



Atheist Freethinkers

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

LPA-AFT denounces the hypocrisy and inconsistency of the Ontario legislature's motion against Quebec Bill 21

Montreal, 27th November 2019 – *Atheist Freethinkers* (LPA-AFT), an association which promotes secularism and supports the rights of atheists, denounces the hypocrisy and inconsistency of the Ontario legislature in adopting unanimously, on November 25th, a motion condemning Quebec Bill 21, i.e. *An Act respecting the laicity of the State*, adopted by the duly elected government of Quebec and strongly supported by the Quebec population. The motion even proposes that Ontario participate in legal challenges to the Bill. The act of thus interfering in the internal affairs of another province is unjust in and of itself, but this is only one aspect among several which make this motion utterly unacceptable.

By opposing Bill 21, Ontario MPPs oppose the secularization of the Quebec State and schools, while in Ontario, large sums of public funds continue to flow towards an entire provincial network of religious schools, i.e. Catholic schools, a network which is independent of regular public schools but for which taxpayers of that province foot the entire bill. Instead of opposing secularism in Quebec, what if Ontario MPPs decided instead to promote secularism in their own province?

But worse still are remarks in support of the motion, of Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath, alleging that Bill 21 is discriminatory and that it undermines religious freedom, even that it is a form of racism. Horwath's assertions are blatantly hypocritical. First of all, Bill 21 protects users of public services and students in public schools by requiring that public servants in positions of authority as well as teachers be religiously neutral. Thus, those State employee are not allowed to indulge in religious advertising, i.e. passive proselytism, which would undermine the freedom of conscience of users and students.

Bill 21 does not remove rights. On the contrary, it removes a religious privilege. The Bill is not discriminatory because it applies to all religions. However the motion passed by the Ontario legislature is discriminatory because it constitutes a rejection of a model of secularism which is standard in the French-speaking world and elsewhere.

Religious symbols are banned in public services and/or schools in France and in parts of Switzerland, Belgium and Germany. Face-coverings, including the full Islamic veil, are banned in many European and African countries, including some Muslim-majority countries. Quebec's Bill 21 is neither exceptional nor unreasonable.

By condemning the model of secularism favoured by the Quebec population and by threatening to contest that model before the courts, Ontario MPPs display an attitude of blatant xenophobia and intolerance with respect to Quebecers, as well as wanton ignorance of secularism.

– 30 –

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