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LETTERS

Unions due for change

Re: Union Members Don't Want Dues Going to Politics, Sept. 4.

I had a good laugh when I read the quotes attributed to Canadian Labour Congress boss Ken Georgetti and the labour party's apologist, federal NDP leader Jack Layton.

Georgetti is quoted as saying the donations of union dues to political parties is not done on "the whim of the individual."

The misuse of union dues is done on the whims of the union bosses and their supporters. Georgetti of all people knows this. He is the guy who sent out a letter when he was president of the B.C. Federation of Labour soliciting funds for an abortion clinic. Of course, the individual union member was not consulted on this "whim" of the union politburo.

Mr. Layton is quoted as saying: "The thing about joining a union is ... that you're becoming part of a democratic structure." Oh really, surely Mr. Layton knows union dues are compulsory. So how can you have compulsory democracy?

Perhaps this socialist comedy act of Georgetti and Layton should talk to their socialist brother, Buzz Hargrove, who said: "There is not a single union in Canada that can claim a mandate from its rank-and-file members for continued financial and political support for the NDP. The labour movement and the party will both be better off if we call an end to this fiction." (He was quoted in Vancouver's *The Province*, June 13, 2002, page A20.)

One wonders when our so-called elected politicians will have the courage to bring in legislation to control these labour bosses, for right now they are a law unto themselves, as witness the above quote by Buzz Hargrove, who freely admits they don't have a "mandate."

Stephen Gray, Chilliwack, B.C.

Years ago, I taught at Vanier College, a Montreal English CEGEP. Like a mobster kicking up a chunk of his earnings to the boss of bosses, my union sent a huge portion of its dues to the central, the CNTU. Each year at its annual meeting, however, the CNTU voted to abolish English CEGEPs.

That, as Frank Cotroneo might say, was one spicy meatball.

Arnie Keller, professor and director, Professional Writing, Department of English, University of Victoria, B.C.

Ken Georgetti of the Canadian Labour Congress is not telling the truth when he says that "when unions decide to donate money to a political party, it goes to their membership for a vote." As a high school teacher in Ontario, I belonged to OSSTF. When OSSTF funds were provided to the Ontario NDP in the 1990s, I do not remember being asked to vote for or against such a situation. And I was not pleased that my dues were going to support a political party for whom I would not vote. Mr. Georgetti should get real.

J. Beverly Ewen, Ajax, Ont.

Re: Labour gets more than its due, Terence Corcoran, Sept. 4.

An excellent piece on the power of unions. They are coercive and have nothing to do with individual rights.

A good question, though, is where is our wonderful Supreme Court, which everyone looks to to preserve our freedoms? Is it possible that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is a hoax? If that sounds kind of strong, ask a farmer who has the temerity to sell his own wheat, or someone who wants to watch direct TV, how useful the Charter is in protecting his freedoms. If you are a lying refugee or a union rep, it works just fine, but if you own a bar and want to have smoking and your patrons do, too, or own an apartment building where you can't raise the rent, you will wonder what the Charter of Rights has done for you.

Gary Elliott, Etobicoke, Ont.



Labour's benefits

Re: Labour's Real Need, Aug. 30.

I agree with the suggestion from Mark Mullins and Jason Clemens of the Fraser Institute, who suggest Canada should examine U.S. labour relations policy in order to improve the working lives of Canadian workers. Specifically, they suggested we look to the 22 American states that have enacted Right to Work laws. These laws emphasize the right of individuals over the rights of a collective, like a union.

The American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization (AFL-CIO), which represents 16 million trade union members in the United States, recently published the following statistics concerning the role of unions in the U.S. economy. Their study found:

■ The 10 states where unions are strongest have higher earnings, better health coverage, less crime, more civic participation, less poverty and better schools than the 10 states where union membership is lowest.

■ Union members earn 26% more than their non-union counterparts.

■ More than 75% of union workers have health benefits, compared with less than half of non-union workers.

■ Nearly 70% of union workers have a pension, compared with 14% of non-union workers.

These all seem like good reasons for employees to want to be part of a union.

The freedom to form a union is an essential part of our democratic process. At work, unions are important for establishing a co-operative, mutually beneficial relationship between employers and their employees. It is the foundation of a partnership that works to achieve common goals such as high productivity, quality work, safe working conditions and decent living standards.

Heinrich Huber, United Food and Commercial Workers Union, Canada.