



Annual General Meeting
June 12, 2013

Report to
2013 Annual General Meeting
from

BC FORUM Board of Directors
Diane Wood, President

2013 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 13, 2012.

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.

Electoral activities

Like other seniors organizations, BC FORUM advocates on public policy issues that affect our members and their families. Unlike most other seniors groups, however, we are not non-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. We proudly do all we can to help elect the party of labour.

Our election work is closely coordinated with the labour movement. Two members of our Board of Directors – President Diane Wood and Director Gord Larkin – are active representatives on the B.C. Federation of Labour's Political Action Committee.

We were dismayed by the comprehensive defeat handed to Adrian Dix and the BC NDP, and to working people and seniors throughout our province, in the May 14 provincial election. Either the polls were spectacularly wrong, or NDP supporters simply stayed home. Voter turnout remained abysmal, barely more than the historic low of 51% recorded in 2009. The NDP's share of the popular vote dropped almost 3%. In the months ahead, the party and the movement will face hard questions about where we go from here.

During this election period, BC FORUM, its directors, regional representatives and volunteers undertook several initiatives to communicate with our members and motivate them to take action:

- We published an issue sheet outlining our election priorities. This was widely circulated as part of the BCFL's communications to all affiliates. We thank the BCFL for covering the cost of printing this information.
- We supported the labour movement's call for action on employment standards, apprenticeships, and employer intimidation.
- In addition, we called for universal public home support services, action on child poverty, improvement in public pensions, fair taxes, affordable public child care, and a truly independent Seniors' Advocate.
- We published a special election edition of our news magazine, The Advocate, to provide additional background on these issues and others. This edition was widely circulated to our members and beyond.
- We completely redesigned our website to highlight our key election issues – and found that bcforum.ca was "hacked" and taken down by persons unknown on Election Day.
- Starting in September, 2012, we expanded each issue of The Advocate from 12 pages to 16, giving us additional space to focus on political issues.
- During the campaign itself, directors, regional representatives and other volunteers personally contacted hundreds of BC FORUM members by telephone to encourage them to vote for change.
- We sent regular e-mail updates to our members to provide information about advance voting and emerging issues, and to encourage them to participate in the campaign.
- With the help of the BCGEU and the B.C. Federation of Labour, we sent two BCFL election packages to our members. We thank them for their assistance with mailing, labeling and postage.
- Throughout, we worked closely with the B.C. Federation of Labour and other groups, such as the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations (COSCO) to maximize the impact of our message.

At the federal level, we participated in the by-election campaign in Victoria. President Diane Wood sent a personal letter to every member in the constituency. This swing riding was successfully held by New Democrat Murray Rankin, following the resignation of MP Denise Savoie for health reasons.

In every campaign, there are many factors at work in determining the eventual outcome. We can be proud of our contribution to these campaigns.

Executive and Labour Council representation

BC FORUM's regional representation through delegate status at labour councils continued to grow.

During the period covered by this report, we welcomed nine new labour council delegates: Tom Duncan, Nanaimo and District; Bruce Elphinstone, Sunshine Coast; Doug Gibson, North Okanagan; Terry Green, South Okanagan; Mogens Jorgensen, Kamloops; Lynda Reid, Campbell River, Courtenay and District; Iris Taylor, Nanaimo and District; and Pamela Willingshofer, Fraser Valley.

Several delegates resigned for personal reasons. We thank Doug Hamilton, Brigid Kemp, Betty Liddle and Liz Woods for their many days and hours of service.

Coordinating our work at the provincial and regional level is a key priority for the Board. Our delegates are extremely active in their labour councils, building BC FORUM's profile in their communities. Several have acted as local media spokespeople for our organization, speaking out on issues that affect older and retired workers and our families.

