

Advocate

Official news magazine of the B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members (BC FORUM)



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Planning for a better future

WORKING TOGETHER, we can do a lot to affect change in this country," Diane Wood, President, told activists who gathered June 11 for BC FORUM's Annual General Meeting.

Introducing debate on the volunteer Board of Directors' report on activities, Wood said the organization has been keeping right-wing governments' "toes to the fire" and speaking out on the issues that affect older and retired workers and our families.

BC FORUM is currently preparing to fully participate in this fall's municipal elections and the 2015 federal election.

Delegates passed four resolutions. They called for elimination of MSP premiums. They defended public health care and condemned private clinics. They called on the federal government to reverse its plans to cut postal service. And they supported B.C. teachers in their dispute with the provincial government.

In addition to BC FORUM members, the meeting was attended by four BC NDP MLAs: Raj Chouhan, Burnaby-Edmonds; Katrine Conroy, Kootenay West; Kathy Corrigan, Burnaby-Deer Lake; and Jenny Kwan, Vancouver-Mount Pleasant.

Leaders of the labour movement also attended in force, including Cindy Oliver, President of the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators; Stephanie Smith, newly-elected President of the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union; and Jim Sinclair, President of the B.C. Federation of Labour.

The Advocate's coverage of the annual meeting begins on page 7.



Diane Wood, President of BC FORUM, chaired the proceedings as members made key policy decisions and heard from political leaders, labour leaders and defenders of public health care at this year's annual general meeting.

CIVIC ELECTION NOV. 15

Time to get active

WE NEED TO ELECT municipal leaders who will support working people, retirees and our families. The decisions of local governments and school boards have a direct impact on our lives. And they can lead the way on a host of vital issues ranging from fair wages to climate change.

Labour Councils throughout B.C. have been gearing up for the election for months, interviewing candidates, running training sessions, and lining up volunteers. Labour Council endorsement of a candidate is not given lightly. It's a thorough and meaningful process. Since there are often many candidates on the ballot, with no stated political affiliation, it's a process that few of us could do on our own.

On Saturday, Nov. 15, BC FORUM urges you to get out and vote for the Labour Council endorsed candidates in your community. Between now and then, candidates need volunteers. Try it. You'll enjoy it!

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Advocate

The Advocate is published by the B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members. BC FORUM – supported by WE Consulting and Benefits and affiliated with the B.C. Federation of Labour – is dedicated to representing the interests of members and their families, continuing into retirement the relationship they enjoyed with the union movement.

#200-5118 Joyce Street
Vancouver, BC V5R 4H1
Toll-free 1.800.896.5678
Tel. 604.688.4565
bcforum@bcfed.ca

Editor: Soren Bech

soren.bech@gmail.com

2102 Porter Road, Roberts Creek,
B.C., V0N 2W5

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In this edition

There are many challenges facing workers who are hoping to retire in the near future. To help individuals in that situation, BC FORUM is working with affiliated unions to deliver a two-day pre-retirement planning course.

Our story is on page 4.

Also in this edition:

- Seniors campaign to defend public health care 6
- Full coverage of the BC FORUM annual meeting 7 - 9
- Target benefits: Another attack on workers' pensions 12
- Time to renew? Please use this convenient form 15
- Harper continues to try to intimidate and silence critics 16

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The dream never dies

By Diane Wood
President, BC FORUM

GERRY EDWARDS' dream was simple to state, much harder to achieve. Social justice. A civil society. Respect for working people.

Throughout his life, he worked towards achieving that dream for his family, for his union sisters and brothers, and for all Canadians. He is known in the movement as a true union and social activist.

Gerry began his working life as a heavy equipment operator, helping to build the Trans-Canada highway. He subsequently worked at a pipe and tube mill in Regina where he became active in the Steelworkers Union. He served for 12 years as President of the 2,000 member Regina Local of the union.

