

## It's time to end union oppression

*Gerry Nicholls - Oct 3, 2011*

When it comes to running a political ad campaign, Ontario's big union bosses have a pretty sweet deal.

Here's how it works: union bosses come up with the political agenda, while unionized employees are forced to come up with the cash. Or to put it another way, unionized employees in Ontario must pay for union boss propaganda campaigns whether they like it or not.

And you can see this arrangement working right now in Ontario's provincial election. Union bosses are currently squeezing money out of unionized workers' pockets to finance a front group called Working Families, which has one goal and one goal only: to demonize Progressive Conservative Party leader Tim Hudak with TV attack ads.

Most unionized employees don't like such tactics. A recent Nanos Research survey, commissioned by the Canadian LabourWatch Association, showed 73% of unionized Canadians are opposed to the types of negative attack ads being run by unions or by union front groups.

Yet even though employees might not like it, they still must finance these attack ads. That's because under Ontario's labour laws unionized employees must pay union dues; they have no choice. The idea is that since all unionized employees benefit from the collective bargaining process, all unionized employees should also pay dues.

But the law also says it's perfectly OK for union bosses to use those forced dues for purposes other than collective bargaining, including funding political advocacy campaigns, such as Working Families.

You don't have to be a legal scholar to see why this practice is wrong and undemocratic. It clearly infringes on every unionized employee's right of free expression and free association. Just as we have the right to associate with a political cause, we should also have the right not to associate with a political cause. As Thomas Jefferson put it, "To compel a man to furnish funds for the propagation of ideas he disbelieves and abhors is sinful and tyrannical."

In the case of Working Families, there are likely many unionized employees who would vehemently disagree with a political campaign attacking the PCs, but who nevertheless are being forced through their dues to support such an effort.

And using forced dues to subsidize Working Families is wrong even if just a minority of unionized workers oppose it. After all, a true democracy must protect the rights of the minority.

Maybe this is why in other democracies unionized workers are not compelled to support the partisan political agendas of union bosses. As John Mortimer of LabourWatch notes, "In virtually every other major economy, including the 47 nations composing the Council of Europe, Australia and the United States, the law bars unions from forcing unionized workers to pay dues for politics or be fired from their jobs."

In other words, when it comes to protecting the rights of unionized employees Ontario is out of touch with the rest of the world.

This must change; it's time to restore a basic democratic freedom to unionized employees. That means reforming labour laws in Ontario to prevent union bosses from using forced dues to pay for politicking. It should be pointed out that such a reform would by no means stop union bosses from having a say during elections.

They could still run negative media campaigns, but they would have pay for them with money that is voluntarily contributed specifically for that purpose.

This is how other advocacy groups operate. They ask their members for voluntary donations to pay for political activity. Why can't union bosses do the same?

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