

Workers rally against bill to allow new unions

Law would disrupt construction industry, protesters claim

BY DOYLE FOX, THE STARPHOENIX MARCH 20, 2010



The Saskatchewan Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council held a rally on Friday in Saskatoon outside the constituency office of MLA and Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour Roy Norris

Photograph by: Richard Marjan, The StarPhoenix, The StarPhoenix

If it ain't broke, don't fix it: That was the chant shouted Friday by dozens of protesters against Bill 80 who circled outside Labour Minister Rob Norris' office.

Terry Parker, business manager for the Saskatchewan Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council, said he informed Norris they would be rallying outside his office at noon on Friday, and Norris would have a chance to speak in defence of Bill 80.

However, Norris wasn't at his office during the rally.

That didn't discourage the protesters from marching and didn't stop Parker from presenting a 1,238-name petition against Bill 80.

"We are here to let the public be aware of the effects of Bill 80 and how it will affect the construction industry and other industries in Saskatchewan," Parker said.

Bill 80 would amend the Construction Industry Labour Relations Act and would pave the way for many changes for construction unions in Saskatchewan.

The bill would allow new unions into Saskatchewan's construction industry and permit wall-to-wall certifications of a job site instead of having all unionized construction workers belong to the craft union associated with their trade.

"It will create two parallel systems to regulate the construction industry in Saskatchewan," Parker said, "one for the current unions in Saskatchewan and another for employer-friendly unions like the Christian Labour Association of Canada that want to come in."

Parker said Bill 80 will disrupt the construction sector.

"It will start creating a downward spiral of wages and conditions that will be lessened because they will be competing on a separate system than us," Parker said.

"We are not afraid of competition," he said. "We will work with the competition, but as long as it's on a level playing field."

The construction sector has seen double the number of new investment in recent years, which is why workers are concerned about changes to legislation.

"We have had 17 years of labour stability in this province because of the labour relations act and we want to maintain that," Parker said.

More protests against Bill 80 are planned for Estevan, Prince Albert, Regina and Moose Jaw.