



The Tye Presents

Hot Stories from the Labour Beat

Recently Reported by Tom Sandborn and Justin Langille



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Editor's Note

The Best (and Only) Labour Beat in BC

The award-winning *Tyee* is the only publication in British Columbia (that we know of) with a regular labour beat covered by skilled reporters.

We've run hundreds of stories in recent years about job safety, workers' rights, labour politics and how to make B.C. and Canada a fairer, more humane place to earn a living.

This packet offers a sampling of ten recent stories.

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Thank you,

David Beers



These articles were originally published on *The Tyee*, and are available at <http://thetyee.ca>. If you would like to republish any of them, in whole or in part, please contact the Business Director of *The Tyee*, Michelle Hoar, at mhoar@thetyee.ca.

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The Decade's Top Labour Stories In BC

*Ten key ways working in this province changed in the Campbell era.
First of two parts.*

Tom Sandborn's article was originally published on Sept. 6, 2010, on TheTyee.ca. The electronic version of the story is available at <http://thetyee.ca/News/2010/09/06/TopLabourStories/>



Labour Day? At *The Tyee* this will be Labour Week, with labour-related special features running today through Friday. And that's just a start for increased labour coverage in the coming months, building as we go an occasional series we're calling *Working Ahead: Labour in a New Era of Challenges*.

We begin with the first of a two-parter, growing out of weeks spent interviewing union officers and staff, heads of local labour councils, rank-and-file members, union-side labour lawyers, employer spokespeople and academic experts. They were asked to help us identify the decade's 10 most significant B.C. labour stories. Here are the first five, with the rest to run tomorrow, along with a diversity of voices weighing in.

1. The Changing Face of B.C. Labour

In 1983, the percentage of B.C.'s work force in a union (a measure called union density) was at 45.3 per cent while by 2007 it had fallen to around 31 per cent, according to StatsCanada.

Nationally, in 1983 the density figure was 35.7 per cent and in 2007, 30.03 per cent. In 2009, union density fell slightly in B.C. Union density has grown in the public sector and fallen in the private sector in Canada and in B.C., but not so dramatically as in the U.S.

In 2009, the Canadian public sector was 71.3 per cent unionized, while the private sector was only 16.1 per cent. In the U.S., the comparative figures were 7.6 per cent in the private sector and 36.8 per cent in the public sector. While the prototypical unionized worker in B.C. in the 1960s was a white, male logger or mill worker, now the face of labour is much more likely to be a visible minority woman who works in a hospital or government office.

Think of it as the Revenge of Rosie the Riveter. (Rosie was the iconic WW II figure who embodied women's entry into the factory work force during the war, and their being driven back out afterwards. Now she's back and often serving as a union president or shop steward.)

2. I'll See You in Court

It's nearly unanimous. Almost every source *The Tyee* consulted agreed that Bill 29, the notorious union-busting legislation passed in 2002, was among the decade's top stories, especially when taken together with the precedent-setting judgment by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2007 that struck down some of its key provisions and established free collective bargaining as a charter-protected right.

Despite this huge win for organized labour, sources tell *The Tyee*, the unions representing B.C. health-care workers face almost weekly challenges as government and employers in the sector take advantage of the provisions of Bill 29 that survived Supreme Court review to privatize and contract out services.

3. Health, Safety and Lethal Workplaces

A list of tragedies prompting criticism of government policies begins with the Sullivan Mine disaster. Between May 15 and 17, 2006, two workers, Doug Erickson and Bob Newcombe, and two B.C. Ambulance paramedics, Kim Weitzel and Shawn Currier, died at Teck Cominco's decommissioned Sullivan Mine site near Cranbrook. They were felled by oxygen-depleted atmosphere inside the tiny water-monitoring structure build over a tailings dump. The tragedy posed serious questions about whether the province adequately regulates mine safety and situations in which workers are isolated on the job site. (Find extensive Tyee coverage here.)

In 2005, Grant De Patie was killed by a drunken teenager driving a stolen car. Grant was dragged to his death in an attempt to stop a "gas and dash" theft at the station where he worked. In 2007, with much fanfare, the provincial government unveiled a new piece of legislation, "Grant's Law," which required prepayment for nighttime gas purchases, but has, to date, reportedly because of retail-industry lobbying, failed to move on more significant reforms that were also called for, including safety barriers for night workers or mandatory double staffing over the night shift.

Grant's father Doug told *The Tyee* last year that: "The government is just catering to businessmen. Employ-

ers weren't doing anything to prevent gas-and-dash crime, or the dangers it posed to people like Grant working alone overnight. We need even stronger laws, not weaker."

Deaths associated with farm work were big news this decade, with three men killed and another two severely disabled working in an enclosed space on a Langley mushroom farm in 2007 and three women killed while another 13 were injured when an overloaded and under-equipped van belonging to a farm labour contractor flipped over on a rainy highway outside Chilliwack in 2007.

On Aug. 31, 29 charges were laid under worker-safety legislation against two companies and several company owners and directors for offenses connected with the mushroom farm deaths. In contrast this April, the provincial government declined to implement almost all the 18 safety-for-farm-worker policies recommended by a coroner's jury investigating the 2007 highway deaths.)

By contrast, calls for inquests to mounting logging-industry deaths in the early part of the decade went unheeded by the provincial government. Critics argued that deregulation under the BC Liberal government had created conditions for more risky practices, leading to a string of deadly tragedies in the forests and on logging roads.

4. Changing the Rules, Moving the Goal Posts

Perhaps the biggest and most consequential labour story of the decade in B.C., many of our sources agreed, was transformation by the Campbell Liberals of the basic regulatory bodies that govern labour and labour relations in the province. Rules embodied in the Labour Relations Code and administered through the Labour Relations Board have been revised to make it much harder for new union certifications to be won, with the numbers of new workers organized into unions plummeting from an annual average of more than 8,000 during the 1990s to less than 2,000 a year in the first three full years under the new business-friendly LRB of the 2000s.

Employment Standards Act changes brought in early in the Campbell years excluded many workers from the act's protection altogether, closed offices, almost totally deregulated work by children between 12 and 15, cut the minimum shift from four to two hours, made it harder for workers to get vacation and overtime pay from their employers and obligated workers who experience employer abuse of ESA protections to conduct their own cumbersome and daunting "do-it-yourself" complaint procedures.

And if you are injured at work in B.C., changes brought in during this decade mean that you are likely to qualify for much less compensation than you would have in the 1990s, only one element in a series of changes that critics say make Worksafe BC a much less effective support for injured workers than in times past. (Later this week in another of our Labour Week features, *The Tyee* will examine in detail the changes made at Worksafe BC and what those changes mean for injured workers. The news on this front is increasingly grim.)

The decade also saw a major revamping of trades training and apprenticeship programs, changes that mean far fewer young B.C. workers are getting the training they need to qualify as journeymen/women in their trades. A source within the building trades referred to this phenomenon as the "de-skilling" of the construction sector.

5. Chump Change

B.C. now has the lowest minimum wage standard in Canada, which allows employers to pay \$8 an hour for many low wage workers and provides permission to pay an even lower \$6 an hour training wage. These extremely low standards have been the target for on-going campaigns by the labour movement, including the "Six Bucks Sucks" initiative.

One of the good news stories for B.C. labour this decade has been advances made in the campaign to get the province's employers to commit to paying at least the "living wage." The campaign got a boost in April of 2010 when the City of New Westminster took steps

to guarantee that all city employees and all hired by city contractors were paid at least \$18.17 an hour, the living wage figure computed by the campaign, which has been actively promoted by unions across the province and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a progressive think tank.

Partly as a result of policies linked to the persistence of relatively low wages, child poverty continues to be a major labour story, with B.C. ranking as the province with the highest levels in Canada each year since 2002, and more than half of the children living in poverty experiencing that deprivation despite the fact that one or more of their parents have full time work.

Colourful excerpts from the Tyee's Comment Section:

UNIONS MUST UNITE

posted by "rantric" on Sept. 6, 2010

As a long time union member I have watched the dismantling of union power and structure this province first hand. Not one of the three major political parties are truly union friendly. Unions set the base line for the quality of life that all workers should expect to enjoy in this province. How many so called union jobs fall well below the \$18.17 per hour living wage. One can only assume that many of those are part time workers and so don;t really count. Does the "living wage" count benefits as a part of that wage or can they be deducted from the base.

