

# Labour group: Protect foreign workers

By The Canadian Press  
Fri, Apr 18 - 6:39 AM

Ottawa's temporary foreign-worker program is flawed because it allows employers to hire cheaply without offering any long-term benefit to the employee, the head of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour told a federal committee Wednesday.

"It is not fair to the workers being brought in, it's not fair to our economy, it's not fair for those being bypassed because access to this program by employers is far too open," Rick Clarke testified at a hearing of the House of Commons standing committee on citizenship and immigration in Halifax.

"The program, as it now stands, marginalizes temporary workers and creates a precarious workforce without the full rights of other workers in this country and opens them up for abuse by their employers."

The committee has been holding hearings on immigration matters in cities across Canada since the end of March and plans to produce studies on the issues.

Clarke said the federal government should work toward creating "a true immigration strategy that meets the needs of workplaces and hopes and dreams of workers and their families."

Still, he warned employers should not ignore skilled, unemployed Canadians in favour of hiring foreign workers for low wages.

When temporary foreign employees are hired to fill shortages, he said, they should be treated the same as any Canadian worker.

"These workers should have the rights for fair wages and safe workplaces, the right to join a union and the right to remain in Canada and apply for citizenship," he said.

He recommended opening advocacy offices across Canada to address immigration and work-related complaints from foreign workers at no cost.

Andrew Telegdi, a Liberal MP from Ontario and vice-chair of the committee, said he's pleased the labour movement is taking the issue of foreign workers' rights seriously.

"We want to make sure that we build a nation," he said.

"Not just a low-wage workforce that can be exploited and found to be redundant and sent out of the country."