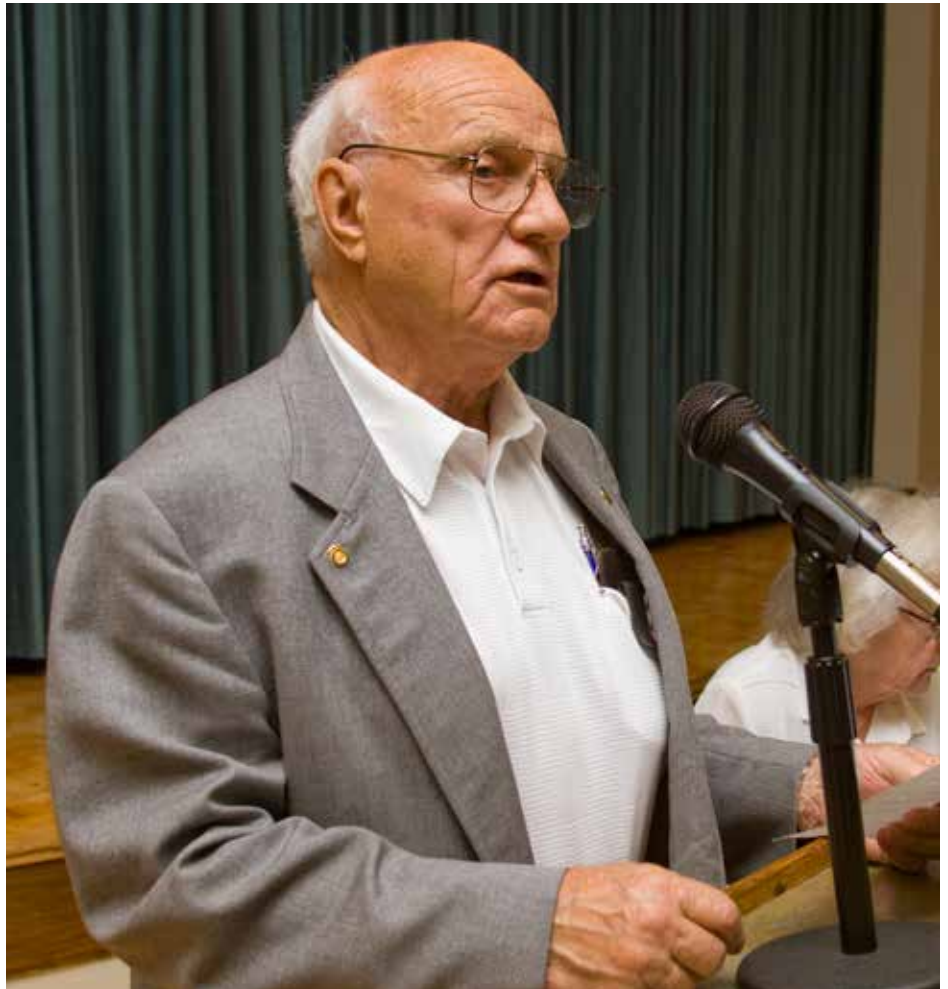
An exceptional organizer, he joined the union's staff, serving in many roles for 20 years. Before his retirement in 1998, he was the Steelworkers' area supervisor for B.C. and the Northwest Territories.

His work didn't end at retirement. Gerry became the union's representative on the BC FORUM board of directors in 1996, assuming roles ranging from Chairperson of the resolutions committee to First Vice-President and President.

During his time as President, BC FORUM was deeply involved in the fight against the HST, Harper's plans to undermine public pensions, and the federal election that vaulted the NDP into the official opposition.

A lifelong member of the CCF and its successor the NDP, Gerry worried that the Harper government is unravelling the social contract, criticizing its "continuing series of tax giveaways to corporations and the wealthy."

"The income gap between rich and poor is growing wider," he wrote



Gerald (Gerry) William Dale Edwards, 1934 – 2014

in March, 2012.

"Retired workers, and workers close to retirement, are already being squeezed by risky markets, low interest rates on savings, stagnant incomes, and the rising cost of everyday household expenses...."

"Surely some of the elite could be asked to pay a fair share of taxes. And surely public pensions are at least as important as prisons and fighter jets."

Later in 2012, Gerry reluctantly stepped down from his duties as President of BC FORUM due to ill health.

"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," he said.

"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!" he said.

Gerry died on August 31, a week short of his 80th birthday. Predeceased by his wife Sharon, he is survived by his daughter, five sons, ten grandchildren, six great grandchildren, nieces and nephews – and by his dream for a better world.

What are you doing after work?

I WENT IN not knowing if I had enough money to retire, and came out knowing that I had a lot more work to do – and not just on money – before I retire.”

That’s what Canadian Media Guild member Terri Theodore, a news editor with Canadian Press, says she learned during a pre-retirement course delivered by BC FORUM in Vancouver.

“*What Are You Doing After Work?*” was developed by the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC). The course is delivered by instructors who are retired and who can share personal experiences of living life after work.

As Terri Theodore discovered during the two-day course, there’s a lot to think about when you are considering retirement.

“The worksheets made me think about how much I spend, where I spend it and what I need to do to

save for retirement. Another worksheet also got me thinking about if I’ll be living in the same home a few years from now, never mind when I turn 65.”

She says the advice on financial advisors will come in very handy.



Participants say they learned a lot of things – and also had a lot of fun at the BC FORUM course on pre-retirement planning.

Terri says the instructors also brought up things that hadn’t occurred to her including, “the need to widen my social circle, thinking about how I’ll occupy my time when I retire and where I’ll live.”

The coordination and the in-

structors were provided by BC FORUM, the B.C. Branch of CURC.

Terri Theodore recommends that if you’re thinking about retirement you should also think about taking the course.

