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BILL GRATES

Terry Parker gets why the Saskatchewan government is ramming Bill 80 through the Legislature with all the finesse and diplomacy of a stud bull in heat. When a political party owes more of its ideology, its brainpower and its funding to Alberta, it's inevitable that the party will draw up legislation that will please its Albertan overlords.

That was the message Parker, the business manager of the Saskatchewan Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council, delivered on March 5 to more than 300 unionized millworkers, plumbers, carpenters and other tradespeople at a ballroom at the Delta Hotel in Regina.

The event followed a similar meet in Saskatoon.

Under Bill 80, the government's proposed legislation, it will be easier for companies to decertify unions, set up sub-companies and force union members to recertify their union over again and end contract negotiations on a trade-by-trade basis. Instead, it would allow contract negotiations on a project-by-project, or 'multi-trade', basis — which would mean one union could represent different categories of workers.

This would benefit the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC), which the rest of the trade union sees as a collaborationist outfit that's friendly with management.

Allowing different unions into the recruitment process will allow construction companies to pick and choose which unions they want to deal with. It's a divide-and-conquer situation that puts companies firmly in the driver's seat while union members try to out-compromise each other on matters like pay, hours of work, and benefits for its worker members.

The resulting race to the bottom could mean as much as \$5,000 to \$15,000 annually in lost wages for tradespeople, Parker says.

"We didn't ask for this legislation and we don't want it," Parker said, noting that Saskatchewan hasn't seen a construction strike since 1992.

Bill 80, introduced last year, is set for third and final reading during the current session of the Legislature. Provincial New Democratic Party leader Dwain Lingenfelter, who also spoke, committed his party to repealing Bill 80 if the NDP forms the government after the November 2011 election. /*Stephen LaRose*