Lets have what is left of our unions, unite and support a free and democratic government. Or should we continue as is, and watch the further erosion of our security,safety and quality of life for the sake of the shareholder?

unions fault

posted by "Bruce Pinard" on Sept. 8, 2010

If the unions had not caved during heu's May 2004 strike, our province would be happier and healthier. Unfortunately lord campbell has recklessly ruled. Selling out our public resources.Selling out the security and well being for tens of thousands of children all in the name of gordum's God,privatization. A God that only facilitates the few. A God that sucks our souls selling them to private share holders for dividends sake. Once mighty unions now quake having lost credibility. Not with the public but God forbid their own members. Ultimately, the biggest mistake in our B.C. labour history. Hang your heads in shame!

Unions R Us

posted by "Frank" on Sept. 9, 2010

Unions cannot control the political environment, nor should they. All they can do is try to protect their members. Outside of that the best they can do is raise alarm bells.

After that its up to the people to decide and unfortunately the people decided Campbell was the best person to run the province the last 3 elections. Or at least about 25% of the population decided that, 50% decided not to vote at all.

(The government assumes that people that don't vote are happy with the status quo)

Don't blame unions for Campbell, the people had their chance three times which suggests to me that if labour had fought back harder the people would have stood on the sidelines as government destroyed them altogether.

'Biggest Rollback of Worker Rights in Canadian History'

That's how one scholar terms Campbell-era policies. Part two of the decade's top 10 labour stories.

Tom Sandborn's article was originally published on Sept. 7., 2010, on TheTyee.ca. The electronic version of the story is available at <http://thetyee.ca/News/2010/09/07/DecadeofLabour/>



AT LEFT: Teachers Mark Beadet and Nicole Beaudet of Maple Ridge at 2005 BCTF support rally. Photo courtesy of Nick Westover.

of non-Canadian workers brought here as temporary workers, with critical comment focused both on the exploitation these workers were exposed to by their vulnerable status and the impact these labour imports had on the ordinary workings of supply and demand, making it easier for employers to keep wages down and unions weak.

In 2006, controversy swirled around a group of European ironworkers brought in to work on the Golden Ears Bridge project. That same year, a group of Latin American tunnel workers hired on Vancouver's Canada Line project joined the Construction and Specialized Workers Local 1611 after telling union organizers they were being paid substandard wages and provided with housing and other benefits inferior to those the company provided European workmates.

This dispute, which has dragged on through numerous Labour Relations Board hearings, led to a BC Human Rights Tribunal ruling that held the Latin American workers had experienced wage and benefit discrimination while working on the Vancouver project.

While construction workers made a lot of temporary foreign worker headlines in B.C., the majority of the over 250,000 temporary workers who were in Canada in 2008 worked in Canadian fields. One of the ongoing and important labour stories of the decade has

Yesterday we kicked off our Labour Week coverage by presenting five of the top labour stories of the past decade, an era shaped by sweeping policy changes by the Campbell government as well as wider economic forces. Our list is based on conversations with union and business leaders, academics and activists. Yesterday's stories included the changing face of B.C. labour, Bill 29 and the Supreme Court ruling against it, sliding workplace safety, regulatory changes crimping organizers, and B.C.'s lowest minimum wage in the country. Today we round out the top 10 list, followed by some perspectives from people we interviewed to create the list.

6. The Stranger at the Door: Temporary Foreign Workers and Response

One of the stories that just kept coming all decade had to do with the controversial increases in the number

been about attempts to unionize agricultural workers, an effort led by the United Food and Commercial Workers through their Agricultural Workers Alliance, which operates 10 store-front organizing centres across the country, including one in the Fraser Valley, where several successful organizing drives have been conducted this decade.

The most recent example of ways offshore workers can face exploitation in Canada (and what unions can do to counter it) was the revelation this summer by the B.C. Federation of Labour that a group of African workers (in this case recent immigrants) employed by a contractor to do silviculture work for the provincial government were being housed in filthy conditions, subjected to death threats, worked 15-hour days and paid erratically and at a lower rate than promised.

7. The Big Get Together in the Woods

In 2004, the Industrial Wood and Allied Workers union, the industry giant that had represented B.C. loggers and millworkers for decades, voted to merge with the United Steelworkers, forming what was described then as Canada's largest private sector union. The merger represented the end of an era, retiring the IWA identity after a tumultuous history that began in 1937, and came as a combination of difficulties created by trade agreements, struggles with environmentalists, climate-change-induced pine beetle infestations and profligate raw log exports shrank the B.C. work force in the province's woods and mills.

8. Showdowns at the Public Service Corral

Some of our sources saw a trio of public sector strikes, taken together, as one of the decade's big labour stories. The Ferry Workers strike in 2003, the HEU strike in 2004 and the BCTF strike in 2005 all followed a similar pattern. The strikes were defined as "illegal" and elicited strident media coverage about "holding the public to ransom," while other unions (most notably CUPE) and community groups organized mass pickets and other solidarity actions, with some militants hoping the specific strikes could be kicked up into a general strike of all organized workers against a government seen as profoundly anti-labour.

In all three cases, union leadership climbed down (typically at the urging of the B.C. Fed) from any visions of a general strike and cut deals with the employer that were met with accusations of "sell out" from the most militant members and observers, while more centrist commentators said union leadership had settled for the best deals possible with a hostile government.

9. Family Feuds

Organized labour is like a family in some ways, and the B.C. labour movement was not without its moments of internecine conflict. In 2003 and 2004, the soon to be defunct IWA came under fire for what some observers saw as illicit attempts to sign voluntary agreements with private contractors like Compass and Sodexo that were eager to take advantage of the business opportunities created by Bill 29 and its mandate for health-care sector privatization. These "partnership" deals were viewed as collusion with the government in its attacks on the Hospital Employees Union, which had signed valid contracts with public employers to represent the workers.

In 2009, an attempt by the B.C. Nurses Union to raid the licensed practical nurses represented by the Hospital Employees Union brought down disciplinary action by the B.C. Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress, while the raid was unpopular with some of the BCNU's own membership as well.

Several other B.C. unions found themselves in the uncomfortable role of employers enmeshed in labour disputes with their own unionized employees this decade.

In 2007, the B.C. Teachers' Federation lived through a bitter dispute with its research and professional staff represented by local 464 of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers.

In 2009, the Telecommunication Workers Union, which represents workers at Telus, faced a labour dispute with 13 office workers represented by the Canadian Office and Professional Workers.

10. Employers Weigh in: Agenda Unfinished

In addition to conversations with union officers, members and staff, as well as union-side lawyers and academic experts, *The Tyee* spoke with some prominent spokespeople from the other side of the bargaining table, including Jock Finlayson at the B.C. Business Council and Phil Hochstein, of the non-union construction employers' umbrella organization the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association of BC. Both Finlayson and Hochstein agree that the decade has been remarkable for relative labour peace.

For Finlayson, among the decade's key stories are the reductions in union density and the increased role of public sector unions in the movement.

Hochstein highlighted what he saw as the need for expanded immigration and use of temporary foreign workers to meet employers' hiring needs. He also said restrictive labour practices enforced by B.C. union contracts were responsible for what he said were B.C.'s lower-than-Canadian-average productivity figures.

'Biggest rollback of worker rights in Canadian history'

So, what conclusions can we draw from these stories and from the reflections of many seasoned labour relations observers? Here are a few.

The decade has seen the Campbell Liberals radically re-structure the legal and administrative bodies that govern labour relations in B.C., mainly in ways that tilt the regulatory playing field to give employers the home-team advantage on wage rates, employment standards, compensation for injured workers and the creation of new unions and union contracts.

"The removal of union members from Employment Standards protections, the exclusion of farm workers and the other changes in Employment Standards mean that at least a third of the workforce has been removed from ESA protection," noted SFU women's studies, economics and political science Prof. Marjorie Griffin Cohen.

"We are losing union density and that will continue," commented CUPE B.C. President Barry O'Neill.

"Limits on union growth have been created by changes in the Labour Relations Code."

"One of the big stories this decade has been the destruction of employment standards in B.C.," HEU media spokeswoman Margi Blamey said.

Bill Saunders, head of the Vancouver and District Labour Council agrees. "The new rules the Liberals have brought in favor the corporations. They want to create a desperate workforce."

Lucy Luna, who organizes farmworkers in the Fraser Valley for the Agricultural Workers Alliance, says that one ruling by the newly employer friendly Labour Relations Board in 2008, which made temporary workers fear that employers can now get away with punishing them for joining a union by sending them home as soon as they unionize "has made my work almost impossible."

Sauder School of Business professor emeritus Mark Thompson calls the changes to the Employment Standards Act "the biggest roll back of worker rights in Canadian history."