“While I know I have a lot of work to do to get to retirement, this course has sent me in the right direction. I have already recommended it to my co-workers, and won’t hesitate to recommend the course to others.”

BC FORUM offers the course free of charge to affiliated unions and union pension plans. We ask only that you cover the instructors’ travel expenses, room rental, lunches and coffee breaks for participants.

To obtain more information, to book the course, or to discuss how the course can be adapted to provide maximum benefit to union members, please contact BC FORUM at 604 688-4565, 1 800 896-5678, or bcforum@bcfed.ca.

Influencing public policy

EVERY MEMBER of BC FORUM helps to ensure that the voices of older and retired workers are heard on public policy issues that affect us and our families.

Our organization is affiliated with the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC), and BC FORUM President Diane Wood sits on the Executive Council.

At a recent CURC meeting in Toronto, Wood took the opportunity to discuss key issues with Irene Mathysen, the Official Opposition critic for seniors (see photo right).

Such personal meetings strengthen the advocacy work we do through written briefs and presentations, and through our alliances with other groups that share our goals.



Photo by Lynn Simmons

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Working to protect and improve public health care for all Canadians

As a federal election looms, seniors mobilize to strengthen Medicare

By JoAnn Lauber

AS THE FEDERAL government begins to unveil its “treats” and promises prior to the 2015 election, citizens of Canada look on with dismay as no mention is made of solid improvements to our public health care system.

There is no mention of plans to protect and reform Medicare, no mention of a possible national pharmaceutical plan that would save us billions of dollars every year, no mention of a national seniors health care strategy on the horizon.

It is rumored that a budgetary surplus, even tax breaks, will likely be announced just before the writ is dropped.

According to Adrienne Silnicki, Executive Director of the Canadian Health Coalition, “A federal surplus is costing us Medicare.”

Speaking to the convention of the National Pensioners Federation in Saskatoon on September 18, 2014, Silnicki said, “The changes to the Canada Health Transfer (dictated by the Conservative Government in December 2011) will mean a loss of \$36 billion to health care over the next 10 years and growing disparity in health care delivery between provinces.” By 2024, every province will lose billions in health care funding.

“For decades,” Silnicki stated, “Canadians have been witnessing the federal abdication from public health care.”

Instead of fulfilling its rightful role of leader in public health care, the Conservative government is re-



Adrienne Silnicki, the new Executive Director of the Canadian Health Coalition, told the National Pensioners Federation that the federal government is abdicating its responsibilities for public health care.

ducing funding and withdrawing from its leadership responsibilities.

These include coordinating health care standards and innovations, implementing best practices and demanding accountability for health care funds transferred to provinces.

Canadians expect more.

Trusted nation-wide surveys continue to show that the main concern for aging citizens, indeed, for all Canadian citizens, is the stability and security of Medicare.

Yet no new health care agreement has been forged between the federal and provincial governments to ensure that Medicare is there for us and for generations to come.

To press Ottawa to pay attention to the health of our health care system, groups of constituents, since the beginning of the year, have made visits to 33 of BC's 36 Members of Parliament.

Representing COSCO and its affiliates, including BC FORUM, the National Association of Federal Retirees, the BC Retired Teachers Association, and others, we seniors asked our elected officials to do everything possible at the national level to pro-

tect and enhance public health care delivery.

But we must do more.

Now, with the federal election almost upon us, we want our political parties to embed plans in their political platforms which would protect, strengthen and expand public Medicare.

And we, personally, can each do something to “Keep the Heart in Medicare”:

- Take a moment to make your views known by answering a short “Save Medicare” Survey. It can be found on the website home pages of the BCRTA (bcрта.ca) or FORUM (bcforum.ca) or COSCO (coscobc.ca). The survey can be filled in on-line.
- Get informed. The “Advocate’s Kit” on the BCRTA website home page has lots of pertinent, accessible information assembled from a variety of sources.
- Talk to your family, friends, and neighbours about the need to protect Medicare and to vote in the 2015 election.
- Meet or write your local MPs. Let them know that Medicare will be in our minds when we vote in 2015. (National Medicare Week is November 23 to 29th.)
- Join the campaign at healthcoalition.ca

Each one of us, individually voicing our concerns, can make a difference. Olivia Chow, reflecting on the significant role of citizens, says: “We (politicians) are just the conduit. It’s people who make change.”

JoAnn Lauber is a key organizer in the campaign by seniors’ groups to defend public health care and “Keep the Heart in Medicare.”

A call to action for seniors

THE BC FORUM board of directors has issued a strong call to action. The board's annual report to members notes that the labour movement, workers, and retired workers are under constant attack from right-wing governments.

"We must work together to fight back," says the report.

The report says the Harper government is refusing to accept its responsibility to take a leadership role on Medicare, threatens retirement security, and is cutting public services such as postal service.

