

## Take away unions' loaded gun

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Here in British Columbia's Lower Mainland, we've begun to endure a CUPE strike that may mean a summer without garbage collection, animal control, sewer work and many other essential municipal services. And this is only part of much broader labour strife that threatens to engulf Alberta as well.

With the country's two most dynamic economies under the pall of major labour disruptions, it's important to understand that it isn't like this in the rest of the world.

For example, the British Office for National Statistics released data in 2006 showing that Canada endures 10 times the number of strike days per 1,000 workers when compared to the average for countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation.

Great Britain itself with twice the population of Canada lost less than 160,000 workdays to strikes in 2005 compared with more than four million in Canada. On a per-capita basis, that means we are subject to 50 times more strike days than the country where trade unionism was born.

Unions and governments in Canada and BC have somehow constructed a framework of apologism for labour radicalism that says it is acceptable for taxpayers to be subjected to unsanitary living conditions in this case--but also withdrawal of education and health services in others -- to give bargaining leverage to unions.

In other developed countries -- including perceived left-leaning Western European nations -- unions are not given legislative loaded guns to hold at the heads of their citizens, as they are in Canada.

Consider that Canada is one of the only countries in the free world that forces union membership on workers who want to practise certain professions like teaching. In most other countries, governments have decided that it is a basic human right to allow employees to choose whether or not to belong to a union.

Amazingly, in B.C. last year barely an eye blinked when the B.C. Teachers Federation attempted to blacklist four teachers who refused to participate in its illegal strike. What more damning evidence can there be that a system needs reform than a union disciplining its members for refusing to break the law?

It strains memory to recall a year where a public-sector union didn't threaten to, or actually did, withdraw some of the services fundamental to our well-being. Surely our elected officials owe us more security than that.

Nations throughout the world have declared that the well-being of their citizenry outweighs the narrow self-interest of the labour movement, and have taken the steps necessary to remove some of the weapons labour uses to advance its agenda.

If the will is there, our governments could employ a range of tools to reassert the pre-

eminence of citizens' needs, including broadening essential-service designations, allowing for workers to opt out of unions that misrepresent them, allowing for replacement workers during strikes, and/or allowing for private competition in traditional union monopolies.

Our major trading partners and competitors across the globe have already made the reforms that built platforms for true labour peace. Not transient peace at any cost, as seems to be the case here, but a more sustainable labour peace based on respecting the rights of unions to bargain within a larger context of the social contract between citizens and their governments. It is time we demand the same of all our elected officials.

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