



# Feds need to regulate union spending, think-tank says

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Sharon Singleton - Money

The federal government needs to regulate union spending to avoid “potential abuse” of workers, a public policy think-tank said.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Studies said Canada’s union laws making union membership mandatory for those joining a unionized workplace, or forcing employees to pay dues even if they choose not to join the union are “markedly different” from virtually all western nations.

As a result, the way unions spend the money they raise from workers should be regulated, the think-tank said in a paper.

“The mandatory nature of the relationship between workers and trade unions in certain industries can be an invitation for abuse,” the paper said.

“Modernizing legislation in order to protect workers from potential abuse at the hands of their unions that can result from these extraordinary powers is both sensible, and long overdue.”

Trade unions should be publicly required to disclose their financial activities and unions should be prevented from diverting mandatory dues to causes that are unrelated to the needs of their members, it said.

The rules could be imposed by changing sections 95 and 110 of the Canada Labour Code, the think-tank added.

Ken Lewenza, president of the Canadian Auto Workers union, called the proposals “absurd” and a diversion from the real issues facing the Canadian economy.

“Unions are the most democratic institutions in the world and we have more accountability in our structure than any other body,” he said.

Every local union must have an elected executive which approves all expenditures, which are in turn voted on by the membership and that document is available to all members.

“In reality it’s a public document and anyone who wants it can see it,” he said, adding that donations to political parties have already been limited.

The centre claims that moves to regulate funding would gain the backing of most unionized

workers, citing a 2008 Nanos Research poll that found more than 80% of workers oppose union leaders giving dues to political parties or advertising during elections.

Nearly 70% of unionized workers opposed giving dues to advocacy groups unrelated to workplace needs, it said.

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