The BC Liberal government has increased regressive taxes such as MSP premiums to the point where the rich now pay a lower share of income in taxes than everyone else.

"Retired workers can be a powerful voice for political change. We vote. We believe in a civil society. And there are more of us every day," says the report.

"BC FORUM is a vehicle to bring together retired workers. Like the labour movement itself, our strength depends on our numbers.

"We must continue to sign up more older workers and retired workers. We ask for your help to make it happen."

The report asks every BC FORUM member "to help us grow stronger by signing up a friend, relative or co-worker.

"Remember that membership is open to all members of unions affiliated with the B.C. Federation of Labour who are aged 50 or more, not just retirees."

You can use the membership application on page 15, or sign up at www.bcforum.ca.



Conroy calls for better services for the elderly

KATRINE CONROY, as the BC Official Opposition's spokesperson on seniors' issues, delivered a keynote speech that covered a wide range of issues, and also took questions from BC FORUM delegates.

She noted that B.C. remains the only province that charges MSP premiums to seniors, and that increases in ferry rates, coupled with cuts in service, have hit seniors particularly hard.

Conroy said that the creation of a Seniors' Advocate position is a real win – following two private members' bill introduced by the NDP and tenacious lobbying by seniors. However, she added, it is frustrating that the position is not independent

of the government and the new advocate "will need to hear from all of us."

She also called for improvements in home support and end-of-life care, and the introduction of "dying with dignity" legislation.

"We should be allowed to choose the way that we want to die," said Conroy.

In July, BC NDP Leader John Horgan assigned Conroy to be the critic for interior economic development, the Columbia River Treaty and Columbia Power.

Maurine Karagianis, MLA for Esquimalt – Royal Roads, is the new spokesperson on seniors issues.

Medicare: threats continue to mount

IN THE COURTS, and in the halls of power in Ottawa, the threats to public health care – Canadians' most highly valued social program – continue to mount relentlessly.

The Harper government refuses to renegotiate a National Health Accord. By doing so, it has abandoned the federal leadership role in Medicare and started us down a road that will lead to a patchwork of different care in different provinces.

Rick Turner, Co-Chair of the B.C. Health Coalition, addressed the BC FORUM annual meeting on a court case that both threatens the future of Medicare and opens the door to private insurance which could cost up to \$15,000 a year.

"It's deplorable, but that's what we'll see if (Dr. Brian) Day (operator of a private surgery clinic in Vancouver) is successful," said Turner.

The coalition is intervening in the B.C. Supreme Court case, and is seeking to raise another \$220,000 towards the anticipated \$550,000 legal costs.

BC FORUM made a donation and encourages everyone who supports public health care to do likewise.

"We're going to need your support," said Turner, calling for people to show up with placards and banners when the case begins.

Originally scheduled for Sept. 8, the B.C. Supreme Court later agreed to Day's request for a six month delay while he seeks a resolution with the provincial government.

"We have not yet heard Dr. Day make a commitment that his clinics will actually stop unlawfully billing patients. Let's not forget that a 2012 BC government audit of Day's Cambie and Specialist Referral clinics revealed that these clinics extra-billed patients \$491,654 in roughly a 30 day period," said Turner.

BC FORUM delegates adopted



Rick Turner, Co-Chair of the B.C. Health Coalition, told BC FORUM delegates that a current court challenge, if successful, could end Medicare as we know it. The coalition needs to raise a total of \$550,000 to cover the legal costs of intervening in the case.

a resolution to support the Health Coalition and Canadian Doctors for Medicare in their fight to protect Canada's public health care system, and to encourage our provincial and national allies to do likewise.

The resolution stated that the court case "could turn Canada's Medicare system into a United States style system without the public having a say."

"Three-quarters of personal bankruptcies in the United States are due

to health care bills," said Russ St. Eloi, expanding on the resolution's statement that the case "could create a system in Canada where we would risk losing our home or going into deep debt when we get sick or injured."

"If Dr. Day wins this case, public wait times would also become longer as doctors and other health professionals are drained from the public system to work in the for-profit system," added the resolution.

“Let’s raise the bar,” says BCFL President

JIM SINCLAIR, President of the BC Federation of Labour, told BC FORUM delegates that working people and seniors are under constant attack.

There is a relentless push to drive down wages and benefits, he said, through the introduction of two-tier wage scales and two tier pensions.

At a time when poverty is going up for old people, all across North America and Europe there is a drive

to move from defined benefit to defined contribution pension plans – a system that shifts all of the risk to future pensioners.

Sinclair highlighted two other key issues: “We’re messing up the planet, and inequality is getting worse and worse.”

“There’s a federal election coming, and a provincial election down the road. We should be out there now raising the bar,” he said.



BC FORUM calls on provincial government to scrap MSP premiums

CALLING MEDICAL Services Plan premiums “a regressive tax that exists in virtually no other province,” BC FORUM delegates demanded that the provincial government scrap the premiums.

