



Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvement Act

Bill 75 Law Amendments Committee Presentation, February 16, 2017

My name is Christine Van Zoost and I'm the Vice President of the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union. I am here today on behalf of Janet Hazelton, President of the Nurses' Union and our Board of Directors.

The Nova Scotia Nurses' Union is a professional union representing approximately 7,000 Licensed Practical Nurses, Registered Nurses and Nurse Practitioners in Nova Scotia's hospitals, long term care facilities, adult residential centers, VON branches and Canadian Blood Services Centres.

It is important for the Nurses' Union to be here today to show support for our brothers and sisters in the Teachers Union, and because all workers are affected by legislation that threatens collective bargaining rights. An attack on Nova Scotia's teachers is an attack on the entire labour movement.

As a long-time nurse and labour activist, it has been difficult for me, personally and professionally, to witness the struggles that teachers in this province are facing both on the job and at the bargaining table.

The introduction of Bill 75, legislation that forces a contract on this province's teachers, goes against the very essence of democracy and free, collective bargaining.

In reality, it is hardly fair to call it a contract as a contract is a fairly negotiated and voluntary arrangement between two or more parties. A contract arises when the parties **agree** that there is an agreement. Formation of a contract generally requires an offer, acceptance, consideration, and a **mutual** intent to be bound.

Imposing a contract on some of our most respected and admired workers proves this government failed to listen. Teachers clearly articulated the complex issues they face in the

classroom and should be given a chance to continue that dialogue at the bargaining table. Instead, government has once again opted for punitive legislation.

As labour organizations, we begin the process of collective bargaining with optimism and the knowledge that what we propose at the table reflects the needs of our members and the interests of those they serve – in this case, our youth. For the past three years, this spirit of collaboration has waned, undermining the integrity of the entire process.

As I am sure you have heard from several presenters, the loss of the long service award is a huge step backwards. This benefit was legitimately established through great strides at the negotiation table. To some it may seem like a generous hand-out at the end of one's career. However, over the past 40 years bargaining teams have forgone wage increases or other benefits in order to attain long service awards. They are a deferred salary designed to encourage retention and recruitment for a stable and skilled workforce.

It is important to note that there are other choices this government could have and still should consider. This is not baseball – we should not have a “three strikes and you're out” mentality. This Union should be afforded the opportunity to return to the table again. This government also has the ability to refer disputes to a neutral and independent third party which is a cornerstone of a modern democracy. The introduction of Bill 75 sends a clear message that a third party cannot be trusted, and that government itself will be our arbitrator.

This attack on Charter-protected union rights is the kind of unfair and offensive treatment of workers that lead people to join unions in the first place. The gains that labour organizations have fought for over time have benefitted countless workers, unionized and non-unionized alike. But this government's history of attacking worker's rights is regressive. Is this really the legacy the Liberals want written in our history books?

On behalf of the Nurses' Union, I urge you to set this legislation aside. Allow free collective bargaining to run its course. Allow teachers and other public sector workers to continue serving the public and to continue to make Nova Scotia a great place to live.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.