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Over the next number of days, the Liberal Government has plans on ramming through legislation that will severely limit the right for our teachers to negotiate a new collective agreement. Along with a number of specific contentious issues, the “Education Improvement Act” is seen by many as a direct attack on some of the most basic democratic principles of our Canadian society. As it currently stands, “Bill 22” significantly limits the ability of a mediator to enable the constructive bargaining discussions required to conclude a fairly negotiated collective agreement. The Bill sets out an array of clauses that, in part, limits strike action, quashes principles of civil rights and liberties, imposes fines to ensure compliance and attacks the fundamental Charter Right of Freedom of Association. Certainly not the kind of democracy that can make anyone feel valued ... or that I want to see in our Province.

This type of legislation has ramifications that go well beyond the particular current dispute between the Government and teachers. It is much less to do about class size and salary demands than it is about the inherent principle that a fully and fairly negotiated agreement is the only right solution. Yes, negotiation takes time ... yes, there are inconveniences ... yes, everyone’s patience is often stretched to near breaking point ... but the alternative is far worse. Certainly not everyone belongs to a Union or has their working conditions collectively negotiated ... but EVERYONE in our Country and Province now benefits from the work and sweat of those who did stand up for these democratic rights in years gone by.

I’m reminded of an old truism that I heard many years ago citing the imperfection of democracy. Democracy may not be perfect ... but it is, in Winston Churchill’s oft-quoted words, “the worst form of government except for all the others.”

I ask that our legislators please remember that ... and do what’s right.

Larry Hayes
Board Chair / Trustee
Burnaby Board of Education SD41