

February 17, 2017
Halifax, N.S.

Law Amendments Committee Written Submission re: Bill 75

Note: I requested an opportunity to speak to the Law Amendments Committee and was told that the McNeil Liberal government was cutting off the time available for LAC presentations and I would not be able to speak, and neither would another 300-400 citizens who also wanted to address the committee. Therefore, I am reluctantly sending a written submission as I want to ensure my opinion is on the record, and the Liberal government has denied me the opportunity to speak to them directly.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion about Bill 75.

By now, you have heard again and again about the overwhelming conditions in classrooms, and the absolute necessity of making changes; however, this fight is not JUST about classroom conditions. It is also about money. Teachers do not just take from public coffers, we are also taxpayers. In terms of real dollars and disposable income, teachers are falling behind. Teachers have many years of university education and student loans to repay, as well as young families, and mortgages, and in addition to that, teachers have increased pension contributions, and the threat of no increases at all after retirement.

I have three Master's degrees (five degrees in total), and I am at the top of the teacher's pay scale. However, I am the sole wage earner in my family, and unlike many others, I have no options to earn extra money by working overtime, even though I am expected to work many overtime hours for free. Due to the circumstances of my family, I have been trying to plan ahead for my retirement, and the service award has been a significant part of that plan. The Liberal government is now trying to strip away a benefit that was gained through previous negotiations, in lieu of salary increases, and promised to me when I retire. Taking into consideration the loss of indexed pensions, my retirement plan counts on a modest service award that I would have earned after 30 years of work to help me transition into retirement and to a fixed income that will not keep up with the cost of living.

This fight is also about the erosion of our fundamental human rights. Entering into negotiations with the threat of Bill 148 sets the whole process up to fail. How can you assert that you have ever bargained fairly when you have imposed restrictions on the negotiations from the very beginning? How can you claim that the NSTU accepted three agreements? A tentative (unconfirmed, provisional, preliminary) agreement does

not become an agreement until the majority of the members accept it. There never *was* a deal. How can you insist that you are making teachers a fair offer but refuse to participate in impartial, binding arbitration? How can you say you are concerned about the ability of Nova Scotians to pay, yet send this dispute to court at the cost of millions of taxpayer dollars? How can you mislead the public by claiming that you have no other path forward except to impose a contract that 9300 teachers of NS have soundly rejected three times? Of course you have options. Imposing legislation is heavy-handed, and simply wrong, and is *NOT* the only path forward. Return to the negotiating table with a mediator, and then ask for binding arbitration on any issues that remain unresolved.

One of the many fundamental things that students learn at school is how to be a good citizen. So tell me Mr. McNeil, how do I teach my students that their voice matters? That they have a part to play in the democratic process when the person with the biggest stick wins, or that if you have the power, you can do whatever you want? How do you justify ignoring the voice of the people? Nova Scotians are watching, and students are learning important lessons about politics and power. However, more than ever, I am determined that my students will *NOT* learn these lessons. I will use every avenue available to me to ensure that my students understand that people in a democracy *DO* have the power, and our voices *WILL* be heard when we *DO NOT* return the Liberal party to power in the next election. You work for the people, and the people will be heard.

We will not go quietly. We will not be complicit in the erosion of public education. We will not participate in the mismanagement of our schools, or the lack of regard for our students. You have galvanized our resolve to stand up and to speak up. Do you hear us? We will not go quietly!

In the words of Elie Wiesel, "There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest."

We are at a crossroads in Education. The Liberal government can go down the road of political austerity and fiscal restraint, or they can make significant and meaningful changes in Education, making Nova Scotia a leader in educational reform.

Liberal MLAs: I know some of you do not agree with the way your party has treated the students and teachers of NS. Have courage; do the right thing. The people of NS will have your back.

Susan C. McKay
Fall River, Nova Scotia