



The outrageous attacks on workers' collective bargaining rights, benefits and pensions in a growing number of American states has sparked demonstrations by thousands at events such as the "We are one" cross-border rally. Photo courtesy BCGEU

An injury to one is an injury to all

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE – including members of BC FORUM – gathered at the Peace Arch in early April to protest moves by newly elected Republican governors to strip workers of bargaining rights. The "We are one" demonstration brought together people from B.C., Washington state and Oregon.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker is eliminating collective bargaining for public employees, saying he has no other option to eliminate a \$137 mil-

lion deficit. At the same time, Republicans across the U.S. are demanding even more tax breaks for corporations and the super-rich – a group that is already raking in the largest share of national income since 1928 and paying much lower taxes.

"Wisconsin, to us, is the front line," says Jim Sinclair, President of the B.C. Federation of Labour. He warns that the right-wing attacks on workers' pay and pensions don't know any borders.

"It's only average workers – both in the public and private sectors – who are being called upon to sacrifice," adds Robert Reich, former American Secretary of Labor.

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Advocate

The Advocate is published by the B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members. BC FORUM is dedicated to representing the interests and well-being of members, their families and spouses, and continuing into retirement the relationship they enjoyed with the union movement. Supported by Working Enterprises and affiliated with the B.C. Federation of Labour, BC FORUM represents thousands of retired union members.

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Alice West (right) – pictured here with BC FORUM director Millie Canessa – has made an immense contribution to the union movement, equality and social justice in Canada.

Advocate photo by Bob Akester

We'd like to say two words to Alice West:

Thank you!

THERE ARE A FEW rare people in the world whose thoughtfulness, commitment and leadership are a true inspiration to the rest of us – people who make you think, “If only I could be more like her.” Alice West, who recently stepped down as president of BC FORUM for health reasons, is such a person.

Gerry Edwards, the newly elected president (see story page 9), says West is an example of how much retired workers can achieve by staying active and involved.

“Alice is a great trade unionist. She has been all her life. She stuck up for women’s rights, the union, and the membership,” says Edwards.

In addition to serving as president of BC FORUM, West is the chair of WE*ACT, Women Elders in Action. In that capacity, she appeared before Parliament’s Standing Committee on

the Status of Women in 2007 to call for action on the number of senior women who live in poverty.

“This is my third time around on what’s happening to the status of women,” she told the committee. “In the sixties I was involved in the fight for women’s equality. In the eighties we had a long fight over the pay equity question.” And now, the income gap in the workplace translates into a gap in retirement, she said, advocating steps to increase the GIS, and to provide affordable housing.

Before retirement, West was active in the Public Service Alliance of Canada, serving as one of three women on the union’s national executive. The impact of their work set the stage for the rest of us, said Nycole Turmel, PSAC President in 2005.

West continues to fight for retired workers as a director of BC FORUM.



Jack Layton, Leader of Canada's New Democrats, appeared with Kennedy Stewart, newly elected MP for Burnaby Douglas at a large rally in Burnaby during the last week of the campaign. RCMP had to close First Avenue when the overflow crowd spilled into the

street. Stewart held the swing riding previously won by retiring MP Bill Siksay. The party added three BC seats while the Conservatives dropped one, and the Liberals fell by three. The Green Party picked up a seat for the first time. *Advocate photo*

The real opposition is now the official opposition

AS JACK LAYTON WAS leaving a Burnaby rally attended by 2,000 people, one of them reached up to the stage, offering him a bottle of Orange Crush. He waved to the crowd, and accepted it with a smile.

Only a few days later, Layton's party would win the most seats in its history, win the majority of seats in Quebec, become the official opposition in the House of Commons, decimate the Bloc Quebecois, and relegate the Liberals to third party status.

"It's a historic breakthrough for the New Democrats," says Gerry Edwards, BC FORUM president.

"It will be a tough chore, but I think Jack Layton will be up to the task.

"It would be very interesting if it

was to break the log jam that we've had for years and years on separatism. It could in fact bring our country closer together," said Edwards.

In an official statement on the election outcome, the Canadian Labour Congress said voters had elected an official opposition that puts working families first.

"The Canadian Labour Congress congratulates the NDP for a campaign that placed the issues important to workers – health care, retirement security and an expanded Canada Pension Plan, and job creation – at the forefront of the election campaign," it said.

