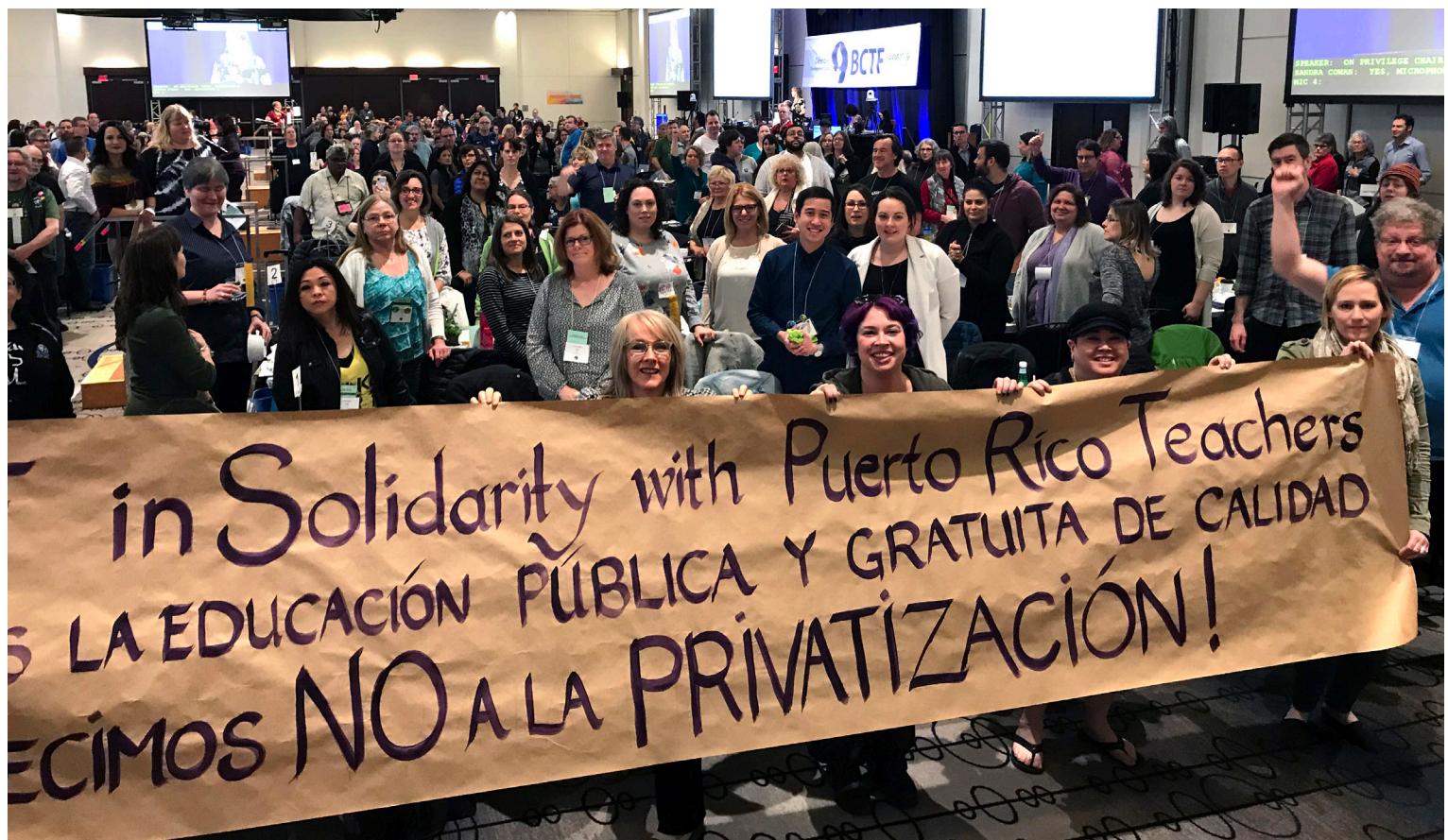


# The Advocate

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY EDITION • JUNE 2018



Surrey Teachers brought forward a motion to support Puerto Rico Teachers in their fight to defend public education and against privatization at this year's BCTF AGM; the motion passed with huge support!



Any Questions? Contact us!

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## Meet the International Solidarity Committee



(Left to right) Helen Kelsey, Gavin Slade-Kerr, Lizanne Foster, June James, Violette Baillargeon Jacqueline Alvarado Cruz and Julia MacRae, chair.

Our committee organizes events, recommends expenditures from the International Solidarity Fund, and promotes International Solidarity among teachers.

If you are keen to join us for the upcoming year please put your name forward for the committee elections at the September 19th STARA meeting, or volunteer to help us organize the next Cross Border Conference 2019 on our expanded organizing committee!

## Your local union and International Solidarity work

By Gavin Slade-Kerr

"Why am I paying my union dues to support teacher unions in other countries? Is this money actually doing any good?" Can a local union even do international solidarity work?