“The BC Liberal government took office in 2001 and since that time has hit families with a shocking and relentless series of increases in regressive taxes,” says the resolution adopted by delegates.

The government has almost doubled MSP premiums, which are now \$69.25 a month for individuals and \$125.50 for a couple. People pay as much in MSP premiums as large corporations pay in income tax.

Although we’re paying much more, we get less. The government cut Pharmacare coverage. It entirely eliminated coverage for paramedical services – chiropractic, naturopathy, massage therapy, non-surgical podiatry and physiotherapy.

“The current system is unfair,” says the resolution. “MSP premiums are a tax that bears no relationship to ability to pay. A billionaire pays

the same as a young man or woman who earns just \$30,000. For that reason, inequality grows deeper every time the government increases MSP premiums.

“In addition to increasing premiums, the BC Liberals privatized the Medical Services Plan. Instead of going into health care, \$324 million of our money is going into profits for Maximums Incorporated, a US

multinational, over a 10 year period. The big banks and credit card companies also take a share when individuals pay their bills (for MSP premiums) on-line.

“Fair, progressive taxes are a much more efficient way of paying for health care. Every penny raised can go into providing quality care rather than boosting private profits,” it concludes.



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Sheesh, what's next? Now Canada Post wants a note from your doctor

Canada Post has announced it will require medical notes from seniors and others who need to retain door-to-door mail delivery

By Marion Pollack
Board Member, BC FORUM

TAKE TWO aspirin, keep door-to-door mail delivery, and call me in the morning."

When I went to elementary school I was required to bring a note from my parents when I missed classes for any reason.

During my working years I often had to bring a medical note to cover certain absences.

I thought during my retirement that I would finally be free of note producing requirements.

However, this belief was overturned by Canada Post's latest announcement that in order to retain door to door mail delivery I will again be required to obtain a medical note attesting to age and infirmity.

Canada Post's decision to require medical notes from seniors and people with disabilities if they want to retain home mail delivery is wrong on many levels.

Here is a short and incomplete list of reasons why this odious idea should be scrapped:

1. It treats seniors and people with disabilities as people whose word cannot be trusted, and who need expert opinions to confirm our reality.

2. It puts more pressure on our medical system. We should go to the doctor when we are ill, when we need medical advice, and when

we need to improve our health. We should not go to the doctor to get a note saying we need door-to-door mail delivery.

The president of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) Louis Francescutti said this request will needlessly expose seniors and people with disabilities to other sick patients. He called this decision irresponsible and said it was made without any consultation with the CMA.

3. It will cost seniors and people with disabilities money. Getting medical notes in order to keep door to door mail delivery is not an insured service under the Canada Health Act. As a result we will have to pay out of pocket for the cost of obtaining these notes.

4. It is an invasion of our privacy.

Who is going to assess these notes? How will they be stored? Who will have access to them? None of this has been properly thought out.

5. Canada Post has said that the provision of medical notes attesting to the fact that a senior cannot access a Community Mail box and needs to keep their door to door mail delivery does not guarantee anything.

They have said that one course of action may be giving a senior's community mail box keys to families or neighbours. This is highly problematic on so many levels.

6. Seniors and people with disabilities, and everyone else deserve door to door mail delivery.

There is one simple solution to this. Canada Post should scrap its plan to end door-to-door delivery!

Scrap plan to end home mail delivery, BC FORUM demands

MEMBERS ATTENDING the BC FORUM Annual General Meeting unanimously called on Canada Post to scrap its plans for extreme cuts in service and dramatic price hikes.

In December last year, Canada Post announced that it would eliminate door-to-door delivery, drastically increase postal rates, close public postal counters, force seniors and people with disabilities to walk to community mailboxes, and slash thousands of jobs.

BC FORUM has publicly opposed the service cuts and price hikes from the outset, noting that they will particularly hurt people with mobility challenges and those who live on fixed incomes. Overall, the changes will lead to further deterioration of the postal service, and the loss of decent jobs will hurt families and communities.

A resolution adopted at the AGM called on BC FORUM to continue to oppose the service cuts and price increases.

It also urged BC FORUM members to speak out against the cuts by signing the petition (www.change.org/p/don-t-let-canada-post-end-door-to-door-delivery), writing to their Member of Parliament, and participating in events opposing the Harper government's attack on Canada Post.

Support our sisters and brothers by buying union products and services

ONE OF THE best ways you can support decent jobs, wages and pensions is to purchase quality union-made products and services. It's now easier than ever.

"We're here to help you buy union. Simple as that," says John Lynn, President of the Lynn Communications Group, which operates the BC-based ShopUnion.ca website.

"The website is designed to be used on the run, as shoppers are scurrying down aisles buying groceries, hardware items, clothing and the other necessities of life. It is designed to make shopping union as easy and convenient as possible," says a message from Lynn posted on the site.

