



Annual General Meeting  
June 13, 2012

Report to  
**2012 Annual General Meeting**

from

**BC FORUM Board of Directors**  
Diane Wood, President

## **2012 Annual General Meeting**

Sisters and brothers,

Welcome!

This report to the Annual General Meeting of the B.C. Federation of Retired Union Members covers our activities since the last AGM, held June 22, 2011.

As is becoming the rule rather than the exception, it has been a busy and eventful period for our members and the life of our organization. The Harper government has unleashed a new attack on Canada's already inadequate public pension system, while the provincial government continues to fail to meet the needs of retired workers.

BC FORUM is unique. We are the only B.C. organization of older and retired workers which is directly affiliated to the labour movement. We are proud of the strong role we play in labour campaigns, and our growing ability to influence and participate in public policy debates. We are a voice for solidarity across generations, and a more civil society.

As you will see throughout this report, our links to the movement, and to those who are working to build a better province, are deep and lasting. It is not a casual relationship. It is part of our structure and purpose. As we all know from our years in the movement, we are strongest when we work together in solidarity, bringing our experience to bear for the benefit of workers both young and old. That strength has never been needed more than it is today.

### **Changes to Executive and Labour Council representation**

Due to health issues, Gerry Edwards has decided to step down as President of BC FORUM.

His contribution as president, and for many more years as a director, has been significant. We will miss him. We extend him our best wishes for a full and speedy recovery.

Gerry, a long time activist with the Steelworkers Union, was elected president of BC FORUM last year. 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. In addition to his work through BC FORUM, Gerry has served on the national executive of SOAR, the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees, and CURC, the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada.

An exceptional organizer, Gerry 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. Before his retirement, he was the union's area supervisor for B.C. and the Northwest Territories.

Elections for a new President, and consequential elections for resulting vacancies, were held at BC FORUM's May 8 board meeting.

- Diane Wood, previously Board Secretary, was elected President.
- Miriam Olney, previously Treasurer, was elected Board Secretary.
- Dave Gill, previously Vice President, was elected Treasurer.
- John Savage, director, was elected Vice President.
- Bill Silvester, not up for election, continues in his role as Vice President.

We extend our thanks to Colleen Fuller, who has stepped down as a director of BC FORUM. Colleen, a noted public policy researcher on health issues, will continue to advise the BC FORUM board on public health care issues.

We have made changes in representation to match the CLC's realignment of some labour councils. We thank Lorraine Logan (NWDLC), Lynda Zorn (North Okanagan LC), and Mike Kuruliak (Port Alberni DLC) for their service as regional representatives to labour councils. New regional representatives have been appointed. Of the labour councils on our list, only three are without a BC FORUM delegate.

The board has extended a standing invitation to regional representatives to attend all board meetings as observers. For the first time, four regional representatives attended the May meeting.

Complete lists of executive members and regional representatives are attached to this report.

## **The attack on Canada's public pensions**

The Harper government plans to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67. Astoundingly, the prime minister chose to announce the cuts to a meeting of the globe's business and political elites at the World Economic Forum in Davos. It's an issue he should have raised during the federal election campaign, instead of springing it on us as an HST-sized surprise for working Canadians.

Canada's public pensions – Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement – are already stingy compared to other nations. They provide less than the average of developed nations which, like Canada, belong to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

BC FORUM produced a special issue of *The Advocate* on this critical issue. It highlights the substantial body of research which shows that current public pensions are not only sustainable in the long-term, there is room for much needed improvement to alleviate poverty among seniors and retired workers.

The repercussions of Harper's unilateral decision to ignore scientific research and expert advice are many. In addition to OAS and GIS payments, it may affect provincial programs that are tied to our national public pensions. Equally

worrisome, income is a key social determinant of health – pushing more elderly Canadians into poverty will also affect their health.

BC FORUM will continue to work with our allies to push for improved pensions, not further reductions as planned by Harper. A resolution on this vital issue – Canada's most basic safety net – will be presented for your debate and consideration at this Annual General Meeting.

Our organization has a long history of working with the Canadian Labour Congress and the B.C. Federation of Labour in the campaign for better pensions. President Gerry Edwards has spoken out frequently on the issue, including in a number of media interviews. He also participated in events to send a message to first ministers when they met in Victoria in December. Further emphasizing the importance of fair pensions for workers, directors Diane Wood and Miriam Olney made a presentation to attendees of the Pension Investment and Governance course at the CLC Winter School.

