabinet positions. The newly formed anti-racism directorate was merged into the Community Safety and Corrections ministry essentially subsuming anti-racism under the umbrella of law and order. This is a clear example of his contempt for racialized people in Ontario. He seems to feel that the only way to deal with all those pesky racism questions is through more policing.

Increased policing targets entire communities, not criminals. Just like carding, which is disproportionately used against racialized people, giving police more power has never led to less crime but has led to increased animosity between people of colour and the police.

If we needed any more evidence of how bad this will get under Ford, we need look no further than the actions of his appointee

to the position of Minister of Community Safety and Corrections, Michael Tibollo. Tibollo decided to wear a bulletproof vest for his first visit to the Toronto neighbourhood of Jane Finch. The notion that it would be so dangerous as to require a bullet proof vest is absurd and proves how little these Tories understand issues of race and poverty.

New Democratic Party Leader Andrea Horwath was quick to respond. "It is absolutely unacceptable to make an insinuation that going into a highly racialized community is going to necessitate the wearing of a bulletproof vest," she said. "Michael Tibollo's comment this morning about wearing a bulletproof vest at Jane and Finch is inexcusably racist. Anyone who would say something so divisive has no credibility."

Right from the beginning Ford and his appointees showed that they are racist to the core. But

they weren't done.

Ford also eliminated the Cabinet position of Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. That portfolio has been downgraded and merged with the Ministry of Energy, Mines, Northern Development. That decision starkly highlights what Ford thinks of Indigenous issues. He apparently only thinks of Indigenous peoples and their lands in terms of how they can be exploited.

This is nothing new for the Tories. The last conservative premier, Mike Harris called for violence against indigenous protesters in Ipperwash provincial park the day after he was elected. He told the Ontario Provincial Police, "I want the fucking Indians out of the park." The result was the murder of Indigenous land defender Dudley George who, along with many others had occupied the park lands to assert their legal land claim.

And to top it all off, the Ontario Tories have begun banging the drum against immigrants and refugees coming to Canada.

Ontario Minister of Children, Community and Social Services Lisa MacLeod began her tenure trashing the federal government for allowing "irregular" refugees into the country. The use of "irregular" and "illegal" by the Ford government has unleashed racist attacks. The reality is that it is legal to try and seek refuge in Canada. The only thing that forces people to cross the border outside of official crossings is the safe third country agreement signed by the Harper Tories and, shameful, upheld by Justin Trudeau's federal Liberal party.

The Ford Tories are going to spend the next 4 years doing all they can to divide and conquer the people of Ontario by whipping up racist sentiment. Their racism must be opposed by our solidarity.

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