

To the Members of the Law Amendments Committee,

I stand before you today as a taxpayer, Nova Scotian, Canadian, and union supporter. I am also a teacher - a title I state with pride. My pride lies not necessarily with my direct endeavours or results, but my pride lies with the many teachers, whether they be current, former, or future, that invest themselves in a belief that education matters. I appreciate them; I appreciate their work...and it is work. I am willing to dispel any notion from any critic that education is not work - in fact, it is an art, a craft. While arts or crafts can be taught, not every person is capable of being a teacher. Not everyone has that disposition. Certain vocations and callings require certain skills and talents. That statement is not one of arrogance, but is of fact, just as not every person is capable of being a politician. Some are best suited to operating small businesses, like appliance repair or publishing or providing deejay services at weddings and anniversaries. However, there is a fundamental difference between operating a small business and balancing your monthly books, and being responsible for a provincial budget balanced within a fiscal year. That difference is that people are not products; they are not bottom lines. I am not a popcorn maker, a blender, or a refrigerator that requires repair. I will not pop because of pressure, I will not be shaken and stirred, and I will not be put in ice. Nor will my colleagues. My students also do not fall under the umbrella of machinery or

I am not a small business owner nor do I seek to be one. But I do know one inalienable fact about business - you need to spend money to get your best results. Actually, there should be a clause with that statement - you need to spend money effectively and wisely in order to obtain your best results. Solid investments result in solid returns. Ferry systems to another country while footing the bulk of the bill, maintaining a seafaring icon that should be dry-docked, and lack of taxation on businesses that claim to be putting jobs in our economy when in fact they threaten to build shop elsewhere if they do not receive substantial tax breaks for their infrastructure and companies. These are not the wise investments required for Nova Scotian taxpayers. These decisions need to be scrutinized by the public with the same ardour that this impasse between the NSTU and the provincial government has garnered.

There are other financial doings by this government that vex me horribly. Passing legislation to award a pension to MLAs after a mere two years while a teacher needs to teach 10 years in order to qualify for theirs, and it cannot be collected until 55 years of age? MLA salary wages increase while Bill 75 will

prohibit teachers from receiving their due Service Award - which is not a bonus; contrary to what it has been depicted as by government and media - but is a deferred portion of salary; which was negotiated in good faith to replace wage increases lost in years past.

Who was going to resist receiving a raise; especially in light of the fact that there was no resistance to the notion? The public cannot vote directly on such a motion, but have to rely on the best judgment of its elected body? Very puzzling decisions indeed.

My union and the unions of Nova Scotia are necessary to move our lives, economy, and futures forward. Much of the successes in Nova Scotia can be attributed to unions and people working together; co-operating to find common ground to experience joint success. I do not have a crystal ball but I would bet that the future of a political party lies in the decisions that they make concerning Bill 75. My union's mission is to act as the primary advocate of its members by protecting and enhancing economic benefits, improving working conditions, supporting personal well-being, keeping members informed and promoting opportunities to participate.

While the concerns are related to personal finances, I take greater umbrage with the lack of efficient and sensible decisions pertaining to students and their possible future successes. The issues in education are multiple. Students have the right to an education; one that best meets their various abilities and goals. Unfortunately, an assortment of issues compound this system -exceptional needs across the spectrum, time spent compiling data that has no direct correlation to student success, etc. Demands on teachers that are ever increasing - many of which are initiatives not tested or are of best fit for our province or in-serviced with teachers prior to implementation - while time to respond to these tasks ever decreasing. Work to Rule did not negatively affect learning in the classroom. Rather, it disrupted the status quo and therefore resulted in numerous phone calls, e-mails, and letters directed to those who are responsible for policies. In essence, a squeaky wheel gets the grease. Or perhaps in this situation, a greasy wheel gave grease to the NSTU and unions in our province. Our union president was asked recently by a media figure why it took until now for teachers to speak out regarding dissatisfaction with teaching conditions and classroom conditions for students. It is because teachers have reached a point in their collective thinking; a line in the sand, if you will, to say that enough is enough. We have been asked to perform virtually impossible tasks with little to no resources; in conditions that may warrant at times a

reprieve from leaky ceilings, mouldy walls, and disproportionate classroom numbers that besiege even the most master of teachers.

In closing, I accessed the dictionary to seek definitions for certain words that were in my head and soul as I considered standing before this body. Words such as honour, integrity, and right came to mind. Within my belief system, these words are not taken lightly - honour is displayed via honesty, fairness, or integrity in one's beliefs and actions. If the current government truly upholds the tenets I have cited, then the flaws in their logic should be obvious to them. It is obvious for much of the electorate of Nova Scotia. As per integrity, it is adherence to moral and ethical principles; displaying soundness of moral character and honesty. The personal freedoms of Canadians and union members are under attack with Bill 75, and with the absence of collective bargaining and dismissal of strike action. The audacity of the government and its advisors to forego these fundamental rights of a democracy will only ultimately cause the cost of court battles to befall taxpayers. Is this short sighted thinking, combined with the first strike of the NSTU in Nova Scotia's history, the legacy that this government desires to leave in the minds of its voters? Perhaps it does not matter to the government - because in all likelihood, when the dust settles and this matter has been resolved, and the rights of union workers and teachers alike have been found to be violated, the pensions of these MLAs will be accessed as they move on to consulting jobs, or advisory panels, or a return to the private sector, repairing microwaves and freezers? Finally the term "right" - equated with conformity with fact, reason, truth, or some standard or principle; or to be correct in judgment, opinion, or action. This term does not apply to the example put forth by the current government of Nova Scotia. They, the provincial government, are potentially culpable for the consequences that are likely to result from the fallout of this debacle by disregarding the requests put forth by teachers and the Union. While the current government may not be alone or directly responsible for the state of education in Nova Scotia, they do currently possess the power to remedy this situation. With great power, comes great responsibility. Be responsible. Do not view the students of Nova Scotia as products. View them as people - prepared, proud, and poised to embark on their life's path as our best resource on display for all to see.

- **The Primacy Of The Individual - democracy stresses the value of the individual and the development of individual capacities as the aim of social organization.**
- **Social Reform Must Come Through Education - Social progress in a democracy must come through the action of citizens; it can only come if there is an**

improvement in the quality of the people themselves. That improvement, in turn, can come only through education.

- **Education Must Begin With The Economic - Moreover, economic reform is the most immediate necessity, because the economic problems of the world are the most pressing.**
- **Education Must Be Through Group Action - group action is essential to success under modern conditions; you cannot get results in business or civic affairs without organization.**
- **Effective Social Reform Involves Fundamental Changes In Social And Economic Institutions - It is necessary to face the fact that real reform will necessitate strong measures of change that may prove unpopular in certain quarters.**
- **The Ultimate Objective Of The Movement Is A Full And Abundant Life For Everyone In The Community - Economic cooperation is the first step, but only the first, towards a society that will permit every individual to develop to the utmost limit of her/his capacities.**

I leave you with words from Moses Coady; founder of the Antigonish Movement, a believer in unionism, and supporter of the NSTU:

"The man who has ceased to learn ought not to be allowed to wander around loose in these dangerous days." Dangerous days, indeed.

Thank you.

Yours in Education and Unionism,

Joey MacIsaac
Teacher, NSTU