## **Political action**

BC FORUM is represented on the B.C. Federation of Labour's Political Action Committee, and the 2012 By-election Working Committee, by directors Gord Larkin and Diane Wood.

BC FORUM provided volunteers to assist with the phone banks in the Coquitlam-Port Moody and Chilliwack-Hope by-elections. We mailed pamphlets produced by the BCFL to all members in the two ridings. We also communicated directly with our members in advance of last year's by-election in Vancouver-Point Grey, which resulted in a near upset. And we encouraged our members to support labour endorsed candidates in last November's civic elections.

The next provincial election is less than a year away. BC FORUM will be actively involved, supporting labour initiatives and adding our voice to the tens of thousands who are calling for real change in British Columbia.

## **Building the movement**

We are extremely grateful for our strong relationship with Working Enterprises, WE Insurance and the labour movement.

WE Insurance provides the excellent group benefit plans that are available to all BC FORUM members, including the world-wide \$2,500 accidental death and dismemberment coverage included in the membership fee, and group rates on extended health and dental coverage, home and tenant insurance. These services are vital to many of our members – indeed, more than half of the hundreds of calls handled by our office deal with insurance issues.

Effective June 1, 2011, WE Insurance made another generous contribution to our operations – it began paying the annual premiums for our members' AD&D coverage. We are very grateful for this unexpected gift and support.

The B.C. Federation of Labour donates the space for our office and supports our work in many additional ways, such as information technology advice and support, photocopying and assistance with mailings. The BCFL also ensures that information about BC FORUM, including The Advocate, is regularly distributed to all affiliates.

Working Enterprises supports our work through an annual grant. We are very grateful for this continuing support of our operations and outreach activities.

BC FORUM directors and other volunteers ensured that we were present and highly visible at conventions of the B.C. Federation of Labour and its affiliates, the CLC winter school – where we had a booth and made presentations to the SHARE pension trustee courses – and other labour events such as Labour Day celebrations. Over the last few months, we have reached out directly to currently active union members through booths at the BCTF, HSA and CUPE BC conventions. Vice President Bill Silvester spoke about BC FORUM and retirement issues at the IATSE 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event held April 3. Vice-President Dave Gill spoke at the COPE 378 Annual Job Steward & Executive Councillor meeting on May 25. Our organization sent delegates to the B.C. Federation of Labour Regional Conference, May 24 to 26, in Kelowna, and erected a display to provide information about retirement issues and BC FORUM membership. We also participated in May Day celebrations in Vancouver, the Day of Mourning event in New Westminster, and continued to provide support on picket lines, e.g. Rocky Mountaineer.

Finally, we greatly appreciate the in-kind support that we are receiving from the BCFL, BCGEU, COPE, UFCW, USWA and other affiliates, including help with mailings, postage and travel. These contributions help us to stretch scarce dollars and advocate more effectively on behalf of older and retired workers.

## **Speaking out on issues that matter**

Unlike most organizations of retirees, BC FORUM is partisan. We recognize that there is only one party that truly understands the needs of workers. We do not pretend to be politically neutral. We have been active, and will continue to be active, in civic, provincial and federal elections to support candidates who will speak out for working families. Preparing for the May 2013 provincial election will be a significant focus of our work in the months ahead.

Our members are frequent participants in rallies, protests and solidarity events, and directors often serve on the planning committees for such events.

We have raised our voices on important public policy issues that affect our families and communities. We contributed to the defeat of the HST – an outrageous tax shift from corporations to people – in last year's referendum. We have spoken out for fair taxes, restoration of public services, and for an increase in the minimum wage, finally won last year. We also called for improvements in the Canada Pension Plan, an increase in the GIS, and a strengthened national

public health care system, including home support and PharmaCare. And we have spoken out against CETA, the proposed Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and Europe. In fact, Board Secretary Diane Wood and Treasurer Miriam Olney were the only attendees at a Vancouver conference to promote the deal who did not come from business or government. They raised critical questions about the CETA provisions that could mean higher drug prices, more power for corporations (less for governments), and thousands of lost jobs.

BC FORUM is a founding member of the Coalition to Build a Better B.C. This coalition brings together workers, seniors, youth groups, and an impressive range of community and environmental organizations. We continue to participate in meetings and events sponsored by the coalition. We are also a full member of the B.C. Health Coalition, supporting its important work to improve public health care.

