

Advocate

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE B.C. FEDERATION OF RETIRED UNION MEMBERS

Vol. 15 No. 2 May, 2012

YOU'RE INVITED TO ATTEND

AGM will hear from top leaders and tackle some of the key issues facing retired workers

THREE OF THE TOP leaders of our movement in Canada and British Columbia will be sharing their ideas for a better future with members at BC FORUM's Annual General Meeting on June 13.

Ken Georgetti, President of the Canadian Labour Congress, will describe the harsh impact of the Harper government's recent budget and its decision to raise the retirement age to 67.

Adrian Dix, Leader of the B.C. New Democrats – fresh from convincing by-election victories in two former B.C. Liberal strongholds – will outline his positive alternatives for B.C. families as we prepare for a provincial election in May, 2013.

Jim Sinclair, President of the B.C. Federation of Labour, will discuss the challenges facing workers and retired workers alike, and how all of us – young and old – can meet the challenges by working together.

It's the first time that so many key leaders have addressed a BC FORUM AGM, and that underlines the fact that we're at a critical junction for the future of our nation and our province. Growing inequality has been fostered by governments that take basic services and pensions away from people and hand ever more generous tax giveaways to their wealthy



On June 13: Sign in, have a coffee, meet old friends, and make your voice heard!

corporate backers. This socially and economically harmful trend must be reversed. Inequality must be replaced with equity, respect and fairness.

With their wealth of hard-earned experience, BC FORUM members have an important role to play. Together, we can help ensure that our children and grandchildren will have the opportunity to realize their hopes and dreams.

"I strongly encourage all members to attend this important event," says Gerry Edwards, President of BC FORUM. "A lot can happen in the months leading up to the next provincial election. We need to make sure the voices of retired workers are heard loud and clear, so the issues that affect us and our families cannot be ignored. Please join us, and bring a friend."

Members will debate key issues such as public pensions and health care, and receive a report on current activities. All members in good standing have the right to vote at the AGM. Renewals and new memberships will be accepted at the sign-in desk.

Registration begins at 9:00 am, Wednesday, June 13, at the Firefighters' Conference Centre, 6515 Bonsor Ave., Burnaby. The AGM will be called to order at 9:30 am.

The conference centre is near SkyTrain's Metrotown Station. There's free parking at the adjacent Bay Parkade.

In this edition:

- Gerry Edwards reluctantly steps down as BC FORUM President..... 2
- Name change won't be enough to save BC Liberals 3
- Federal budget fails us all 4-5
- Working after 65 6-7
- Remembering Frank Kennedy..... 8
- DriveABLE unfair, disrespectful..... 10
- Is your membership about to expire? Renew today 12

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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 and soon to be retired union members.

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Harper may have fooled some people, some of the time...

By Gerry Edwards
President, BC FORUM

IT WAS HEARTENING to read, as this edition of The Advocate was being prepared for printing, that the federal NDP has moved into a statistical tie with the Harper Conservatives. The Nanos poll showed that Stephen Harper's "leadership" and "competence" ratings have dropped precipitously.

The number of undecided voters has also increased. This is usually a sign of further changes to come, since voters seldom move directly from one party to another without stopping in the undecided column on the way.

There are some very good reasons for Canadians to be upset with the Harper government, including the burgeoning cost of F-35 stealth fighter jets, the Pierre Poutine robocalls that tried to mislead voters, and the extra two years before workers will qualify for OAS and GIS, the most basic public pensions for the most needy seniors.

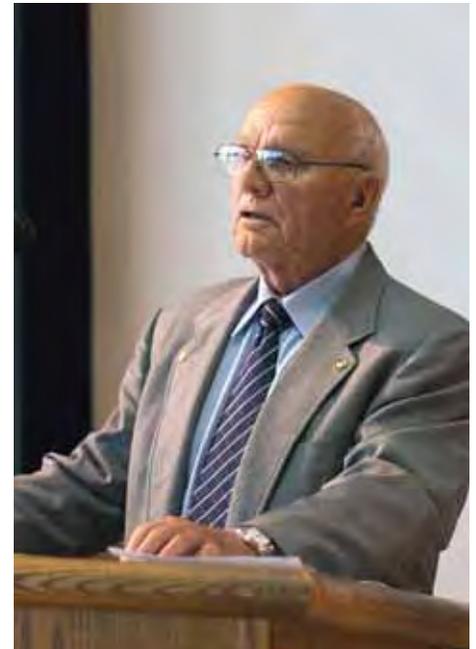
All of these issues are rooted in deception.

Throughout the last election, the government lied about the true cost of the fighter jets, and heaped scorn on the independent parliamentary budget officer when he said they would cost at least \$10 billion more.

Robocalls spread lies to people who had identified themselves to canvassers as non-Conservatives, falsely claiming to be calling from Elections Canada and telling voters their polling place had been moved.

And the prime minister himself has repeatedly assured us that public pensions would not be cut.

When you add in government actions like cutting and muzzling Environment Canada scientists whose research findings the government



doesn't want us to hear, it's abundantly clear that Mr. Harper doesn't trust voters with the truth. Now, increasingly, voters don't trust him.