President Ken Georgetti said the CLC is prepared to work with all parties to promote the economic security of Canadians, and he lost no time in calling for action to create jobs.

"We are calling on all political parties to roll up their sleeves and get to work to create good, family-supporting jobs for the more than 1.4 million Canadians who are unemployed, and for many thousands of others whose work is part-time, temporary and poorly paid," said Georgetti.

The latest Statistics Canada figures show that unemployment still remains well above the 1.1 million who were unemployed in October, 2008, just prior to the recession. Since then, part-time work has increased steadily, while the number of full time jobs has stagnated. In addition, new jobs are concentrated in the service industry, while jobs in goods-producing sectors continue to decline. Employment is down in both construction and manufacturing.

GROWING INFLUENCE OF RETIRED WORKERS

Retired from the job, not from life

AS ONE DOOR CLOSES on a senior's working life, another opens. The new retiree looks out on a scene providing familiar but challenging opportunities.

Seniors are a growing influence in Canadian society. The numbers alone show it: seniors were 9% of the Canadian population in 1960; 14% in 2009 and will be 25% in 2036. This is a political force to be reckoned with.

The Canadian Labour Congress recognized this shift when it founded the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC) in 1993. Led by president Pat Kerwin, CURC encourages and recruits the seniors and retirees to keep their union activism



Pat Kerwin is president of the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC). BC FORUM is the provincial arm of CURC.

Advocate photo by Bob Akester

by joining CURC and its campaigns. These include the public pensions improvement campaign for the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and the Old Age Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) and the campaign for a nation-



CURC vice-president Louissette Hinton, along with BC FORUM president Gerry Edwards and treasurer Miriam Olney were among those who staffed a joint booth at the CLC convention in Vancouver in May.

al Pharmacare program.

And CURC seniors are finding that their unified voices are being heard. A year-long pension campaign resulted in eight provinces backing the CPP improvement campaign. The opposition of Prime Minister Harper means public pension improvements will be a major issue in the next federal election. The lobbying work by delegations of CURC members who met with elected representatives of all parties has already done much to put the pension issue in the election spotlight.

CURC embraces many issues on behalf of members, including support for the Canadian Health Coalition campaign to establish a national Pharmacare program. The Saskatchewan Federation of Union Retiree successfully lobbied the Calvert government to include a promise for pharmacare for everyone in the last provincial election. Currently they are promoting the Canadian Health Coalition – Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives study that showed that a national plan could

provide universal coverage and save more than \$10 billion annually. As well, CURC has reached out with many in labour to campaign for the ex-Nortel employees who lost pensions and benefits in the company bankruptcy.

To campaign successfully, CURC continues to organize and develop provincial, and local area councils which ensure that seniors' voices are heard. As Larry Wark, president of the Nova Scotia Federation of Union Retirees said, key union people are now becoming retirees and it's time for all CURC affiliates to increase their visibility.

To learn more about CURC, please visit unionretiree.ca where you can find local contacts and download issues of the CURC magazine, Union Retiree, as well as news releases and public position papers.

In addition, many workers lose health benefits when they retire. BC FORUM, the provincial arm of CURC in British Columbia, provides these benefits through WE Insurance.



Vote **YES** to scrap the HST

- It's an unfair tax.
- It increases our costs and kills consumer confidence.
- It fosters an underground economy.
- It's a massive tax shift from big corporations to people.
- It's particularly hard on retired workers and our families.
- And let's not forget, the B.C. Liberals said they wouldn't do it. They lied.

More than half a million British Columbians signed petitions to force the B.C. Liberals to give us a chance to vote to scrap the HST. When you get your ballot in the mail, please vote "yes."

Photo: Moni Habib tiltedplane.com

SPECIAL REPORT: WHY THE HST MUST GO

We need fair, progressive taxes

BC FORUM supports fair, progressive taxes. We do not support the Harmonized Sales Tax (HST).

Our members – retired workers and workers nearing retirement – understand that it costs money to provide health care, education, environmental protection and other services to British Columbians.

As we have done all our lives, we are ready to pay our fair share, even if that means an increase in taxes. The HST, however, is not fair.

The HST has increased taxes paid by ordinary people by \$1.9 Billion a year – \$1.4 Billion after the small rebates given to some. We get nothing

in return. Quite the reverse.

