

## Obama's labour law will bring harassment

By Susan Martinuk, Calgary Herald - March 6, 2009

"[Union leaders] broke ranks and chose to endorse me . . . [it] proved critical to my campaign. So I owe those unions." Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*.

President Barack Obama owes America's unions and, apparently, he has no shame in admitting it. They secured his 2005 Senate victory and invested \$300 million to promote him as their choice for president. Now that he's in the White House, it's payback time.

That's why one of his current priorities is to pass the Employee Free Choice Act, a bill that has nothing to do with the free choice of employees and everything to do with making union leaders richer and more powerful.

Once approved, this bill will deny workers the right to a secret ballot vote when deciding if they want to unionize their workplace. Unionization will instead be determined by a distinctly non-democratic process called card check, where a workplace is automatically unionized if 50 per cent plus one workers sign cards supporting certification.

Card signing frees unions from having to win people over with dreary concepts like facts, free choice and democracy. Signatures are very public, and are often obtained after coercive and intimidating encounters with union organizers.

In some cases, misinformation is provided and workers are led to believe that everyone else has signed and they will be stigmatized as the lone holdout if they fail to get on board. In other cases, organizers approach employees who are most likely to sign and leave those who would reject unionization in the dark. They may not even know a union drive exists until a Notice of Certification is posted.

Card check means the unions are very aware of who has supported their cause and who hasn't. In contrast, a secret-ballot vote shields workers from intimidation by union strong-arms or employers before a vote and protects them from retribution afterwards. Card signing has no such protections.

If you think some of the above examples are a stretch, consider the following. Seven female employees (who represented the entire non-management staff at a bank in Lively, Ontario) decided to challenge union practices after they were forcibly unionized by card signing. They launched complaints to the federal labour board, citing intimidation, coercion, misinformation and invasion of privacy--all in the name of card signing. In one case, a woman alone in a remote home received a surprise nighttime visit from union organizers who refused to leave until she signed the card--even after her repeated requests they do so.

In a response that says it all, the labour board dismissed their complaints, stating they "stemmed from [the women's] lack of knowledge about the unionization process." In other words, bullying and harassment are the unionization process. Get used to it.

John Mortimer is president of the Canadian LabourWatch Association. He says the American bill is essentially "a knock-off of the worst of Canadian labour law" and that "much of Canada has been subject to similar laws proposed by this Bill for decades." He cites research showing that unionization increases dramatically with card checks (by an estimated 25 to 40 per cent compared to secret-ballot votes) and results in a negative impact on employee productivity, a 28 to 50 per cent reduction in research and development spending, and a 15 per cent reduction in profits.

The Fraser Institute also cites studies indicating that an expansion of union power (as would result from this bill) will result in higher unemployment, less investment and a less prosperous economy. Similarly, the U. S. Chamber of Commerce is fighting against passage of this bill on the basis that it will impose costly regulations on businesses, disrupt the way businesses are run, stifle the U. S. economy and be bad for American workers.

This bill will only magnify many of the problems in America's current economic crisis. Yet, Obama is willing to risk those consequences for all Americans simply because he OWES America's unions.

Obama promised to bring change and a renewed vision to Washington. That he would do things a new way. He now proposes to strip American workers of their right to a democratic vote and to open their workplaces to coercion and harassment-- all because he owes the unions.

As Obama says, it's the new way of doing business in Washington.

Susan Martinuk column appears every Friday.

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