

## Opinion/Letters

# Whistle blowers are deserving of protection



**NORTHERN  
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



This is a copy of an open letter sent to the Honorable Howard Hampton, Attorney-General for Ontario.

Dear Howard:

Remember those timber management hearings—the ones that started in May of 1988, have cost taxpayers over \$50 million and are still going on? They're about to have their fourth anniversary, and may hear final arguments from the lawyers this fall.

When Anne Koven and Eli Martel (the two remaining board members who have sat through over 50,000 pages of transcribed evidence) will deliver their ruling is anyone's guess.

Whatever comes out of the process will be a kind of "rule book" for doing forestry in Ontario. The Board is likely to issue stricter rules for local consultation on timber management plans, including the creation of public advisory panels to try to resolve local conflicts. Those panels are supported by the industry, most of the opponents of MNR, and reluctantly by senior bureaucrats with in MNR as well.

### Freedom of Information

But however when this new "forestry rule book" is finally written, how will the public know if the Ministry of Natural Resources is actually performing according to the rule book?

With a "class" environmental assessment approved by the Board, MNR will be able to resist future attempts to hold a public hearing on a contentious forestry issue. The public will be consulted ad nauseam through various mechanisms, but how will the public know that the information presented by MNR in those consultation processes is actually what's going on in the forests, and not just a glossed-over version of the facts that the government wants the public to know?

There are only two ways we can be protected from this kind of "Big Brother" problem. One is through access to information laws. I have already explained in this column how the so called *Freedom of Information* laws in Ontario are anything but *free*. The delays in getting information and the costs of the process are prohibitive.

The other mechanism, providing protection for those inside the system who want to tell the public the truth is know a *whistle-blower legislation*: providing legal protection for civil servants or industry people with a conscience who want to expose wrong-doing or faulty figures.

Governments are generally reluctant to pass such laws, since they regard any system that weakens their control on the flow of information to the governed as a real threat.

Your government has hinted that such legislation is being "considered seriously."

### Severe problems

Since you are the man doing that consideration, I thought I should remind you of the submission you made to the timber management community hearing two years in Fort Frances. If you want to look it up, it's on page 36,461 of the hearing transcripts:

*"I think one of the greatest things you (the EA board) could do for forest management in this province and for the environment generally would be to recommend very strongly the immediate legislation of whistle-blower clauses that would affect not only private industry but the Crown.*

*If people could come forward, people who work at the lower level, whether they be people work in a paper mill or who work in a chemical plant or who work in the field for the Ministry of Natural Resources, if they knew that they weren't risking their job and their livelihood of their family when they came forward and said: Look, I have something I want to show you here—you know, 30,000 tree seedlings have been buried or 10,000 cords of wood was burned up on the side of the road. If you could recommend that highly in your report, I think you would be doing a great service not only for forest management but for the environment in general."*

Mr. Hampton, I agree with you completely. On that 24th afternoon in 1990 in Fort Frances you presented the Board with colour pictures you had taken of wasted wood from the construction of the Bending Lake and Sedgwick Lake roads.

You complained about severe problems with tree planting contracts.

You said that all this information had come to you from civil servants or private sector people who called you, "at home at ten o'clock" because they were afraid to expose their identities to the world and risk suspension, demotion, or dismissal for embarrassing their employer.

continued on page 12

# Debate on motion, vote, shows the differences between parties

Free Trade, a subject that dominated the last federal election, surfaced once again in the House of Commons on Monday, May 11. And this time there was no question as to which party was consistent in its opposition to the Canada-US agreement, which party remained fully in support of the agreement, and which party showed its true colours to the Canadian people.

NDP Trade Critic Dave Barrett moved a motion that said as follows: "That this House urge the government to abrogate the Canada-US Trade Agreement."

In the debate that followed it became clear—both by speeches delivered and the votes cast—that the Liberal party had abandoned its 1988 position of being vehemently opposed to the FTA and were now in favour of renegotiating the deal instead of killing it.

The Conservatives, to no one's surprise, maintained their support of a trade deal that has directly contributed to the loss of nearly 400,000 jobs.

In his speech to the House, Dave Barrett stated that the trade deal "has been a disaster. It has ripped the guts and the heart out of the manufacturing base of this country. It has destroyed the economy of the provinces of Ontario and Quebec more than any other regions in this country, and has continued to be ignored by the United States.

"In any instance (where) it feels Canada may have been out-competing the Americans, it immediately uses tactics to attack Canadian interests in spite of the agreement that it claims would give us a level playing field."

In addition, Barrett pointed out that in the Depression, Canada's manufacturing employment dropped by 29.7 per cent, with the combined impact of the FTA and the recession on manufacturing already at 23.1 per cent.

Lloyd Axworthy, Trade Critic for the Liberal Party, moved an amendment to the NDP motions by adding the following words: "unless the Agreement has been successfully renegotiated in a manner satisfactory to Canadian interests."

The NDP voted against the Liberal amendment because we believe that there is no way to renegotiate a bad deal that has cost Canada thousands of jobs. The Liberals voted against our motion to kill the trade deal. (People may want to call a Liberal and ask them why.) The Conservatives voted against killing the deal and against renegotiating it—failing once again to recognize the damage they have caused.

For voters that still believe that there are no differences between the three federal political parties they only have to look at this debate and the vote. For those who believe that the NDP and the Liberals should unite to defeat the trade deal may want to rethink their position.

Yours truly,

Iain Angus, MP

Thunder Bay-Atikokan

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