

# Province attempting to 'gut' Human Rights Commission

Re "Make-up of board attacked," Kim Lunman, Herald, Nov. 26

Premier Ralph Klein's government's "new open policy" to invite ordinary Albertans to fill vacancies on the province's Human Rights Commission is nothing more than a thinly dis-

guised attempt to gut the commission.

Campaign promises to democratize the government may be fine for ensuring fairness in a government contract tendering process, but it is a totally inappropriate policy to follow in the human rights field.

Human rights legislation is for the protection of individuals from discrimination by the majority. The foundations of the Individual Rights Protection Act are not subject to majority opinion but flow from the individual.

As part of the IRPA, human rights tribunals were created to speed up the complaint process, to make litigation more economically feasible and to offer appropriate remedies not available to individuals through the common law.

Tribunals were to be headed by commissioners, men and women with special knowledge in human rights law essential to the competent performance of their quasi-judicial duties.

This government has tripped over itself to do everything in its power to undermine the commission. First, former community development minister Dianne Mirosch speculated the commission might be dismantled and created a review process with

that goal in mind.

Second, the present community development minister, Gary Mar, under the guise of its "new open policy," terminated Edmonton lawyer Shirish Chotalia, who has a Master's degree in human rights law, in favor of receiving applications for her vacant position from "ordinary Albertans." Will Klein, under this banner of openness, begin appointing ordinary Albertans to the Court of Queen's Bench?

Third, the Conservative government has re-appointed Tory Del Iannucci, which seemingly contradicts its policy against patronage appointments.

It is disingenuous of the premier to argue that the IRPA is not needed because Albertans' individual rights are protected under the charter. Charter protection does not extend to private actions. Without the IRPA a black man could be denied lodging with impunity.

It must be remembered that it was not so long ago in this province that Terry Long and his neo-Nazi followers assembled outside Provost to burn crosses and to fly the flag of the Third Reich. It was only through the IRPA that he was prevented from doing so. Now is

not the time to dismantle the commission but to embolden it.

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DIANNE MIROSH



GARY MAR