My last column as President of BC FORUM

I DEEPLY REGRET that this is the last time that I will be discussing issues with you in this column. Over the last few months, I have had some health challenges which make it difficult for me to give as much time and energy as the position of President of BC FORUM demands and deserves.

Our organization has tremendous potential to bring together the voices of older and retired workers. Collectively, as we did through our unions, we have the power to contribute much to improve the lives of ordinary people in our province, and in our country.

While my own circumstances make it necessary for me to take a step back, I know that BC FORUM will be in the good hands of an active, energetic and involved board of directors. There is much to do. Let's get it done!

Trying to deny voters a real choice won't be enough to save the B.C. Liberals

At its heart, the rallying cry of Liberal backroom boys to “unify the right” is a rallying cry against choice

**By Jim Sinclair
President, B.C. Federation of Labour
Chair, BC FORUM**

FOLLOWING DEVASTATING by-election losses, powerful Liberal backroom boys sprang into action with a desperate message about vote splitting in the latest chapter of the Liberals' efforts to cling to power.

It would be laughable, except these aren't comedians and they aren't joking.

In the April 19 by-elections, more than 70 per cent of voters in former B.C. Liberal strongholds voted against that party.

Rather than taking such a crushing result as an indictment of their record and an overwhelming desire for change, Liberal MLAs and their backroom boys took it as a strong sign that they might need to change their name.

Apparently, they do think voters are that dumb.

Even worse, these Liberal insiders insulted and disrespected every voter in B.C. by castigating voters and assuming only the backroom boys have the right to decide what choices British Columbians will have at the ballot box. B.C. Conservative organizers woke up the day after the by-election to phone calls pushing them to get out of the B.C. Liberals' way, while voters were bombarded with Liberal talking points on vote splitting.

In general, British Columbians are fair-minded people who believe in public health care, a high quality public education system, and a gov-

ernment that looks out for vulnerable people. They also value a government that is honest and fair, that says what it will do and does what it says.

They haven't received any of that from the B.C. Liberal government.

Instead, they've had a government that has said one thing and done another. Whether because of their promise not to sell B.C. Rail or their insistence they wouldn't implement the HST, the B.C. Liberals have lost the trust of British Columbians.

British Columbians have a government that has made working and middle-class British Columbians worse off by piling on user fees and fare hikes while giving massive tax cuts to the richest British Columbians.

Premier Christy Clark campaigned on a promise to get rid of the HST and call an early election. Instead, she spent millions of taxpayer dollars on a futile referendum effort fighting to save the HST, and still hasn't called an election to seek a mandate.

Some believe she wanted to, but caved to pressure from the same B.C. Liberal backroom boys who are now desperate to reinvent their party to fool voters into leaving them in power.

Here's the point they are missing.

It's not just Clark, Finance Minister Kevin Falcon and the Liberal caucus voters are done with.

They are also done with the backroom boys, the friends and insiders getting richer and richer off the backs of taxpayers, while working and middle-class families struggle to make ends meet.

British Columbians are ready for real change, and that includes the 20 per cent of British Columbians who now say they will vote Conservative.

Whatever you think of John Cummins and the B.C. Conservatives, and I'm certainly no fan, they have every right to run candidates in by-elections and in the next provincial election.

No matter how strong the pressure tactics from the Liberals' backroom, Cummins is well advised not to fall victim to their overtures. If he does, he will most certainly see the little popularity he has built disappear more quickly than it came.

The B.C. Liberals can change their name and put on new faces, but they won't change who they are as British Columbians will see through it.

Meanwhile, Adrian Dix and the B.C. NDP are laying out a positive vision for British Columbia that will improve the investment climate in the province and make it easier for small businesses and families to make ends meet, while protecting the things we care about as British Columbians.

Dix promises to invest in skills training and education so that young people as well as older British Columbians displaced by changes in our economy can fill the job openings of tomorrow and earn good, family-supporting wages. These are the kinds of positive changes British Columbians want.

At its heart, the rallying cry of those Liberal backroom boys to “unify the right” is a rallying cry against choice.

It is born from the fear that if British Columbians are given a real choice, the backroom boys will lose power.

It's got nothing to do with what's good for British Columbians.

Whether the B.C. Liberal backroom boys like it or not, British Columbians are making our choice.

That choice is for real change.

Harper goes back on his word and pushes ahead with drastic changes to public pensions

We will not cut pensions.
We will not cut transfers
to the provinces for major
programs such as health
care.

– Stephen Harper,
June, 2011

THE CONGRESS OF Union Retirees of Canada (CURC) – the national voice of BC FORUM – says the Harper government’s attack on Old Age Security (OAS) is the equivalent of taking an axe to the retirement security of our children and grandchildren.

