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‘Potentially biased’ poll did not violate professional standards: ruling

By Peter O'Neil, Vancouver Sun October 3, 2013

OTTAWA — A complaint against a 2011 poll that was used to promote legislation opposed by unions was dismissed Thursday by the organization that oversees polling standards in Canada.

The Marketing Research and Intelligence Association panel review found that Nanos Research, a prominent Ottawa-based polling firm, did not violate association standards or bring “discredit” to the polling profession.

The ruling, made public Thursday, dismissed a complaint against Nanos by the Canadian Labour Congress.

But the ruling did say Nanos’s handling of two questions in the poll resulted in the release of “potentially biased information” on public attitudes about that proposed law.

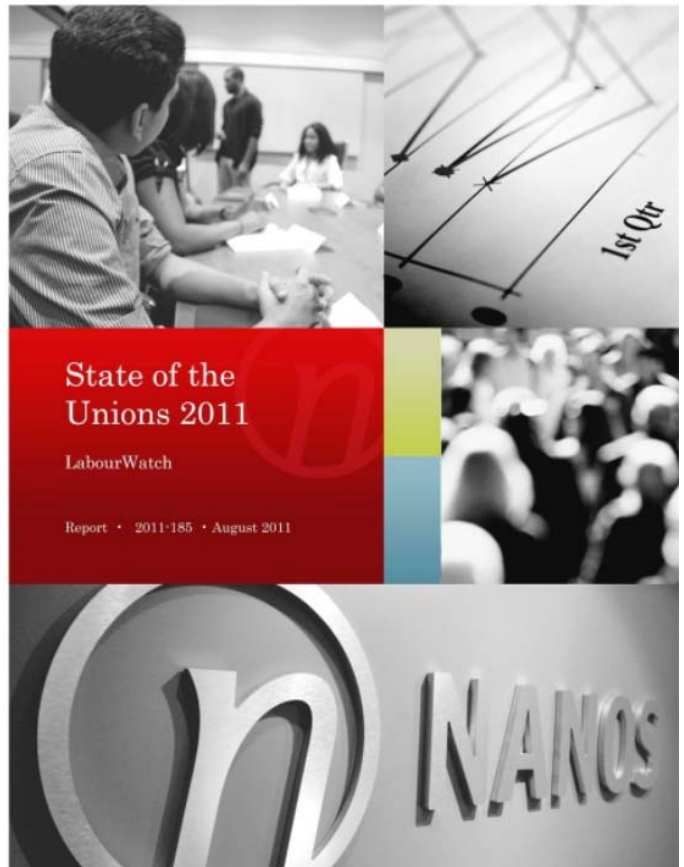
The poll was funded by Canadian Labour Watch Association, a Vancouver organization partly funded by non-union construction firms. LabourWatch, among other things, provides information on how to decertify unions.

The poll suggested that an overwhelming percentage of Canadians supported B.C. Conservative MP Russ Hiebert’s bill requiring unions to make public all transactions over \$5,000 and all remuneration to employees totalling more than \$100,000.

The bill was passed in the Commons but defeated by the Tory-dominated Senate in the spring.

The CLC and two Saskatchewan academics complained the poll withheld the results from one question that appeared to contradict overall conclusions that suggested Canadians supported Hiebert’s bill.

Nanos Research chairman Nik Nanos said he left the data out of the poll because the question he had posed was flawed.



The CLC, the academics and veteran Canadian pollster Allan Gregg also complained publicly that respondents were improperly “primed” with a lengthy and biased preamble posed before a second question in order to get the response being sought by Nanos’s client.

The panel found that the handling of two questions “allowed potentially biased information to be reported by LabourWatch,” MRIA stated in a letter to Nanos.

“However, despite the lack of clarity ... the Complaint Panel concluded that the (MRIA’s Code of Conduct) had not been violated.”

There was therefore “no evidence of a violation of the Code by (Nanos), nor evidence of any act or omission ... that has brought discredit to the industry/profession.”

The letter did not explain why the panel dismissed the complaint even though “potentially biased information” was released.

University of Regina business administration professor Sean Tucker, one of the two academics, criticized the ruling.

“The long-awaited decision by the association’s disciplinary panel provides no rationale to support their conclusion,” he said in an email.

“The decision makes no reference to sections of the Association’s Code of Conduct nor does it reflect in any meaningful way on Nanos’ questionable polling methodology.

The CLC has 30 days to seek a review of the decision.

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