

DEFINITIONS WHAT THE WORDS MEAN!

LABOUR LAW

Labour laws include the legal rules for organizing unions and negotiating with employers. Some labour laws favour workers, many favour employers.

Provincial labour laws govern most workers. Workers in some sectors like telecommunications and airlines are governed by federal (Canada) labour laws.

Around the world, workers fight for fair labour laws that make it easier to form unions and to protect workers. Long ago, all union activity in Canada was considered criminal. In 1872, a strike by printers in Toronto (in which many were jailed and fired) resulted in labour laws that legalized unions and gave workers some protection.

Corporations and pro-employer governments are now trying to change labour laws - to weaken unions, lower wages and increase corporate profits.

THE RAND FORMULA

After World War II, workers in Canada and most other countries increased efforts to defeat exploitation and rise out of poverty. There were many strikes across Canada. A major strike by auto workers in Windsor in 1945, was settled by a judge, Ivan Rand. Key terms of the settlement (known as the Rand Formula) provided the framework of labour law in Canada.

Because all workers in a unionized workplace benefit from union membership, the Rand Formula required them to pay union dues even if they didn't choose to join a union. (There were a few exceptions). During the same period, unions agreed not to strike while a collective agreement (union contract) is in force. Although the Rand Formula was an important victory, many barriers to organizing unions remained in place.

MANDATORY UNION MEMBERSHIP

All workers benefit from union membership, therefore unions have always fought for mandatory membership—the requirement that all workers in a unionized workplace must join the union.

DUES CHECK-OFF

Dues check-off is the payment of union dues as a deduction from workers' pay cheques.

“RIGHT TO WORK” LEGISLATION

In the United States, an extreme set of anti-union laws being promoted by pro-employer politicians is called “right to work” legislation. Here are the main features of right to work legislation:

- Workers in a unionized workplace can quit their union and/or stop paying union dues.
- Employers are not required to deduct union dues from workers’ pay cheques.
- Political activity by unions is either forbidden or is restricted.
- Governments weaken unions by imposing many rules on them. The rules are restrictive, costly, and time-consuming.

“Right to work” legislation weakens unions. This means lower wages for both union and non-union workers. It also means that it is much harder for unions to oppose lower wages and cuts to public services.

The Conservative government of Stephen Harper has started to introduce such legislation. Other conservative forces across Canada, including Ontario Conservative leader Tim Hudak, are also trying to introduce these anti-worker laws.

THE AUSTERITY AGENDA

The austerity agenda is the political program of the rich—the big banks and corporations as well as the politicians who protect them. Austerity punishes the 99% for the excesses of the 1%. “Austerity” means living with less—but the austerity agenda of the rich requires only working people to live with less (lower wages, privatization and reduced public service). Austerity does the greatest harm to communities already struggling with racial barriers and other forms of exclusion.

OTHER DEFINITIONS

INTERNAL CAMPAIGNS

Internal campaigns include activities within a union. They strengthen the union by increasing member awareness and activity. Internal campaigns prepare the union for collective bargaining and other challenges involving the employer. These campaigns also prepare unions for major public campaigns such as the campaign to defeat the Harper/Hudak attack.

EXTERNAL CAMPAIGNS

External campaigns are public campaigns. These campaigns engage labour’s allies and educate the public. External campaigns include elections, lobbying, advertising, demonstrations, strikes, music, theatre—and many other activities and tactics.