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presentation



Notes for a Submission

By

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To the Law Amendments Committee:

Crown Attorneys' Labour Relations Act

Good afternoon.

Madame/Mr. Chairperson and Committee members – I am here today to speak to an unfortunate piece of legislation, the Crown Attorneys' Labour Relations Act.

My name is Jason MacLean and I am President of NSGEU.

The NSGEU is the largest union in the province representing approximately 31,000 hardworking women and men across the public sector in the provincial government, corrections, public schools, community colleges, universities, municipalities, community organizations and health care.

I have to say I am disappointed to be at law amendments to, once again, speak against another piece of Liberal legislation aimed at stripping public servants of their rights to free and open collective bargaining.

This legislation unfairly tilts the balance of power towards the McNeil Liberals and away from hard working public servants.

We know how this kind of strong-arm political maneuver played out throughout the public service.

It pushed an already vulnerable health care system into chaos.

The result is a health care crisis that people now must accept as the new normal.

The province can't recruit the number of health care professionals the system needs.

How many times do I need to repeat this?

Surgeries are cancelled last minute; emergency departments are closed; families are forced to go without a doctor; seniors can't get into long term care beds; and vulnerable people are left at home without the kind of home care they need.

Such political interference into the collective bargaining process puts up unnecessary barriers to recruiting people to come and work in Nova Scotia.

Our health care workers continue to be among the lowest paid in Canada and this government has shown they are more interested in meddling in lives of working people than treating them fairly and allow the bargaining process to unfold without interference.

I am disappointed to be here today because lately, there has been a lot of good work happening between the labour movement and government.

As a Union leader who represents over 30-thousand working Nova Scotians it's clear that the Liberal government doesn't believe our collective agreements are worth the paper they are printed on.

In November of 2015 then Finance Minister Randy Delory told organized labour in a meeting and in public statement that he wants to 'repair public-sector labour relations that have been broken far too long.'

Let me be clear: It wasn't broken. Stephen McNeil and the Liberal MLAs sitting around this table broke it.

Time and time again this government has bullied working people, without any thought to the consequences.

When every problem looks like a nail, the only tool this government will use is a hammer.

Don't forget, health care is in crisis and vulnerable people continue to suffer at the hands of this government.

And now it's Crown Attorneys'.

In 2015 this government agreed to extending the right of arbitration. Now as government once again fails to get a deal they resort, as all bullies do, to intimidation and manipulation.

Stephen McNeil has now changed the rules, broken his own agreement, and has surrendered any credibility he might have had left with working people.

With the fallout of the Jordan decision, the court system is on the brink of crisis and as it did with health care, the actions of this Premier will push it over the edge.

The Premier claims he is showing leadership and making tough decisions.

Real leadership would be to negotiate in good faith and find a compromise - not act like a child who doesn't get his own way and takes his ball and goes home.

Real leadership would be to honour the conditions of the existing contract and work in collaboration to find solutions, not legislate away the failures of his government.

No one said this would be easy. The fact the two sides are far apart is part of the process. In the past that was only a sign that each side needed to work harder.

The 'McNeil' process is to ram through legislation to get what he wants.

Health care is in crisis – too bad.

We can't recruit health care workers – too bad.

People are leaving the system – too bad.

And now, victims won't get the justice they deserve – too bad.

How can any public servant feel confident that what they bargained for, what this government agreed to, will be honoured if things get difficult?

If the government can break the terms of the contracts, are they sending us a message that we can too?

If contracts don't mean anything anymore, then I think we might need to reconsider how we do things, as well.

This is a challenge of integrity. A challenge of trust. A challenge of respect.

So far, it's a challenge that government has failed.

I ask the government members of this committee to tell the working people of this province, how can they trust this government to protect the benefits and rights they have worked for and depend on?

In 2015, Minister Delorey told us he wanted to fix labour relations. If this is government's vision of a fixed system, it's no wonder they can't see the crisis in health care or the potential crisis in the justice system.

Today, I offer no amendments to the bill, as the bill is a slap in the face to every working person who has a collective agreement in Nova Scotia.

The only honourable thing to do is to withdraw the bill and get back to finding solutions. Just as we used to do before the Liberals tried to "fix" labour relations, which weren't actually broken at all.