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TOPIC: Labour Day Protest of Bill 80

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Costa Maragos: Anchor

Today, Labour celebrates its big day with a big message to Government, and our reporter Geoff Leo is covering this story. We know that down at the Legislature there's a picnic today but with a strong message. Geoff, what was that all about?

Geoff Leo: Reporter

Well absolutely, there was hundreds of workers down at the Legislature. They gave up part of their holiday to protest. Well, right across town it was pretty much business as usual.

Alistair Blake: Construction Worker

I think in this day and age you need more than forty hours.

Geoff Leo:

That's why Alistair Blake isn't part of a union. He likes to work long, some might say ridiculously long, hours, which is what he's doing here at this Wal-Mart construction site, even working on Labour Day.

Alistair Blake:

I work about a hundred and thirty, a hundred and forty every two weeks, so about sixty-five, seventy a week.

Geoff Leo:

Across town, these workers have the day off, and they're celebrating what they see as the benefits of unions, organizations that they say are under attack now by the Saskatchewan Government.

Person Not Identified:

I think in Saskatchewan we should build on our successes, not tear them down for crass ideological reasons.

Geoff Leo:

They're concerned about Bill 80. It's a law that would allow competition among unions representing trades people in Saskatchewan. Right now, unionized construction workers must be members of a union that belongs to the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council. The new law would allow other unions to organize workers, and it's got the full support of the construction companies.

Michael Fougere: Saskatchewan Construction Association

This is expanding workers' rights. It's giving workers greater choice for which union represents them. I think the question we all should be asking is, why should the government have a list of only those unions that can represent workers, and then if you're not on that list then you cannot represent workers? That's inherently unfair.

Geoff Leo:

But unionized workers here see things differently. They say this law would open to the door to what they call employer-friendly unions that are operating in provinces like Alberta.

Terry Parker: Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council

We've seen that the Christian Labour Association of Canada and the CEP have signed sweetheart deals with employers in order to keep the traditional unions out of the certification process with their employees.

Geoff Leo:

And they fear that means a cut in pensions, health benefits, and wages. So they plan to keep fighting this law, which will come before the Legislature this fall. Now Costa, I talked to the Labour Minister just a few hours ago. He says that this will simply provide competition, and better service from unions for workers in this Province. He says he's thinking that the trade unions are really just

afraid of losing their monopoly, and he says come the fall,  
that's very likely what's going to happen.