

Columnists

## Murrroy Mandryk: Unnecessary teachers' strike inching toward the inevitable

*This is a government that brought us to this point because they have desperately wanted to make teachers' negotiations about something else.*

Murray Mandryk

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The pending teachers' job action has been long in the making, including last April's Rally for Education at the legislature. PHOTO BY LARISSA KURZ /Regina Leader-Post

About the only thing more evident than the likelihood of a Saskatchewan teachers' strike in the new year is that it could have been avoided.

Of course, avoiding this looming job action would have required a broader-minded Saskatchewan Party administration. Instead, it chose to see teachers in 2023 as one of its many nemeses.

Sadly, teachers checked all the political boxes:

Intellectuals who don't derive their income from primary industries.

Public employees costly to a provincial 2023-24 government budget that went from a billion-dollar surplus last March to a quarter-billion-dollar deficit in October, despite all the rhetoric we hear of record population and job numbers and a through-the-roof GDP.

And progressives defying the “parental rights” narrative (borrowed from U.S. Republicans) who would keep secret from a parent that their child might find it more comfortable to come out in a school setting rather than at home.

They are seen as just more of the activist radicals telling parents how to raise their kids ... or that maybe all schools — private or public — should simply comply with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code, as suggested by the Children’s Advocate this week.

And now teachers want go out and strike to further both their agenda and their personal greed, leaving both parents and students high and dry? Why not vilify them? One can imagine the back-to-work legislation is being written as we speak, complete with notwithstanding clause language.

Really, what else can a government that hasn’t seriously negotiated with teachers since last May possibly do?

Teachers are bracing for the fallout from the government narrative, framing their pending job action in a way to build as much support as they can.

Rather than issue a standard-looking press release on conciliation talks with the province breaking down, the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation (STF) framed it as “A Message to Saskatchewan Parents and Students.”

“Regrettably, the Government of Saskatchewan has failed to move off its original position since negotiations began in May,” said the STF statement that called job action “virtually inevitable.”

“These issues include class size, classroom complexity, support for students and violence in the classroom. When teachers are not allowed to freely discuss the issues facing the education sector, that means collective bargaining is not working.”

The only question now is when the job action is likely to start.

Expect the teachers to wait until conciliator Sue Barber’s final report in mid-January, as a way to avoid criticism from the government for not doing so.

But by mid-January, it will be exams for high school students, so expect teachers to begin their job action sometime after that.

Again, teachers will also have to garner as much public support as they possibly can, so postponing job action until that period between January finals and year-end final exams in June makes the most sense.

It seems likely that the teachers hope to build cause for their call for more classroom supports. And expect the Sask. Party to continue to be intransigent on hiring classroom help ... although one suspects the hawks in government will be eager to legislate teachers back to work even before the spring sitting begins in March. We may be heading toward another early, drawn-out legislative sitting.

Of course, there are those who will continue to buy into the government's narrative that began with provocative billboards from last summer eagerly suggesting Saskatchewan has the highest-paid teachers in Western Canada.

Were this simply a matter of the government needing to keep teachers' wages in check, one would certainly appreciate government diligence. This is what they are supposed to do.

But this fight has always been about classroom issues — not the least of which is hiring more teaching assistants or child psychologists that aren't even part of the STF.

This is a government that brought us to this point because they have desperately wanted to make teachers' negotiations about something else.

We will see teachers' job action because, ultimately, this is what the Sask. Party government has wanted.

*Mandryk is the political columnist for the Regina Leader-Post and the Saskatoon StarPhoenix.*

<https://leaderpost.com/opinion/columnists/murray-mandryk-unnecessary-teachers-strike-inching-toward-the-inevitable>

For years I had issues with Murray Mandryk in the only newspaper forum in the province for what seemed clear pandering to the hand that fed him obviously in service to the Saskatchewan Party. But he might be showing a little more spunk and independence of mind as the Sask Party's virulent TJB sickness spreads. Even the in-house tame columnist cannot stomach it now.