

# The prudent approach to B.C. labour policy: If it's not broken, don't fix it

BY MARK VON SCHELLWITZ, THE VANCOUVER SUN FEBRUARY 18, 2013

Recent articles written by prominent labour advocates have shed light on organized labour wanting to turn the labour policy clock back.

Calls by unions for labour leaders to "finish the job ... started in 1999" (almost a decade and a half ago) and to "toughen enforcement of workers' rights" through Employment Standards Act changes implies an agenda that makes small businesses very nervous.

Small business fears changes to labour laws that will pit businesses and employees against the ambitions of large unions intent on growing union membership and, more importantly, adding more revenue to union coffers.

These organized labour advocates admit that "today's labour movement is predominantly a public sector organization" and that "the economy, once dominated by highly unionized resource industries, is going through its own transformations that hamper union organizing." This is true; the old 9-to-5 industrial world of work characterized by single-income households is long gone.

The world of work has changed radically since the turn of the century due to the incredible changes in technology, communications and transportation.

The free movement of goods, services, and ideas have created opportunities and millions of new jobs. The new world of work is dominated by smaller, more flexible work sites that accommodate all sorts of cultures, lifestyles, family situations, and flexible schedules.

British Columbia's roughly 400,000 largely non-unionized small businesses are the economic engine of the province's economy, creating jobs for more than a million British Columbians. The only thing these small businesses and their employees want are fair employment laws and practices that respect individual choices and give no special advantages to anyone.

Reintroducing old labour laws from the 1990s that do not reflect the new world of work simply to make it easier for large unions to organize small business just does not make sense. The No. 1 labour policy change the B.C. Federation of Labour wants is to eliminate an employee's democratic right for a secret ballot vote on union certification and a return to the old "card check" certification model.

A supervised secret ballot vote is the only fair and accurate mechanism through which to determine the true wishes of employees. It allows employees to make an important decision free of peer pressure and intimidation from both employers and unions. It also respects the intelligence of employees to make reasoned judgments in the certification process. According to a 2011 Nanos poll, 84 per cent of British Columbians agree.

Just as an individual is given privacy and anonymity when casting a provincial election vote, so too should an individual expect to receive the same rights when voting on union certification.

As we approach a provincial election in May, the Coalition of B.C. Businesses' advice to political parties thinking of making labour policy changes is simple: "If it is not broken don't fix it."

We already have fair, balanced labour laws in British Columbia that have allowed small businesses to create over a million private-sector jobs. Don't allow big unions to take away an employee's right to a secret ballot or implement other costly labour policies that will add unnecessary regulation, disrupt the workplace, and kill job creation, simply to make it easier for unions to increase their dwindling private-sector membership and add to their coffers.

Small businesses are the backbone of the province. Don't take them for granted. Do what is best for all British Columbians, not the big unions.

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