

Unions Are Contrary To Christian Beliefs?



The CBC is reporting that an Ontario furniture manufacturer has elected to close down following a vote by its workers to unionize. The reason for the closure? The furniture manufacturer's owners have stated that their Christian beliefs do not allow them to work with a union. Apparently it is the owners' view that working with a union does not allow them to "live peaceably with all men" and to not "use force to gain what we want." Presumably their current non-unionized workplace operates as a conflict-free utopia.

While the owners' argument is creative, it's difficult to imagine that their attempt to link their resistance to working with a union to their right to religious freedom will be permitted to take precedence over the workers' rights to organize. The union has already publicly stated that they are not buying the owners' argument and have intimated that they will take legal action.

Since both the employer and the union are pointing to rights that are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, if the dispute focuses on the conflict of those rights we would expect a lively dialogue about the extent to which one individual's religious beliefs can be protected when they impinge on the freedoms of others. However, we believe it is most likely that the union will seek access to the protections available to organizing workers under the Ontario *Labour Relations Act* and will argue that the employer's religious beliefs are not genuinely held but rather are being used as an excuse for anti-union sentiment and should not require a consideration of *Charter* rights.