

War on unions, war on wages

Hudak is targeting you

Good jobs don't just happen.

It's a fact that bosses like to pay as little as possible for labour. History tells us that the only way working people ever win decent wages, benefits, pensions, and safe workplaces is by getting organized. That's why unions were invented. And at a time when more and more jobs are part-time, temporary, and insecure, that's why unions are more important than ever.

But Ontario PC leader Tim Hudak is on the side of the bosses. He knows unions succeed when they challenge business – and government – to share the wealth workers create. When it comes to labour law, Hudak has one main aim: to drive down wages. And to do that, he's attacking unions.

In 2012, Hudak said that if he were Premier, he'd let workers receive the benefits of union representation without paying the dues that make those benefits possible. His idea for U.S.-style "free rider" legislation did not go over well, however. Unions opposed it. So did people within the PC party. So in February 2014, Hudak dropped it. "Our agenda is a lot bigger, and a lot more ambitious, than that," he said.

Does this mean workers have nothing to fear from Hudak? No, it doesn't.

First, Hudak could say something different after the election. That's what happened in Michigan, where the governor opposed free-rider legislation before his election but passed it into law a month after. But even if Hudak's telling the truth, he still has labour in his sights. Based on PC private members' bills and their policy paper, "Flexible Labour Markets," here's what Hudak would like to see in Ontario:

› **Opting out of collective bargaining.** The PCs could require every worker in a bargaining unit to pay dues, but allow individual workers to opt out of the bargaining unit altogether. This is not

the same as a free-rider law, but it could have the same effect. The PCs proposed the idea in two private member's bills.

- › **Destroying seniority.** The PCs want to void any contract clause that "grants a preference of employment to members of the trade union." This is a direct attack on seniority – no small matter if Hudak wipes out 100,000 jobs. Also, in the public sector this proposal would open the door to old-style patronage, where jobs in *public* service become a reward for *political* service.
- › **Red tape.** Tories don't like regulations for business but they love them for unions. The PCs want unions to collect dues directly from their members, not through payroll deductions. They want all strike votes supervised by the Labour Relations Board or Elections Ontario. They want all union revenues and expenses over \$5,000 reported to government and published. All of these measures would pull union resources away from representing members.
- › **Shutting unions up.** Tim Hudak wants to stop unions from voicing opinions on political issues – such as his plans for labour law. Silencing opposition by blocking democratic unions from being heard is common practice in many countries, of course – just not the kind of countries we want to emulate.
- › **Driving down wages.** All of the measures listed here would drive down wages by weakening unions. But Hudak and the PCs aren't stopping there. They want a legislated wage freeze for every public sector employee. They want to rig arbitrations so public employees' wages could only go down, never up. And they want to privatize more public services, which invariably lowers wages.

Tim Hudak gets his ideas around labour law from the United States. There, even states that *don't* have

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“free rider” legislation have found creative ways to bust unions. Laws in Wisconsin, for example, allow public employees to bargain collectively, but their unions can only bargain wages, and no wage increase above the rate of inflation is allowed.

Make no mistake about it: Tim Hudak is gunning for your union. He plans to cut your wages. He’s coming after you.

Questions for politicians

- Q In the last two years there has been a lot of debate in Ontario about labour law. Can you explain the specific changes your party would make to labour laws, if elected, and why you would make those changes?
- Q If elected, will your party pass legislation to allow workers in unionized workplaces to opt out of paying dues, or to opt out of bargaining units altogether?
- Q One idea that has been raised in PC policy documents is the idea that anyone should be able to compete for any job in any bargaining unit regardless of any provision in a collective agreement. Do you support this idea, or would you allow employers and unions to continue to freely negotiate job security provisions? Do you support seniority as a principle to reduce favouritism in hiring decisions?
- Q With respect to labour law, what is the overall intention of your party’s policies? Do you support measures to help unions succeed at organizing and collective bargaining to improve jobs for their members, or is your goal to limit union success and thereby keep labour costs low?

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