Due to budget constraints, and the high cost of travel and accommodation, we were not able to arrange a face-to-face meeting between board members and regional representatives during the last year. Such meetings have been very useful in the past. We have compensated in several ways. We send representatives frequent e-mail updates on board decisions and current issues. We provide background information as needed to assist delegates in maximizing media opportunities when they arise. We seize the opportunity to meet with delegates when board members are in their area for other events, such as the BCFL political action conference held in Nanaimo in early March. And while we recognize that it's difficult for those who live outside the Lower Mainland to attend, we have extended a standing invitation to regional representatives to attend board meetings as observers.

At the Board level, we have accepted with regret the resignations of Ray Andrus and Gerry Edwards, long-time directors who are coping with health issues. Ray and Gerry, who is our immediate past president, are fierce advocates for working people and made a significant contribution to BC FORUM. We miss them both.

We also welcomed several new directors to our board: Maureen Shaw, representing our new affiliate, the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators; Gordie Westrand, International Longshore and Warehouse Union; Fred Girling, United Steelworkers; and Marion Pollack, Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

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

Liaison with affiliates

Ensuring that every union member has the opportunity to join BC FORUM when she or he retires is essential if we are to build our membership. That's the time when most members join. Getting our message to the right people at the right time is easier said than done. Many unions do not have the ability to track retirements.

To collectively address this issue, and other common interests, we have established a process of regular consultation with affiliated unions. Following a request from Jim Sinclair, Chair of BC FORUM and President of the BCFL, a significant number of affiliates have appointed representatives to liaise with BC FORUM.

Our first meeting, held Jan. 16, was attended by affiliate liaisons from CUPW, PSAC, HEAT&Frost118, USW, CEU, BWU, COPE378, BCTF, HEU, CEP, TWU, HSA, UBC/ACTRA, and ILWU. We discussed the advantages of joining BC FORUM, including access to Working Enterprises benefits, and steps we could take to reach retiring members. The affiliate liaisons agreed to promote our organization in their newsletters and websites, to help distribute our brochures to members nearing retirement, and to establish communication between their administrative staff and ours. It was a productive meeting. We agreed to meet again on a quarterly basis, and to work to encourage even more affiliates to appoint liaisons.

Rosemary Brown Award

Rosemary Brown (1930-2003) was an inspiring Canadian woman who greatly influenced and affected the global agenda towards equality and justice for all.

Rosemary was a distinguished social worker, a politician, an author, a media personality, an academic, a feminist, and a loving mother and grandmother. She was bestowed with 16 honorary Doctorates from Canadian universities and was a member of the Privy Council, the Order of Canada, the Order of BC, and the Order of Jamaica.

Each year, the Rosemary Brown Award for Women honours and recognizes a BC woman or BC-based organization that promotes the values and ideals that Rosemary Brown championed during her lifetime.

We are proud that Alice West – long serving Board member representing the Public Service Alliance of Canada and former President of BC FORUM – has been selected for this year's award. Alice has made an immense contribution to the labour movement and our organization. She is a most deserving winner of this award, and the province-wide recognition it brings to her many achievements.

Pre-retirement planning

Sixteen members of BC FORUM participated in a two and a half day "train the trainers" course in March. The event was financed through a Horizons grant obtained by the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada.

This modular course on pre-retirement planning will be delivered by our instructors through labour council weekend schools and affiliated unions. We thank the BCGEU for providing meeting space, the CLC regional office for providing lunches and CURC for providing the instructor, Bob Hatfield.

Outreach

In recent years, BC FORUM has been working hard, with notable success, to increase our visibility within the labour movement.

This work by directors and other volunteers takes many forms.

We presented information on BC FORUM (and Protein for People) at display booths at several conventions: Retired Teachers, BCTF, CUPE-BC, COPE 378, and B.C. Federation of Labour, where President Wood was a speaker at the convention, and several directors attended as delegates. President Wood also addressed the B.C. Government Retired Employees' Association AGM.

Our booth at the Vancouver Labour Day picnic gathered signatures on a petition to protect retirement security, later tabled in the House of Commons. We also maintained a constant presence during every week of the CLC Winter School.