As members of the International Solidarity Committee of the STA, we sometimes get asked these questions. Perhaps you've been wondering and just haven't had the opportunity to ask. We can confidently tell you that our little bits of funding are making a difference. We are seeing that actions of determined teachers have a real impact in Colombia, Honduras, El Salvador, and even in the United States. The STA has a standing International Solidarity Committee which meets throughout the year

and organizes events, etc. Part of our STA budget each year includes the International Solidarity Fund, of \$9000, (approx. \$1.60 per member per year) administered by our executive committee, which helps us give funding to on-going projects. On the next page we outline the work you've supported over the year and the results we're happy to report.

## We support projects in El Salvador, Honduras, and Colombia

By Gavin Slade-Kerr

In El Salvador and Honduras, the STA works with the local teachers' unions: the National Association of Educators of El Salvador (ANDES), the Honduran Secondary School Teachers' College (COPEMH), and in Colombia, the Federation of Columbia Educators (FECODE). We work via Codevelopment Canada ([codev.org](http://codev.org)) which monitors the projects and does translation etc.



Steve Stewart (CoDev) and Daysi Marquez (Honduras)

In Central America the focus of our support is a multi-union supported/multi-year project by teachers there who promote and develop gender equity based education. Girls in these countries have been largely discouraged from seeking an education, particularly in rural areas, and are encouraged to instead focus on homemaking and child care. Plus, rampant sexism and violence throughout the society is at a crisis level. This is not good for girls and women, and lack of equality isn't good for men and boys either! These teachers' unions are working to change this through their promotion and development of Non-Sexist and Inclusive Pedagogy (NSIP). NSIP works through by training teachers in the approach, and by developing related resource materials that foster values of gender equity and inclusiveness in the classroom.

At the International Social Justice conference here in Surrey in April, the NSIP coordinator for Honduras, Daysi Marquez, came to lead Canadian teachers through a NSIP workshop. What an unusual opportunity! I attended on the Sunday here in room #2 at the STA office and was fascinated as she guided us through the activities. Through role play, and other workshop activities we

examined the systemic bias against girls and women in society. We examined the role of teachers in overcoming these barriers and changing the mindset to allow girls to participate as fully in society as men do.

### El Salvador

In support of non-sexist pedagogy, ANDES created and printed the textbook *Ourselves, Others and the World that Surrounds Us*. Three thousand copies were printed and distributed to classrooms across the country. Last year, they held meetings with 85 teachers to discuss and collaboratively develop ways to use the textbook with students. They found that the teaching aid that accompanied the textbook has been very helpful as it highlights areas from the official curriculum that are supported by the textbook.

From here on I will paraphrase the report we have received from the Central American teachers, letting us know how our money was spent...

ANDES was successful in completing the 5th Diploma

in Non-Sexist and Inclusive Pedagogy with 150 public school teachers from Santa Ana, Sonsonate, La Libertad, San Salvador, Chalatenango, Cabanas, La Paz, Usulután, San Miguel and La Union, representing 10 of the country's 14 provinces. This was achieved by holding many visits, planning meetings, and further training with a group of 12 facilitators, who also met to evaluate the results of past diplomas and adjust methodologies according to the results of each training session. The implementation of the Diploma in NSIP, in coordination with the Education Ministry, continues to give teachers important control over the training of fellow teachers, as well as influencing the communities and students they work directly with.

ANDES held 2 two-day workshops with 50 social studies teachers for the creation of a new lesson/unit text on the history of El Salvador from a NSIP perspective. The workshops focused on an analysis of the current social studies textbook, strategies for pedagogy, and formulation of an NSIP perspective involving collective experiences for teaching social studies in the classroom. ANDES received technical support from the NSIP consultants for facilitating the workshops, as well as during a series of interviews with academics and social studies teachers.

Next year ANDES proposes to build on past results and continue to strengthen strategies which have sustained the NSIP project in El Salvador. They will strengthen the facilitator terms in NSIP with greater theoretical, methodological, and organizational tools in order to implement and support the NSIP educational materials being produced by this project. This will be carried out through two national workshops with 35 NSIP facilitators and 10 Social Studies teachers, focusing on the socio-cultural paradigm and the construction of gender identities, as well as the relationship between society and education.



Maria Trejos and Gloria Roque imparting NSIP Workshop with Social Studies Teachers



NSIP-trained teachers receiving certificates from ANDES

Additionally, ANDES will continue to lobby the Education Ministry authorities in order to obtain their endorsement for making this new textbook part of the official curriculum.

A new NSIP facilitator team is also part of the plan for next year. The team will have teaching training workshops on how to use the textbooks *Ourselves, Others and the World that Surrounds Us* and *America Past and Present, Pedagogical Mediation, for Teaching Social Studies*.

