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MEDIA ADVISORY

Former NDP premier's law firm threatens legal action against theatrical unions over Blue Man boycott information picket

Former NDP Premier Bob Rae's law firm, Goodmans LLP, has threatened legal action against the heads of four Toronto professional theatrical representative organizations over an information picket related to the growing boycott of the controversial Toronto production of Blue Man Group. The production is scheduled to open at the Panasonic Theatre on Yonge Street in mid-June. Goodman's represents Clear Channel Entertainment, owner of the theatre.

Clear Channel is the largest radio broadcaster in the United States. The company has been widely accused of politically-motivated censorship of entertainers opposed to U.S. President George W. Bush, such as The Dixie Chicks, and a bias in favour of virulent right wing commentators like Rush Limbaugh.

In a letter faxed Tuesday evening to the offices of Canadian Actors' Equity Association (CAEA), the Toronto Musicians' Association (TMA) and Locals 58 and 822 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE), Goodmans threatened that Clear Channel would "pursue all legal remedies available to [our client]" if a Wednesday noon hour press conference and information picket called by the Blue Man Boycott Coalition "causes any disruption and/or delay in the construction and/or renovation work that is occurring at the theatre." The letter was signed by Joseph K. Morrison, a Goodmans Associate. Bob Rae is a partner in the firm. According to Goodmans website, Rae's clients include trade unions.

Reaction from the threatened groups was swift and outraged.

"It is shocking and shameful that Bob Rae's law firm is playing handmaiden to Blue Man Group's anti-union and anti-artist invasion of Toronto's traditionally cooperative theatrical community," said Susan Wallace, CAEA Executive Director.

"It is unbelievable that our right to freedom of speech and association, which are both protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, is being so nakedly threatened by the associates of someone we thought was one of the Charter's most ardent defenders," added Bill Skolnik, TMA Executive Director, who was named in the Goodman's letter.

“Blue Man Group managers told me to my face that ‘union members don’t fit in our family’ and refused to hire me, despite my qualification and experience,” said Cheryl Batulis, Business Agent for IATSE Local 822, the Theatrical Wardrobe, Makeup Artists & Hairstylists Union. “Now the owner of the theatre tells me I can’t even protest this discrimination against people whose only ‘crime’ is to be represented, like Clear Channel is represented by Goodmans.”

“We call upon the former premier to repudiate this anti-union threat by his firm,” said IATSE Local 58 President Gord Graham. “Surely the premier whose government passed a law against scab labour would be as outraged by this attempt at legal intimidation as we are.”

The Coalition vowed to proceed with its press conference and information picket as scheduled. The event will take place today at 12:15 p.m. on the northwest corner of Yonge St. and St. Mary St., across from the Panasonic Theatre.

For more information or to arrange interviews with spokespersons for the Coalition, contact: Victoria Lord – 416.484.9047 & 647.519.8577 Additional contact: Bill Reno - 416.223.7366.