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LABOUR MINISTRY: Safety inspectors, shut out of a review of workplace safety, believe their jobs may be at risk

By **NORMAN DE BONO, THE LONDON FREE PRESS**

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OPSEU members in downtown London Thursday protest safety inspectors being shut out of a provincial review of workplace safety. (DEREK RUTTAN, The London Free Press)

Safety inspectors across Ontario have been shut out of a provincial review of workplace safety, a move pickets at a London rally Thursday heard threatens safety on the job.

Labour Ministry inspectors and staff, supported by members of other unions, took to the streets Thursday in downtown London to pressure the ministry to add their voice to a panel reviewing the Ontario safety system — and send a warning there's growing concern Ontario may privatize workplace safety inspection.

"The government is caving to pressure from business, but we have to tell them they cannot fix the budget on the backs of workers," Len Elliott, a health and safety inspector in London and president of Local 101, of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), said at the York St. rally.

The ministry formed a panel in January to review the safety inspection system. The panel is dominated by private interests and some policy officials with the ministry, Elliott added.

The ministry couldn't be reached for comment Thursday.

Elliott said he fears that without input at the panel, the government may move to privatize safety inspection since business is pushing for just such a move, said Elliott.

"They have told us that everything is on the table, they are not making a commitment to leave inspection alone," he said.

If safety inspections are privatized, "the private sector would police themselves and that is truly a conflict," added Warren (Smokey)

Thomas, OPSEU president.

"There are good bosses in the world, but there are notoriously bad ones, too, and they need to be policed by people that are not beholdng to them."

Tim Carrie, president of Local 27 of the Canadian Auto Workers union, also attended the rally since safety inspections are critical in the manufacturing and automotive sectors, he said.

"I cannot understand why government thinks they can make changes to the Health and Safety Act and not invite frontline workers who administer and enforce, to be part of the discussion and decision," said Carrie.

The rally included more than 200 pickets outside the labour office, a broad cross-section of public, private, white-collar and blue-collar unions to protest against the ministry's position.

There were 478 deaths on the job in Ontario last year and more than 800 across Canada, along with "tens of thousands" injuries, said Elliott.

Ontario health and safety inspectors respond to accidents on the job where workers are hurt or killed, or where workers have safety concerns.

The ministry has about 45 inspectors working in London and area and about 80 total staff in London.

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