

My name is Michael. I am a Cree man from the frozen swamps of the north, also known as Treaty 5 territory. I am a son and grandson of residential school survivors, and in turn a fellow member of an entire community of families continuing to feel the effects of the same residential school policies which have devastated and continue to devastate Indigenous communities and First Nations throughout this country's borders.

We at Red for Ed feel that it is our responsibility as educators to make our voices known in light of our Premier's recent words, and his new Indigenous Relations Minister's words. We are deeply offended and worried by these comments, in light of Bill 64, an odious bill which itself is an overall assault on how we deliver education to our youth. When put into context other conflicts this PC government has had on labour in general, the gaslighting and deflecting as a response paints a clear and horrifying picture that our provincial government has beliefs and policies diametrically opposed to what I believe most Manitobans believe in our hearts and minds.

We educators take our jobs seriously. As educators, we are not only teachers, but EAs, admin, clerks, maintenance workers, bus drivers, and we spend the bulk of our day interacting with our society's youth. We develop bonds, and come to emphasise with all of our students. We know, we see it first hand, the challenges Indigenous youth face in our educational system, but even more, we understand how critical it is for the communities in which we serve, which include non-Indigenous students and families, to have some level of understanding and empathy with people outside their circles. That involves knowing the truth about how things are, and how things were. And within the context of residential schools, how terrifyingly our province's leadership wishes to pretend that they, if they happened at all, weren't nearly as bad as people say.

We cannot allow for our province's leadership to speak so recklessly about a system that continues to negatively impact our communities. And once again, it's not just about our Indigenous students. For the most part, we don't need to teach them shit about the impact of residential schools, because for many, they continue to deal with those impacts through generational trauma. They're good, when it comes to knowing about residential schools. It's about everyone else, quite frankly. The power of not mandating teaching about this subject, and instead deflecting and marginalizing, is incredibly powerful in limiting society's motivation to initiate change. This needs to be fought against, at every turn.

When it comes to our government's overhaul of how we deliver education, we as educators need to stand up and make it known that we refuse to follow this revisionist narrative that the motives for residential schools were made with 'good intentions'. Ask yourself, what 'good intentions' are implied, when it comes to this belief? Because any Canadian history teacher worth their salt could tell you about actual documented conversations in Parliament applauding such policies to achieve an overall goal to eliminate Indigenous people. Are we facing a future where we are not allowed to teach certain subjects truthfully, for fear of our jobs? The authoritarian nature of Bill 64's impact on how the government's ability to impose such a thing could very well lead us to that dystopian future.

Many of us educators have seen first hand the challenges Indigenous youth face in this system. We know them, we develop bonds with them. We wish we could do more, but we have limitations. We understand that, unfortunately, their challenges are merely an overall pattern of neglect and hostility to Indigenous people. As educators, as well as parents, family members and community members, we understand that we as a society need to do better in supporting our Indigenous students and Indigenous communities. The consequences

of the funding gap between provincially-run schools and federally (i.e. First Nation) run schools are real, people. This understanding includes taking a stand and standing up for the truth. We demand from our leadership that the generational trauma wrought from the legacy of residential schools, as well as the current trauma wrought from its evil successor in our province's Child and Family Services, be taken seriously in healing and coming to terms with, not shied away from and shadowed by manufactured outrage over statues and some paint.

Our society's leadership must make amends for the decisions made by their white male forefathers, in Ottawa as well as here on these steps. In not running away from, hiding from, sweeping under the rug, we need leadership with the fortitude to, first, accept some uncomfortable truths, accept some humility in and from there accept leadership in undertaking the perilous task in what needs to be done in order to have a beautiful future for those who come after us.

We educators are here. We stand with residential school survivors, because we are teaching your grandchildren, and like all of our students, they are our children too. We want what's best for them, and we want what's best for our communities. We will not stand for whitewashing history, and we are here to fight for what is right.

Hiy Hiy