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LETTERS

Saint Ken and the drive for decent-paying jobs

Congratulations on your series, *State of the Unions*. It was some of the best science fiction I've read. Your "poll questions" were worded in such a way as to obtain the answers you were looking for.

I became active in my union because there were many opportunities in place for me to gain meaningful input — to both my union and employer. I fear little of reprisal or retribution for constructively speaking my mind. Can the same be said about answering important concerns of employees mired in the management-supported models? Not bloody likely.

The only gripe I have with certain unions is that they have become too complacent with management when it comes to the types of employment deemed acceptable. Terms such as seasonal/temporary/permanent, part-time/contract and all other forms of employment that are not full time leave members feeling sold short.

My message to union leaders everywhere is: Go ahead and seek out new members to sign up, but it still should be about decent-paying, full-time jobs for the underemployed — the members who pay dues and not only feel hugely disenfranchised from their workplace but also from their unions.

H. Malcolm Thomas, Cobourg.

Re: No Market for Unions? Ask Genie Marshall, Sept. 9

After reading the column by Ken Georgetti, I was almost ready to hail him as the patron saint of all workers.

Saint Ken informs us that readers of the *National Post* are served up more ideology than information. He then proceeds to castigate LabourWatch as "a virtual Who's Who of vehemently anti-labour organizations...united in their determination to deny workers their fundamental rights under the Charter of Rights to join a union."

Actually, these organizations do not deny workers that right; they simply want to assert the equally fundamental rights of workers not to join a union.

Saint Ken proceeds to note that the *National Post* newsroom, "alone among the four Toronto-based daily newspapers, is unorganized." In union-speak, this means that at the other four newspapers, workers are all dutiful, upstanding individuals who labour for love and care of family and community, while *Post* employees are just three-headed monsters who beat their wives and children. Organized or not, organized has no bearing on the quality of the product.

On reflection, I tend to believe that Saint Ken is less interested in Ms. Grace's problems than in the

prospect of organizing more people to pay union dues.

Tecwyn Roberts, Coquitlam, B.C.

If Mr. Georgetti is correct and most members are satisfied with their unions, then giving workers the freedom to join, not join, or un-join a union as they wish should have very little effect. I was a union member for many years before I retired as a teacher, and I would have loved to have had that opportunity.

If Mr. Georgetti believes what he is saying, why not give workers that freedom? If he is right, he has nothing to fear and those dues will keep rolling in. If he doesn't really believe it, then we will know what to think of his remarks.

Your move, Mr. Georgetti.
Robert W. Archibald, Brantford, Ont.

It never ceases to amaze how union interests will consistently misrepresent the level of protections offered to workers without the need for union representation. The case of Genie Marshall makes this point. While Mr. Georgetti is correct about a union providing a grievance process, representation and an anti-discrimination clause in a collective agreement, what is conspicuously absent is a list of Ms. Marshall's existing rights.

There are multiple grievance

processes: first under the Employment Standards Act, second under the Human Rights Code and third through the common law courts. In the first two cases, representation is not necessary. In the second case particularly, the Human Rights Commission is a named party and comes down on discriminating employers with the full force of the state. In the third case, lawyers are quite willing to take up an employee's cause which, if successful, will ultimately be billed to the employer either in part or in total depending on how outrageous the behaviour of the employer is.

It is easy to turn Ms. Marshall into a sympathetic figure, what with only two years to retire; a lone sexagenarian battling the powers that be at Haverdale. Then again, she turned her nose up at 10 months' severance and basically wants a two-year vacation, which will dovetail nicely with the onset of retirement. Instead of suing Haverdale while looking for other work, she spends her time trying the matter in the media while enlisting the help of her superstar daughter.

There is a certain irony in this as Amanda Marshall did not achieve her celebrity status and wealth under the protection of a seniority-obsessed union, but rather by her own merits and value operating in a free marketplace.

Clark Browning, Toronto.

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