

Media and Politics

In the past few months, I was happy to note that the government seemed to be taking a keen interest on the many problems faced by temporary foreign workers in Canada, including participants of the Live-in Caregiver Program. This was undoubtedly triggered by the extensive media coverage of the unscrupulous practices of recruiters which highlighted the vulnerability of this sector and gave impetus to the various initiatives and proposals meant to protect the long exploited migrant workers. These initiatives included proposals to regulate recruitment agencies and employers, the creation of a live-in caregiver hotline meant to clarify existing employment standards legislation as applied to the situation of live-in caregivers, nationwide consultations on LCP reforms, and a rather comprehensive House of Commons standing committee report on proposed reforms to the foreign worker programs.

Then an allegation of abuse against a prominent politician exploded. Both the politicians and the media went berserk and lost no time in taking advantage of the opportunity to politicize the matter. Unfortunately, the bigger issues seem to have been forgotten and simply became a convenient backdrop to the political bickering that ensued.

Ironically, it is again the extensive media coverage of the alleged abuse and illegal acts of this Liberal MP against her caregivers which has veered the focus away from the very same issues that it helped gain some momentum a while back.

While I appreciate the work of persistent investigative reporters who have brought these important issues to the public attention, and even the well-meaning initiatives of politicians, recent developments to my mind, only served to highlight the following:

- Media can be a very powerful tool for constructive change. However if misused and abused, it can also turn into a potent weapon for destruction.
- Most (if not all) politicians rely on positive image to survive and to ensure votes for the next election. Therefore, they will do almost anything to ensure that their public image is always protected.
- The politicians can be easily sidetracked from the substantial issues once their personal and partisan interests are affected as they will tend to fight tooth and nail to preserve or restore their good reputation.
- Public perception as shaped by the media, can easily obfuscate the truth and run roughshod the very basic principles of fairness and due process.

Media and politics clearly play an important part in our democratic system. But after seeing much sensationalism and petty mudslinging, one cannot help but be cynical about the motives behind almost every media story and every political move. While it is understandable that there are always differing perspectives to every issue and every circumstance, it is another story when the very basic tenets of truth and justice are already

being jeopardized. Worse, the energy that could have been spent on promoting the public good is being wasted on pursuing selfish ends.

Call me naïve, but I still long for the day when media, politics and the common good will finally converge to bring about true and lasting solutions to the many problems faced by the long suffering and disadvantaged sectors of society.

We can dream, can't we?

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