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(revised December 7, 2012)



Canadian Teachers' Federation
Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants

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(from the view of a classroom teacher)

As a classroom teacher, why should I care about Bill C-377? The question itself is unusual. Normally it is provincial or territorial legislation that sometime causes my attention to shift from my focus on my students. But federal legislation? It seems unusual that the FEDERAL government appears intent on passing legislation that has the potential to significantly affect me and mine. And now, having had an opportunity to give some attention to Bill C-377 I find myself caring very much!

I care about the potential for a significant invasion of my and my colleagues' personal privacy. As a result of intense lobbying major changes by way of amendments are being proposed prior to third reading. The fact remains that the Federal government passed a Bill at First and Second reading that called for personal information about me (name, address) to be posted on a government website for all to see if I receive benefits of more than \$5000.00 as a result of my membership in my organization including:

- Employee life and health trusts;
- Group sickness or accident insurance plans;
- Retirement compensation agreements;
- Death benefits;
- Counseling services (including counseling for mental or physical health of themselves or a family member, and re-employment).

How can I trust this government to ensure that my privacy will be protected with the passage of this Bill or others that may follow?

I care about the potential dramatic increase in costs for me within my Member organization:

- The CLC estimates it will take the average Local 200-400 hours annually to prepare the returns. What additional human and material resources will be required for complying with the new rules?
- Will I have to accept declining services from my organization? If I expect the same service will my fees have to increase?

I care about the potential increased expense to the Federal government. The estimates are in the tens of millions of dollars and as high as \$150million for additional government costs in administering the new guidelines.

- In times of austerity will I see services from the federal government continue to erode?
- Will my taxes increase?

I care about perceptions of unfairness. As a teacher, I work each day with my students to address issues of fairness. What is right and what is wrong? As a professional I make hundreds of decisions a week about what is best for individual students, "our future". I find myself wondering why doctors, lawyers and other professionals who have similar individual tax exemption provisions will not be subject to the same scrutiny.



- Is it because I belong to an organization that bargains collectively for me? Call it a society, association, federation, or union; am I being targeted because of my membership?
- Does it have anything to do with the fact that more than 70% of the teachers in Canada are women? Indeed many of the caring professions in Canada (like Nurses) have a majority of women members. Unions have been enormously influential in the last half century in making advances for women's rights. Are we entering a new era like we have seen recently south of the border where hard won provisions respecting the rights of women are being questioned with attempts to roll them back?

I care because I am concerned that this is an attempt to mute my voice and the voice of my organization. I try to model to my students the principles of democracy and the rights democracy is supposed to protect every day.

- How can I explain such legislation to them?
- Is this Bill driven by ideology?
- Does the fact that my organization advocates publicly for children and families, for equity and social justice make a difference?
- What am I to think about a federal leadership that would potentially impose such egregious limitations on my citizenship?

I care because I am a problem solver who looks for solutions in an open and transparent way. What problem is the government trying to solve with this legislation? I am told this is about transparency. Transparency, from a federal government who packages vastly different pieces of proposed legislation in huge omnibus bills? As a member of my organization I know that there is absolute transparency in the budgetary process of my organization. I wish that all legislation that has the potential to affect my bottom line would be subject to such scrutiny.

- So what is the problem? I don't see one, nor do my colleagues with whom I associate. I pay fees to my organization and that gives me a voice and a vote. If I do not like how my fees are spent I can use the democratic process enshrined in the legislation, regulation and policy that gives me voice within my organization to advocate for change.

I care because I am a teacher. I have a voice and I teach the children in my care to use their voice and someone will listen. Who will listen to me? Who will ensure that my message is received? Who will be my advocate in a representative democracy, at the federal level?





1. It's undemocratic.

Bill C-377 is an attempt by the federal government to silence yet another democratic voice which does not share the Harper government ideology. The Bill singles out labour unions and does not apply to other dues collective professional organizations.

2. It fails its own transparency test.

Bill C-377 is testament to the Harper government's inability to engage in a consultative process before imposing measures. Somewhat surprisingly, the Speaker ruled that the Bill did not require a Royal Recommendation despite the fact that a private member's bill cannot have associated cost. Unfortunately, the report of the Parliamentary Budget Officer will not be available before the Bill is projected to pass.

3. It's wasteful.

Bill C-377 is a wasteful and ineffective use of taxpayers' dollars. Bill C-377 creates a new federal government level that has been estimated to cost taxpayers up to \$150million dollars per year. Inevitable legal challenges will be an additional cost for Canadians.

4. It's unlawful.

Bill C-377 represents a significant invasion of provincial and territorial jurisdictions regarding labour laws/rights. It will be challenged as unconstitutional. Despite proposed amendments, it has the potential to be a serious invasion of privacy.

5. It is mean-spirited and hurts specific groups of citizens.

Since women make up 70% of the teachers in Canada, they will be significantly impacted by Bill C-377 both as union members and as taxpayers.

This type of paternalistic control over any institution has no place in civil society; especially one purporting to be a democracy.

Teachers belong to very democratic unions and federations that have long been champions for transparency -- their budgets are scrutinized and voted by their membership; they will lose money and services.

As my MP, will you speak for me in opposing this bill? Will you vote against it?





Questions you may be asked...

Q. How can you tell me that this is not popular when a 2011 Nanos poll of 1000 Canadians found 83% support for requiring unions to publicly disclose their finances – the same question found 86% of union members agreeing with public disclosure (Labour Day Poll.).