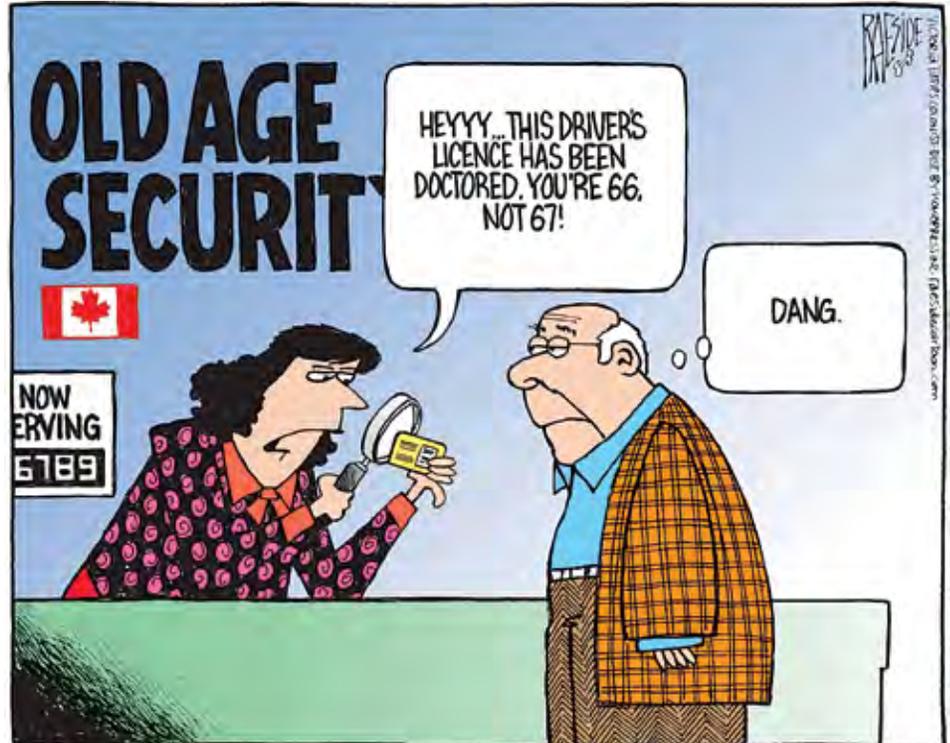
“The budget does little to assist young people today through affordable education and jobs, and it will penalize them when they do retire,” said CURC President Pat Kerwin.

He said instead of forcing Canadians to work longer before they can retire, the more logical approach would have been to make improvements to the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans.

Kerwin accused the Tories of blaming an ageing population for a lot of the problems facing Canadians. The cost of health care, he said, is another example of that. He urged the government to bring in a National Pharmacare program which would tackle the fastest growing element in health care costs over the past decade.

Kerwin said all Canadians should expect to be able to reap the benefits of living in a resource-rich, prosperous country, regardless of age, now and into the future.

“The Congress of Union Retirees of Canada will work with students and young workers to ensure that politicians understand our common concerns,” he said.



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“Reckless cuts” affect us all

NDP LEADER Thomas Mulcair has slammed the Conservatives for recklessly cutting vital services to Canadians, such as Old Age Security and health care.

“Stephen Harper promised jobs and growth, but delivered reckless cuts. There’s nothing (in the budget) on jobs, nothing on inequality and nothing to strengthen our front-line health services,” said Mulcair.

“Mr. Harper is once again looking out for his friends, while he ignores growing inequality.”

The budget outlines the Conservative plan to raise the OAS eligibility age from 65 to 67, forcing seniors to work two years longer to make ends meet. It also unilaterally changes the funding formula for federal health transfers, short-changing provinces by a whopping \$31 billion, opening the door to privatization and two-tier health care.

“The Conservatives ran an entire

election campaign without saying a word to Canadians about their plans to cut OAS or health transfers,” Mulcair said. “Clearly Mr. Harper is not a man of his word.”

As recently as last June, Mr. Harper stated in the House of Commons, “We will not cut pensions. We will not cut transfers to the provinces for major programs such as health care.”

Mulcair said New Democrats would oppose the Conservative budget unless it was amended to focus on the priorities of Canadians. New Democrats are calling for more targeted incentives to create good jobs, protect retirement security and to provide stable funding to allow provinces to hire more doctors and nurses.

“Conservatives want to balance the books on the backs of seniors who can’t retire with dignity, and families without a family doctor. New Democrats will hold them accountable for that,” said Mulcair.

Budget fails Canadians on jobs, pensions

Canadian Labour Congress says the middle class is under attack

THE PRESIDENT of the Canadian Labour Congress says the federal budget tabled on March 29 has failed Canadians by destroying valuable public services and jobs and attacking pensions.

"The government could have used this budget to help struggling middle class and working Canadians," said Georgetti. "It chose to not to do so."

Georgetti said the government has borrowed billions of dollars to spend on tax giveaways to big business who

don't need the money and who are sitting on the cash rather than investing in creating jobs.

"Now the government wants to pay for those tax breaks by making drastic spending cuts.

"This will destroy thousands of jobs and will result in the loss of important public services – everything from food inspection, to environmental programs, to processing Employment Insurance claims."

The budget made some small good news announcements, but these were greatly outweighed by deep cuts to federal government programs.

The CLC president strongly criti-

cized cutbacks to Old Age Security eligibility to seniors.

"Governments have a role to play in helping Canadians to meet their basic needs during retirement.

"This budget should have been used to improve the retirement security of Canadians, not to undermine it."