"For instance, products and services are now listed under key words. If you're looking for toilet paper you don't need to search for bathroom supplies, paper supplies, toiletries – you simply type in 'toilet paper'. In a split second you learn which manufacturers of toilet paper are unionized," he says.

"The web site also lists products made outside of BC and outside of Canada, to the extent that we have the resources to seek out the information. This means that the majority of items which fill our fridges and cupboards which are in fact made in another province or in the USA or elsewhere, will be on the list if they're union made."

B.C. has a long tradition of shopping union, beginning in 1939 when the Vancouver New Westminster and District Union Label Trades Council was organized. In 1956 the Canadian Labour Congress came on board in support of the Buy Union movement, and in the 1980s a directory of unionized businesses and services began publication to inform union members how they could support the movement with their wallets and purses.

On Jan. 1, 2012, the movement reached a new plateau when ShopUnion.ca was launched in B.C., making information quickly available on the internet, and through SmartPhones and tablets.

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Target benefit pension plans will shift the benefits to employers

BC FORUM has strongly criticized plans to introduce target benefit plans for federally regulated employers such as railways, Air Canada and Canada Post

GROUPS REPRESENTING hundreds of thousands of retired workers, including BC FORUM, have called on the federal government to scrap its plans to allow federally-regulated employers to convert their defined benefit pension plans to target benefit plans.

“These pension benefits were paid for through the deferred earnings of retired members, and formed part of their compensation and terms and conditions of employment,” says a letter addressed to the minister responsible, Kevin Sorenson.

“It is unconscionable that the government would permit employers to retroactively escape their legal obligations in this manner.”

The letter calls on the government to “clearly and unambiguously repudiate” any changes that would allow employers to escape their obligations and potentially reduce the pensions of current retirees.

The groups also criticized the government’s “consultation” process, where the minister met only with groups he had invited.

In addition to joining with other groups in signing the open letter to the minister, BC FORUM submitted a detailed brief on the issue.

Further, a petition is being circulated calling on the government to improve retirement security rather than attack it. The petition is posted at www.bcforum.ca.



Making ends meet in retirement is a continuing challenge for many people. The government should be strengthening retirement security rather than cutting public pensions, and now, encouraging federally regulated employers to do the same.

Harper’s pension scheme puts retirement security at risk

IT’S CLEAR that the Conservatives’ latest pension scheme is putting the retirement security of thousands of workers at risk,” says Murray Rankin, the NDP critic on pensions.

“People are very worried that this pension scheme would put previously secure pensions at risk, even for those already in retirement.”

Rankin says the Conservative plan will clearly encourage crown corporations and companies in the federal sector to weaken the pensions of their workers.

A report to members, received by Canada Post employees and pensioners, makes it clear that the

crown corporation plans to make use of the Conservatives’ new pension scheme by shifting from a secure defined benefit plan to a riskier target benefit scheme.

Workers and retirees would be at risk of benefit reductions from plan shortfalls.

“The Conservative plan would let federally regulated companies and crown corporations break pension promises made to workers and retirees,” says Rankin.

“The Conservatives are intent on major cuts to Canada Post – first home delivery, and now the pensions of its workers.”

Helping people who suffer dementia

A PRIVATE MEMBER'S bill calling for a national dementia strategy will go before Parliament later this year. The bill was introduced by Claude Gravelle, NDP MP for Nickel Belt, Ontario, who lost his mother to dementia in 2003.

Gravelle says more needs to be done to support people with dementia, and the friends and family members who act as caregivers.

Over 70,000 British Columbians, and 750,000 people across Canada, are currently living with dementia.

Without a cure, this number is expected to grow dramatically.

"We know it will be 1.4 million people within a generation," says Gravelle.

Often, he says, the disease also

affects three or four caregivers. In 2008, caregivers in B.C. contributed more than 33 million hours of unpaid care.

"The health care and economic crisis of dementia facing Canada is alarming. The \$33 billion a year bill will soar to \$293 billion by 2040. We need to make a real difference now," says Gravelle.

When he introduced Bill C-356, Gravelle invoked the memory of his mother as an example of the heartbreak facing many Canadians.

"Long before her death at 83 in 2003, my mom started to forget appointments and things on the stove. This deteriorated to forgetting to take medication, to language loss, changes in mood and behaviour and

loss of initiative.

"My siblings and elderly father were helpless and so ill-prepared and under-resourced to watch a mild-mannered woman at times turn aggressive and see parts of her true self slip away," he said.

Bill C-356 would "develop a comprehensive national plan to address all aspects of Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. It would encourage more research, prevention and specific help for caregivers."

Over 40 petitions in support of a national dementia strategy have been tabled in Parliament. In addition, more than 250 civic governments throughout Canada have passed resolutions in support of federal leadership on an overall plan.

