

Worker Bashing 101

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Friday, September 03, 2010

<https://politicsrespun.org/2010/09/worker-bashing-101/>

For those people on your Christmas list who think you're full of hot air when you complain that there has been a concerted attack on workers in the last few decades, here are a few examples of demonizing rhetoric to introduce them to, courtesy of [Adrian MacNair: We don't need no stinkin' unions | National Post](#)

Dalton McGuinty's current plan to freeze public sector wages has delivered to him the same experience of previous governments that tried to cut their deficits by freezing pay. The game is playing out in much the same way, too, with the unions threatening to use extortion in order to get their raises.

Notice how 1.5 centuries of worker-fought rights to collective bargaining, the right to withhold labour in the form of a strike, is now considered to be extortion, a criminal activity.

The simple fact of the matter is that public sector union workers in Ontario are grossly overpaid as it is. It isn't as if the government is asking to lay people off, cut salaries, or axe positions permanently. No, they're doing none of the things that private sector workers have suffered through during the recession. All they're asking the union to do is to hold the line on salaries for two years.

Many public sector workers are paid what is considered to be a [living wage](#), which is higher than the serf class abundant in service sectors. They aren't overpaid, the serfs are miserably exploited.

The solution for the abuse of private sector workers is not to make public sector unionized workers suffer, but to improve the working lives of those under the thumb of oppressive employers.

Holding the line on salaries is a pay cut if there is inflation. So when MacNair claims the government isn't cutting salaries, they actually are with a zero raise, unless of course inflation disappears: not likely.

How about we cut 2% of the public sector every single year? And we keep cutting it until we have a \$19.3 billion surplus? I think that would send the right message to the unions. Public sector salaries eat up 55% of the province's program spending. Which means that less than half of what you spend on services are actually services.

What a clever solution: eternal pay cuts! What message would that send to union members? That they are worth less than what they are paid now. Are they really?

The salaries of a highly trained lab technician, long-term care facility practical nurse, kindergarten teacher, teen crisis counsellor, water treatment centre technician, or cardiac stent purchaser may consume 55% of program spending, but if we fire them all, the service provided is not left for us on their workstation consuming the other 45% of service costs. It is foolish to imagine that what a person brings to a service is not actually part of the service.

I find it incomprehensible that the Ontario government, with the ability to draw upon an international labour pool, the high number of unemployed, and the clear deflation in private sector salaries, would even bother trying to please the unions. If they don't like it, fire them all. If that's against the law, change the laws in the legislature. If that's politically impossible, run an election on the issue. There have to be enough people who are sick and tired of the whining and complaining of the gilded class.

Fire them all? When Reagan fired the air traffic controllers, he at least had trained military personnel to stick in place.

Honestly, I do not want to know who will replace all the fired Children's Hospital oncologists. That is simply an absurd suggestion.

And if earning a living wage is considered to be membership in the gilded class, then the consequence of this view is that workers don't really deserve a living wage.

Further, the message here is that those who think they ought to earn a living wage are whining.

So the next time you feel paranoid, or imposing or otherwise unjustified in expressing concern for people's working lives, remember, you aren't to blame.

Follow the money. The rich who are getting richer are trying to shame you out of a reasonable expectation for a decent work life and living wages.

That is sick and wrong and we must make it stop.