



Advocacy Matters

Why We Must Stand Up for Collective Bargaining This Year

Welcome to the start of a new academic year. As we prepare for the challenges and opportunities ahead, the MRFA Advocacy Committee wants to address a question we sometimes hear: *Why is the MRFA engaging in protests and actions that seem so overtly political?*

The answer is simple but critical: unions are political. Work itself is political.

Regardless of union membership, the nature of employment is unchangeably political, and unions owe their origin and their continued right to exist to political advocacy. Legislation makes these matters political by default. The *Employment Standards Code* applies to all Albertan workers. That document was written and passed by politicians. Our negotiations with MRU's Board of Governors are not divorced from Alberta's *Labour Relations Code*. Last bargaining round, we saw first-hand how the pre-existing *Public Sector Employers Act* could be used to legally force the Board of Governors to bargain in bad faith.

It is not just work. Essentially every aspect of our lives is political, including education. The *Post-Secondary Learning Act* dictates in fine detail what our institution looks like across its one hundred pages. Our budget is dictated every single year by the government, with recent shifts toward targeted funding that repurpose the academy into job training. Additional government control can be seen on the horizon in the form of "Institutional Neutrality."

As a union, we are non-partisan. This means we will never endorse a political party or tell you how to vote. But it is dishonest to pretend that all political actions and platforms are equal in their impacts to workers. We have a responsibility to educate ourselves and share information with others regarding the consequences of political actions. We will push back against the government – our employer – when they take actions that harm workers.

Unions have always been political, and they should be.

We need to be political. The weather does not change because one shuts the windows. Many would say that the economic and political landscape have shifted over the years. There's truth to this. The world under our feet is constantly in flux, and it is our responsibility to advocate for better conditions for workers as legislation threatens the rights of individuals in this province. The rights we have today were gained amidst even harsher conditions through more politically "radical" union action. We cannot merely inherit these rights while waiting out the storm from behind closed windows; we must step outside to defend them, and relentlessly push forward.

We are negotiating with a government that has made collective bargaining a political battlefield, and if we fail to defend our rights now, we set ourselves up for failure in our upcoming negotiations.

Our right to free and fair collective bargaining is actively being undermined, not just at the bargaining table, but through legislative interference. We need to remember the precedents set over the last couple of years and what is at stake for all public-sector workers in Alberta.

The Erosion of Our Bargaining Rights

Two major strategies are currently being used to restrict our rights and control the outcomes of public-sector bargaining:

1. The Notwithstanding Clause and the Back to School Act (Bill 2 - 2025):

We must look at what happened to the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) last October. When the government passed the *Back to School Act*, they ended a three-week teachers' strike and imposed a four-year collective agreement that the teachers had already overwhelmingly rejected.

- To shield this unprecedented action from a Charter challenge, the government invoked the Notwithstanding Clause.
- The ATA's request for an injunction was then denied, despite the acknowledgment of serious constitutional implications regarding the use of the clause. The injunction was denied based on a "balance of convenience" (disruption to students).
- Framing the issue as a matter of convenience risks obscuring the larger stakes. Labour rights and freedom of association are constitutional protections precisely because collective bargaining can create temporary disruption. The core question—whether the government can use the Notwithstanding Clause to override workers' Charter Rights—remains unresolved, and a broader constitutional challenge is expected in the coming years on this matter as well as the PBCO/Secret Public sector mandates.

2. Secret Mandates and the PBCO:

During our last two rounds of bargaining, we experienced firsthand the chilling effect of government intervention. Under the Public Sector Employers Act, the government empowered the Provincial Bargaining and Compensation Office (PBCO) to issue "secret mandates". This means the employer comes to the table bound by non-negotiable directives from the government—directives that they are legally prohibited from disclosing to us. Bargaining becomes a guessing game. It makes a mockery of the process, stripping power away from the actual negotiators at the table and placing it in the hands of a "ghost" in the room. Labour experts note this strategy is designed to steer negotiations and enforce government priorities without direct legislative intervention.

Why This Matters for the MRFA

Today, Alberta's teachers are back in classrooms under a contract forced upon them, having had their constitutionally protected right to strike stripped away. This abuse of power undermines the principles of fair and free collective bargaining, principles that protect all unionized workers in Alberta, including post-secondary faculty. The tools used against the ATA and the secret mandates dictating our own negotiations are part of a coordinated effort to weaken unions and restrict workers' rights.

In the fallout of Bill 2, many remarked that the government's actions were "illegal." This sentiment is born from imagining that the intersection of "wrong" and "unprecedented" must be disallowed by the law. However, nothing that the provincial government did was illegal, and we need to speak and act accordingly. Our political system allows for harmful legislation to be passed with impunity between election cycles. Thus we must also be politically active between election cycles, lest we see the same attacks made against us during our bargaining. Peaceful, visible solidarity is not beyond the scope of our mandate; it is a necessity to protect our rights and futures. We stand in solidarity with all workers facing such attacks.

Take Action: Stand With Us

We need your voice and your presence. Here is how you can get involved:

- **Advocate Locally:** Talk with colleagues, students, and friends about what's at stake. Share messages of support publicly
- **Attend the Fight Back Rally:** Join the Alberta Federation of Labour's province-wide day of protest. The Calgary March and Rally is on **Saturday, October 17, 2026, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.** at Calgary City Hall (800 Macleod Trl SE).
- [Join the AFL Fight Back Hub](#): RSVP for the rally and connect with others
- [Join the MRFA's Rapid Response Team](#): Sign up to receive urgent action alerts and timely information that goes beyond our weekly bulletins.
- [Contact Your MLA](#): Write to your MLA to express concern about the government's use of the notwithstanding clause and the broader erosion of collective bargaining rights in Alberta.

In solidarity,

The MRFA Advocacy Committee