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## Tories over the top with new bills

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For The Calgary Herald

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First, they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Communist.

Then, they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Jew.

Then, they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up, because I was a Protestant.

Then they came for me, and by that time, there was no one left to speak up for me.

-- Pastor Martin Niemoller, 1945

Across both urban and rural landscapes, the people of Alberta are increasingly organizing, questioning and speaking out against the entrenched big business/government politburo. Now, a series of sophisticated and stealthy new laws are before the legislature that seem designed to put a lid on that. Sound farfetched? Read on as we look at a few cases, and judge for yourself.

1. On Wednesday night, 350 furious ranchers and farmers packed the Memorial Centre in Lacombe to talk about highly controversial Bill 46. Bill 46 will further reduce Alberta landowners' property rights before the EUB successor regulatory bodies, if they are opposing an industrial development on their land. It restricts landowner participation, ranging from the ability to get intervenor standing to written and oral submissions, to representation by legal counsel.

Why is there a need to muzzle rural Albertans who have a legitimate right to legally oppose developments on their property? This isn't just an issue for the farmers, it's fundamentally undemocratic.

2. In August, the Alberta Medical Association sounded the alarm on Bill 41, which would effectively seize government control of what has always been an independent self-regulatory professional body. AMA president Gerry Kiefer immediately demanded "assurance that the proposed changes neither constitute nor encourage political interference," saying "Bill 41 represents an unprecedented intrusion by the government of Alberta into professional self-regulation of medicine."

Kiefer said the legal changes would now allow a Health minister to control

the College of Physicians and Surgeons, including code of conduct, direction and regulations, all "without any oversight by the legislative assembly."

Doctors are one of the most trusted and highly credible groups in society. They are in a unique position to whistle-blow (such as some have recently in the oilsands) on important matters of public health and safety, and to get the quick ear of the media and public. Why is there a need to interfere with the independent authority of their professional body? This isn't just an issue for the doctors, it's fundamentally undemocratic.

3. Bill 1, the lobbyist registry, which has the whole volunteer sector up in arms. It started with the idea of curbing insider influence, but somehow has gone the opposite way.

Bill 1 affects all Alberta businesses and non-profit organizations whose employees or contractors contact the provincial government to seek change about legislation, regulation, policies or programs (unless the government contacts you rather than the other way around -- that means the select few are still at it, and off-record to boot).

So it affects most people who have a paid job or business, or who volunteer or sit on the board of a non-profit. They will have to file an "information return" to the politburo -- er, government every six months, detailing not only these contacts (who, when, what, where), but also what their plans are for contact over the next six months. Why do they need to know our future questions for our government and how are they going to use this information?

Bill 1 also applies to "grassroots organization" of a society's own members, such as mailouts or phone calls to ask members to contact their MLAs about an issue.

It also targets "a person associated" with the so-called lobbyist (such as a spouse, board member or other employees), to legally bar them from being paid by the province to give advice on the issue. So what your spouse or someone else in your organization does, over which you have no control, can affect your ability to qualify for work.

The state has absolutely no right to demand this level of control in our lives, nor do Albertans need a mountain of paperwork reporting back to the government about who we talk to and when.

This is not just an issue affecting genuine lobbyists, this is fundamentally undemocratic. It's time to connect the dots and wake up before it's too late.

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