

# CLACAlert

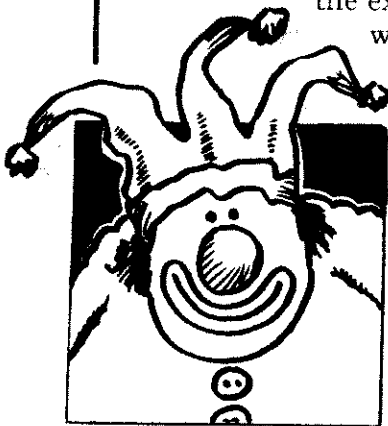
Fact Sheet #2

## Real Unions make a Real Difference in People's Lives

Over the past couple of decades, the hard won gains of working people have come under attack from anti-worker governments and big business. In fighting to protect these gains and reverse the drive to gut social programs and labour rights, workers are also confronting phony unions whose practices further weaken the collective and individual rights of all workers.

### Beware of Phony Unions!

As far as company unions go, the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) is not new or unique. CLAC was formed in 1952 by Dutch immigrants affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). CLAC rejects basic trade union principles in favour of the worst type of business unionism, which is often done at the expense of workers. Employers favour CLAC in order to keep their workplaces union-free, leaving employees without the input and respect they deserve.



CLAC claims that it is a legitimate union but their track record speaks for itself. CLAC's growth coincided with the election of anti-union governments which gutted our social support system in favour of corporate interests and changed the landscape governing labour relations. Weakened labour rights made it harder for legitimate unions to organize and bargain freely, while it made it easier for unrepresentative unions to gain a foothold.

CLAC's overall ideals are in line with conservative and business philosophy. CLAC's research arm, the Work Research Foundation (WRF) actively lobby governments on issues related to labour relations, and support policies that harm the interests of workers. The WRF and CLAC support back-to-work legislation; oppose anti-scab legislation; and promote union busting through their support for "open shop" with employers.

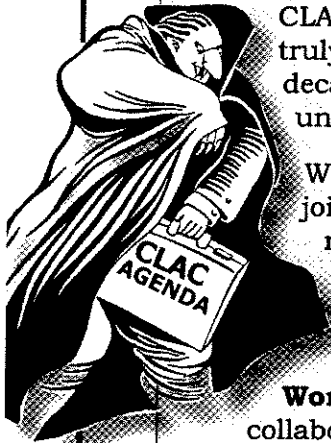
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## The CLAC Agenda



CLAC's primary goal is to undercut the work of legitimate, democratic and truly representative unions and to roll back the clock on gains made over decades. All this in the name of creating a positive relationship with anti-union employers, who are eager to keep real unions out.

Where workers are given a real opportunity to consider the benefits of joining a representative union or going with CLAC, more often than not, members choose legitimate unions. That is why we need to reach out to our fellow workers and expose the true nature of CLAC. We must begin by informing our activists, membership, workers at large, politicians and the general public of the negative effects of this phony union.

**Workers deserve better** than to be in a company union looking to collaborate with employers at the expense of workers' basic rights, wages, benefits, working conditions and health and safety. Workers deserve to be members of real unions that are not afraid to go to the wall to defend their members' interests and those of their families and communities.

## Real Union Democracy vs CLAC's "smiley face"

Contrary to the democratic structures that define our movement, CLAC's members cannot question, let alone change, the very essence of this company union. The fact that 25% to 40% of CLAC's collective agreements are voluntary recognitions, means that these workers find themselves stuck in an organization that bargains away their rights, and does not respect their personal beliefs and cultural and ethnic diversity.

Real trade unions pride themselves on the fact that union democracy is not a hollow concept, but a living reality that members experience and practice at the work-site, union office and at the convention floor. Democracy in CLAC, however, is certainly in short supply. The CLAC Constitution is so preoccupied with controlling what members can and cannot do that it even contains articles restricting the rights of members to run for office. Other constitutional mechanisms are in place so as to discourage dissent.

The CLAC staff control the day-to-day running of the organization. It has been argued that the Staff Council is a parallel power structure to CLAC's elected National Board and wields much greater control of CLAC than its elected leaders. This is the case in the bargaining process where collective agreements are struck behind closed doors between CLAC staff and employers, often without the membership's input or involvement.



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[canadianlabour.ca](http://canadianlabour.ca)

## The difference between CLAC and Real Unions

<b>REAL UNIONS</b>	<b>The Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC)</b>
Real Unions conduct open and transparent organizing drives.	25% to 40% "Voluntary Recognitions" (behind closed door deals between employers and CLAC staff).
Members of Real Unions vote to ratify their collective agreements.	CLAC staff has authority to "conclude, execute, or administer collective agreements" without having to go back for a membership vote.
Real Unions lobby governments to strengthen labour rights (anti-scab, minimum wage, employment standards, etc.).	CLAC lobbies governments against anti-scab legislation, supports back-to-work legislation, promotes open shop and opposes the Rand formula, thus encouraging free riders.
Real Unions are independent, democratic, and representative organizations.	CLAC is employer-accommodating, unrepresentative, and staff-controlled.
Real Unions negotiate agreements with higher provisions and increased protections than the law.	CLAC commonly negotiates agreements with sub-standard provisions that are below minimum standards, as in the case of BC.