Georgetti said he was disappointed that the government did not move to improve access to the Employment Insurance program.

"Only 39.5% of unemployed Canadian workers are able to collect regular EI benefits. That is a scandal and it has to be fixed. These workers, who paid their premiums in good faith, need EI to tide them over until they find new jobs," he said.

Canada's pensions are too meager, not too generous

AN UMBRELLA GROUP that brings together about 80 organizations, including BC FORUM, has expressed profound disappointment in the Harper government's plan to raise the retirement age and thereby undermine the financial security of thousands of Canadians.

"Canada's public pension system is already among the stingiest in the developed nations of the world," said Gudrun Langolf, first vice president of the B.C. Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations (COSCO).

"Thousands of retired Canadians live in poverty, including many women. Old Age Security is our most fundamental safety net. It needs to be improved, because Canada's public pensions are already too meager.

"I fear, if they are raising the age, that it won't be long before we see further cuts in these inadequate pensions."

Langolf pointed out that Canada spends far less than the OECD average on pensions. She noted that a study by Canada's parliamentary

budget officer found that OAS is sustainable with a retirement age of 65 – indeed, he found there was room to improve the program by 0.4 percent of GDP each year.

Langolf added that expert advice, commissioned by the Harper government itself, found there is no financial need to raise the retirement age.

The report by Edward Whitehouse, a pension policy expert with the World Bank and the OECD, concluded, "There is no pressing financial or fiscal need to increase pension ages in the foreseeable future."

"I call on all Members of Parliament, in every party, to work to improve pensions, and to lift pensioners out of poverty, not to condemn future retirees to more financial insecurity.

"People are already being squeezed by record household debt, low interest on savings, risky markets, and the rising cost of living. It is profoundly disappointing that our federal government would make things even worse for them," said Langolf.

A budget from the 1930s

ALL CANADIANS WILL pay the price for a federal budget that will result in significant job losses, weaker environmental protection, and unnecessary cuts to cherished public services, says the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

The CCPA says the government's three rounds of spending cuts will result in the loss of over 70,000 full-time jobs (35,000 in the public sector and 37,000 in the private sector) and could raise the unemployment rate to 7.8%.

"This may be a 2012 budget but it's got the 1930s written all over it," says CCPA Senior Economist David Macdonald.

"We are dismantling public programs and peeling back income supports such as Old Age Security without asking profitable corporations and the wealthy among us to do their part. We saw a similar story unfold in the 1930s and it didn't end well. History is repeating itself."

Working after age 65: What's at stake?

This article is extracted from a technical paper prepared by Angella MacEwen, an economist and CPPA research associate. To read the full document, please visit www.policyalternatives.ca.

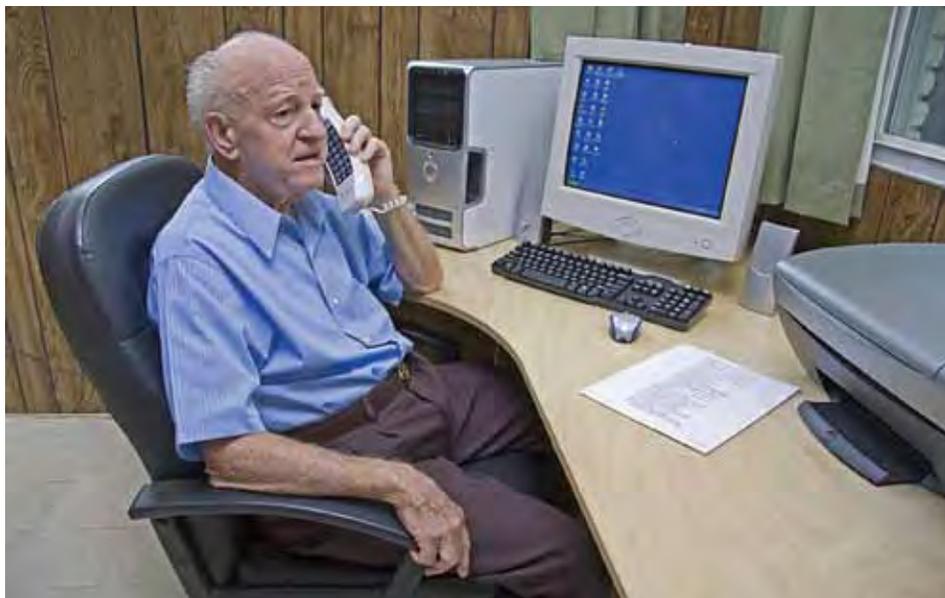
IT IS ARGUED BY SOME that eligibility for Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) at age 65 discourages older Canadians from remaining in the workforce, and that we need to keep them working longer to avoid present and future labour shortages and a sharp rise in the so-called “dependency” ratio (the ratio of retirees to the working-age population). Accordingly, the federal government proposes to phase-in an increase in the age of eligibility from age 65 to age 67, affecting Canadians who are now 54 and younger.

The purpose of this paper is to look at some of the realities of working past age 65, and to examine what an increase in the OAS eligibility age will mean for those who will have no choice but to work longer in the future.

