



MP's bill aims to unlock union spending as Tories move on labour

By Andy Radia – October 4, 2011

Ken Georgetti, right, with Nova Scotia Premier Darrell Dexter.



The Conservatives have launched another salvo at Canada's unions - this time through a private member's bill that would force labour organizations to disclose their financial statements to the public.

The bill, introduced on Monday by Conservative MP Russ Hiebert, would require all Canadian labour unions to publicly disclose their financial statements or risk losing their tax exempt status.

Every union in Canada would be required to file a standard set of financials each year, which would then be posted on a public website.

Supporters of the proposed measure argue it will ensure greater accountability and transparency among Canada's unions.

"Workers facing a union drive should be able to learn where their forced union dues will be spent," Terrance Oakey, president of Merit Canada representing Canada's open shop construction associations, said in a press release.

"And Canadians should know because of the tax-free treatment that unions receive."

A Nanos Research poll in September 2011 indicated 83 per cent of Canadians agreed with mandatory public financial disclosure for both public and private sector unions on a regular basis

Canadian Labour Congress president Ken Georgetti, however, says the proposed bill is just one more example of the Conservative government's attempt to bully anyone who doesn't agree with it.

"Our financial records have always been open to our members and if Russ Hiebert knew anything about unions, he would know this. I wish Conservative cabinet ministers like Tony Clement and Peter McKay would be as transparent with their use of taxpayers' money as we are with our dues from members," he said in a press release.

"This is simply a distraction from the real issues facing our country."

You can't blame unions for feeling besieged under the new Tory majority government.

Since earning their majority in May, the Conservatives have sided against unions at Canada Post and Air Canada, have hinted at job cuts in the public sector, and have accused the NDP of illegally accepting union sponsorships at its recent party convention in Vancouver.

"By attacking unions, the Conservatives are trying to neutralize what will be one of their major opponents in a coming round of government cutbacks," wrote Daniel Leblanc of The Globe and Mail.