

**PRESENTATION TO LAW AMENDMENTS COMMITTEE
NOVA SCOTIA LEGISLATURE**

“Bill 148 - An Act Respecting the Sustainability of Public Services”

By President of CUPE Nova Scotia – Mike McNeil
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My name is Mike McNeil. I am a long-time executive member of CUPE Local 1259, Long Term Care, and the president of CUPE Nova Scotia.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to this legislation.

What is the purpose of Bill 148?

The Finance Minister says that Bill 148 is about sustaining public services.

If public services are valuable enough that the government thought it needed to legislate essential service agreements on almost 40,000 health care and community services workers in seven (7) different unions last year, the services are valuable enough to pay a fair, negotiated wage.

Every day in Nova Scotia, public sector workers are being asked to do more with less. And so far we have kept doing that. CUPE members do it because they care about the frail elderly woman in a nursing home bed, they care about the well-being of our children in the classroom, their safety on the school bus, and CUPE members work to deliver the best services possible to vulnerable adults with disabilities. These are just a few of the many public services CUPE members provide. It is devastating to workplace morale to have government raise the fist of legislation over the collective bargaining process.

The Premier says Nova Scotia can't afford unions anymore.

Do you really think that cutting the wages of a nursing home worker is going to save the economy? My rate of pay is about \$16.50 an hour. Over the term of the

government's compensation plan in Bill 148, I calculate that this will give me around about a dime more an hour - 45 cents more an hour after four (4) years.

It's not the fault of the average worker that the economy is in trouble. In fact the opposite is true. Raising wages will boost consumer spending and assist in relieving the indebtedness of Nova Scotians. Unions' wages raise the standard of living for everyone and build the middleclass. Weakening unions and workers' rights will only hurt the economy.

Wage freezes will cause a brain drain in the public sector. It is already difficult to fill positions in the public sector. A freeze will make the situation worse.

Public sector workers are paying for the fiscal mismanagement of the Liberal government. The McNeil government is playing games, trying to blame public sector workers for their broken promise to not cut services.

Stephen McNeil promised better – nowhere in his election platform did he indicate a plan to freeze wages or sidestep collective bargaining. In fact, McNeil took out an ad during the election proclaiming that he respected collective bargaining and the right to strike. So much for truth in advertising. McNeil is not the 'progressive' he promised to be. This government's word cannot be trusted.

Undermining workers' rights, and attacking the gains we have made are not the way to build a stronger economy in Nova Scotia. Nor is it the way we build strong communities. Many of our public sector workers are single parents working two (2) or more jobs to make ends meet. Imagine the burden on them.

The contracts we negotiate at the bargaining table set standards that improve both union and non-union workplaces and help all families keep up. We need to protect more vulnerable workers with our workforce changing so much and so quickly. Young workers, new Canadians, workers who are part-time or in temporary positions all need unions to work on their behalf.

Unions like CUPE are pushing for an expanded CPP, affordable quality child care, a health care system that will be there for us in the future, pay equity and other programs that help all Nova Scotians achieve a good quality of life.

Everyone has the right to join a union and to engage in a meaningful process of collective bargaining.

When collective bargaining is free of political meddling, it works.

Collective agreements in Nova Scotia are on par with collective agreements negotiated by public sector unions and employers in Atlantic Canada and Canada at large. There is no evidence of lopsided bargaining here.

The process of collective bargaining has evolved over many years and has been long-supported in jurisprudence and by Canada's international obligations. We understand that collective bargaining may at times appear slow and complicated but this is the case for many other processes in a democratic society that respects fundamental human rights.

Free collective bargaining is a human right.

Bill 148 tramples on those rights.

CUPE does not engage in concession bargaining. We are not turning the clock back on wages or workers' rights. CUPE remains committed to a meaningful collective bargaining process and is ready to engage in that process with government and employers at any time.

Thank you for your attention.

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