Kim Pollack of the United Steelworkers told *The Tyee* that changes made to the Forestry Act in 2004 created a much more dangerous workplace, with safety deregulated, increased subcontracting and a race to the bottom on safety procedures, resulting in 43 deaths in the woods the next year.

As evidenced by this testimony from the woods, worker safety continues to be an ongoing and sometimes heartbreaking story, as B.C. workers continue to die or come home crippled while trying to earn a living.

And more and more temporary foreign workers are being brought into B.C. under federally sponsored programs that critics say are consciously designed to drive down local wages and insulate employers both from the law of supply and demand and from collective bargaining.

Seth Klein, of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, said that the explosive growth in temporary foreign worker programs was breaking a long established

social contract, which offered new workers a pathway to citizenship and full rights.

“That contract has been broken, and the quid pro quo is no longer on offer, all in the name of worker discipline,” he said.

Several of the experts who spoke with *The Tyee* noted that the response of organized labour in B.C. to temporary foreign worker issues has been remarkably free of the racism that has blemished union response to off-shore workers in times past. This time round, instead of lobbying to keep foreign workers out, B.C.’s labour movement has enlisted the new workers into existing unions, set up store-front service centres to meet their needs and called on the government to allow guest workers a pathway to citizenship.

Meanwhile, the face of the labour movement is changing, with more and more of its membership concentrated in public-sector bodies, many with predominantly female and visible minority memberships. In another significant change, the IWA, the logger and mill workers’ union that was for many years an iconic presence in B.C. labour relations, was absorbed by the United Steel Workers this decade, and union density continued to fall.

Bill 29 and after

Some of the province’s key labour stories started in the legislative assembly or the courtrooms of the nation. At the beginning of the tumultuous decade, the provincial government passed Bill 29, a questionable piece of legislation that allowed the biggest mass layoffs of women workers in Canadian history, over 8,000 workers, only to see the Supreme Court of Canada strike down key provisions of the controversial law. In a landmark ruling that almost everyone *The Tyee* contacted included in their top 10 story list, the court disallowed as unconstitutional legislative language that allegedly gave the government power to unilaterally abandon settled contracts with health-care workers and outsource their jobs to lower paying private contractors.

From a union perspective, a second good news story related to Bill 29 and its partial invalidation is that the HEU has been successful in re-organizing almost all the jobs that were privatized and contracted out under

the bill’s flawed mandate. So, while health-care workers continue to face challenges, including government supported de-accreditation and contract flipping in the long-term care sector, whatever dreams the Liberals may have had of creating a system free of unions have not been realized.

“Not a week goes by that we aren’t still dealing with the consequences of Bill 29,” said HEU secretary/business manager Judy Darcy told *The Tyee*. “The Supreme Court decision, while a huge win, didn’t give successorship rights when work is contracted out to private sector employers and still allowed contract flipping and pressure on workers to grant concessions to prevent contracting out. Public sector bargaining in B.C. is now the most restrictive I have seen, and I have bargained in jurisdictions right across Canada.”

Changes to laws, regs hurt organizing

Other key Liberal legislative and regulatory initiatives which are still in effect revamped Employment Standards legislation, the functioning of Worksafe BC (the agency formerly known as the WCB) and the Labour Relations Board, all in ways that critics say privilege the agendas of management and employers over workers’ rights.

These changes, say the critics, have created a province in which it is shamefully possible to work full time and still not be able to house and feed yourself adequately, where the government has given up on any serious attempts to regulate child labour and worker safety, where child poverty is higher than anywhere else in Canada, where foreign workers are brought in by the thousands to flip burgers and harvest crops but denied a right to settle and make a life in Canada, and where it is harder and harder for workers to organize for better conditions via trade unions.

Within those unions, some rank and file activists are expressing impatience with a leadership they see as insufficiently militant, a story that has been a hardy perennial all through the history of the movement.

Gene McGuckin, for example, a retired CEP member, shop steward, local executive member and contract negotiator, was one of the founders of the Prepare the General Strike organization. He is critical of B.C. Fed leadership during the decade, and identifies as one

of the province's key labour stories this decade the "linked defeats and union-brass sell-outs of the ferry workers' strike in 2003, the HEU strike in 2004 and the BCTF strike in 2005.

"In each case the defiant workers had significant-to-huge public support," asserted McGuckin, but the eventual settlements were in his view "capitulations" that cost union members wages and benefits and hurt B.C. citizens by resulting in higher ferry charges and poorer levels of health care and education.

B.C. Fed president Jim Sinclair says he has a different view of history than McGuckin and other critics of his leadership. "The disputes he mentions showed real increases in solidarity."

CUPE B.C.'s Barry O'Neill, while not endorsing McGuckin's criticisms of Fed leadership, did point out that his union had organized the largest solidarity walkouts since the 1980s during the HEU and BCTF strikes McGuckin cites.

"We're in time of transition, with some weakening of militancy," he said. "Times are different but we should be moving toward more militancy. We have been too dependent on friendly governments."

Living wage breakthrough in New West

Darryl Walker, president of the B.C. Government and Service Employees Union, while, like O'Neill, declining to endorse McGuckin's critique of union leadership, said that critical views like those expressed by the veteran rank and file member were "not necessarily unhealthy. We need to hold on to views like this. Sometimes we don't go far enough. However, in 2003-2005, I think each struggle was pushed to the right level. You can be damned in hindsight, and maybe mistakes were made, but I think most members were happy with the decisions made by officers and leadership."

If B.C.'s labour movement took a beating from BC Liberal government policies in the past decade, it gained a victory this year within the council chambers of New Westminster. The campaign for a living wage in B.C., which has been actively supported by organized labour, got a big boost when New Westminster became the first municipality to commit that all its

direct employees and all those who work for significant city contractors must receive a living wage of over \$18 an hour.

"New Westminister was a win, and a good one," said the B.C. Fed's Sinclair. "It is only one of the many pieces of evidence that the labour movement is still alive and kicking, and fighting on many fronts, from strikes to regulatory reform to municipal byelaws.

"The Fed has moved more to seeing that we represent all working people, not just our members, although they are, of course, very important," said Sinclair. "We are there for working people in general. Just look at our campaigns to increase the minimum wage and protect public services."

Colourful excerpts from the Tyee's Comment Section:

Here and Abroad

posted by "OwlRol" on Sept. 7, 2010

It would behoove us to watch what is going on elsewhere in the world, notably the upstart union movements in Latin America, for which many organizers have paid with their lives, and the stumbling union movement in Europe.

I haven't seen such union activity, complete with non-union support, now taking place in France (although not quite the 1968 movement), here in BC since the Days of Solidarity. Where was that all-out support for the Telus workers, the teachers and the healthcare workers, amongst others, over the last few years?

As one prof said in the early 70s "it's easy to change the leader, it's harder to change the party in charge and its most difficult to change the system." Proportional representation may be one step in the right direction if we can ever get it passed.

I suspect that things will need to get much worse before the working class in BC will organize as a cohesive group to put pressure on for needed changes. The HST has galvanized many people from different social groups, but it is not a big enough issue to tip the scales, surely a new leader, perhaps a new party after an election but not likely more than that.

Internationally, I think that the Scandinavian countries will be the next target of the capitalist elite, because they are quite successful social democratic states, their regulations are far more thought out and egalitarian than ours and they provide a more just, albeit, capitalist role model that many in the NDP party might like to emulate.

workers' rights, what a joke

posted by "BCer" on Sept. 7, 2010

It used to be there was some dignity in working for a living. The major employers (think Bighealth and construction and forests) treat workers with contempt. Workers are a liability to the bottom line. We are bullied, insulted, being assaulted and dying at work. And

I work for a union shop! Get rid of the GD liberals once and for all.

@coyote

posted by "dorothy" on Sept. 9, 2010

I think the future will depend on the level and amount of intelligence we can chase down to apply to the job. But hasn't that always been the case? I see much of the mess we're in now as a result of intelligence and resourcefulness not being in vogue for such a long time, where profits would be maximized based on everyone running with the pack. We need to treasure the fast runners and spearheaders rather than feeding them Ritalin.

Of Political Parties I Care Not A Whit II

posted by "Jerry Munro" on Sept. 8, 2010

The working class needs to be made aware of, and come to understand this central dynamic within class divided societies... and that being excluded from this economic "power" is the central source of their frequent victimhood. Which needs to end... and can only so through a determined revolutionary struggle for power with the ruling class and its State.

Philippines Bloody for Unionists, But Invest There Says Ottawa

Canada's government is too quiet on abuses say human rights advocates.

