

## National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? A deceitful government scheme

The great English dramatist/actor Noel Coward once quipped that, "It is discouraging to think how many people are shocked by honesty and how few by deceit."

He had that right. And he could have been talking about Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne and her deceitful government scheme to pay off the bombastic teacher's unions with our tax dollars in what certainly appears to be a quid pro quo for their undying opposition to the Conservatives.

What a sweetheart deal for both her and the unions.

They get millions from the province to underwrite their bargaining costs ? something private sector unions certainly don't get ? and at the same time pour millions into running ads and financing phony front groups aimed at making Conservatives look bad.

Consider this: At last count, the Ontario teacher's pension fund is worth \$154 billion. A reasonable rate of return on their annual investments could be enough, all by itself, to cover the current Liberal deficit of \$12.5 billion.

Yet, despite the enormous wealth of the teachers' fund, Wynne's Liberals saw fit to ? secretly ? subsidize their bargaining unit by up to \$7.1 million over the last while, news when it was first revealed by The Globe and Mail was cavalierly dismissed by Education Minister Liz Sandals.

Asked if the union even had to submit receipts, Sandals, in a jaw-dropping display of Liberal arrogance, replied: "You're asking me if I have receipts and invoices. No, I don't. We know what hotel rooms cost, we know what meeting rooms cost, we know what the food costs, we know what 100 pizzas cost. You don't need to see every bill when you're doing an estimate of costs. I don't ask."

Since then, under considerable pressure, Wynne has announced that she is demanding receipts. She has also warned the one teacher's union which hasn't settled yet that she'll get tough on them if they don't.

But, of course, all that is beside the point. While it's obvious that receipts should be required when putting in expenses ? as they are in most workplaces, including the unions themselves, no doubt ? the point is that subsidizing the union bargaining team is not legitimate in the first place. Why should they hurry to settle when they know Wynne will bail them out?

And the really sleazy part of this cozy relationship ? which both the Liberals and the unions deny, of course ? is that while Wynne wrote a cheque for \$468 million in concessions to the teachers just before the last election, the unions, ever grateful, poured millions of their cash into helping defeat Tory leader Tim Hudak and elect Wynne.

(The unions, by the way, claim they are non-partisan, which means in their language, "anybody but the Tories.")

You'll recall, no doubt, the extraordinary hue and cry that went up across the nation over the great Senate payment scandal, an affair which, when all is said and done, involves roughly a million dollars of questionable public spending, just a fraction of what Wynne slid along to the wealthy unions in appreciation of their continuing support.

In her Toronto Sun column, Christina Blizzard puts this scandal into another perspective. She writes that while school enrolment is DOWN by five percent since 2002/03, teacher salaries are UP 30 percent and the education budget has skyrocketed by 240 percent. Blizzard points out that Ontario graduates 4,000 more teachers per year than it can possibly hire ? the unions have such a sweet deal of keeping retirees on the part-time payroll that there's no room for newcomers ? yet at the same time Wynne eliminated 50 medical residency positions over two years at a time when 800,000 Ontarians don't have a family doctor. (Overall, Wynne has increased education spending by about 1.4 times health and long-term care spending, despite the obvious growing need for health care and the drop in school enrolment. Go figure.)

The Liberals claimed that subsidizing the unions for bargaining is a perfectly normal practice. No, it's not.

Sandals also accused the Tories of doing it as well, apparently oblivious to the fact the Tories haven't been in office for more than 13 years and did not underwrite the union bargaining teams. But why quibble with details when it seems that ? given the McGuinty-Wynne record of scandalous behaviour ? people are going to elect them anyway?

Which, alas, is what Noel Coward knew many decades ago

