



Union leaders - give your people what they want

By John Mortimer, Calgary Sun October 28, 2013

Union leaders have spent two years and millions of dollars fighting legislation to make them financially accountable through public disclosure laws. Their efforts have fallen on deaf ears. A new poll shows that working Canadians, including current and formerly unionized ones, remain strongly supportive of laws requiring unions to reveal their tax-free financial activities.

A 2013 Leger survey for LabourWatch found that over 80% of current or previously unionized Canadians and 83% of all working Canadians want our union leaders to follow the example set by other nations' union leaders who joined with government to achieve public disclosure.

In the late 1950's, then-Senator John F. Kennedy collaborated with America's union leaders to pass disclosure laws implemented during his subsequent presidency. One of those leaders was George Meany, President of the American Federation of Labor (AFLCIO) from 1955 to 1979. At US Senate disclosure hearings Meany affirmed his belief in "the goldfish bowl theory" – "the concept that reporting and public disclosure of union finances . . . will either eliminate or tend to discourage the abuses."

In France in 2008, union leaders worked with government leading to a law enabling public assessment of union financial activities.

In Australia, the now defeated Labor government signaled in 2012 to Australia's union leaders that they needed to accept strengthened disclosure in the wake of another financial scandal.

In contrast to these cooperative efforts, Canada's union leaders have made every effort to thwart such legislation. They've misled Canadians in interviews, press releases, newspaper columns and appearances before Parliamentary committees. For example, they've repeatedly claimed that Canada's labour boards keep union financial statements that can be requested – but not one provincial or federal labour board does this. They simply cannot be trusted on this topic – at all.

Their ultimate target is Bill C-377, a private member's bill introduced by MP Russ Hiebert and passed by the House of Commons in December, 2012. It amends the Income Tax Act to enable Canadian taxpayers to better evaluate a tax scheme exempting four to five billion dollars of union revenue and spending from taxation and scrutiny. In other nations, public disclosure laws like this have exposed union corruption; union leaders have been jailed, funds recovered and overall financial compliance improved.

Due to the prorogation of Parliament, C-377 remains before the Senate. It has been returned to the Senate First Reading stage without some June amendments. The Leger poll again confirms that Canadians want union financial transparency.

Union leaders' disregard for the wishes of dues paying Members and the union-free Canadians they want to unionize has been demonstrated regularly in other areas such as the battle over unionization by signed cards instead of secret ballot votes.

Professional union organizers pressure employees in their homes, sometimes refusing to leave without a signed card. Employees are told things that are simply not true to get a signature. Labour relations experts know unions will even fraudulently sign cards on behalf of employees. There is no effective labour board process to address such abuses. Only secret ballot votes can cleanse such union tactics.

Support for secret ballot votes has always been highest amongst currently unionized Canadians ranging from 86% to 92% over four such surveys done for LabourWatch in the last decade. Union leaders don't advocate replacing card check with votes. Nor do they oppose legislation such as Newfoundland's in 2012 or Ontario's in 2003 that took the vote away from employees. Sadly, unions are able to force employees to pay for the funding of political parties and lobbying activities that they don't support. It's time for change.

- *John Mortimer is president of the Canadian LabourWatch Association (www.labourwatch.com)*