Tom Sandborn's article was originally published on Nov. 25, 2009, on TheTyee.ca. The electronic version of the story is available at <http://thetyee.ca/News/2009/11/25/PhilippinesBloody/>

Why is Canada's government promoting the Philippines as a prime place to invest, even as workers in that nation face abduction, torture and death for trying to organize unions?

Increasingly, that question is being pressed by human rights activists in B.C. and elsewhere in Canada.

In the United States, Walmart and other big apparel firms have sent a critical letter to Philippine president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, citing in her country a "pattern of harassment and violence against workers, labour leaders and human rights promoters."

And the International Trade Union Confederation, which represents 178 million workers in 158 different countries, last year documented a grim situation that has further deteriorated. "Four trade union officials were shot and killed by unknown assassins and the military intimidated and harassed union officials. The authorities continued frustrating worker attempts to form unions and arrested union officials," reported the confederation.

In April, Ken Georgetti, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, joined a long list of other Canadian labour leaders as well as many Canadian churches in sending a letter to the Philippine president. "We vehemently protest the on-going human and labour rights violations and repression perpetrated by state authorities in the Philippines," they wrote.

Go to a Canadian government web site, however, and you are shown a very different picture. The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade is promoting Canadian investment in the Philippines and posting a pro-Philippines investment article that paints a rosy picture of business prospects there while urging investors to meet with a Philippine business delegation that visited Canada this summer.

"In fact, the Philippines is now considered one of the most attractive investment destinations in the world, accounting for 6.7 per cent of the estimated US\$326 billion global information and communication technology outsourcing market, next to India and China," reads the article.

Step up the criticism: activist

One of the loudest voices calling for Canada to take a stronger stand against the Philippines government is Toronto-based human rights activist Kevin Thomas.

"If Canadians are willing to accept a share of the benefits of trade and investment in the Philippines, we have to also accept a share of the responsibility to protect the rights and physical integrity of those workers and communities that make those benefits possible" said Thomas, who helps run the Maquila Solidarity Network.

Dana Cryderman, Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) spokesper-

son, told *The Tyee* that her department and the government of Canada has not been as silent as Thomas and other critics think.

“Canada is actively engaged on the issue of human rights in the Philippines. Canadian representatives regularly raise our concerns with the Philippines at all levels. On April 18, 2008, Deepak Obhrai, Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs, issued a members statement expressing our concerns regarding the human rights situation in the Philippines,” Cryderman told *The Tyee* in a recent email exchange.

Obhrai, an MP and Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs and for International Cooperation, told Parliament in April that Canada was encouraged by recent developments in the Philippines with regards to promoting and protecting human rights.

He told Parliament: “The Philippines faces serious human rights challenges, notably, the ongoing extrajudicial killings and the apparent culture of impunity. Canada raised these concerns on April 11 during the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review of the Philippines. Canada also encouraged the Philippines to ensure that its security forces are aware of human rights and of their responsibility to protect human rights defenders.”

DFAIT’s Cryderman told *The Tyee* that Canada has often expressed its concerns about human and labour rights abuses in the Philippines, including statements made as part of its involvement at the United Nations Human Rights Council. She also cited Canadian work on capacity building with Philippine institutions with “a mandate to improve human rights.”

‘Building people-to-people solidarity’

May Farrales, chair of the Vancouver-based B.C. Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines, is not impressed with the efforts cited by DFAIT. “It is time that the Canadian government wake up to the true character of the Arroyo regime,” she told *The Tyee* in an email. “We believe Canada’s position that the Philippines is a ‘functioning democracy’ is no longer tenable.”

Farrales maintains that the Canadian government could do more, and grassroots movements in Canada can help push this agenda.

“We believe that Canada’s response will remain ineffective until Canada is also willing to critically examine all its various spheres of relations with the Philippines, including immigration, trade and investment, military aid (e.g. promotion of joint military training exercises, etc), CIDA funding for various projects including those that supposedly uphold the rule of law, etc.”

Farrales adds: “This is where Canadians can do more to understand Canada’s role in the Philippines and with that understanding, help lobby the Canadian government and get more involved in building people-to-people solidarity.”

Farrales’ group wants the Canadian government to review all its aid and relationships with the Philippines, call for real human rights protection reforms there and convene a Parliamentary investigation into Philippine human rights violations.

Bill Saunders, president of the Vancouver and District Labour Council, who toured the Philippines for two weeks last December. He said workers in the Philippines “don’t want to have to go off shore and work as servants. At present, the Philippine economy is geared to exporting cheap labour around the world, with offshore workers each supporting up to ten people at home in the Philippines while up to 35 per cent of the population lives with malnourishment.

“Trade unions are an important part of this fight for justice. The Canadian government is complicit with repression now. It should be supporting demands for union rights and stop colluding with those in the Philippines who are trying to crush unions.”

Thomas notes that the International Labour Organization has recently completed a long deferred investigation into possible labour abuses in the Philippines. (It took two years for the government of the Philippines to give its permission for the ILO committee to do its work within the country.)

In announcing the upcoming visit of the ILO committee to the Philippines in a press release this summer, the global labour body referred to “serious allegations of the murder of trade unionists, death threats, arrest of trade union leaders in connection with their trade union activities, widespread impunity relating to violence against trade unionists and the militarization of workplaces in export processing zones (EPZs) and special economic zones.”

When the final report from the ILO investigation is published during the first quarter of 2010, Thomas expects that the findings will confirm the many credible reports of anti-union violence and systematic denial of freedom to associate that his organization and many other labour and human rights groups have heard for years.

‘Vital to our continued prosperity’

The Tyee asked DFAIT’s Cryderman whether it was appropriate for the Canadian government to promote investment in the Philippines while reports of labour abuses there are so common. She replied:

“Canadian Direct Investment Abroad (CDIA) is an important trade policy priority for Canada in its relationship with the Philippines. It is vital to our continued prosperity, and our economic engagement with the Philippines gives us the opportunity to encourage and incorporate Canadian values towards positive policy developments on better human rights conditions.”

Colourful excerpts from the Tyee's Comment Section:

Corporate Social Responsibility

posted by "kootenay" on Nov. 25, 2009

Frankly, this government doesn't give a damn about human rights, especially in developing countries.

I spent last week in Ottawa lobbying in favour of Bill C-300 which attempts to provide a mechanism for dealing with environmental and human rights violations supported or perpetrated by Canadian companies abroad.

The Conservatives initial response to this bill was to table their own policy; however, compliance is voluntary and the CSR official, Marketa Evans, has no power to investigate abuses if the corporations in question do not agree to it.

Bill C-300 would impose conditions on Economic Development Canada EDC to only invest and insure projects in developing countries where corporations have proven they are willing and capable of following internationally recognized human rights and environmental regulations. Naturally the conservatives think such regulations would make Canadian companies less competitive.

Just one example of a Canadian mining company operating in the Philippines. At an operating Copper mine they are dumping mine waste directly into the ocean. In addition the tailing pond broke and flooded the village below it with toxic waste. Parents of dead children were paid \$23/child.

I guess that's why the Philippines are such a great investment opportunity. Here is a link <http://creekside1.blogspot.com/2009/10/bill-c-300-in-minefield-of.html>

Canadian Companies

posted by "offended" on Nov. 26, 2010

have call centres there (Telus is one of these companies). It would be nice if there was a way to find out what other unionized jobs have ended up there so that those of us who wish to take our business elsewhere (to another company) could do so.

Your right.

posted by "Bob Watts" on Nov. 26, 2010

This planet can only support 3 billion people and we are at double that population right now. I watch in horror when I see that the USA has 100 years of natural gas left, then what happens? If we burn trees for heat, then the trees they'll be gone in 5 years. What is the future for my one child? I would guess the future for us in North America is what is happening in 3rd world countries today. Easter Island here we come!!!

Campbell River's Tight Squeeze

Portrait of a town struggling to adjust to two closed mills and hard times.

Justin Langille's article was originally published on April 9, 2010, on TheTyee.ca. The electronic version of the story is available at <http://thetyee.ca/News/2010/04/09/CampbellRiverSqueeze/>



AT LEFT: Decisive words of encouragement adorn the Town Centre Inn, a local motel on the outskirts of downtown Campbell River. Photograph by Justin Langille.

Since the mill closed on February 25, 2009, over 63 per-cent of his fellow workers decided to take a severance package from the company rather than wait to go back to work. The offer is tempting to Welsh. He isn't ready to give up though -- not yet anyway.

Negotiations between Catalyst and his union, the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers locals 1123 and 630, have been ongoing for the past year.

Two weeks ago, on the day I arrived in town, the union was still standing by a contract that was brokered in 2009. And Catalyst was arguing the Elk Falls mill won't be affordable unless workers take a big pay cut.

