



STATEMENT FROM PETL ON STUDENT ENCAMPMENTS AND OUR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Students across the globe attending post-secondary institutions are exercising their constitutionally protected rights to free expression, association, and assembly, and their right to protest. In Canada, Palestine solidarity encampments have been established at McGill University, the University of Western Ontario, the University of British Columbia, the University of Victoria, the University of Calgary, McMaster University, the University of Ottawa, Vancouver Island University, the University of Manitoba, and the University of Toronto's St. George, Mississauga, and Scarborough campuses. The list continues to grow.

As unionists, we know very well that peaceful protest and freedom of expression and association are fundamental to the labour movement. They are some of the most powerful tools we have at our disposal to advocate for worker rights and a fair and equitable society, and we stand ready to defend them against unconstitutional repression when necessary.

The Peel Elementary Teachers' Local extends and expresses its support for students' rights to free expression, assembly, and association at post-secondary institutions in Ontario and across the country. Where the right to peaceful protest is taken away or restricted, we risk the loss of democratic and inalienable rights. The arrest or intimidation of those exercising their right to protest, strike, or speak out against injustice is inexcusable and must be unequivocally denounced.

Exercising the right to free expression necessitates ensuring the rights of others, including the right to safety and security. Discomfort is not a safety concern and must not be mobilized to interfere with the fundamental right to peaceful protest. This was confirmed in a recent Quebec Superior Court judgment that rejected an injunction to limit the movement of protesters on campus at McGill University in Montreal.

The encampments also raise the question of whether universities are places of private property. Post-secondary institutions are not private property; they must be seen and understood as part of our commons, places that must be accessible and available to all. As publicly funded institutions, colleges and universities receive funding through our taxes and students' tuition fees.

The violent response by governments and police against students, academic workers, and educators is dangerous. As a public sector union representing education workers, we cherish and protect what is in the realm of the public sector and are in solidarity with those who defend the principle of the right to peaceful protest on public property. Civil disobedience is a pillar of the labour movement. Indeed, this is how our union, and every other union, was built and is sustained.