Directors made several presentations on retirement issues to groups including representatives of the BCGEU Pension Plan, the Federation of Post Secondary Educators' Pension Advisory Committee, the Vancouver branch of the B.C. Government Retired Employees' Association, and union trustees who attended the Share/BCFL course.

We also participated in annual events such as May Day celebrations, the Day of Mourning, and continued to provide support on picket lines, e.g. Rocky Mountaineer.

Benefits

Our partnership with Working Enterprises is truly mutually beneficial.

WE provides the excellent group benefit plans that are available to all BC FORUM members, including 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 group benefits and insurance issues.

The benefits available to BC FORUM members through WE always draw much interest at public events. With some employers making it more and more difficult for unions to negotiate benefits for retired members, this is expected to become an even more important part of the services we provide in the future.

In addition to these health and benefit plans, WE makes it possible for BC FORUM to provide members with free \$2,500 AD&D coverage, world-wide, until they reach their 86th birthday (the highest we've been able to negotiate). We have recently expanded this coverage to make it available to the spouses of members, at the low rate of \$5 per year.

Speaking out on issues that matter

BC FORUM continued to work with our allies to push for improved pensions, not further reductions as planned by Harper.

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 Diane Wood has spoken out frequently on the issue, including a column she wrote which was published by rabble.ca, and later went viral.

We have called for improvements in the Canada Pension Plan, an increase in the GIS, maintaining OAS eligibility at age 65, and a strengthened national public health care system, including universal home support and PharmaCare. We criticised the BC Liberal government's decision to cave in to the demands of big pharmaceutical companies, placing private profit ahead of the interests of patients by eliminating all funding to BC's independent drug watchdog, the Therapeutics Initiative.

We strongly opposed an anti-union private members' bill – Bill C-377, *An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act* – that has been condemned by Canada's privacy commissioner, the Canadian Bar Association, opposition parties and the labour movement as a significant threat to privacy. In feature articles in *The Advocate* and a special mailing to members we explained how this unfair legislation will create a bureaucratic nightmare and heap new costs on unions. It is one more example of the Harper government's disregard for working people.

And we have spoken out against CETA, the proposed Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between Canada and Europe.

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 and will continue to do so.

Our President represents BC FORUM on the Executive Council of the B.C. Federation of Labour, and our Secretary attends these key coordinating meetings as an Observer.

We are a full member of the B.C. Health Coalition, supporting its important work to improve public health care.

We have joined in partnership with Protein for People, supporting that organization's work to feed the hungry, and are represented on their Board by President Wood.

We actively support the United Way as part of labour's involvement. Board member Gordon Larkin is a member of the Labour Participation Committee.

We endorsed the Integrated Care Advocacy Plan, a proposal by several organizations to improve care for seniors and others. Three board members have been appointed to liaise with this campaign.

In addition, BC FORUM is active in a number of organizations that represent seniors.

We are the provincial federation of the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada (CURC) and are represented on the Executive Council. Through CURC, we are linked to the CLC's political action initiatives at the national level, the Canadian Health Coalition, and the Council of Canadians. CURC meetings also provide an opportunity for us to meet face to face with MPs – including Opposition Leader Thomas Mulcair and various critics – to present our issues to them first-hand.

We are affiliated to the Council of Senior Citizens' Organizations of B.C. (COSCO). President Diane Wood serves as a General Vice-President of COSCO, bringing BC FORUM's perspective to the monthly executive meetings. In addition, five board members attend COSCO's monthly delegate meetings. Several representatives attended a major two day conference, organized by COSCO, on "The Joys and Tears of Living Longer."

We are affiliated through CURC to the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens' Federation (NPSCF). Our president attended the three day NPSCF AGM held immediately after the COSCO conference.

In addition, BC FORUM met with representatives of the Stephen Lewis Foundation, which is doing much needed work to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa. We actively support the Foundation's Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign, an initiative to aid the many women who are raising their grandchildren after losing their own children to this devastating disease.