### Some FAQ on CLAC

#### Is CLAC affiliated to any religious organization?

Not officially or legally. CLAC maintains very close ties (arms length) with the Christian Reformed Church and reformed church inspired organizations.

The Christian Reformed Church in North America takes pride in the creation of the American Christian Labour Association in 1931. The founders of CLAC were members of the Christian Reformed Church and built CLAC as one of a number of societal organizations that were part of the church's overall mission.

Some adherents and sympathizers have described CLAC's leaders as the Lord's dedicated "band of CLAC'ers" who have been busy "erecting signposts for the Kingdom of God in the socio-economic arena".



more on page 2...



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## Some more FAQ on CLAC

### Is CLAC a real union?

A number of Labour Relations Boards across the country say they are. Other Labour Relations Boards do not recognize CLAC as a legitimate union in the construction industry. However, we believe that **a union should be judged on what they do, not whether or not they are officially considered one.**

The CLAC was founded in 1952 but did not get its first certification until 1963 because it was deemed to have a Christian-bias as far as its principles and practices were concerned.

Between 25%-40% of CLAC's certifications are Voluntary Recognitions, where workers have no say in who represents them since these agreements are struck behind closed doors between employers and CLAC reps.

Unions should represent their members' interests, and in order to do this they have to be independent of employer influence. Does CLAC pass the test? We'll leave that decision up to you...

### CLAC says that unions are only upset with them because they're so successful. How do you respond?

There's no doubt that CLAC has been growing for the last 10 years or so. What we're worried about is not that they are growing, but rather what is behind the growth: it is because employers are often "choosing" CLAC to keep legitimate unions out and because workers are often not given the choice about whether they want to join or when they can leave CLAC.

If workers had all the information about CLAC and were given a real opportunity to consider the benefits of joining a real, representative union, it is likely that fewer workers would choose CLAC.

### Do real unions oppose CLAC because it is a Christian union?

Absolutely not! Real unions include Christian unions, such as the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA).

Our issue with CLAC is that they negotiate sub-standard agreements that are below industry standards (on wages, overtime pay, vacation, holiday pay, etc.) often without the input or involvement of members.

In the political and legislative arenas, CLAC acts in opposition to the interest of workers (as witnessed by their opposition to the anti-scab legislation).

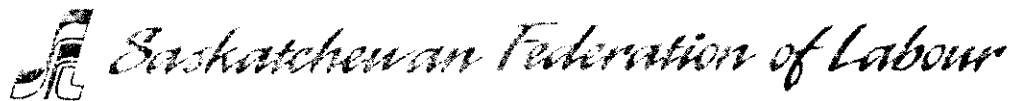
CLAC's collaborative approach has a simplistic appeal to those who value so-called "harmony" in the workplace. In reality, such an approach is undertaken at the expense of workers and their rights. That's the real truth behind CLAC's "smiley-face" version of the workplace.



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February 26, 2008

To: SFL Affiliates, Senior Staff Reps, Executive Council, Labour Councils and Coordinating Committees

Greetings:

Re: **Bill 6 and CLAC**

CLACAlert, developed by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), provides a detailed description of The Christian Labour Association (CLAC). As you will read, CLAC is an anti-democratic, employer-accommodating, and staff-controlled organization.

CLAC has made inroads in Alberta, Ontario, and British Columbia under right-wing, anti-union governments (Klein, Harris, and Campbell). They have a presence in construction, healthcare, and a wide variety of other workplaces.

Up until now, Saskatchewan's labour legislation has prevented the establishment of such employer-dominated unions from getting a toehold in our province. **But Bill 6, which the Sask. Party government has tabled to amend the *Trade Union Act*, may open the door for CLAC to enter Saskatchewan.**

Bill 6, if passed, will repeal Section 6(2)(c), making many of our unions vulnerable to raiding by CLAC. Under Section 6(2)(c), the Labour Relations Board can refuse to order a vote, if it is satisfied that the existing union represents the majority of employees in the appropriate unit. This Section has been useful in the past in keeping unwanted associations out of our workplaces.

Of particular concern is that CLAC attempts to get all-employee certifications that extend across all workers at a single worksite. This encourages the hiring of semi-skilled workers, who are then assigned a multitude of tasks, taking away from the hiring of highly skilled, highly qualified professionals and tradespeople. On construction sites, would CLAC undermine the apprenticeship/journeyman training and certification program? In the healthcare sector, we all agree recruitment and retention of qualified healthcare workers is an urgent priority. Why would we want to encourage an employer-run organization to enter Saskatchewan and create deskilling?

CLAC has a presence in the healthcare sector in B.C., in particular in personal care homes and long-term care facilities. Several locals have since left CLAC due to low wages, inferior benefits, and poor representation, and joined public sector unions such as BCGEU and HEU.

We share the concerns of the CLC that CLAC is not a democratic or representative organization and does not serve the interests of workers. We do not support the stripping away of the legal authority of the LRB to determine an existing certification and to summarily dismiss frivolous applications.

**Please take five minutes to contact the Minister of Labour, Rob Norris at [legislationfeedback@lab.gov.sk.ca](mailto:legislationfeedback@lab.gov.sk.ca) or 787-9478 and tell the government NOT to repeal Section (2)(c).**

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry Hubich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Larry" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Hubich".

Larry Hubich  
President