

Bill 28 provides choice for Manitoba tradespeople

Bill 28 preserves choice and ensures that all employers and their employees have the opportunity to bid and work on public projects in Manitoba without having to join or pay dues to a building trades union.

Most employees in Manitoba's construction industry do not belong to a building trade union - by choice. These are skilled tradespersons working for employers who meet or exceed legislated safety standards, pay good wages, benefits, and strive for workplace and project excellence.

In Manitoba, the open-shop sector is comprised of small, medium and large businesses engaged in the heavy civil, industrial, commercial and residential projects. They and their workforce, who have chosen to work without union representation, build our bridges, fix our roads, develop residential and commercial properties -- effectively all aspects of construction. Bill 28 ensures that these employers and, more importantly, their employees - your neighbours, friends and family - who make up the vast majority of the construction industry, can work on public projects without forced unionization, without being forced to pay union dues.

Bill 28 ensures that all employers and their employees have an opportunity to work on public projects without having a labour model imposed upon their workplaces by the ideology of government. Bill 28 is about enabling free choice. Despite what the Manitoba Building Trade union argues, this is a good thing.

It is obvious that when more industry is allowed to participate, competition goes up, costs go down, and innovation and productivity increase. Project labour agreements set out terms and conditions for a project and can have their place, but they need to be done openly, because of the exercise of free will, not imposition. Allow all qualified employers and their employees to work on the project regardless of union affiliation if any, and regardless of the labour model they choose to employ. Bill 28 does not eliminate project labour agreements but rather allows the successful bidder to determine the labour management model it will employ to do the job.

A few facts about "union-only procurement." A closed-project labour agreement system, as supported by the Manitoba Building Trades, forces workers to join a designated trade union, or pay union dues to work on major public infrastructure projects, even though the projects are being paid for by the workers' own tax dollars and even though those same workers have rejected joining a union. That's called forced unionization. It's like forcing a shopper to pay an entrance fee each time to a grocery store before then purchasing groceries.

Project labour agreements on Manitoba projects such as the Red River Floodway, East Side Road and Keeyask dam had or currently have project labour agreements forcing all workers to pay dues to a union for the privilege of working. While there is nothing wrong with identifying terms and conditions on a project -- for example aboriginal participation, use of local labour, etc. -- forcing non-union workers to pay union dues as the price to work is just wrong.

According to a study by the Beacon Hill Institute, restricting tendering processes and forcing workers to belong to unions increases costs for projects by 12-18 per cent. Other studies from across Canada have suggested the cost increases could be even higher. The City of Montreal produced a study that suggests costs could be up to 30% higher. The City of Hamilton's study found costs could be as much as 40 per cent greater. Another report, prepared by Cardus, suggests that Ontarians are paying 20 to 30 per cent more for construction projects that are subject to closed tendering. Similarly, studies in other countries have shown similar cost increases due to closed tendering practices.

The Manitoba government is doing the right thing with Bill 28, and the majority of Manitobans agree.

A 2016 poll conducted by NRG research group revealed that the majority of Manitobans agreed it's time for the Manitoba government to abandon the policy of forced unionization, forcing workers to pay union dues to be allowed to work, in favour of one that protects choice. Bill 28 does this and is a huge step in the right direction.

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