Working with allies to defend Medicare

BC FORUM, affiliated with the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of B.C. (COSCO), fully supports this resolution on public health care adopted at a recent meeting of affiliates

Whereas access to quality health care is a fundamental right of every Canadian resident, regardless of race, gender, disability, political belief, social conditions, location, or ability to pay.

Whereas a system of public and non-profit health care, publicly administered and delivered on a not-for-profit basis, contributes to the economic welfare of Canada and provides its citizens with high quality health care.

Whereas all levels of government have a role to play in the delivery

of quality and accessible health care; and that the Federal Government should give strong leadership in enforcing national standards and providing coordination, innovation, and federal transfers at a level that secures the integrity and reinforcement of the Canada Health Act of 1984.

Whereas all Canadians should have equitable access to safe, affordable, and appropriate medications; many Canadians depend on medications for their very lives.

Whereas Canadians should have the security of a continuum of community-based integrated services that includes a universal system of home care, home support and long-term care services, and hospice and palliative care; and that this continuum of services should be an integral part of a Canadian comprehensive health care system.

Whereas a comprehensive national health care system includes edu-

cation, prevention, diagnosis, counselling, and timely treatment.

Therefore, be it resolved:

- That the federal, provincial and territorial governments be urged to negotiate a new comprehensive health accord that protects, transforms, and strengthens our national health care system. This must include human and financial resources including a 6 per cent escalator, as well as a national seniors health care plan and a national pharmaceutical strategy that will improve health outcomes for Canadians; and further
- That this meeting of the Affiliates of the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of British Columbia ask other seniors organizations and individuals to join us in declaring our commitment to use all democratic means to ensure that the foregoing proposals are implemented in a new Canadian health accord.

BC FORUM welcomes new director

DONISA BERNARDO was sworn in as a new Board member at the July 15 meeting of the BC FORUM Board of Directors.

“Donisa is the Financial Secretary of the Hospital Employees’ Union, and a very welcome addition to our Board,” said Diane Wood, President.

“Her appointment marks the first time the HEU has been represented on the Board. We look forward to her participation in our work.”

At the same meeting, Gordon Westrand was elected as Treasurer. He replaces Dave Gill who stepped down due to increasing work commitments.

“We thank Dave for the many hours, commitment and energy he has put into serving our members and the BC FORUM Board,” said Wood.

Work to strengthen our voice in labour

SEVERAL AFFILIATED unions have submitted a resolution to this year’s B.C. Federation of Labour convention, calling for a constitutional change to strengthen BC FORUM’s voice in the labour movement.

Modelled on the Canadian Labour Congress’ relationship with the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC), the resolution would give BC FORUM voice and vote at BCFL Executive Council meetings, and two delegates to convention. BC FORUM currently has voice but no vote at the Executive Council, and no delegates to convention.

The resolution notes that the relationship between the CLC and CURC is essentially the same as that between the BCFL and BC FORUM.



Thanks to volunteers like Sandy Bauer, regional representative, BC FORUM was a highly visible participant in rallies to support striking teachers and the Vancouver Pride Parade.

As a constitutional amendment, the resolution will require the approval of two-thirds of delegates in order to pass.

New parliamentary secretary for seniors

MICHELLE STILWELL, MLA for Parksville – Qualicum and a gold medal winning Paralympic champion, has been appointed as the provincial government’s new Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health for Seniors.

Responsibility for seniors had previously rested with Ralph Sultan, MLA for West Vancouver – Capilano. Rather than reporting to the

minister of health, Sultan served as a minister of state in the cabinet.

BC FORUM has invited Ms Stilwell to meet with the Board of Directors to discuss issues that affect older workers, retirees, and our families.

New pension rules

EFFECTIVE MARCH 31, 2014, the Wills, Estates and Succession Act sets new rules for nominating beneficiaries of pensions. You may now be able to include organizations, alternate or multiple beneficiaries.

If you’re thinking about making changes, consult your financial advisor, estate planner or lawyer to determine what’s best for you.

Strengthening BC FORUM has never been more important

Please encourage your friends to join our team

THROUGH OUR UNIONS, before we retired, we've all seen the benefits of collective action. Our voices are strongest when we stand together in solidarity.

That's where BC FORUM comes in. We are the only provincial organization that represents union members who have retired or are nearing retirement. We are an integral part of the labour movement, with formal representation in leadership bodies, and maintain strong links with provincial and national seniors' groups.

Together, we can make a difference for ourselves and our families. Please encourage friends, colleagues and family members to join us using the form below, or on-line at www.bcforum.ca.

Renew your membership – and sign up a friend

PLEASE HAVE A LOOK at the mailing label on this edition of *The Advocate* to check whether your membership is now due for renewal. If your membership is about to expire, you can renew by mailing the coupon below to BC FORUM, #200 - 5118 Joyce St., Vancouver, B.C. V5R 4H1.