I spoke to Welsh only hours before he left for Nanaimo to meet with other union locals in an attempt to broker a collective wage deal. While I waited to hear back, I walked the streets of Campbell River, trying to understand a community in crisis.

Devastating closures

During the last two years, mass forestry lay-offs have hit Campbell River hard.

In February 2008, the TimberWest sawmill closed its doors and cut loose 257 employees.

When Arnold Welsh and nearly 350 fellow workers lost their jobs at a Campbell River paper mill early last year, they didn't fret.

"We just thought it was a temporary down," Welsh said. "You know, the market's down a bit and we'll be back in a few weeks or a month."

For 30 years, Welsh loaded barges and trucks for paper producer Catalyst. His job helped support a family of five.

It's been more than a year since the company's Elk Falls mill stopped producing paper. Welsh is still jobless. He's collecting EI, and trying to find work elsewhere. He has good credentials and experience. But well-paying industrial jobs in Campbell River are scarce.

Next month, Breakwater Resources announced its Myra Falls Mine would reduce its workforce by 187 jobs.

The following July brought lay-offs for 440 employees when Catalyst permanently closed its sawdust pulp and containerboard division at Elk Falls. Welsh lost his job when the entire mill closed in early 2009.

Important support industries were hurt by the removal of core sawmill jobs. Everyone from hydraulic equipment suppliers to marine mechanics felt the brunt of local closures.

Campbell River is just one of many small communities in coastal and interior B.C. that have lost major industrial employers in a failing B.C. forestry industry. Declining housing and newsprint markets in the U.S have lowered substantial stateside demand for Canadian lumber and paper products in recent years. Meanwhile, pine beetle infestations have rendered commercially viable stands of Interior timber nearly worthless. A rising Canadian dollar has also lowered the profit margin for Canadian companies that post their share prices in U.S. dollars, but operate with Canadian costs.

In the last three years alone, four-dozen sawmills have closed permanently or indefinitely in B.C., according to the Ministry of Forests and Range's 2008/2009 Service Plan Report.

"Not just the coastal, but the B.C. forest sector and the global forest sector has had the crap kicked out of it," says Doug Preston, executive director of the North Island Employment Centre.

An employment support organization based in Campbell River, NIEF understands how mill closures can devastate a community.

Compared to 2008, the group has seen a 27 per cent increase in people using its services this year. That amounts to 3,735 people of Campbell River's estimated 31,328 residents seeking work.

Preston told *The Tye* that 1,532 of them have been displaced resource workers. Of these resource sector workers, 1,149 were displaced forestry workers.

Free soap and toothpaste for the needy

Georgette Whitehead, co-coordinator for the Campbell River Women's Centre, runs a modest anti-poverty program.

She's seen way more people than usual come for free clothing and hygiene products. In past years, about 300 to 350 people a month would use the centre's drop-in program.

That's increased to around 450 a month this year, Whitehead said.

"Definitely people are coming here in the last couple of years who've never come to a community social service and asked for toothpaste before," said Whitehead.

The centre also has a diaper and formula voucher handout program for women and their families. In 2008, the \$20 vouchers lasted all year. Last year, they were all distributed in three months. This year they were already gone by mid-March.

The centre and its anti-poverty program are valuable to Campbell River women and their families. Whitehead knows that Campbell River is a community in transition, one that is at the whim of larger changes at the provincial and global level.

Free soap and toothpaste will only go so far.

"It's a little bit of a band-aid. Right?" she asks.

Wait for negotiations or flee town?

Just outside of downtown Campbell River proper, among an assemblage of strip malls and parking lots, stands the wood-clad Labour Centre, headquarters for CEP local 630 and CEP local 1123. The two union chapters represent the workers of the Elk Falls mill.

On the second floor, I found 630's president Doug Ellis holding court with recording secretary Mark Steenvoorden and financial secretary Rick Dione waiting for me to arrive.

Stout and jovial with a bright red polo shirt, white hair and inviting disposition, Ellis handed me a paper cup

of tea while Steenvoorden and Dione shuffled paper around the small office lined with binders, filing cabinets and trophies from bygone fishing derbies.

A sense of urgency was palpable.

As 630 president, Ellis was getting ready to join Welsh and other union reps in Nanaimo. The goal was to hash out a deal that would get Elk Falls started up with minimal wage concessions for employees.

Ellis was cautiously optimistic that the talks might bring progress. Catalyst CEO Richard Garneau had been towing a hard line on labour's last offer, a \$40 per hour/\$80 per ton (of paper) deal that would see employee wages cut 20 per cent from their pre-lay-off rates.

Some of those who were laid off haven't been able to wait for negotiations to succeed.

A year after the closure, more than two-thirds of Elk Falls employees have taken a \$57,000 severance package, according to a news release on Catalyst's website.

The three Campbell River union reps conceded that some of their friends have done well, finding work with tar sands operations in places like Fort McMurray. But the majority has found it difficult to land work in any area close to Campbell River.

The reps are also mindful about the ripple effect that mill closures are having on the community.

"You only have to look around at restaurants and pubs to notice that attendance is down, Steenvoorden said.

"Every sort of business in this town is feeling the effect of it. Loggers are out, sawmill workers are out. It spins off into the community. Less dollars being spent in the community means less jobs and... less [of a] standard of living for everybody."

Ripple effect hurts laundry operator

Laundry services may not be the first business that comes to mind when talking about forestry-related job losses, but in Campbell River, business is way down.

"Overall, the revenue has dropped by about 40 per cent this last year," said James Rogers, owner of Campbell River Laundromat Ltd.

It's the central laundry in town, located in the very middle of Tyee Plaza.

Mill employees who did their laundry here have left Campbell River to work elsewhere. Maintenance crews from out of town who had contracts with Catalyst would bring their coveralls to be cleaned proper, but not anymore.

As well, local businesses that had their mats or linens laundered by Rogers and his staff have closed, moved away or cut staff and now have less to bring in.

If Catalyst were to open again, it would be an invaluable asset to his business, Rogers said. But he knows that things won't return to the way that they were.

"It's tough," he admitted.

Adjusting will take time, realtor says

Downtown Campbell River is adorned with a variety of healthy retail businesses. Restaurants, a bookstore, a skateboard store and other independent shops make up the face of local independent business.

These locations are also interspersed with empty storefronts shrouded with brown paper and dusty for lease signs.

A short walk around the corner from the popular Shoppers Row and the central stretch of the Island Highway that runs along the south-west side of Tyee Plaza reveals tattoo shops, gallery spaces and former First Nation band offices that lay vacant.

In 2005 and 2006, Remax Check realty was selling about three commercial properties a month. Now it's down to one in a good month, said realtor Randy Check. He's got an inventory of 75 or 80 properties, but those are all leases.

"It's an important service that we provide, but in terms of selling commercial real estate, [there is] very little activity," said Check.

“It’s a boom and bust type thing with a resource-based community like Campbell River. It’s gonna take some time for things to adjust.”

This lack of small business growth is made all the more ominous by the growing presence of big box stores on the periphery of downtown.

Save-on-Foods and London Drugs have opened locations in the last couple of years. Home Depot opened up a brand new store last year on Feb. 19, just days before the Elk Falls layoffs were announced. A new Wal-Mart promises much-needed jobs, but many people fear it could hurt local business.

New task force faces tough decisions

Mayor Charlie Cornfield is faced with an admittedly bleak economic future. But that doesn’t deter him from thinking about the possibilities for Campbell River in the next phases of B.C. forestry.

The industry has always been cyclical, he noted. Campbell River shouldn’t want to wait for the upturn in the market, he believes. It must take advantage of current opportunities.

The town is ideally positioned for forestry, Cornfield posited. Its land grows trees extremely well -- if you cut them down, you can grow more trees. The industry, he said, is totally sustainable.

He’s optimistic the Task Force on Forestry started by council last August will be able to create incentives for a new mill to be built in the town in the future.

Composed of local forestry industry intelligentsia, the task force will be working to position Campbell River as a central player and location for future forestry industry developments.

It aims to “support a business enabling environment that will enhance and retain existing business and attract new forest industry capital to Campbell River,” according to an August 2009 city press release.

Cornfield has been working hard with acting city manager George Paul to retain existing business.

Paul has recommended to city council that major industrial taxes be reduced to \$3.5 million this year from \$4.6 million last year. He has also proposed that further cuts be made to reduce the levy against industry even further by 2012 to \$1.5 million.

These rates would meet the requirements of Catalyst CEO Richard Garneau, who lost to Campbell River in B.C. Supreme Court after only paying \$1.5 million of \$4.6 million in taxes for city services last year.