Many of the services seniors depend on are being slashed, while other essentials of life cost more. We are being forced to pay \$1.9 Billion more so large corporations can pay \$1.9 billion less. It is a massive tax shift onto the shoulders of people who, in our case, live on fixed incomes and are already struggling to make ends meet.

Adding to the injury, the BC Liberal Party promised in writing that they would not introduce the HST. They lied to BC seniors about an issue that significantly hurts our quality of life.

We urge you to vote “yes” to get rid of the HST.

The HST is unfair

“This is not a fair tax. The government is doing everything they can to load the dice so that they will win the vote. I don’t think they’ll be successful, but if you examine what they’re trying to do, you have to vote yes to say no to the HST.

“They lied in the first place, and

they’re telling more lies again now. They brought some people in from Alberta to look at this, and they came back with figures that are nowhere even close to what it will cost young people with children.”

– **Gerry Edwards**
President, BC FORUM

Prices not going down

Good luck trying to convince working people that paying more for goods and services will help their bosses, and then their bosses will help them.

Wednesday’s report on the costs and benefits of the HST ignored an inconvenient economic concept called “price stickiness” – where busi-

nesses resist lowering prices when input costs are reduced.

Even worse, the report contained no analysis of the HST’s impact on the underground economy – which is massive.

– **Michael Smyth**
The Province, May 5, 2011

HST panel report full of errors

The report revealed (p. 18) that the HST is raising about \$820 million more than the PST... The tax shift, using the panel’s figures, works out to \$327 per person – that’s per person – The Advocate, May 2011

son, not per family as claimed by the panel.

– **David Schreck**
Economist, May 4, 2011
(www.strategictoughts.com)

HST report a mess for premier

The public was already well justified in its anger over both the timing and nature of the HST.

The panel substantiated both concerns, revealing additional details about the full extent of the tax grab.

– **Vaughn Palmer**
Vancouver Sun, May 7, 2011

HST has been vastly oversold

A government-appointed panel has undermined several of the government’s own selling points in favour of the HST ahead of the coming province wide mail-in referendum on the controversial consumer tax.

The four-member panel found the HST will bring no more than a modest benefit to the B.C. economy, create nowhere near the 113,000 new jobs hoped for when the tax came into effect last year, and is far from revenue neutral.

In a finely balanced study released Wednesday, the panel said the 12 percent tax is already adding hundreds of millions of extra dollars to the treasury, contrary to the government’s initial prediction that tax breaks and rebates would balance off the new tax revenue from the HST.

“That hasn’t happened,” the panel said. “The HST is raising more revenue... than was predicted.”

“With each passing year, the HST will continue raising more revenue... because it taxes a broader base of goods and services.”

– **Rod Mickleburgh**
Globe and Mail, May 4, 2011

“The HST is a pure tax increase and is regressive.”

– *Impact of the HST on Ontario and British Columbia households,*
Dr. Robert Murrell, senior fellow,
Canadian Centre for Policy Studies

HST shift

During his leadership race, Adrian Dix correctly noted that when the government increases MSP premiums and long term care user fees at the same time it lowers corporate taxes, you must conclude that the tax increases on families are paying for the business tax cuts.

There is no way to avoid concluding that the HST is the biggest tax shift in B.C. history, a shift that is consistent with the direction B.C. has followed since Gordon Campbell came to power, moving taxes away from the principle of ability to pay.

– David Schreck

Economist, May 7, 2011
(www.strategicthoughts.com)

No savings here

The cost of lumber, coal, copper aluminum or gas and oil is set by world commodity prices and will not come down because of an HST refund cheque from government. Similarly, jobs are created when demand for those resources increases and production expands to meet demand, not when the companies get a refund cheque.

Those HST refunds will go directly to the bottom line of corporations and banks headquarters in Toronto, Europe, Asia and the United States.

– *The truth about the HST and why returning to the PST is better for B.C.,*
FightHST.com

Returning to PST will save billions

The best investment British Columbians could ever make would be to pay back the full \$1.6 billion, go back to the PST and save ourselves \$10 billion (over five years).

It's a no brainer.