Not everyone can postpone retirement

SOME CANADIANS are forced to retire early for health reasons, and extending the age of eligibility for OAS and GIS would have especially severe consequences for persons who would not be able to replace lost OAS and GIS benefits with earnings.

A 2008 Statistics Canada survey of older workers (55+) found that only 30% had retired because they were financially ready. One in five (20%) retired because they had been displaced by layoffs or plant closures. It is important to note that half of older workers who found other employment after layoffs or plant closures faced significantly reduced wages (at least 25% less than their previous job).



In the last decade, the number of Canadians aged 65 to 70 who are still working – often because they have no other choice – has more than doubled.

More than 50% of fully retired workers over 55 have three or more chronic health conditions (such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or arthritis), and one in four fully retired workers over 55 list poor health as their reason for retirement. A 2008 Statistics Canada survey of older workers (55+) found that 75% of those unemployed and not looking for work cited long-term disability as the reason. An additional 14% cited short-term disability as a barrier to paid work.

Another study on how health affects retirement age found that physically demanding and stressful jobs lead to earlier retirement. Physically demanding jobs are more likely to influence men's retirement decisions, and stressful work environments with limited control over decision-making are more likely to influence women's retirement decisions. Many older workers will have difficulty remaining in the workforce due to poor health, even if they are not financially ready to retire.

Other older workers — about 7% of current retirees — retired to pro-

vide care for a partner.

Some voluntary and involuntary retirement can be prevented through positive measures such as by assisting older workers who have been laid off, and by encouraging employers to provide a more positive, flexible, and supportive work environment. But the “stick” of raising the eligibility age for OAS and GIS will penalize a significant group of older workers in ill health.

Supporting seniors who want to work

A COMMONLY SUGGESTED way for employers to retain seniors is to offer flexible work arrangements, including working from home, part-time work, flexible job hours, extended leaves of absence, job-sharing, and phased retirement. Studies suggest that surprisingly few Canadian employers have adopted these kinds of policies.

Another critical component is allowing workers to receive their pension alongside their wage. This allows workers to reduce their work

hours without financial hardship, and allows employers to retain valuable older workers who might otherwise have fully retired.

Another commonly cited barrier to seniors' labour force participation is negative stereotypes of older workers, with about half of seniors polled indicating that they felt age discrimination in the workplace was common. The report of a 2008 HRSDC expert panel on older workers recommended that the federal government take on a public awareness campaign to combat negative stereotypes of older workers.

Older workers who are displaced from the labour force because of plant-closure or layoff often face longer periods of unemployment than younger workers, end up in lower paying jobs, or retire earlier than they otherwise would have. Creative job-matching, skills-matching, and retraining programs would help address the barriers that displaced older workers encounter. One example is the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce pilot project Third Quarter, which matches seniors and employers using an online database with an emphasis on seniors' skills rather than occupation.

Conclusion

SENIORS CONTRIBUTE significantly to Canadian life through paid and unpaid work. When Canadians are healthy, many are already delaying retirement and choosing to work longer. Some professional and managerial workers choose to work longer. Others do so because they do not have sufficient savings to retire.

An important subset of seniors over age 65 are working part-time and in self-employment, and also have low incomes from work. Delaying the age of eligibility for OAS and GIS will result in significantly reduced incomes for those who are unable to replace OAS and GIS income from earnings in low wage jobs. It would take very considerable hours in low wage jobs



Many are forced to work because they have lost their workplace pension.

or from self-employment to replace the maximum OAS and GIS benefit

of about \$14,000 per year for individuals, or even to replace the basic OAS benefit of just over \$5,000 per year. Raising the age of eligibility is also problematic for seniors who are in very physically demanding and stressful jobs, and for those in ill health who are unable to continue in paid work.

Some people, most often professionals and managers who are in good health and able to find work which suits their needs and interests, do willingly work past age 65. Others can be encouraged to work longer through positive workplace policies.

Choosing to work longer is one thing, but forcing Canadians without workplace pensions or large savings to work full-time past age 65 is unfair, especially given the high probability that the jobs many are able to find will be part-time and low paid.

Quick facts about working after 65

- The OAS and GIS combined today provide one third of the income of all seniors aged over 65, and fully one half of the incomes of seniors with individual incomes of less than \$20,000.
- One in four (24%) persons aged 65 to 70 is still working, up from 11% in 2000.
- Four in ten (39%) workers aged 65 to 69 (32% of men and 51% of women in that age group) work part-time, compared to just 12% of so-called "core-age" workers aged 25 to 54.
- Forty percent of workers over 65 are self-employed.
- Half of self-employed workers over 65 earn less than \$5,000 per year.
- Fully one in three or 33% of employees over 65 are low-wage — defined as earning less than two-thirds of the median hourly wage.
- A 2008 Statistics Canada survey of older workers (55+) found that only 30% had retired because they were financially ready.
- More than 50% of fully retired workers over 55 have three or more chronic health conditions (such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or arthritis), and one in four fully retired workers over 55 list poor health as their reason for retirement.
- Delaying the age of eligibility for OAS and GIS will result in significantly reduced incomes for those who are unable to replace OAS/GIS income from earnings in low wage jobs. It would take considerable hours in low wage jobs or from self-employment to replace the maximum OAS/GIS benefit of about \$14,000 per year for individuals, or even to replace the basic OAS benefit of just over \$5,000 per year.