But slashing corporate taxes would likely increase residential rates from 15.5 to 16.7 per cent, according to some reports.

How far is council willing to cut industrial taxation to help to appease Catalyst and possibly restart the Elk Falls mill? It’s a tough decision, admitted Cornfield. And one the city will face for years.

Union negotiations go nowhere

Two days after I first spoke to laid-off mill worker Arnold Welsh, news came that in Nanaimo talks between union locals and Catalyst stalled once again.

Catalyst’s seven CEP locals told the company that, collectively among four plants, they would take a 15.5 per cent cut in wages. Union reps figured that would let Catalyst garner enough overhead to help the Elk Falls mill and others reopen.

Shortly after the offer was put on the table, the meeting broke for supper. Ellis, Welsh and the rest of the CEP members went to their hotel rooms.

Less than 15 minutes later, the CEP delegates got a call from Catalyst negotiators telling them that the deal was no good and talks were over. They left.

I asked Welsh to see what he thought about it.

“It was a good chunk of coin,” Welsh said of the offer, with a sigh that rested somewhere beyond disappointment.

From here, Welsh doesn’t really know what’s going to happen in negotiations between Catalyst and his union or in his personal life.

Looking back a year, he never considered that things would come to this point.

In the future, he'll consider taking severance and cutting his ties with the company if he finds a job that he enjoys. When his EI runs out, he might not have any choice.

"I'd like to be in Campbell River, but if anything comes up anywhere else, I will be leaving. I have to supply my family with income."

Colourful excerpts from the Tyee's Comment Section:

Go West, Young Man!

posted by "alive" on April 9, 2010

Guess the industrial age is on the way out? I was bribed to move west because of all the activity going on and the lack of skilled people. Lately we have seen how some large firms are doing their best to close down their operations. Witness Kitimat where Alcan prefers to sit back and collect from their Kemano turbines, how Gold River papermill disposed of a perfectly sound operation, and now how Campbell River follows suit. The common denominator is the cry that wages are the problem, like suddenly it is a sin that a worker should have a bank account? More likely is that it is a determined effort to bust any union movement in this province. Remember how scab unions got work on building condo's when Gordo was major? Now he is premier and it is the entire province that ends up with poorly paid jobs.

three sides to every story

posted by "lifeboat19" on April 9, 2010

...The forest companies are nothing more than robber barons. I remember the day when a suit came into the Timberwest sawmill and said 'sorry boys we know you did your best but we cant make it.'

I saw production boys with few skills busting there asses for 90 days to prove we could make money. In the end they were shown the door when when the clock ran out. Timberwest the scumbags that they were immediately cut the wires to every motor and tore the place to the ground to make sure no one could restart it.

The tug guys are busy busy busy in CR loading logs for Vancouver, the States and the far east, all very efficiently cut by feller bunchers that take a 10th of the manpower as a conventional show.

As for the pulp mill they had it good for a long time. It may have bit to be low on the totem pole, but lots of boys with high school or less did very well for themselves. There are ideologues on both sides that need

to bend. It is certainly a world market for pulp and paper. But soon when the recession ends, it will be again a country-wide market for well trained people. If the lowest price is the law, WestJet will be more than happy to fly the skilled to McMurray. And if there is no consensus, the best will vote with their feet not their union cards and the rest will serve ageing boomers in oceanview homes for a meager living.

Global Labour Frames Future in Vancouver

Nine-hundred delegates from all over the world to vote on green social justice agenda.

Tom Sandborn's article was originally published on June 21, 2010, on TheTyee.ca. The electronic version of the story is available at <http://thetyee.ca/News/2010/06/21/LabourFramesFuture/>



AT LEFT: Guy Ryder, secretary general of the International Trade Union Confederation.

The ITUC is the world's largest umbrella group of independent unions, representing 175 million workers in 155 countries. If all of Ryder's members were gathered together in one nation, it would be the sixth largest country by population in the world, just larger than Pakistan and just smaller than Brazil.

Ryder said his organization is facing historic challenges during the current economic crisis, and he talked with excitement about some of the approaches the ITUC is pursuing to rebuild the house of labour after decades of neo-conservative onslaught.

'From crisis to social justice'

Ryder calls for more aggressive organizing of unorganized workers everywhere, especially in the Third World, where much of the work done by unionized workers in the developed world has moved, and for a global tax on financial transactions to fund an economic recovery that includes workers and jobs. Flightnetwork.com -Specializing in Cheap Flights

The "jobless recovery" reported in the business pages, he said, is not a recovery at all unless it allows workers to get back to work and to earn a fair return for their labour.

Ryder said this week's congress in Vancouver, working under the slogan "Now the People: From the

The international labour movement has arrived in Vancouver this week, and is preparing to take its prescription for healing the world economy to the summer's upcoming G8 and G20 summits. Global labour's point man, Guy Ryder, told *The Tyee* he represents a movement that has been hurt by business globalization and anti-union ideologies, but is resilient and building strength in areas far from the industrial heartlands of the most developed nations.

Secretary general of the International Trade Union Confederation Ryder, a Cambridge graduate, was trim, relaxed, eloquent and dapper in a well cut grey suit when he spoke with *The Tyee* this spring, in town for preliminary meetings in advance of the ITUC's second world congress that runs June 21-25 in Vancouver.

Crisis to Global Social Justice” would focus on workers’ rights, migrant workers, climate change and HIV-AIDS.

“The last three decades have been very unfavorable for working people,” he said. “Starting with the Reagan/Thatcher years, the labour share of global wealth has now been driven down to the level we had in 1930. The International Labour Organization says the current crisis has destroyed 34 million extra jobs in the past two years. The aggregate trend is negative and the international labour movement has got to find ways to deal with job losses and follow and organize jobs when they are shifted to the third world.”

Those trends are evident in Canada. In 2008, 31.2 per cent of Canadian workers belonged to unions, down from 33.7 per cent in 1997, according to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. Rates of unionization varied from 24 per cent in Alberta to 39.4 per cent in Quebec. B.C.’s rate was 31 per cent.

The economic downturn of the past two years has only worsened the picture for labour, driving the Canadian national figure for unionization down to 29.9 per cent for 2009.

Of the 4,605,193 union members in Canada in 2009, over three million belong to the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the host group for the upcoming ITUC meeting in Vancouver.

CLC president Ken Georgetti told *The Tyee*, “Having the world congress in Vancouver gives the labour movement in Canada the chance to see the struggles of workers around the world first hand. It’s also a chance to learn that most of us have the same struggles, and we share the same aspirations -- a decent job, decent and safe work, the ability to retire in dignity after a lifetime of work with a decent pension.”

‘Just transition, green jobs’ agenda

The ITUC Congress will hear from a spectrum of international speakers including Juan Somavia, director general of the International Labour Organization, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, Pascal Lamy, director-

general of the World Trade Organization, and Helen Clark, administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.

The ITUC gathers together most of the organized workers on the planet with the exception of the over 200 million workers in state controlled Chinese unions. Ryder said the Chinese organizations are not yet eligible to join his group because the level of state and party control over organized labour means the unions in China do not qualify as independent. The World Federation of Trade Unions claims to represent up to 70 million workers in unions that were once aligned with local communist parties and the Soviet Union. Ryder says these claims are “not credible.”

More than 900 delegates from the 300-plus labour centrals that make up the ITUC are gathering in Vancouver. Fresh from this international meeting, some of these same labour leaders will move on to participate in meetings of the G8 and G20 slated for Ontario immediately after the ITUC events.

To these gatherings of the leaders of the world’s most powerful economies the labour leaders will be bringing a set of proposals for what Ryder calls a “just transition, green jobs” agenda that will repair the world economy without making climate change and other environmental damage worse.

“We’ll be bringing the message that there needs to be more interests represented at the table than just finance,” the CLC’s Georgetti told *The Tyee*. “It’s more than just money. Trade and the expansion of trade has to benefit more than just business -- it must benefit workers too. We found out a long time ago that trade agreements don’t benefit workers and it’s time to change that.”

“Employment issues need to be taken into account,” Ryder said, “but at the same time, we need to follow a green, low carbon agenda. We’ve seen a major turn of the corner in the union movement on this topic. Ten years ago international labour couldn’t endorse the Kyoto Accord, but we’ve seen a real sea change now. Only a few weeks ago I was invited to speak to the Greenpeace International AGM. That would have been unimaginable 10 years ago. Then, we and environmentalists were on opposite sides of the barricades.”