– *The truth about the HST and why returning to the PST is better for B.C.,*
FightHST.com



Adrian Dix, elected as leader of the B.C. NDP April 17, immediately took aim at the HST. He says the party is ready to take on the B.C. Liberals whenever an election is called, but first he wants to defeat the HST in the coming referendum.

"The HST transferred \$2 billion from ordinary people and small business to larger corporations. That fact has been glossed over by the Liberals from day one. They've been wrong on just about everything the last couple of years. Wrong on the harmonized sales tax. Wrong on health care. Wrong on the economy," said Dix.

Advocate photo

SPECIAL REPORT: WHY THE HST MUST GO



Photo: Moni Habib tiltedplane.com

You're paying much more

Previously exempt from PST, the following are now subject to the full 12 percent harmonized sales tax.

- Airline fares within Canada.
- New homes. After promised rebates, the HST will add \$26,250 to the cost of a home selling for \$750,000.
- Real estate fees and commissions.
- Energy conservation, retrofits and equipment.
- Car and household repair services.
- Household renovations and painting.
- All food products except "basic groceries."
- Non-prescription medication, plus vitamins and dietary supplements.
- Restaurant meals.
- Bicycles and tricycles.
- Basic cable TV and residential phone service.
- Services like accounting, home care and hair care.
- School supplies and summer camp for the kids and grandkids.
- Funeral services.
- Parking.
- Movie and theatre tickets.
- Membership fees for gyms or health clubs.
- Dry cleaning.
- Magazines and newspapers.
- Work-related safety equipment, like steel-toed boots, as well as safety helmets, life jackets, first-aid kits, smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.

Even "HST exempt" living expenses are going up:

- Rent. Taxing maintenance and other required services puts pressure on landlords to raise rents.
- Strata fees. The increased cost for services is estimated at 5 to 8 percent.
- Insurance premiums, as insurers cover increased costs for repairs, restoration and other services.
- Residential care for seniors. All residential care facilities which contracted out maintenance and care services – as the government urged them to do – pay HST on those contracts. The BC Care Providers Association estimates the HST costs a 100 bed facility \$210,000 a year, the equivalent of four to five care staff positions.

Are you in favour of extinguishing the HST and reinstating the PST in conjunction with the GST?

YES X

NEW PRESIDENT TAKES OFFICE



President Edwards chairs a BC FORUM board meeting May 5.

Advocate photo

Gerry Edwards elected president of BC FORUM

GERRY EDWARDS, a long time activist with the Steelworkers Union, has been elected president of the BC FORUM board of directors.

Edwards served as president of the 2,000 member Regina Local of the Steelworkers for 12 years. He was a union staff member for 20 years, and is an exceptional organizer. Before his retirement, he was the union's area supervisor for B.C. and the Northwest Territories.

He has been the union's representative on the BC FORUM board since 1996, holding a number of positions including first vice-president, and chairperson of the resolutions committee.

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Campaigning for fair taxes for people

UNIONS AND COMMUNITY groups have launched a campaign to press for fair taxes for people.

The Coalition to Build a Better B.C. – of which BC FORUM is a founding member – is raising funds to hire a part-time coordinator of the campaign. The overall objective is to create a solid majority in favour of strong public and social sectors in B.C., funded by a fair and equitable tax system.

The immediate priority is to participate in the HST debate by focusing on the need for fair taxes and reinvigorated public services.

The coalition is working with the Vancouver and District Labour Council as one of the co-sponsors of a May 27 conference to examine the effects of income inequality, offer remedies based on fair and progressive taxes, and consider the debates around the HST and environmental taxes.

A critical issue

Tax fairness has become a critical issue in British Columbia – and indeed across Canada – as right-wing governments continue to hand ever more generous tax giveaways to corporations and the super-wealthy.

The problem is most acute in B.C. Provincial finance minister Kevin Falcon, for example, is overjoyed that the Harper government's planned corporate tax cuts will give B.C. the "most competitive" corporate tax rate in the G7 group of the world's most developed economies. He believes this will spur corporate investment and jobs.

Unfortunately, the record shows the opposite to be true. The endless gifts to corporations have simply boosted their profits, not investment or jobs.

Profiting at our expense

And who has paid for the giveaways to banks and big corporations? Ordinary people, including working families trying to make ends meet, and retired workers on fixed incomes.

We're all paying more through an endless increase in fees, such as Medical Service Plan premiums, Hydro rates, and the HST.