Hundreds pay tribute to Frank Kennedy

SEVERAL HUNDRED longshore workers, family and community members gathered at the Maritime Centre in Vancouver on Sunday, March 4 to honor the life of BC FORUM director and ILWU leader Frank Kennedy who died Feb. 18 after a long illness. He was 83.

More than a dozen speakers recalled Kennedy's life-long dedication to workers, peace and social justice – work he continued long after his retirement through his active involvement in BC FORUM.

ILWU Canada President Tom Dufresne recalled Kennedy's determination to improve the lives of members and build a stronger union movement in Canada.

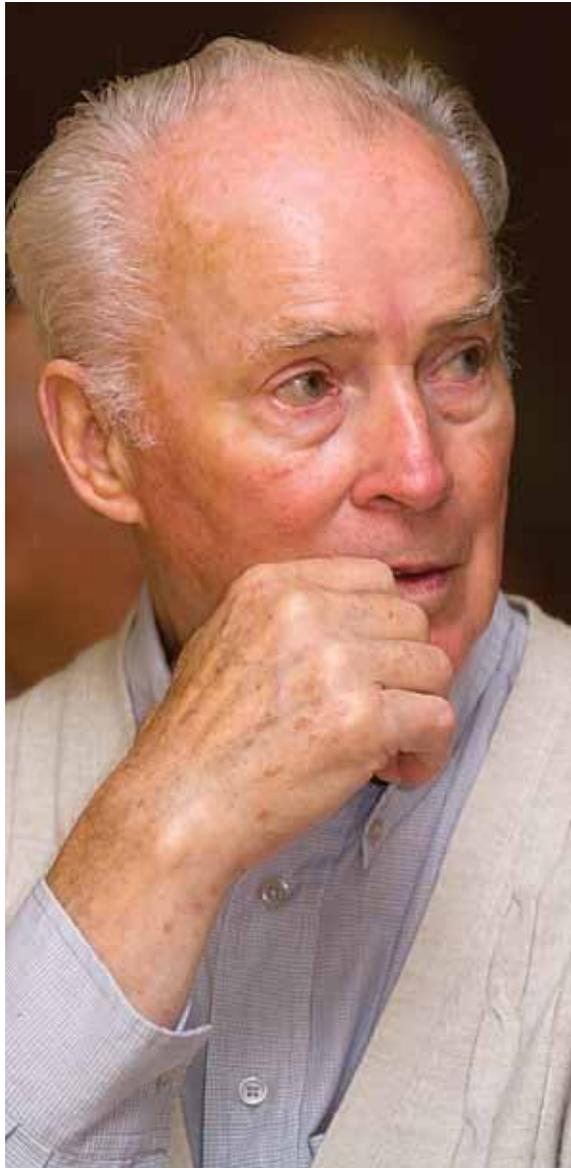
"Frank was a man for all seasons because he worked so well with all kinds of people – longshore workers, young activists, pensioners and politicians," said Dufresne, adding that Kennedy's long history of working with peace and social justice groups has left a gap that's hard to fill.

"If he were still with us, I'm sure he'd be helping young people in the Occupy movement learn how to work more effectively with unions," said Dufresne.

Kennedy's longshore career began in 1951, when the Vancouver union was still affiliated with the ILA. He played a key role in moving members to affiliate with the ILWU, then helped consolidate many smaller Vancouver area locals into Local 500.

"Frank understood those changes would make our union stronger, and he was right," recalled his good friend and fellow union leader Dave Lomas, who helped organize the memorial and recorded a four-hour interview with Kennedy before he died.

"I learned a lot about labour history and the union movement during my 45 years on the waterfront, and I owe much of it to Frank," said



Frank Kennedy: leader, mentor, and a life-long advocate for working families, peace and social justice.

Lomas. "I was working but not involved with the union until Frank encouraged me and many others to get involved."

Many speakers noted that Kennedy was a great mentor who excelled at training new leaders. Others pointed to Kennedy's relaxed and calm demeanor – especially in times of crisis and conflict – that made him a popular person to consult during difficult times.

He served in a wide variety of posts, including President of Local 500, Secretary-Treasurer of ILWU Canada, Trustee of the Pension and Welfare Plans, International Executive Board, and Secretary-Treasurer of the Vancouver and District Labour Council.

In a tribute posted at rabble.ca, Fred Wilson of the CEP said Kennedy left an enduring legacy.

"In 1968 he was chairperson of the (VDLC Committee) that coordinated the labour movement's civic politics. Frank convened and chaired the conference that created the Committee of Progressive Electors (COPE) which went on to shape progressive politics in Vancouver for 40 years. At various times, Frank was President of COPE, a candidate and a negotiator with the Civic NDP and others over the 'labour slate' that elected majorities to Vancouver City Council, School Board and Park Board," said Wilson.

