

# Conservative bills that target unions stalled in Senate

Bill Curry, The Globe and Mail, June 10, 2014

Two controversial Conservative bills that critics condemn as an attack on organized labour won't be passed into law this summer, but they're not dead yet.

Each year in June, the Senate passes a flurry of bills into law before the summer recess. However Conservatives and Liberals confirm to The Globe that neither Bill C-377 nor C-525 – Conservative private member's bills that are strongly opposed by unions – are going anywhere this month.

It was this time last year that the Conservative leadership in the Senate attempted to pass C-377, a private member's bill from B.C. MP Russ Hiebert aimed at forcing more financial disclosure from unions, into law before the recess.

But in a rare show of defiance, a group of Conservative Senators made the surprise move of blocking the government's plans. Led by Conservative Senator Hugh Segal, several Conservative Senators broke ranks with their leadership last June and voted with opposition Senators to dramatically amend the bill and send it back to the House of Commons. However Parliament later prorogued, which returned the bill to its original form.

The bill has sat untouched in the Senate for months. In April, it was joined in the Senate by a second bill that was approved by the House of Commons. Alberta MP Blaine Calkins, who introduced Bill C-525, has said it will prevent situations in which workers are intimidated into forming a union. The current process requires organizers of a potential union to obtain the signatures on cards of 50 per cent plus one of workers. Mr. Calkins argues that opens the door to intimidation by union organizers and proposes a secret ballot vote. Critics say that would be a major hurdle to forming a union, by giving time for employers to intimidate staff before a union is in place.

A spokesperson for Claude Carignan, the government leader in the Senate, said there are no plans to advance either of the bills before the Senate breaks for summer.

There is speculation in the Senate that the government may simply be waiting for Mr. Segal's departure before advancing the bills. There will be a new dynamic in the Senate in the fall because Mr. Segal – a red Tory appointed to the Senate in 2005 by Liberal prime minister Paul Martin – is retiring this month.

The opposition leader in the Senate, Liberal James Cowan, said he meets regularly with the Conservative leadership to negotiate which bills will be debated, but those two bills don't come up.

"Whether the government's reluctant to move, what the reason for it, I don't know," Mr. Cowan told *The Globe*. "They haven't raised either of these bills as being priority bills, so you'd really have to ask them what their intentions are."

Mr. Hiebert, the author of the bill that ran into trouble last fall, said he is in regular contact with Senators and hopes it will advance in the fall.

"I'm still optimistic that it will get done... I'm speaking with lots of Senators and there's been some movement in the Senate," he said, pointing to several retirements and the fact that Liberals in the Senate are no longer part of the Liberal caucus with MPs. "I'm not going to make any predictions as to the outcome. We're too early on in that process."

Hassan Yussuff, the recently-elected new president of the Canadian Labour Congress, said both bills are unnecessary and should die in the Senate.

"These bills really have little to do with remedying an issue or a problem that requires attention," he said. "These were individual members who, in my view, had little to do [with] – and little understanding of – labour relations in this country."