New generation of leadership

Ryder, born in the U.K. and just over 50 years old, represents a new generation of leadership much more responsive to environmentalism than would have been possible even a decade ago. Similarly embracing campaigns many earlier unionists might have opposed, the organization he has led since its founding congress in 2006 is trying to ensure gender parity and a focus on the rights of women and young workers at its Vancouver gathering. Every national delegation will be required to reflect a 50-50 gender balance or it will have to answer to the credentials committee, which, Ryder said, may well cut back the voting strength of delegations that arrive with more men than women members.

Ryder said that if the June congress had been held two years ago, trade agreements and their impacts on workers would have been at the top of the agenda. Now, however, in the wake of the current global financial crisis and mounting concerns about climate change, other topics have shouldered their way to the top of labour's agenda. As noted, the ITUC is committed to helping to build an environmentally friendly economy that fairly treats all workers, especially the women and migrant workers who continue to bear the brunt of economic disruptions.

Ryder said his organization will be lobbying for the creation of a "financial transaction tax" that would collect a small amount each time a stock, bond or derivative is traded, with the revenue collected earmarked for job creation, progress on the United Nations mandated Millennium Development goals and a worker friendly, jobs oriented economic recovery plan.

"More financial regulation is needed," Ryder said. "Some transactions should be ended altogether, like the 'naked credit default swaps' that are such a big part of the Greek crisis now."

"Naked" credit default swaps are a particularly bizarre phenomenon of modern finance, a purely speculative insurance policy purchased by someone who does not hold any of the bonds or other financial instruments

that underlie the CDS. "It's like having fire insurance on your neighbor's house," said Ryder.

Regulating derivatives

Marc Lee, senior economist at the B.C. offices of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, is supportive of the call for increased transparency and regulation of financial instruments like the naked CDS.

"Derivative trading should be tightly regulated," he told *The Tyee*. "Derivatives were originally developed as a hedge, a way to insure against future loss, but speculators have flipped them on their heads. Anything that shrinks the size of financial speculation is a good thing. Lots of it occurs in totally unregulated areas now."

Lee was more ambivalent about Ryder's suggested financial transaction tax.

"While it is a good idea, and one we've discussed at the CCPA for years now, you have to be careful about the competing claims that are made for such a tax. On the one hand, proponents say such a tax will reduce speculation, while on the other they tout it as a source of revenue for achieving useful social targets like the Millennium Development Goals. If the tax is successful enough in reducing speculation, it will likely reduce the revenue base that is being promised for progressive policy goals."

The International Trade Union Confederation held its founding congress in Vienna in 2006, merging the two major global labour groups then in existence, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the World Confederation of Labour. The merger was made possible by the end of the Cold War, during which the WCL represented unions aligned with the U.S.S.R. and the IFTU represented labour centrals aligned with the U.S. and other non-Soviet powers.

Colourful excerpts from the Tyee's Comment Section:

Work Ethic

posted by "Camero409" on June 21, 2010

I am sick and tired of the Canadian work ethic being criticized. I have travelled to quite a few parts of the world as a consultant in the railway industry. I can tell you our work ethic is second to none especially compared to SE Asia.

SE Asia lacks quality control at every level and isn't enforced until there are representatives from the west in place. I worked in Bangladesh where there is a huge garment industry. A person I met represented a clothing company here in Canada. She would put a mark on the last box loaded under her supervision and inspection. When she arrived next morning she would remove all boxes that had been loaded after she left until she arrived next day.

I asked her why. She replied that the minute she turns her back and walks out the door, quality control goes with her. I heard the same story over and over again with manufacturers in China and other SE Asia countries.

Our workers here are as good or better than most if not all countries including the US in my opinion. Now he is premier and it is the entire province that ends up with poorly paid jobs.

Compete with this...

posted by "Jerry Munro" on June 21, 2010

There are places and work places in "People's" China right now, working so goddamn hard for so little in return, by way of lives or cash, that the workers are committing suicide in droves. You want to compete with that, do you? Is this a New Global World Order, or just a very old one that capitalism is resurrecting again, from the time of the Industrial Revolution in England, dressed up in a shiny coat of poisonous lead paint, to bamboozle us?

I say we are being bamboozled, and this "international labour leader" guy is part of the hype. We need to

look after ourselves first, then do what we can to help the third world help itself. Otherwise, we are going down with the ship of capitalism too.

BC/Canada needs B Corporation legislation?

posted by "Peter Dimitrov" on June 22, 2010

...indeed there is nothing wrong with Canadian work ethic. Management is continually pushing workers to produce more while heaping on more work, cutting wages or benefits, hassling pensioners, using bankruptcy re-organization laws to undermine workers, families and communities.

But beyond that, we need better solutions to the mess created by Capital and State Capitalists like Campbell and Harper. Legislation to promote more economic democracy, more co-operatives, balanced laws pertaining to bankruptcy, pension protection legislation, and perhaps the notion of B Corporation needs to be promoted.

When Two Jobs Aren't Enough

*Thousands in BC lack the full time, decent paying jobs they seek.
Walk a mile on their treadmill.*

Justin Langille's article was originally published on Sept. 8, 2010, on TheTyee.ca. The electronic version of the story is available at <http://thetyee.ca/News/2010/09/08/TwoJobsArentEnough/>



AT LEFT: Melanie Hardy, director of Career Zone employment centre, has seen client list double. Photo by Justin Langille.

Of course she wants to work as an accountant again, she says.

She has talked to the right people, she knows what it would take: language skills, time and money. Of those, she possesses not nearly enough at the moment. And though I meet Lyn at an ESL class investing still more hours to better herself, she worries she's stuck on the margins of a good life in British Columbia.

Lyn is one of thousands of largely invisible people in B.C. working two, three, sometimes more jobs in order to make ends meet, somehow piling those exhausting duties on top of caring for children and relatives while striving to gain the education needed to step up and off the low-wage treadmill.

Three years ago, the widespread nature of this tough reality in B.C. was masked by seemingly robust economic figures. In 2007 the province's unemployment rate stood at 4.2 per cent after 335,000 jobs had been created between 1997 and 2006. Beneath that surface, however, lived and worked many, many people like Lyn, as 21 per cent of women and nearly 30 per cent of men were employed in casual and non-standard work, according to a 2008 study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

And then the global economic meltdown hit, causing anyone precariously employed to hang on for dear life

Lyn is a shy mother of two, with long black hair, slim black-framed glasses and two draining jobs that even together don't give her much hope of getting ahead.

She gave up a career in China as an accountant and moved to Vancouver five years ago so that her kids could go to school in Canada. When she's not working at her brother's store on her day off, she makes \$11.50 an hour putting in up to 50 hours a week at a chain grocery store on Hastings.

It wouldn't be a bad job, but paying overtime isn't one of the boss's policies, she says. She wants what she's owed but she's scared to report it. It's the same for her co-workers. None of them are happy about the way they're treated at work, but no one wants rock the boat. For now, she chips away at the debt she acquired moving here, and pours more than half of her meager salary into rent.

to what they had, for fear of being kicked loose from the job market altogether.

I ask Lyn about her prospects.

“Right now I’m afraid to think about the future,” she tells me.

Changing standards

The prospects for Lyn and others like her have been shaped not only by a rough economy but by policies enacted by the B.C. Liberal government since 2001. Complex changes to the Employment Standards Act have ushered in overtime averaging rules that cause employers to pressure workers into pulling long shifts over consecutive days. Call-in periods for employees have been reduced from two to four hours, giving people less time to rearrange their lives for the sake of a shift.

Posting employment standards and work schedules in the workplace was deemed unnecessary.

Enforcement of the act switched from routine government inspection to a complaint-based system devoid of requirement to investigate complaints. Fifty per cent of standards offices were closed.

New Canadians like Lyn, who are expected to make up two thirds of B.C.’s population by 2025, are especially likely to end up on this ragged edge of the labour market, according to a 2008 Statscan study.

Their wages were lower and their likelihood of being overqualified for work was higher. They also more commonly did involuntary part-time work -- a way of saying you are working an extra job to make up for wage or hours your primary job isn’t giving you. “If someone has multiple part-time jobs, it’s not because they’re choosing part-time employment,” Sylvia Fuller, a University of British Columbia sociologist and leading expert on Canadian employment trends, told *The Tyee*.

“People do choose part time employment for a variety of reasons, but if they’re trying to get full-time hours with multiple part time jobs, it’s because they can’t find the adequate full time work.”

The standard employment arrangement that came to prominence in the post-war era in Canada -- the full-time, 40-hour work week that most labour policies are based on -- has lost ground.

Non-standard work has emerged in its place; lower waged work that offers few benefits, tentative contracts and little mobility, while giving employers more power to dictate terms to their workers.