In the 1980s, the labour council worked with peace movement groups to create

the End the Arms Race Coalition, and Kennedy served for many years as its president. The coalition organized massive peace marches that brought more than 100,000 people into the streets of Vancouver.

"Frank was one of those rare and treasured leaders who don't come often enough, but leave behind a rich legacy for us to learn from," said ILWU Secretary-Treasurer Willie Adams.



B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members

Mark your calendar now! 2012 Annual General Meeting

- Wednesday, June 13 – 9:30 am to noon
- Firefighters’ Conference & Banquet Centre
- 6515 Bonsor Avenue, Burnaby, B.C.

Hear great speakers like **Ken Georgetti, Adrian Dix** and **Jim Sinclair**. Join us in debating resolutions on future action as we work together to build a better province for older workers, retired workers and our families.

- **Easy access** to the Firefighters Conference Centre (corner of Bonsor and Bennett) via Sky Train – Metrotown Station. There’s also free parking at the adjacent Bay Parkade.
- **Coffee** will be served at 9:00 am. Come early and enjoy a chat with other BC FORUM members, guests and directors.
- **Current members** of BC FORUM will have the right to vote at the AGM. We will be accepting renewals and new memberships at the sign-in desk prior to the meeting.
- **Great door prizes!** Please join us, and feel free to bring a guest.

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Concerns mount over costly DriveABLE tests

- Experts question validity of computer test
- Older drivers object to paying private company \$300 plus HST to take it

IT'S INTIMIDATING, expensive and unfair. It may be medically and scientifically unreliable. And if you flunk the test, you move from independence to dependence for everyday tasks like buying groceries.

Small wonder there's a rising wave of anger against the DriveABLE computer test developed, and now administered for profit, by a husband and wife team from Alberta.

Throughout British Columbia, NDP MLAs have hosted community meetings to discuss the issue with seniors and their families.

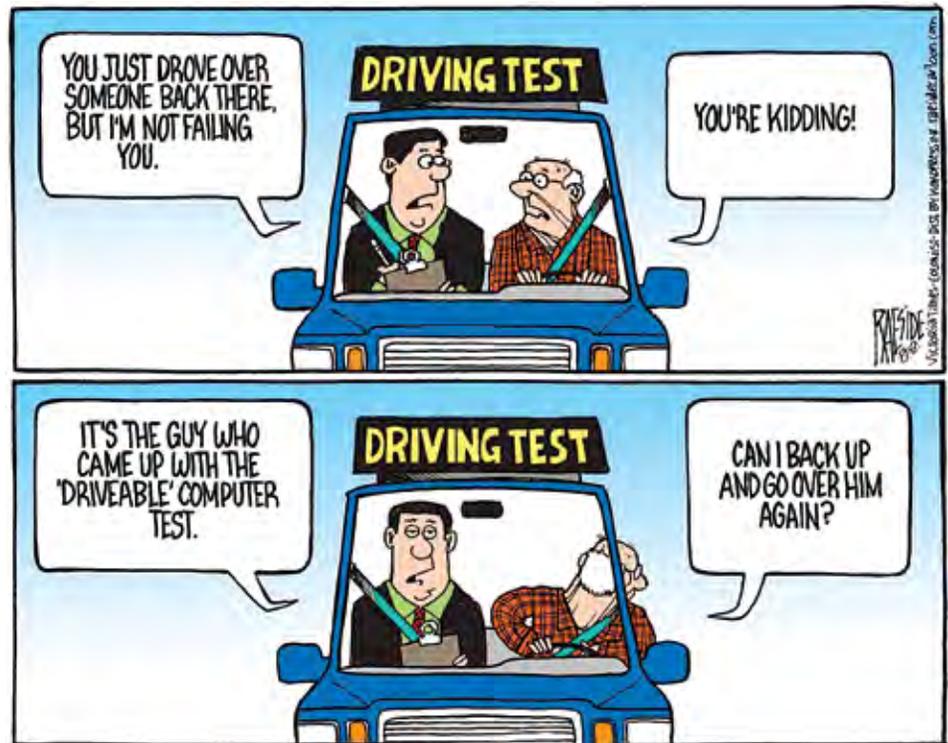
In Invermere last month, several speakers said the test seemed to be engineered for seniors to fail. It depends on touch screen computers, a technology that some seniors encounter for the first time on the day of the test.

"I don't think it's just. I really think it's degrading for anyone to be put up against the unknown," said Jane Jefferson, who recently accompanied her 90 year old father when he took the test.

And that's another key issue. You're advised to bring another driver with you in case this private company decides to take away your license.

It's worst in rural areas. In East Kootenay, for example, the nearest testing centres are in Kelowna and Nelson. Suddenly you have to add to the \$300 cost of the test the additional cost of gas, food, and a hotel room for two people.

Gary Coons, NDP MLA for the North Coast, says his constituents also face a considerable burden.



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Residents of Haida Gwaii have to travel to Prince George for a DriveABLE assessment.

"That's a minimum five day return trip. With ferries, fuel, motels, meals and mandatory escort, it's a cost of more than \$1,500. It's unacceptable," Coons told the Legislature.