A. This poll was commissioned by Labourwatch – an obviously partisan anti-union organization. I'm not here to talk about the validity of a public opinion polling. I am here speaking as a constituent and a union member. You need to know that I am so opposed to this legislation that I took the time to come and see you personally to express my views. I hope that is worth more than an anonymous response to a poll.

I can also tell you that any of my colleagues with whom I have spoken about this are also not in favour of the legislation and believe that there are sufficient disclosure requirements for our union/association.

Q. Are you not interested in transparency – what are they doing with your dues? What do Unions have to hide?

A. Of course I'm interested in transparency; that is why I make sure to view the union/association financial statement that they provide to me. Those of us who pay union dues have full access to budgets and audited financial statements. We get to debate them and vote on them too.

This bill requires the publishing of personal information about union employees and those who may receive payment from unions or union trusts. The privacy rights of these individuals are far more important than business wanting to know about union finances.

Q. Do you know what union leaders are paid?

A. As a dues paying member, of course I have the right to know what the people I elect to represent me are being paid. I can find out the salaries of employees and program area budgets simply by asking or reviewing financial statements. This bill is not going to make that any better – it may, in fact, make it worse as I'll have to figure out how to retrieve the information I'm looking for from the mountain of data that this Bill requires.

Q. Since the union is partially funded by tax dollars, does the public not have a right to know how their money is being spent?

A. Unions receive all their money from dues paying members. I get to deduct my dues from my income just like every other individual who pays dues to a work related association. This bill targets unions for the disclosure and not other associations like law societies or chambers of commerce whose members also get a deduction from their dues either from business taxes or personal taxes. This is blatantly unfair.

If this bill is really about the public's right to know where their tax dollars are being spent then why exclude all of the other organizations?

Q. Do you think you should be forced to pay union dues to support things you do not agree with – should you not have the choice?

- A. Yes, my union may spend on things I don't necessarily agree with just as governments spend my tax dollars on things I don't agree with – like this bill. As you know, unions are democratic organizations and I have an opportunity to debate and vote on proposed initiatives. As in any democracy, sometimes I don't agree with the majority. That doesn't mean I should be able to withhold my dues. Following that logic, I should be able to withhold my taxes if I disagree with the government.

Beyond that, my union has a responsibility to represent me and I benefit from the services I receive. Unions also represent my views in working toward benefiting Canadians as a whole. I have no problem paying for that.

Note: This may prompt a response linking the functions of a union to the functions of a government. The response should be that yes but the difference might be that my union cares about me – I'm not sure that I can say the same about the government.

Q. Are you willing to forfeit your tax benefit?

- A. The decision to raise taxes rests with the government. Provided taxes are raised fairly and that the funds are used to provide services to Canadians, I have no problem paying my fair share.

Q. You have some serious concerns about this Bill. How could we amend it to address your concerns?

- A. I would be happy to assist you with this but I first have to know exactly what problem the government is trying to solve with the introduction of this legislation. To my knowledge, union members are not complaining about transparency or how their money is spent or any kind of democratic deficit.

The CLC has reported that in 2010-11 less than 0.00002% (two hundred-thousandths of one percent) of the over 4 million union members in Canada filed a complaint about financial disclosures. Given that the Nanos survey reported more union members in favour of increased accountability than the general public, I'm finding it hard to believe that there is a large concern from anyone.

I hear far more about secret dealings from the government in Ottawa than I do from unions.

I would be pleased to help in the problem solving exercise but, as a teacher I know that to solve a problem, the question has to be clearly defined.





Advocacy is the action undertaken by a group to bring about positive change in people's lives. The purpose of advocacy is to assist in securing the rights of one's self or another.

General advocacy tips for meetings with MPs:

- Make an appointment through the constituency office either by phone or letter (mailed or faxed). You can ask for a particular time and place but be prepared to be flexible. Other individuals and groups also want to meet with the MP, and these meetings need to be slotted in.
- Learn, from both the politicians and the public servants, how their respective systems operate. If you have not done this before, ask what you can expect at the meeting.
- Form alliances. If a delegation is meeting with the MP, decide in advance who will speak on what issues and research the issues as thoroughly as possible.
- Be on time for the meeting. A short, well-prepared presentation is often much more impressive and effective than a long, rambling one. Know your facts.
- Concentrate on solutions rather than problems. Offer information that could assist the other person in making the desired decisions. Use the time to help them with things that might be unknown to them.
- Don't prolong the meeting beyond the allotted time unless the MP indicates that he or she wants the discussion to continue.
- Take charge of the meeting. You asked for it, so discuss your issues. Don't let the MP dominate the meeting or take over the agenda.
- Give the MP a chance to speak. Don't resort to ridicule. Treat all questions calmly and seriously.
- If you did not send the MP advance material, leave a short summary of your views when you leave—one page is ideal. Even if you did send advance information this may be appropriate.
- Don't leave without asking to whom else you should be talking and do talk to them.
- Send the MP a thank-you letter after the meeting and offer to meet again in the future or to provide any information that may be needed.
- Don't let the contact die after one meeting. Try to establish regular, informal meetings or, at least, telephone conversations.

Source: *Advocacy: A Practical Guide*, Alberta Teachers' Association

<http://www.teachers.ab.ca/For%20Members/Getting%20Involved/Advocacy%20and%20Action/Pages/Advocacy%20A%20Practical%20Guide.aspx#meetingsdelegations>