Next year ANDES will also carry out a second round of one-day workshops and text distributions of *Ourselves, Others and the World that Surrounds Us* for approximately 500 primary school teachers. They will also carry out a fifth diploma program *Theory and Methodology in the Exercise of Non-Sexist and Inclusive Pedagogy*, expanding the program to 11 campuses throughout the country with the aim of graduating at least 150 teachers. Finally, they will carry out an evaluation of the resource *America in Time and Space: Identity Through Historical Reality*, a revision of the resource, the publication of 500 copies, and a 2 day training session in its application for 120 middle school social studies teachers.

## Honduras

In Honduras, COPEMH is broadening the training of teachers in the application of the Non-Sexist Pedagogy text and teachers' guide: *Neither Little Red Riding Hoods, Nor Big Bad Wolves: Generating Spaces for Dialogue*. Such a brilliant title, eh? This text book and teachers' guide has

been published by the Honduran Ministry of Education, which greatly increases its reach to teachers all over the country. The NSIP team will develop at least 3 teaching strategies for approaching the phenomena of youth emigration and its impact on Honduran classrooms, and they'll also generate at least three teaching strategies for approaching the natural sciences curriculum with a gender and environmental lens.



Honduran students engaging with the new units



One of the students in a pilot unit "The Natural Sciences are Not Neutral"

## Teacher activists lose their jobs, and their rights!



COPEMH Leaders in Honduras

In Honduras the repression of teachers continues. Teacher organizations in Honduras formed the backbone of the movement to restore democracy following the June 2009 coup that ousted progressive president Mel Zelaya. In an effort to crush their resistance, the de facto regime eliminated automatic dues check-offs and union leave for the most active teachers' organizations -COPEMH (high school teachers) and PRICPHMA (early education and primary school teachers). The executive committee members of the two organizations, arguing that the measures violated freedom of association, refused to return to the classrooms until their terms finished. As a result the Education minister ordered them to be fired.

Our union partners, COPEMH and PRICPHMA appealed the firings of the veteran teachers, winning their cases both in the Honduran courts and internationally at an International Labour Organization tribunal. However, the Honduran government appealed the Honduran lower court ruling, and in 2013, managed to have the Supreme Court overturn the ruling in the teachers' favour. By then however, the de facto regime was well-established and teacher resistance had ebbed. The government choose not to act on the Supreme Court ruling.

Fast forward to late November, 2017 – the government of President Juan Orlando Hernandez, heir to the coup regime, declares himself re-elected following widespread election fraud. Tens of thousands, tired of the corruption and violence and outraged by the blatant fraud, take to the streets in pro-democracy protests. Some 40 are shot or beaten to death, hundreds wounded and more than 800 jailed. Teachers again are at the forefront of the protests, and so the government moves to enforce the four-year old ruling. In March 2018, eight former executive committee members from PRICPHMA, and two from COPEMH, are summarily fired and escorted from their schools. The teacher representatives lose not only their jobs, but access to the teachers' social security and pension system.

COPEMH and PRICPHMA have appealed to Canadian partners for support in covering legal costs to appeal the firings, as well has to help support the teachers' families as they seek alternative employment in the midst of a severe economic depression in the country, so the STA executive recently agreed to send \$1500 to aid in their fight. This came from our \$9000 International Solidarity fund budget. Please see Jaime Rodriguez, one of the fired teachers, former president of COPEMH on the left in this picture.

With all this happening, it is hard to believe the same people can be involved in a long term project to reduce sexism and inequality in the country, but it's true!

### Colombia

In Colombia, FECODE has been developing their "PEACE SCHOOLS" project as a way for teachers, schools and the unions to participate in the peace process after the end of their 50 year civil war. Unfortunately schools have been sites of conflict in that long history, and teachers and teacher activists have paid a high price over the years; many have been killed either in school buildings or because they are teachers and activists. It is so hard for us to imagine such a situation! FECODE is helping teachers and school communities look forward with peace and compassion through "pedagogical circles" which are groups of teachers and parents developing projects, units, activities, acts of public remembrance etc. to work through lingering problems. Their work will strengthen the existing 10 provincial pedagogical circles in schools and municipalities directly affected by war in the country, and expand the creation of 12 more provincial pedagogical circles, through workshops, seminars, and a national meeting. They will identify and systematize alternative pedagogical experiences related to the "School as a Territory of Peace" across the country, through at least 22 provincial seminars and production of education materials. Finally, they will train teachers in the pedagogical circles in democratization of education and conflict resolution, strengthening their pedagogical practices.



Teachers during a provincial seminar on Schools as Territories of Peace



Julia MacRae, Lianne Foster, Naomi Klein and Seth Klein



## An International Conference, right here in Surrey

This year the STA International Solidarity committee hosted the STA's first International Social Justice Conference on April 7, 2018. RECLAIMING COMMON GROUND attracted teachers from Washington and Oregon, as well as from across British Columbia, to participate in workshops on climate change, LGBTQ rights, Indigenous, poverty, peace, Palestine, and many other social justice issues.

