

Not long ago, Premier McNeil himself spoke against government interfering in the fair collective bargaining process. In 2007 and again in 2013, he stated that he supported unions, and that anti-strike laws do not provide stability in a province. Premier McNeil said "Let's not take a sledgehammer to this issue". He recognized that imposing a contract on a group of professionals is both heavy-handed and wrong.

I am here today to reason with you, and to ask that, in the matter of imposing a contract on public school teachers, all Liberal MLAs vote with their conscience and their constituents in mind, while showing respect for the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I know I don't have to appeal to the Progressive Conservative, NDP or Independent MLAs because they have been very clear that they support fair collective bargaining, a protected Canadian right. They have also attended our rallies, listened to our stories, and they are willing to do more than just tell us they understand how desperately teachers and specialists need to see meaningful changes in the education system in Nova Scotia.

The Nova Scotian Education system is in crisis. My colleagues and I have worked tirelessly to keep it running, but we are exhausted and Premier McNeil's legislation may just be what breaks us. Any MLA who supports this legislation is going on record as saying that education in Nova Scotia does NOT matter. The legislation does not as Minister Casey confabulates "improve the teaching and learning conditions in our public schools".

Bill 75 is a reflection of a short-sighted government that also made sure to punish teachers for standing up for their students. If the Liberals believed tentative agreement number three was the best option, then why present this "Act Respecting a Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements" that takes money away from the classroom and from teachers? It will also eliminate the arbitrator from the newly named Council to Improve Classroom Conditions, who, clearly would be needed to get anything done.

Two months of work to rule, have not harmed students and teachers, as much as twenty years of government neglect. During work to rule, students were in the classroom every single day learning from teachers, who were not weighted down by endless data collection, provincial testing and other distractions from teaching. Every single day of course- except December 5th, 2016 when the McNeil government prevented students from going to school and insulted every member of the Nova Scotia Teacher's Union under the guise that students would not be safe. On December 6th, with the exact same plan we had in place the day before, students returned to class. This government reversal happened in large part due to all of the public support for teachers. Never before in my career have I witnessed such unabashed support for teachers. The public was as galvanized as the NSTU, by the insult that we would not keep our students safe.

Every single day, my colleagues and I demonstrate our commitment to education. We show up to work despite not having enough resources, with too many students in our classes, with too many needs, knowing we will not get to everyone that day. We endure more than most people realize. We are hit, bit, yelled at, threatened, intimidated, but we still persevere because we also see the fruits of our labour. We have the privilege of witnessing students speak for the first time, read, write, develop a passion for a subject, learn how to use technology, gain confidence and grow. We watch our students' dreams take shape and we support them in any way possible. That could be by giving extra help, coaching a team, buying lunch, having a conversation, directing them to a resource, writing a letter, or just being there when they need us.

And now, Liberal MLAs, we need you to help us support our students. We need at least nine of you to act for education and vote against this anti-teacher legislation. NSTU members and our supporters will remember your bravery. There is another pathway to resolve this issue and legislation is not it.

Ultimately, we need to see immediate changes in our classrooms, and we know that is possible through fair collective bargaining. Do not permanently sever the relationship between NSTU members and the McNeil government, as will be the case if this legislation passes.

Presented by Nancie de la Chevotière
To Law Amendments Committee
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