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B.C. LIBERAL ATTACK ON SUPREME COURT MORE ARROGANCE, SAY MLAs

VICTORIA – When Health Minister George Abbott claims that the Supreme Court of Canada engaged in judicial activism by striking down the law that stripped away the rights of health workers in 2002, he is proving again the arrogance of the Campbell government, say New Democrat Health Critic Adrian Dix and Labour Critic Chuck Puchmayr.

“We don’t have a case of judicial activism here, but a court upholding the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms against a rogue government,” Dix said of Friday’s Supreme Court ruling. “When B.C. Liberals claim that Bill 29 fully respected the jurisprudence of the day, they are showing that they believe they can do anything they want to their opponents.

“The whole point of the court’s decision was that the Campbell government acted illegally in 2002 when it decided to punish its political opponents by passing Bill 29, which voided the contracts of health care workers and took away their rights,” said Dix, the MLA for Vancouver – Kingsway.

The MLAs pointed out that many of the Supreme Court’s recent rulings have upheld the rights of governments rather than those of activists and government opponents. In recent rulings, the court has stated that it is reluctant to strike down laws passed by Parliament and legislatures unless it has a strong reason to do so.

“The fact that a Supreme Court that has become known for its caution would strike down Bill 29 in such a decisive fashion proves what a serious attack on the rights of health care workers Bill 29 was,” said Puchmayr, the MLA for New Westminster, who noted that Bill 29 had also been condemned by the International Labour Organization, an arm of the United Nations. “The Supreme Court felt that it had no choice but to stand up for rights that had been so seriously trampled upon by the Campbell government.”

“The Campbell Liberals are trying to suggest the Court is acting inappropriately or engaging in activism, and they are also suggesting that the court is establishing a new right of collective bargaining. In fact, the decision was an extraordinary victory for the freedom of association rights of workers and stands in a Canadian tradition that respects those rights,” Dix said.

“Carole James has set out the right path by calling on Gordon Campbell to rescind Bill 29 in full, to begin talks with the affected workers about restoring their rights, and to place a moratorium on health care layoffs and contracting out,” Puchmayr said.

“Bill 29 not only hurt health care workers, it hurt patients in B.C. and continues to do so,” said Dix. “It’s time for the Campbell government to take steps to undo the damage it has done to patient care in B.C.”