Communications

We have resumed regular quarterly publication of our news magazine, The Advocate. This was made possible due to the generosity of UFCW 1518, which covered the cost of printing two editions. While more and more members are coming onto e-mail, The Advocate remains our primary means of getting out the message. Each edition is mailed to all members, as well as all B.C. MLAs and every MP across Canada. The Advocate is also made available to other seniors' organizations and handed out at our booths and seniors' forums.

The number of visitors to our website – www.bcforum.ca – continued to grow. The site was updated frequently to provide the most current information on BC FORUM and labour movement campaigns and events.

Thanks to the volunteer efforts of David Halme of the BCTF, we now have a Facebook page: www.facebook.com/BCRetiredUnionMembersForum.

Our membership brochure has been completely redesigned and updated. We thank the BCGEU for their help with printing this vital tool.

From time to time, we send personal e-mails to our members, particularly on emerging political issues and campaigns. Several e-mails were sent during the provincial election period. While not all members have e-mail addresses, the number who do is increasing.

Administration

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.

Working together

The work that we do is made possible through the solidarity and support of our members, and the generous contributions made by our allies in the movement.

We particularly extend our thanks to:

- The Board of Working Enterprises for their annual grant that allows us to keep a part-time administrator on staff.
- The B.C. Federation of Labour for contributing office and meeting space, advice about information technology, help with mailings and much more. Thanks to the BCFL we now have a new (to us) office desk with four legs that all touch the floor! The BCFL also ensures that information about BC FORUM, including The Advocate, is regularly distributed to all affiliates.
- UFCW 1518 for their generous contribution to help ensure The Advocate is printed on a regular basis.
- BCGEU for their contributions towards printing, mailings, and travel that allows us to fully participate in CURC's national meetings.
- Heritage Credit Union, the new owners of the home and tenant insurance division of WE Insurance, for their support towards Advocate printing and mailing costs.

We greatly appreciate the in-kind support that we are receiving from the BCFL, BCGEU, COPE, UFCW 1518, USWA and other affiliates. These contributions help us to stretch scarce dollars and advocate more effectively on behalf of older and retired workers.

Conclusion

Over the years, BC FORUM has become a recognized force for senior union members and retirees.

Our volunteer board is focused and working hard. Our visibility is higher than ever. Union leaders have provided great encouragement and support. Retired workers, and workers nearing retirement, are more aware of our organization.

Still, we need to do more to increase our membership, and to help former union members remain active and aware participants in promoting labour's agenda.

In the years 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	BCFL
Diane Wood, President	BCGEU
John Savage, Vice President	CEP
Bill Silvester, Vice President	TWU
Dave Gill, Treasurer	COPE
Miriam Olney, Secretary	UFCW
Dan Bradford	BCGEU
Millie Canessa	BCGEU
Fred Girling	USW
Gord Larkin	CLC
Marion Pollack	CUPW
John Radosevic	CAW
Gord Savard	CUPE
Maureen Shaw	FPSE
Russ St. Eloi	BCYT-BCTC
Alice West	PSAC
Gordon Westrand	ILWU

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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Website Resource

Michelle Boudreau	CEP
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CLC Representative to BC FORUM

Ron Stipp	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
Tom Duncan	Nanaimo, District and Duncan Labour Council
Bruce Elphinstone	Sunshine Coast Labour Council
Mary Gay	West Kootenay Labour Council
Doug Gibson	North Okanagan Labour Council
Terry Green	South Okanagan Boundary 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 *
Mogens Jorgensen	Kamloops and District Labour Council
Lyle Kristiansen	Sunshine Coast Labour Council
Mike Lang	Port Alberni and District Labour Council
Lynda Reid	Campbell River, Courtenay and District Labour Council
Mona Sykes	Victoria Labour Council
Iris Taylor	Nanaimo, District and Duncan Labour Council
De Whalen	Vancouver and District Labour Council
Ron Williams	North Central Labour Council *
Pamela Willingshofer	Fraser Valley Labour Council
Marjorie Witton	West Kootenay 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