



FOCUS ON QUEEN'S PARK



Liberals Shut Down Human Rights Hearings

Just eight days after Ontario Attorney General Michael Bryant said he looked forward to controversial human rights reforms being debated in a legislative committee, the Liberal government introduced a time allocation motion to end public hearings into Bill 107.

Public hearings into the legislation to reform the Human Rights Commission were scheduled to start in January. While many of the groups and individuals who had applied for standing in the hearings looked on in the legislature, the McGuinty Liberals suddenly announced the about-face.

The decision has even upset supporters of the Bill, including Barbara Hall, who heads the Human Rights Commission. She voiced her "profound dismay" in a letter to Premier Dalton McGuinty.

Both opposition parties also slammed the Liberals for shutting down public debate on the issue.

"Premier, after promising advocacy groups and visible minorities

concerned with human rights protection that you would hold public hearings on Bill 107, today you announced that you're cancelling the public hearings and shutting down debate," said NDP Leader Howard Hampton.

"You promised to listen to human rights advocates, not shut them out. What's your justification for this betrayal of trust and this betrayal of your promise?"

You're the one who said to the people of Ontario that you believed in open, accountable, transparent government," said Hampton. "You're the one who told these advocates that there would be continued public hearings and that you wanted to hear what they had to say.

What's really interesting is that you spent over \$100,000 on newspaper ads advertising that there would be public hearings. That's \$100,000 of public money. So I want to ask the Premier this: If you weren't interested in hearing from these human rights advocates, if you don't care what they say, why did you spend \$100,000 placing ads saying there would be hearings?"

Liberals Vote Against Protecting Jobs

NDP Leader Howard Hampton says McGuinty Liberals have let down working families by voting down an NDP Opposition Day motion that called for action to keep good-paying manufacturing and resource jobs in Ontario.

Liberal MPPs voted down the key recommendation of the NDP's Job Protection Act – the creation of a Job Protection Commissioner to help at-risk companies reposition themselves when faced with bankruptcy and shutting down. They also voted down the creation of a reasonable hydro policy to sustain jobs. The final vote was 38-14, with Liberals voting against the motion and New Democrats and Progressive Conservative MPPs voting in favour of the motion.

"During elections, politicians always talk about how they're on the side of working people. Today, McGuinty Liberals had a chance to stand up and be counted. But tonight, they put their partisan interests ahead of the public interest and voted down a motion that would have helped keep good-paying manufacturing and resource jobs here in Ontario," Hampton said.

The NDP Opposition Day motion reads as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario recognize that manufacturing and resource jobs have formed the economic foundation of prosperity and economic security for Ontario's working families for more than a century;

"That failed provincial policies are causing that foundation to crumble; that those failed policies have led to a recession in Ontario's manufacturing and forestry sectors and caused great hardship for Ontario's working families; that decisive action must be taken now to keep good paying manufacturing and forestry jobs in Ontario; and

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario call upon the Ontario government to take immediate action to sustain jobs by providing greater institutional support to manufacturing and resource workers whose workplaces are threatened, starting with a reasonable hydro policy that can sustain jobs and the creation of a Job Protection Commissioner for Ontario – as recommended by the NDP Job Protection Act."

"McGuinty Liberals owe working families an explanation. After presiding over the loss of

136,000 manufacturing and resource sector jobs, how could Liberals vote against keeping good-paying jobs in Ontario?" Hampton asked.

Bill to Reform WSIB Compensation

In November, NDP MPP Andrea Horwath moved first reading of her Private Member's Bill, An Act to Amend the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act.

"This is following up on an activity of a couple days ago," said Horwath, "when we raised the issue of the untenable position that injured workers are in with the erosion of their payments as a result of inflation because the indexing that they need to make sure their benefits are able to withstand inflation is not in place.

My Bill would index two types of payments that are received by injured workers. It amends the Act to enable annual cost-of-living increases to WSIB compensation paid to injured workers in Ontario by removing the existing reduced indexing factor.

Bill 162 also provides for the unreduced indexing factor to apply to all payments made on or after January 1, 1994. If any payment made to a person on or after that date was less than the amount that would have been paid using the unreduced indexing factor, the board must pay the difference to the person," said Horwath.

KORMOS' KORNER

"You (the government) know full well that the current lineup of people wanting to appear in front of that committee could be accommodated during the winter months and this Bill (Bill 107) could be reported back for third reading, should your government wish it to pass through committee in time for the spring session.

There's something going on that you're not talking about, that you're doing your very best to conceal. I think the Attorney General simply cut and run. He can't handle the debate. The Attorney General and the Liberal government embarked on a privatization process, privatizing human rights and human rights advocacy here in Ontario. Opposition parties don't want anything to do with it, nor do a whole lot on Ontarians, and you're afraid of the debate. You won't engage in the debate. You run from the debate.

You silence those who are critics of your legislation and your policies. And you call yourselves the government of democratic reform and democratic renewal and openness and transparency? I say, shame on you. It's a disgusting moment in the history of this government."

- Peter Kormos



NDP Labour Critic
Peter Kormos



NDP Wants Bargaining Rights for Part-Time Instructors

NDP Education Critic Rosario Marchese is calling on the McGuinty Liberals to extend bargaining rights to part-time college instructors.

"Part-time instructors are a crucial part of the education system in Ontario and should therefore have the same right to organize and collectively bargain as do other instructors," says Marchese.

Despite the government's ban on unionization of these educational workers, faculty and support staff from Ontario's 24 colleges have recently formed an organization of part-time and sessional employees of colleges of applied arts and technology.

Recently the UN's International Labour Organization (ILO), ruled that such workers be given the legal right to bargain collectively and urged the McGuinty Liberals to let this happen.

One part-time instructor criticized the current situation as "Third World," because of its exploitation of cheap labour that has no job security benefits. The United Nations agency report stated unambiguously that "there's no reason that the basic rights of association and

collective bargaining shouldn't also apply to part-time workers."

"I have addressed this abysmal situation in my Private Member's Bill," says Marchese. "Bill 13, An Act to Amend the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act with respect to part-time staff, would allow for part-time instructors to be treated like first-class instructors. Simply because someone works in a profession on a part-time basis is no justification to deny them the same rights that colleagues have.

As a representative of a civilized society like Ontario, I want to say that I'm strongly urging this government to pass my Private Member's Bill. After all, the whole world is watching us."

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