We have long been involved in "far away" international solidarity, but, we thought, why not pay attention to the colleagues immediately south of the border? Two of us had attended the Northwest Teachers for Social Justice conference in Seattle last October and were energized by the passion and energy of the speakers and attendees there. Our goal was to recreate that determined, hopeful atmosphere here in April.

We applied for and won a \$25,000 grant from the BCTF to host a regional social justice conference, and got support from adjoining locals. We scored a major coup with attracting Naomi Klein and Seth Klein to be our keynote speakers. Naomi is a renowned writer on the importance of facing and dealing with issues facing global citizens. Seth Klein is an economist with the CCPA. Other great speakers offered to facilitate workshops. By conference day, there were so many amazing offerings, it was difficult to choose!

Workshops examined intersections between mental health and gender identity, we had the First Nations blanket exercise, looked at a global peace initiative, democratic education, immigrant/refugee learners, Islamophobia, and many more. The day felt like an important moment of intellectual energy and

renewed commitment to continuing the struggle to support progressive change. Because of polarizing politics south of the border, it is a challenging time to be a teacher, which makes it all the more timely to reach out as colleagues and offer our solidarity.

The conference has strengthened our ties to each other's communities and allows us to continue to support each other as we work to make the world a better place for us, our children, and grandchildren. We hope to repeat next year, perhaps with a date earlier in the spring so as not to conflict with American Spring Break or conflate with our own STA convention. If you would like to be involved with the organizing committee, we always welcome new people and new ideas.

**Proud to be a Surrey Teacher!**



Teachers in West Virginia on strike

Photo: West Virginia Education Association

## Things are happening because of teacher action in the United States!

By Julia MacRae and Gavin Slade-Kerr

It's been called the "Teachers' Spring", as teachers in five different states have staged massive protests successfully leading to pay and school budget increases. Teacher salaries had been cut following the 2008 recession and remained largely static since, even decreasing in some states. More than three quarters of all teachers saw their standard of living fall behind others in their communities. For teachers in these states, it is a matter of economic survival, they just can't survive on their low salaries. Almost 20% of public school teachers in many states have a second job, or even 2 other jobs, outside of teaching to supplement their income. We heard a shocking story of a teacher who sold his blood every other week to supplement his income!

In states such as West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma and Arizona schools are scandalously underfunded, and class sizes keep on growing as more and more teachers leave the profession or depart for other states where there is better pay. This has produced severe teacher shortages. For example, Arizona is short 2000 teachers! However, some of these states also have a rich history of labour activism with the coal mine strikes, etc., and so even though these are "right to work" states, that largely supported Trump, and are controlled by Republicans, many people have supported the teachers in these actions.

Beginning in West Virginia, rank and file teachers and other public workers organized a two week walkout, largely facilitated through social media. As a result of these actions, WV legislators recently passed a bill increasing teachers' salaries by 5 percent. Emboldened by the successes in West Virginia, teachers began to organize strikes elsewhere. Pay increases have been even more dramatic in other states. In Arizona, where teachers wore red shirts in solidarity with the movement, other union members joined the protest in support. Recently, their government has passed a bill that includes increasing teacher salaries by 20 percent as well as a commitment to increased school budgets. Teachers' groups in North

Carolina are also agitating. Legislators in Alabama and South Dakota recently voted to increase teachers' pay, largely as a result of the protests in other states in an effort to head off similar action in their own. Check out the #Red4Ed hashtag for a compelling stream of teacher action from many states.

Governments are listening as teachers organize and call for support of education. As more media cover the teacher strikes and other actions by unions, people are becoming optimistic about changing the anti-union laws that have been passed in some states. Other strikes have started: bus drivers in Georgia, and university employees in California and Tennessee.

It is interesting to note that in some cases, the teacher union was not in the lead, in fact some teachers have been so disappointed with their union leadership only accepting concession after concession that the entire rank and file rose up and went out. Also interesting is the massive organizing on social media; Facebook groups started with just 7 members and grew to 40,000 very quickly. The fact that these teacher uprisings are happening in states dominated by conservative republicans is also interesting to note, whereas in the so-called "blue states" perhaps they have been lulled into inaction by the democrats and their periodic concessions to teachers. Similar to the students in the March For Our Lives national movement, teachers are confronting the government directly to provide for their future, - a living wage, healthcare, pensions and money for the schools.

Well, looking at things from our side of the border, it is certainly interesting to Canadian teachers to see where teachers are making some gains in other jurisdictions, whatever the reasons and local politics, union history and different realities. It can help us with our own strategy if we keep abreast of what is going on with our colleagues around the world.