



Mixed Messages

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In the last few years the Ontario government has made strong commitments to making Ontario a more welcoming place for skilled immigrants, in particular by investing resources in bridging programs, establishing a Fairness Commission and negotiating a better deal with the federal government for immigrants to Ontario – all promising signs.

But while these commitments receive public attention and approval, this same government passes legislation that re-enacts old barriers, dating back to before the last World War. On May 13, 2010, Bill 158 – an Act to review and update the statutes governing the accounting professions in Ontario – passed third reading. In essence, the Bill was an opportunity to modernize the profession. Sadly, the opportunity was lost and instead restrictions on how international accounting credentials can be used were re-enacted. Only the fine was updated to modern times, creating a \$10,000 fine for anyone using any portion of the initials CA (chartered accountant), CMA (certified management accountant) or CGA (certified general accountant).

Does the right hand know what the left is doing? It seems it does not.

While Bill 158 was intended to increase transparency and accountability for the profession, it effectively re-affirms the barrier to internationally trained accountants, and prevents them from listing their professional credentials. In practical terms, it means that if the

Finance Director from the Bank of England were to come to Ontario to work, he would not be permitted to show the letters CA after his name to show that he was a chartered accountant. He could only do so after completing the various requirements in Ontario. Perhaps he could just go back to school and start over, so that there would be no confusion?

Internationally-trained CGAs, CAs and CMAs are all affected by what is essentially a cartel. Although the Act does not prevent them from practicing their profession, they are unable to market themselves to employers or as entrepreneurs. Their hands are tied, and their opportunities limited.

It seems clear that the Ontario Government must amend or withdraw Bill 158, or risk losing credibility on their platform commitment to including immigrants in the Ontario economy.

There is a reasonable compromise. The Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) put forward an effective option to the Justice Committee. It suggested the Act allow the use of international designations under any circumstance, provided that the issuing jurisdiction is clearly indicated in brackets following the designation, e.g., ACMA (UK), ACCA (UK) or ACA (India). This option would enable consumers and businesses to identify the international skills and experience that may be needed to reach new markets, and build Ontario's prosperity. Unfortunately this suggestion was not heard.

It seems clear that the Ontario Government must amend or withdraw Bill 158, or risk losing credibility on their platform commitment to including immigrants in the Ontario economy, as well as their ambitions of an *Open Ontario*. It is time to have the right hand and the left hand working together.