In addition, BC FORUM is active in a number of organizations that represent seniors. We are the provincial arm of the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC) and are represented on the Executive Council. President Gerry Edwards and Board Secretary Diane Wood were delegates to the CURC convention last fall. We are affiliated to the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of B.C. (COSCO), with representatives at both delegate meetings and the executive. Our representatives bring BC FORUM's perspective to the boards and membership of both organizations.

Our President represents BC FORUM on the Executive Council of the B.C. Federation of Labour, and a second Executive member attends these meetings as an Observer.

## **Administration and communications**

Hitomi Nasu, a Certified Management Accountant with many years of union experience, provides service to members and administrative support to our active volunteer board. She staffs our office at the BC Federation of Labour four days a week. (Wednesday is her day off.)

On a contract basis, Soren Bech assists with communications and The Advocate, while Michelle Boudreau provides website management and development services to our organization.

## **In memoriam**

Brother Frank Kennedy, a long time director of BC FORUM and a giant figure in B.C.'s labour movement, died after a period of illness on Feb. 18, 2012. He was 83.

Frank began work as a longshoreman in 1951, and held many positions in his local of the ILWU. He was elected Secretary Treasurer of the ILWU Canadian Area

in the 1960s, and served in that office until the 1980s. Frank was also elected as Canada's representative on the union's international executive board.

For a number of years, he took leave from ILWU Canada in order to pursue a full time elected position as Secretary Treasurer to the Vancouver and District Labour Council.

In addition to his work in the labour movement, Frank was the founding President of The Committee of Progressive Electors (COPE), and the founding Chair of End the Arms Race.

We extend our condolences to Frank's family and friends. His experience and wisdom will be missed.

There will be a minute of silence at the AGM in memory of Bro. Kennedy and other members who have passed away during the last 12 months.

## **Conclusion**

Over the years, BC FORUM has become a recognized force for senior union members and retirees. Re-locating our operations to the B.C. Federation of Labour offices has proved to be a major step to increasing our visibility and further strengthening our connections to the movement.

We have the ability to do much more to increase our membership, and to help former union members remain active and aware participants in promoting labour's agenda. In the year ahead, with the support of Working Enterprises, affiliated unions, our members and activists, we look forward to further expansion of our membership, activities, and even stronger advocacy on behalf of retired workers.

Respectfully submitted,

*Diane Wood*

President, BC FORUM

USW 2009

## **BC FORUM Board of Directors**

Jim Sinclair, Chair	BC Fed
Diane Wood, President	BCGEU
John Savage, Vice President	CEP
Bill Silvester, Vice President	TWU
Dave Gill, Treasurer	COPE
Miriam Olney, Secretary	UFCW
Ray Andrus	CUPW
Danny Bradford	BCGEU
Millie Canessa	BCGEU
Gerry Edwards	USW
Gord Larkin	CLC
John Radosevic	CAW
Gord Savard	CUPE
Russ St. Eloi	BCYT-BCTC
Alice West	PSAC

### **Staff**

Hitomi Nasu	USW
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### **Health Care Resource**

Colleen Fuller	CEP
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### **Communications Resource**

Soren Bech	CEP
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### **CLC Representative to BC FORUM**

Iris Taylor	CLC
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## **Regional Representatives**

Sandy Bauer	Vancouver and District Labour Council
Suzanne Bennett	Campbell River, Courtenay and District Labour Council
John Colbourne	South Okanagan Boundary Labour Council
Mary Gay	West Kootenay Labour Council
Doug Hamilton	Shuswap – Columbia and District Labour Council
John Hurren	North Central Labour Council *
Ken Isomura	New Westminster and District Labour Council
Chris Johns	East Kootenay and District Labour Council
Victor Johnson	North Central Labour Council *
Brigid Kemp	South Okanagan – Boundary Labour Council
Lyle Kristiansen	Sunshine Coast Labour Council
Mike Lang	Port Alberni and District Labour Council
Betty Liddle	Campbell River, Courtenay and District Labour Council
Mona Sykes	Victoria Labour Council
De Whalen	Vancouver and District Labour Council
Ron Williams	North Central Labour Council *
Marjorie Witton	West Kootenay Labour Council
Liz Woods	North Okanagan Labour Council
Marie Worth	Squamish and District Labour Committee

## **National representative**

Pat Kerwin, President Congress of Union Retirees of Canada

\* North Central Labour Council results from the merger of the Prince George, Quesnel, South Cariboo and Peace River Labour Councils