



Dear colleagues,

As summer begins, the time has come to assess the general atmosphere of our relations with the employer. What should we think of an employer who can simultaneously negotiate and legislate, consult and mandate, deliberate and impose? Previous governments have almost always successfully navigated these troubled waters without really abusing their power. There have been a few exceptions, but these were perhaps justified. Now we are facing a situation where the abuse is growing.

During the last round of negotiations, the Treasury Board used the threat of a special law to make a "final offer" which saw a good deal of what had been entered into in negotiations vanishing. In the months that followed, the government adopted, within the framework of the implementation of the budget, two unacceptable legislative measures - one which basically renders normal negotiation impossible, the other which abolishes, for all intents and purposes, the pay equity legislation.

To top it all, at the launch of the 2010 National Public Service Week, the government of Canada gave an award of excellence to Ms. Hélène Laurendeau, for, as was explained, having "finalized twenty-six collective bargaining agreements that were approved by the bargaining agents". Did they forget to say that the bargaining agents in question had a gun to their heads? Can we call that free and informed consent? The award was also bestowed to her for the role that she played in drawing up the *Expenditure Restraint Act* and the *Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act*, two legislative instruments that put us back more than fifty years in terms of labour relations. I leave it to you to decide if it was appropriate to reward someone who gave the steamroller treatment to her colleagues of the federal public service.

During this time, our Parliamentarians have taken advantage of the global economic situation to promote their right-wing ideology. Finance Minister Flaherty used all platforms to warn us against what was happening abroad, going even as far as comparing us to Greece. However, Canada has one of the best debt to gross domestic product ratios, and its economic growth is one of the best in the world. In short, our politicians, after reducing taxes and creating the deficit, are now playing the fear card to attack the public service.

The attacks against free negotiation and the pay equity legislation were not enough. The employer had decided, long before the economic crisis could be blamed, that it was going to make cutbacks in the retirement and benefits of its employees. It now had the pretext for it. Instead of trying to improve the situation of Canadians in general, it seeks to diminish benefits to the lowest common denominator. Of course, our politicians knew that that would not happen without provoking a stir. They therefore decided to begin

with those who are already in retirement, and who are the least able to defend themselves. In fact, retirees of the federal public service will very soon have to pay from 25 to 32 % more for their dental care. A first step towards a planned impoverishment.

We learned last week that the employer now wishes to appropriate surpluses from the public service long-term disability insurance plan, as it did for employment insurance and as it did for the pension funds of government employees. It is always easy to serve oneself when one can make laws unilaterally to achieve these ends. Why not impoverish government workers' long-term disability?

However the public service is not the only victim of this government. The population at large is also a victim of a vast system of information control. Media representatives have already been complaining about it for quite some time. All communication of the State now passes through the cabinet of the Prime Minister. Even the distribution of information is being impoverished.

Our members, who have to write information intended for the public, are now subjected to a censorship that essentially aims at preventing them from distributing the results of their work. For example, data on the labour market, which have always been published as soon as they became available, are now censored by Ottawa. We are returning to the "*Grande Noirceur* (Great Darkness)" of the 1950s: denying information to people in order to exercise better control. Our members now no longer have the right to speak to journalists. Maurice Duplessis said at one point: "You, shut up!". This is the kind of treatment that weakens democracy.

The priorities of this government are also strange at times. More money for prisons, less for serving the people. More freedom for companies, less environmental controls. Billions for the G-8 summit, less money for the destitute. More money for the rich, less for the poor.

For those among us who still had doubts, I hope that the light is beginning to shine on the type of government in place. We are faced with a group whose ideologies essentially aim to move us backwards regarding services provided to Canadians, the quality of work life, and individual liberties.

CAPE is here to defend your interests. However, we must be able to count on your support and your participation. In September, we will resume our training and awareness-raising activities. I hope that we will see you there in large numbers.

In the meantime, I invite you to communicate your concerns or questions to us. You can communicate with your local representatives, your Labour Relations Officer or directly with me. We must be aware of what is going on in your workplace to better focus our efforts.

Claude Poirier  
CAPE President