

# Building trade unions in Saskatchewan press government to scrap or alter Bill 80

BY ANGELA HALL, LEADER-POST    AUGUST 18, 2009

REGINA — Saskatchewan's building trade unions pressed the government at a meeting Tuesday to scrap or significantly alter a proposed new law affecting the construction industry, arguing the bill has little merit in its present form.

But Advanced Education, Employment and Labour Minister Rob Norris said the very fact that some groups feel Bill 80 goes too far while others say it's not far enough indicates the Saskatchewan Party government is on the right track.

"In this business, that probably means we're pretty close to the mark as far as striking a balanced, reasonable approach to ensuring that the construction sector is robust, that there's respect for the Canadian constitution," said Norris, who maintains the bill will offer more choice, in part by opening the door to unions currently shut out of the construction industry in Saskatchewan.

While the minister was non-committal about whether the bill will be revised before likely being made law this fall, he said the government will cast a "fresh set of eyes" on some concerns the Saskatchewan Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council raised during the closed-door meeting at the legislature. "They raised some questions, fair questions," said Norris, who is also awaiting a report from the legislative committee that earlier held public hearings on Bill 80 — An Act to Amend the Construction Industry Labour Relations Act.

Terry Parker, the building and construction trade council's business manager, said his group is concerned Bill 80 could create two parallel systems in the industry. The current system for unionized contractors and workers will continue, which sees collective agreements bargained provincially on a trade-by-trade basis. But Bill 80 will also invite in new unions, and permit wall-to-wall certification by a single union of all the workers at a site.

"Hopefully either they scrap the whole bill and see it as not workable in this province or possibly make revisions that would create the stability in the industry. We've had 17 years without work stoppages in this province and we want to keep that stability going," said Parker.

The council is also concerned about the bill's abandonment provisions, which lay out how a union certification can be shed when the union fails to represent its members, being made retroactive.

"The meeting was constructive. The minister agreed to look at a number of our points," said Parker.

Saskatchewan business groups, as well as two unions currently not permitted to organize in the province's construction sector (Communications, Energy and Paperworkers and Christian Labour Association of Canada), have largely welcomed the bill.

About 20 per cent of the province's construction industry is currently unionized.

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