British Columbia is now the only province in Canada where seniors still pay MSP premiums. Students are paying more to go to school. Residential care rates are the highest in Canada. The minimum wage, even

after the May 1 increase, is still the lowest in Canada. And we've had the nation's highest rate of child poverty for years.

There is one group that has done very well for itself.

A comprehensive study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, based on Statistics Canada data, shows that the richest one percent of Canadians now pay a lower rate of total taxes than anyone else.

The immense shifts in taxes that have taken place are no accident. They have been implemented by politicians who don't like the idea that governments at their best are a collective enterprise – a powerful tool to build civilized societies where every individual has a right to be treated with fairness, equality and opportunity. These politicians prefer the law of the jungle, every one for himself, dog eat dog.

It's an approach that's very good for the biggest dogs: the large corporations, and the super-rich. They contribute heavily to get what Dave Barrett has called "the best governments money can buy." The campaign for fair taxes is nothing less than a campaign for governments that work for us.

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Long campaign wins increase for lowest paid

TENS OF THOUSANDS of British Columbia's lowest paid workers received a long overdue raise May 1 when the so-called training wage was scrapped and the provincial minimum wage was increased for the first time in ten years.

About 52,000 workers in B.C. are paid minimum wage and tens of thousands more earn less than \$10 an hour.

"I want to thank the thousands of low wage workers, students, union members, faith groups and municipal leaders who joined the Federation's '\$10 NOW' campaign," said Jim Sinclair, president of the B.C. Federation of Labour.

"With their help we have built overwhelming support for a significant increase to the minimum wage. Together with them, we forced the

Liberals to do the right thing and remove the minimum wage freeze and scrap the bogus training wage."

The Federation is calling on the Christy Clark government to scrap the tip wage which also took effect May 1 and will be paid to workers who serve alcohol.

"Workers who earn tips are routinely asked to pay for items like theft and breakage along with the forced sharing of tips with other staff. With no oversight from the Ministry of Labour, and additional cuts to the Ministry's budget this year, the tip wage puts servers at risk of abuse," said Sinclair.

"The Clark Liberals shouldn't even consider introducing a tip wage until they increase the enforcement of Employment Standards which are ignored all too often.

"The Liberal government needs to stop appeasing the private liquor sector. Under pressure from private liquor stores, the WCB is gutting 'working alone' regulations.

"Now they have introduced a tip wage that takes money from server's pockets and gives it to the owners of bars and licensed restaurants," said Sinclair.

"Instead of appeasing certain business interests, our province should have a minimum wage for all workers with future increases based on increases in the cost of living."

Even with the increase to \$8.75 BC will continue to have the lowest minimum wage in the country.

Future increases will eventually take the minimum wage to \$10.25 next year.

B.C. Forum Annual General Meeting

All current BC FORUM members are invited to attend and participate in discussions and debates at our annual meeting:

- Wednesday, June 22, 2011
- Registration: 9:00 am
- Call to order: 9:30 am
- Firefighters Conference Centre,
6515 Bonsor Avenue, Burnaby (at Metrotown)



YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN BC FORUM:

1. Helps to build **solidarity across the generations**, strengthens the labour movement, and supports the fight for a civil society and social justice for retired workers, active workers who are 50 or older, and our families.
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4. Includes a **free subscription** to the BC FORUM newsletter, *The Advocate*, keeping you in touch with issues that affect retired workers and our families.

Keep building the movement – join or renew today!

BC FORUM is a registered non-profit society for retired union members, and active members age 50 and over. We are dedicated to representing the interests and well-being of members, their families and spouses.

Membership in BC FORUM allows you to realize the kind of savings on programs, services and products that are only possible through the power

of group negotiations.

Membership dues are \$20 a year or \$49 for three years. Your membership includes free coverage under BC FORUM's \$2,500 group accident insurance plan. Optional benefits include homeowner, tenant, extended health, dental, and travel insurance.

Members also have access to financial advice and planning, dis-

counts on selected travel packages and income tax services. Our newsletter, *The Advocate*, will inform you about current initiatives.

There are more than 100,000 retired union members in B.C. Together, we can be a powerful voice for the well-being of our families.

Join or renew by sending in the form below, or online at www.bcforum.ca.



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