You can also renew your membership on-line at www.bcforum.ca.

We also ask for your help in reaching out to people who are nearing retirement or have already retired. Like all membership-based organizations, we are all stronger when as many people as possible work together.

Remember that BC FORUM actively welcomes workers who are 50 and older, so don't be shy about encouraging your friends and family members to join us, even if they are still in the workforce.

Solidarity makes us strong.



BC FORUM has always provided free \$2,500 Accidental Death and Dismemberment insurance coverage to members.

We are proud to now extend this coverage to members' spouses at the low cost of \$5 per year. All you have to do is check the appropriate box when you apply or renew your membership. BC FORUM's AD&D coverage is valid until you reach age 86, the maximum age we were able to negotiate.



Please check expiry date on mailing label. If 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.



B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members • #200 - 5118 Joyce St., Vancouver, V5R 4H1
604 688-4565 • 1 800 896-5678 • Fax: 604 430-5917 • bcforum@bcfed.ca • www.bcforum.ca

Membership: **Application** **Renewal** **New address**

Name: _____
LAST FIRST INITIAL

Address: _____
STREET ADDRESS CITY POSTAL CODE

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Union: _____ Date of birth:* _____
DAY MONTH YEAR

Spouse's name: _____ Spouse's birth date:* _____
DAY MONTH YEAR

\$20 - 1 year \$49 - 3 years (free \$2,500 AD&D for member)

\$25 - 1 year \$64 - 3 years (adds \$2,500 AD&D for spouse)

Payment: Cheque Visa MC Expiry: ____ / ____

Card number: _____

.....
SIGNATURE

Date of application: _____
DAY MONTH YEAR

* Required for AD&D group insurance coverage to age 86.

Why is Stephen Harper so afraid?

By Soren Bech
Editor, The Advocate

THE HARPER government likes to keep things simple. It prefers populist slogans to debate. It reduces complex multi-faceted issues to black and white talking points. It steadfastly ignores research and reports, even from government agencies, on issues ranging from pensions to the environment.

As we learned at the time of the Northern Gateway pipeline hearings, this government keeps a list of enemies – which seems to include everyone who dares to disagree with its ideology. It doesn't hesitate to use the powers of state to silence them.

Scores of federally employed scientists have been fired. Those who remain have been muzzled, forbidden to speak to the media. Research stations have been closed, lest they uncover inconvenient truths.

Now the Canada Revenue Agency's (CRA) auditors have been unleashed to do the government's dirty work.

Back in 2012, Harper set up a \$13.4 million program to audit and harass registered charities that speak out on public issues.

The first audits targeted environmental groups that have criticized government's energy and pipeline policies.

The government is now auditing 52 groups for "political activity."

The current wave includes poverty, international aid, human rights groups, and one think-tank – the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA).

There's no sign of an audit of the Fraser Institute, the business sponsored group which tends to support far-right laissez-faire policies.

It is a clear attempt to silence those who criticize where Harper is

taking the country.

Since these groups usually have scarce resources, they cannot afford to pay huge legal bills. The result is self-censorship to avoid aggravating the government and its auditors.

"Since October 2013, we have been forced to divert resources from our policy work in order to comply with the most intrusive audit we have ever experienced – and there's no end in sight," says Seth Klein, BC Director of the CCPA.

Close to 500 academics have now signed an open letter accusing the Harper government of trying to intimidate and silence its critics.

"The CCPA is an internationally-recognized and respected research centre, built on a solid tradition of critical analysis," says the letter.

"Indeed, the CCPA plays a vital role by supplying much needed reflection on a number of policies, which it has always done in a fair and unbiased way, and which respects the fundamental tools of sound research....

"It may reach a different set of conclusions from those of the government, but then that is allowed in a free-thinking democratic country. On the contrary, we would argue,

that such dissent should be encouraged and not stifled by such actions of the CRA.

"If there is bias, the bias seems to be mostly in the CRA's decision to audit the CCPA and apparently no other think tanks.... We are therefore left with the conclusion that the decision to audit the CCPA is politically motivated to intimidate and silence its criticism of your government's policies," they write.

Klein called the letter "a stunning show of solidarity."

"We are concerned about what the audits mean for the future – not just for our own work, but for open discourse in this country.

"We are incredibly grateful for this show of support from the academic community. It was unexpected, and such a pleasant surprise," he said.

"With people like this standing up for the future of open democratic debate, we're confident that we'll get through these tough times."

You can help the CCPA, and strengthen Canada's leading progressive think tank, by making a donation at www.policyalternatives.ca.

There is nothing the Harper government fears more than informed public opinion.

New address? New e-mail address?

Please send your new address and e-mail address to BC FORUM.

You can mail in the form on page 15, or you can reach us by telephone or e-mail: 1.800.896.5678 (toll free), 604.688.4565, bforum@bcfed.ca



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