

Labour board backs 'anti-union' Web site

LabourWatch aims to inform employers

Advocates for an alternative union Web site say a recent decision by the British Columbia labour relations board supporting LabourWatch.com speaks volumes for the credibility of the fast growing site. Called a "virulent anti-union Web site" by a group attempting to organize a drive at the Brick furniture store in Coquitlam, B.C., the presiding board ruled no evidence existed to back up the claim.

According to John Mortimer, president of the Canadian LabourWatch Association, the "groundbreaking decision" gives the Internet location a stamp of approval as it strives to provide a synopsis of the labour code in plain, easy to understand language.

"We never attack unions or criticize unions or the government. We are advocating that all parties be decent to each other, informed and obey the law," said Mortimer, who has been involved with LabourWatch.com since its inception in November 2000.

The idea was first floated three years ago by a Vancouver labour lawyer who suggested a site should exist to balance out the large number of pro-union Internet pages that can easily be accessed while surfing the Web.

While no formal polling was conducted to determine if a need existed for such a concept, Mortimer said a word-of-mouth campaign made it apparent there was a need for information such as how to revoke a union card, how to decertify a union and what unions cannot guarantee.

"As far as I know we are the only site like this in Canada and during our research we weren't able to find one anywhere in North America either," he added.

Since September, the site has been averaging 7,600 visitors a month, 98 per cent from within Canada. Prior to this fall, an average of 3,500 visitors a month were logging on.

Comprised of national and provincial member associations like the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and Merit Contractors Association of Alberta, as well as several law firms specializing in labour law, the association is kept afloat by membership fees of at least \$1,000 each.

But according to the spokesman for the Alberta Union of Public Employees, the core membership group is merely a long list of small businesses that view unions as a hindrance.

"If you look at the list of who wants to fight the idea of unions, they are all small companies. The big companies are much more mature about dealing with unions because it solves more problems than it creates," said David Climenhaga while viewing the site.

Bill Armstrong is a lawyer with the Calgary firm Laird Armstrong, which is listed under member law firms on the LabourWatch site.

"Union drives are always a difficult issue because the union is there giving information, but where is the other side? Management is very limited in what they can and cannot say during such times," said Armstrong, who represents employers dealing with labour relation problems.

"(The site) is certainly a new idea in place of something that didn't exist before."

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