

AN OPEN LETTER TO BILL MURDOCH, MPP

August 11, 2000

Bill Murdoch, MPP
Bruce-Grey
1047 Second Avenue E.
Owen Sound, ON
N4K 2H8

Dear Mr. Murdoch,

During your interview with CBC Radio's Here and Now program on July 28, 2000 you made several offensive and insulting comments regarding your government's cuts to the Ministry of Environment. You said the mistake was that "...we didn't cut the right people". That the government "...kept the ones that didn't do the work, and they've been upset about it ever since and some of them haven't been doing their jobs".

Later on in the interview, you said: "So, I don't have any problems with the cuts because a lot of them used to sit around their office trying to figure out what to do the next day. If they go out and do their job, the people that are left in the Ministry of Environment, then we shouldn't be getting into these problems".

Your comments show an alarming ignorance of the facts. In the past five years, your government has slashed the staff at the Ministry of Environment (MOE) by 42 per cent, closed seven district offices and two sub-offices, and chopped the operating budget by 39 per cent. Amazingly, your government plans further cuts. By April 2001, MOE's budget will be close to half it was when your government took office.

Among the 938 staff your government laid off were: watershed management scientists, groundwater evaluators, microbiologists, hydrogeologists, groundwater quality technicians, enforcement officers, surface water technicians, environmental officers, water well inspectors and junior water scientists.

The MOE staff who survived your government's purge face an ever-increasing workload. Much of the technical and scientific expertise is gone. Our members tell us that the crippling cuts have forced them to become reactive, not pro-active as they would prefer. Environmental officers in the field speak of having at least 40 projects on the go at any one time. With clerical staff laid off, much of their time is spent doing paper work.

You claim in the interview that "we've been set up a little bit on this" by the remaining staff at MOE. Considering their mounting workloads, they don't have the time to participate in any of your conspiracy theories!

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Senior management has provided little guidance to staff in these difficult times. What direction there has been is confused, misinformed and constantly shifting depending on the orders they receive from their political masters – your government.

The problem at the Ministry of Environment is not that the right staff were laid off and the wrong ones kept on. The problem is that your government systematically set out to destroy the MOE's capability to protect the province's air, land and water by dramatically reducing the ministry's staff and resources.

It is time your government admitted its own culpability and stopped blaming existing staff. It is time for your government to rebuild the Ministry of Environment so that the tragedy of Walkerton's contaminated drinking water is never repeated.

Yours sincerely,

Leah Casselman, President
Ontario Public Service Employees Union

cc: Ontario media
OPSEU members in the Ministry of Environment