

Liberals and Tories Limit Ontario Workers' Right to Unionize

NDP Leader Howard Hampton said the McGuinty Liberals are condemning working Ontarians to harassment, intimidation and even termination by voting down his Private Member's Bill to reintroduce card certification in Ontario.

"It's shameful that the McGuinty Liberals voted down a bill that would have made it easier for Ontario workers to unionize. The Harris Conservative government removed card certification in 1995 and the McGuinty Liberals are continuing to turn their backs on Ontario's most vulnerable workers, those who toil away for the lowest wages and without good benefits," said Hampton.

Under card certification, a union can be created without a ratification vote when more than 55 per cent of workers sign a union card. Other provinces, such as Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec and New Brunswick all have card certification. On May 1, in front of a Queen's Park gallery packed with workers, members of the Ontario Legislature defeated Hampton's Private Member's Bill 55 to 11. More than 40 members of the McGuinty government,

including several cabinet ministers voted against the bill.

"This is about social and economic justice. Card certification is good for workers, good for business and good for the economy. Unfortunately, this is a matter of political will, which is in short supply with the McGuinty Liberals. And it's hard-working Ontarians who will suffer because of it," said Hampton.

OFL President, Wayne Samuelson, agreed: "When Liberals and Tories voted to continue the Mike Harris legislation that limits unionization, they also sabotaged their own anti-poverty agenda," he said. "People in unions have a sustainable future and a chance to work for decent wages. If McGuinty was serious about reducing poverty, he would not continue to make it harder for workers to join unions."

Liberals, Tories Defeat WSIB Experience Rating Program Motion

NDP Leader, Howard Hampton, heaped scorn on the Liberals and Tories for defeating his motion calling for an immediate moratorium on rebates and surcharges related to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board's (WSIB) deeply-flawed

Experience Rating program until an internal board report is completed.

“Employers who are able to hide their serious injuries and reduce their compensation costs become eligible to receive a rebate from the WSIB. If they report their lost time injuries, they are penalized. This makes absolutely no sense and simply encourages employers to under-report workplace injuries and force injured workers back to work as soon as possible,” said Hampton.

His comments came during debate on May 14 on the NDP’s motion to develop a plan to eliminate the WSIB’s deeply-flawed Experience Rating program. The governing Liberals and opposition Tories combined to defeat the bill 50 to 9.

It is estimated that between the rebates and surcharges under the program, the money at stake for many employers can add up to millions – roughly \$200 million annually throughout Ontario.

In fact, it has been estimated that more than \$2 billion in rebates have gone to companies in the past 10 years without any sign that the program actually reduces injuries.

“This is yet another example of a McGuinty program that simply is not working and the Tories are quite

comfortable with allowing it to continue,” said Hampton.

“You would think that with \$2 billion going out the door in the past 10 years without any sign of improvement in the number of serious injuries and fatalities, the McGuinty government would have had plenty of time to review the program.

They refuse to do so and the Tories are allowing them to get away with it.”

In addition to calling for an immediate moratorium on the Experience Rating rebates and penalties, Hampton called for an end to Experience Rating incentives to employers who

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contravene the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. He also endorsed the OFL's Excellence Fund proposal as a long-term alternative to the Experience Rating program.

Paul Miller, NDP MPP for Hamilton East – Stony Creek, also spoke during the debate: “The Ontario Federation of Labour has documented cases of the instances where workplaces in which fatal accidents have occurred have been deemed safe and worthy of rebates under the Experience Rating program.

The decline of Ontario's health and safety system committee certification is wholly inadequate,” Miller continued.

“The degeneration of Ontario's health and safety system can also be seen in the widespread disregard for the heart and soul of occupational health and safety in this province: joint health and safety committees.

Ontario's health and safety efforts are based upon the concept of the Internal Responsibility System, (IRS) which recognizes that there cannot be a Ministry inspector at every workplace every day and therefore seeks to establish a joint labour management committee in every workplace of 20 or more workers.

There are also employers with a good health and safety program which

encourage workers to report claims, but then get targeted by the WSIB and the Ministry of Labour and are called “high risk,” Miller said. “This has been incredibly damaging to the health and safety programs in Ontario because it sends the message that those employers would have been better off suppressing claims, as many other employers do.

The WSIB's Experience Rating program distorts and undermines the province's workplace health and safety program by distorting employer behaviour: The Ministry of Labour's efforts are severely hurt by a dysfunctional committee system, as manifested in the deplorable certification statistics,” Miller concluded.

Jobs Policy Enables Corporations To Take Money and Run

NDP Leader Howard Hampton says Dalton McGuinty's real industrial job strategy is all about giving big corporations bug bucks with no job guarantees.

“Dalton McGuinty's real industrial jobs strategy is to throw public money at major corporations without securing job guarantees for workers. He is allowing these companies to take the money and run, said Hampton.”

During today's Question Period, Hampton cited several examples from across the province of companies that have received millions of dollars in loans and grants from provincial government and then proceed to either layoff workers or cease operations all together.

"The NDP supports investments in ailing economic sectors, but we would have done it right, with strong job guarantees and iron-clad clawback provisions," said Hampton.

"The McGuinty government could have done it this way. They chose instead to hand out money without strong job guarantees and strong clawback provisions. From Windsor, to Guelph, to Thunder Bay, workers are paying the price for the poor choices made by this government. Corporations get cash. Workers get a pink slip."

The close scrutiny of government handouts comes in the wake of news that the "Big Three" automakers received \$400 million of provincial money while at the same time shedding 10,000 jobs over the past four years.

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