



Notes for a Submission

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To the

Law Amendments Committee

On

Bill 19

Amendments to the Trade Union Act

December 10, 2013

Introduction

Thank you, Madam Chairperson and members of the Committee for this opportunity to speak to you about Bill 19 - Amendments to the *Trade Union Act*. We are here on behalf of our President Joan Jessome.

As you may know, the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (or NSGEU) is the largest union in the province representing more than 30,000 workers across the public sector in the provincial government, corrections, health care, public schools, community colleges, universities, municipalities, and community organizations. We have approximately 100 locals and 90 Bargaining Units.

During the last 25 years, we have had close to 45 certifications, of which:

- 26 took over one year;
- 15 took more than 18 months;
- 9 took more than 2 years; and
- 2 even took close to 3 years.

It is very important in our view that employees, who have a right to unionize in Nova Scotia and a right to association under the Charter, have a reasonable expectation of achieving a fair collective agreement in a reasonable period of time. We think under normal circumstances that time period should be less than a year.

NSGEU supports the existing legislated provisions for First Contract Arbitration, inclusive of the time lines to go to the Labour Board for assistance.

Our recent two experiences which were referred to the Board showed us that the present process is working well, and as originally intended. In fact, the Labour Board was instrumental in assisting the parties achieve a negotiated first contract settlement without having one imposed.

However, we understand the present government wishes to change the provisions in a few areas, inclusive of removing the time lines.

We are also aware that the Labour Management Review Committee which is representative of unionized employers and employees, recommended a revision to the proposed amendments. In light of that change, NSGEU can support this Bill.

We are appreciative of the re-consideration by the Minister of the unanimous recommendations by the Labour Management Review Committee. We wish to take this opportunity to thank the Minister and the Department of Labour and Advanced Education for their willingness to make this stated change. It will continue to make it possible for employees to seek First Contract Arbitration as an alternative to a work stoppage if the stated conditions in the amendment are met.

We appreciate this opportunity to speak with you on Bill 19.