

# Forced union membership violates rights, lawyer says

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By Murray McNeill

A Swedish lawyer ventured into the heart of union country Tuesday to deliver a decidedly un-union-like message - that forced union membership is a violation of basic human rights.

Jan Södergren, a human rights lawyer from Stockholm, told a Frontier Centre for Public Policy (FCPP) luncheon that Article 20 (2) of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "No one may be compelled to belong to an association."

Yet Canada still has legislation and collective agreements that require employees to be members in good standing of a union as a condition of their employment, the luncheon was told. As well, it allows unions to use membership dues to support political activities.

Södergren said both of those practices are no longer allowed in 47 nations within the Council of Europe.

Södergren is on a five-city North American tour sponsored by the Canadian LabourWatch Association, a Vancouver-based, non-profit organization whose primary role is the advancement of employee rights in labour relations.

Association president and Canadian labour relations commentator John Mortimer told the luncheon that those practices shouldn't be allowed in Canada, either. He's hoping that eventually the Supreme Court of Canada will strike down those practices here.

Mortimer said his group brought Södergren to North America to stimulate discussion and focus attention on the fact Canada is out of step with most other western countries when it comes to these two basic rights.

"It is time they (Supreme Court judges) took the high road and stopped discrimination against Canadians who do not wish to be members of a union," he said.

However, Manitoba Federation of Labour president Darlene Dziewit said that Mortimer shouldn't hold his breath waiting for that to happen.

"I think that mainstream Canadians understand that the union movement has been an effective force in bettering the lives of working Canadians," Dziewit said.

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