Bill Routley, NDP MLA for Cowichan Valley, tabled a petition signed by almost 1,000 constituents who are fed up with the way the government is trying to take away seniors' independence.

"This petition is regarding the treatment of seniors at the hands of DriveABLE. Our seniors want a fair process, and they want to be able to take their test in their community. They want a road test," Routley told the Legislature, before he was cut off by the Speaker who didn't want to hear any more.

An article in the Journal of the Canadian Medical Association, printed April 19, 2011, questioned the scientific validity of the test.

Programs like DriveABLE should not be the sole determinant of a senior's capacity to drive, said Dr. Malcolm Man-Son-Hing, a geriatrician in Ontario.

"It can give some indication, but you can't hang your hat on any single test out there. It really is a clinical judgment," said Hing. "Who else is in a better position to make that call than their physician?"

"None of us believe that any person should be allowed to continue to drive if they can no longer do so safely," Norm Macdonald, NDP MLA, told the Invermere meeting.

"We all accept that we need to have a way to ensure that drivers' abilities are assessed as they age. But people in this area will not accept that seniors should have their licenses removed improperly or unfairly. It is the responsibility of government to provide a fair and accurate assessment program for drivers. There is no proof that DriveABLE is meeting this standard," said Macdonald.

A CASUALTY IN THE CLASS WAR:

Canada's public health care services

THESE CLASS WARFARE, all right, but it's my class, the rich class that's making war. And we're winning," says Warren Buffett, one of the richest men in the world.

In his latest policy note, Robert G. Evans, a health care expert who describes himself as 'the undisciplined economist,' says the Occupy Wall Street movement suggests that people are finally catching on.

Evans says that by choosing the phrase *making* war, "Buffett meant that there was deliberate intent and agency behind the huge transfer of wealth, since 1980, from the 99% to the 1%."

"Nor is the war metaphorical. There are real casualties, even if no body bags. Sadly, much Canadian commentary on inequality is pitifully

naive or deliberately obfuscatory. The 1% have captured national governments," says Evans.

A cross-national study of income inequality by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, published in 2011, found that the richest 1% of Americans took 17% of pre-tax income in 2005.

"As one would expect, the awful Americans top the income inequality chart... But 'kinder gentler' Canada? Yep, the bronze," says Evans. The top 1% in Canada take 12.7% of income.

The trend of increasing inequality is similar in both countries. The wealth and income of the 1% has increased substantially while those in the middle have seen their incomes fall.

Evans says capture of the national

governments is a central feature of the strategy to redistribute wealth from the many to the few.

"The process of capture has been quite different in the two countries – much quieter and less disruptive in Canada. The 1% in Canada are stealth fighters. And perhaps for that reason, very few Canadians have connected the dots to figure out that there is, in fact, a war on," says Evans.

How will the 1% agenda affect Medicare?

Stephen Harper has quietly slipped his knife into the heart of Medicare by ending conditional cash transfers, critical to the maintenance of universal standards of care, says Evans. It will take time, but it would kill medicare, creating higher costs and less access for 99% of us .



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TRADE AGREEMENT WITH EU

Government must put its cards on the table

Canadians have a right to know how the agreement will impact health care services

OUR HEALTH CARE system is not for sale and under no circumstances should Canada sign a free trade agreement at the expense of our public system. This is the main conclusion of the first of a series of NDP roundtables on the potential impacts of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with the European Union. The goal of this series of discussions is to make up for the lack of debate in the House of Commons on an agreement that will affect the public services Canadians depend on.

"The Conservatives are surreptitiously negotiating a free trade agreement which could have irreversible effects on our Canadian health services," said NDP Deputy Health critic, Anne Minh-Thu Quach.

"By promoting deregulation, they could allow for more private sector involvement and threaten the very survival of our public system. Health procurement must be withdrawn

from the negotiating table."

Generic drugs are another topic of concern. Experts predict that drug costs could skyrocket if intellectual property rights are prolonged as demanded by the European Union, costing Canadians up to \$3 billion annually.

"The EU proposals would further protect profits for European phar-

maceutical multinationals, at the expense of Canadian consumers," said Brian Masse, NDP International Trade critic.

"Why does the Conservative government want to make us pay more for prescription drugs when we're already among those who pay the highest prices in the world for these products?"

It's your life – plan ahead and make your wishes known

IT'S ONE OF the most difficult decisions facing caregivers. It can cause tremendous stress within families. What level of care and medical intervention would their loved one want if he or she were able to decide?

On September 1, 2011, advance directives became a new legal option for capable adults to do advance care planning, and to make their wishes known for their future health care treatment.

Advance care planning is the process of thinking about, and writing down, your wishes or instructions in

the event you become incapable of deciding for yourself.

More information about advance care planning, including how to make an advance care plan, name a representative in a Representation Agreement, and to make an advance directive is available at the website: www.seniorsbc.ca/legal/healthdecisions.

BC FORUM members can request a copy of the planning guide from our office. Copies of the guide will also be available at our June 13 AGM.



Please check the expiry date on your mailing label. If your membership is due you can also renew at www.bcforum.ca. BCGEU, HSA, COPE and UFCW will pay first year BC FORUM dues for qualified members.



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