

ndp goes to bat for railcar pact

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New Democrat Leader Howard Hampton said Tuesday he would support "an Ontario-first policy" so that companies like Bombardier get first dibs on provincial contracts. Hampton said he was part of the government that created an Ontario-first policy in 1992 and negotiated with Bombardier to invest \$50 million in the latest technology for Thunder Bay's plant. "We said you're going to get first opportunity at any rapid transit, any urban transit and inter-urban transit vehicles that need to be built for Ontario cities," he said in Thunder Bay. "I think we need to maintain that kind of Ontario-first policy."

Bombardier, the Canadian Auto Workers union and other groups say Dalton McGuinty's Liberal government isn't following the 1992 Ontario-first agreement. The agreement, between Bombardier and Ontario, says the company "shall be the sole supplier of mass transit vehicles" for cities in Ontario. Ottawa is considering Bombardier and two other groups for a multi-million-dollar contract to build rail cars. Getting the contract would mean months of work for Bombardier employees.

Because of the 1992 agreement, Bombardier and the CAW believe they should automatically get the contract. "Unfortunately, the message doesn't seem to be getting through to the provincial government," said Paul Pugh, president of CAW Local 1075. Even the Conservatives that came before McGuinty's Liberals didn't challenge the agreement, Pugh said. "It's weird." Hampton toured the Thunder Bay plant on Tuesday with fellow local New Democrats Bruce Hyer and John Rafferty.

"The City of Ottawa is, frankly, concerned with the City of Ottawa," Hampton said. "It's the McGuinty government provincially and the Martin government federally that should be thinking down the road. "So far, there doesn't seem to be any leadership and they don't have their thinking caps on." Earlier this month, the CAW learned there were three group bids for Ottawa's railcar project: Bombardier and SNC Lavelin Engineers; Kinkisharyo and Kiewit-Ellis Don; and Siemens, PCL Constructors Canada and Dufferin Construction. The results of the Ottawa contract will be known in "early spring," Pugh said.

The Bombardier workforce is currently working on two bi-level railcar orders, one for New Mexico and the other for Toronto's GO Transit. The company has also secured an order with Salt Lake City, Utah. Pugh said that order will likely begin in November. The Utah order ensures the plant has enough work for the 265 CAW members still at the plant until spring.

Bombardier also has an order for 21 cars for Yong-In, South Korea. Two or three cars will be built in early 2006 and the rest of the year will be spent testing them, Pugh said. "This car hasn't been produced at the plant before, so it requires a lot of testing," he said.

Hampton said the purpose of his visit was to "send a message to the McGuinty government" that urban transit is going to become more and more important as fuel prices climb. "When the price of gas hits \$1.20 a litre, a whole bunch of us are sooner or later going to park the truck, park the car and we're going to start taking the train," he said.