The erosion

Two years ago, fewer than two out of three working Canadians had a standard employment relationship. That is, a stable, year-round, full-time position, with one employer and at one location that met their needs.

The other 36 per cent, according to Statscan, were employed in non-standard jobs; part-time permanent work, temporary full-time or part-time, self-employed employers or, by their own account, self-employed: in other words, workers that are especially vulnerable to recession and the bottom lines of private companies and governments.

Throughout the ‘90s and the aughts, public and private employers in Canada took a hit as economic globalization came to fruition. Manufacturing and production jobs, among others, were cut or sent off shore to keep the bottom line in tact.

Employers sought “flexibility” from their employees. New positions created tended to be part-time or temporary contracts that didn’t offer the same degree of security and benefits as full-time positions.

These types of jobs aren’t only vulnerable to economic insecurity; they often don’t often include benefits, raises or promotions.

B.C. Liberal policy changes also increased both the supply of casual workers and the abundance of casual jobs, making it necessary for people to take nearly any available job, no matter how low paying or volatile.

Access to social assistance was complicated and restricted, along with a 30 per cent cut to the budget of the ministry of housing and social development, according to the CCPA’s 2008 report on casual work.

Additional changes to eligibility for single parents with children, waiting periods for social assistance and cuts to benefits furthered the likelihood of job seekers to take on non-standard, precarious work.

The privatization of crown corporations like B.C. Rail, part of B.C. Hydro and B.C. Ferries made well-paying jobs in the public service prone to cost reduction measures and cuts.

Meanwhile, the passing of bill C-29 in 2002 privatized and contracted out 9,000 jobs in B.C. health support services. This transformed accessible, dependable full time jobs, worked largely by immigrant workers, into low-wage part-time positions, which many employees now have to work two or three of to get by.

“While additional resources provide part of the solution, more must be done to develop innovative approaches to both meet the challenges and create the opportunities to better serve seniors, families and communities in our province,” Colin Hansen, then minister of health services wrote in his introduction to the ministry’s 2002/2003 annual service plan report.

In rural B.C., the gradual decline of forestry and logging industries shook the job market the hardest.

Between 1990 and 2008, workers in these industries endured an average 13.5 per cent unemployment rate compared to the 7.8 per cent average for all B.C. industries, according to Statscan figures supplied by a government published guide to the B.C. economy, current to Jan. 2010.

Traditionally high-paying jobs that supported families and the economies of whole communities were shed, forcing loggers and mill workers to take low-service sector jobs or seek work out of town, sometimes in other provinces.

The current Liberal administration knows that demographic shifts may also put those emerging into the B.C. labour market in a tight spot. “The overall aging of the workforce also has implications for the availability of potential labour supply to enter the workforce,” concludes the 2009-2019 B.C. Labour Market Outlook. “The number of new entrants is expected to decline over time, meaning that migrants will become an increasingly important source of labour supply.”

In Dec. 2009 the CAW, Canada’s largest private sector union, began a nationwide campaign, taking action against the erosion of good jobs in Canada.

The B.C. Federation of Labour’s campaign to raise the minimum wage to \$10 per hour has been touted by many as a bare necessity in providing economic security to those in low wage positions. But the government has opted instead to “offset financial circumstances and directly target benefits to individual needs” in drug costs, trades training, child care assistance and rental assistance, Minister Murray Coell wrote to *The Tyee*.

“Our government has held fast to the view that there are many better and effective ways to assist these workers apart from increasing minimum wage,” wrote Coell.

Over the last decade, some of Canada’s top academics have been researching who’s working on the most fragile edges of economies across the countries.

Their ongoing research finds that vulnerable members of the workforce, who are most likely to work over time without proper pay or work multiple part time jobs to make ends meet, are not only the new Canadians that our economy will increasingly depend on.

‘It’s not the way it was’

On the sixth floor of a high-rise with a view of beautiful Coal Harbor, people work a different daily grind than those on the floors above and below them.

From 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., unemployed women from all sectors of Vancouver’s labour market come here to carve out a place in the economy. The YWCA’s Focus at Work program offers workshops that help them assess their career interests, develop their employability and refine job-hunting skills.

In a real way, precarious work is a women’s issue. More than twice as many women as men are stuck in part time work.

Statscan research from May 2009 showed that in the past 30 years, 45 per cent of “core age” women (15-24 years old) worked part-time versus just over 20

per cent of men the same age. In the last year, B.C. unemployment rates for men have dropped by 1.4 per cent, but have stayed the same for women. In July of this year, 28.1 per cent of employed women held part time jobs versus 9.3 per cent of men in B.C.

“It’s not the way it was,” Karen, a mother of three who’s re-entering the work force after 19 years, tells me. “It’s not full-time 40 hour weeks. It’s casual, part-time, temporary contract...”

A chartered accountant, a manufacturing worker, a teacher from Columbia and a recent graduate are among those in the room who want back in the workforce. They’re looking for jobs in the non-profit sector, social services, childcare or marketing, but they’ve had to meet the challenges of finding work head on.

Applying to jobs via email yields virtually nothing, they say.

The jobs they’re looking for are never offered to the public, filled internally instead, or else hidden among mazes of contacts and networks. When they go for interviews, they are sometimes asked their age and the size of their family, and they sense their answers count against them. Some of them have been out of work for months, some for years. Everyone at the table wants the security that full-time work with a good organization brings. Commuting between two part-time jobs would be draining, being on call could disrupt and damage their home lives and working a temporary contract could spell disappointment, but most of them are more than willing to take the chance.

However, they’re hoping that if the program works out, they won’t have to.

The program claims an 82 per cent success rate and offers further help with the search once you’ve graduated. This approach, combined with being in a positive environment in the company of other women has been a godsend, participants said.

When I ask them what would help others in their position, they don’t mince words.

One recommendation rings out with a bit more volume than the others.

More funding for progressive employment programs like this, yes, but more importantly, more available “childcare!” they exclaim, nearly in unison.

‘We have to lift everybody up’

On Granville Street, past the clubs, sex shops and hostels, there is a storefront less popular than weekend haunts, but more important to the unemployed.

“We usually see about 200 new clients, now we’re seeing 400... on a monthly basis... and we’re not seeing it magically going away,” Melanie Hardy, manager of the YWCA’s Career Zone tells me.

“Youth... they’re the last hired and the first fired.”

The employment centre’s central location in Canada’s most expensive and desirable city invites a diverse clientele and a myriad of old and new trends.

A third of clients have multiple barriers to the job market. They steer around poverty, histories of sexual and substance abuse and mental health issues to get job ready.

Homelessness and unfinished high school often compound these stresses.

The remaining majority is a *mélange* of interests competing for a foot in the door.

University graduates are a more frequent fixture and an increasing number of internationals with temporary visas having been showing up on their doorsteps.

Highly educated 20-somethings with nothing to lose from Germany, Italy and other parts of the European Union are one more demographic in the urban Lower Mainland vying for jobs in customer service, hospitality and tourism.

These demands on the job market are meeting gradual developments head on: high paying, low-skilled jobs have been shed in the transition to a knowledge-based economy over the last 20 years. Over the last two decades, North American employers have shut down unionized factories here in favor of moves to low wage environments in the third world, leaving Cana-

dian workers facing a job market heavily weighted towards barista and other service sector jobs

“They’ve been replaced by a lot of customer service, hospitality jobs, that are great, but you can’t raise a family on them and pay the rent,” Hardy laments.

“We have to lift everybody up, and that requires investment in education and training, as well as helping young people transition... to not just throw them out in to the labour market.”

Hardy also thinks that part time or temporary opportunities can be beneficial.

She endorses an emerging employment counseling model that does away with staid assessment and one-track career exploration, instead encouraging direction by trying out many experiences. Temporary contracts and part-time jobs allow youth to try out a number of different jobs and potential careers, but these opportunities need to be formalized and supported.

Co-ops are often only offered within the corridors of education. Why not expand the possibilities for formal training provided by wage subsidies and internships to the rest of the job market?

This is where she feels government investment in job training should go, “especially in times of high unemployment like the recession. That’s when you really need the government to still be engaging young people.”

The worker’s interests

Any search for the most precariously employed will take you beyond the glass towers and asphalt causeways of downtown, outside the sprawling Metro Vancouver suburbs, and into the fields that require planting and harvesting by human hand.

Every year, thousands of temporary foreign agricultural workers come to B.C. to work swathes of agricultural land in the Okanagan and the Fraser Valley. And the numbers are only growing.

In 2009, 3,437 temporary foreign agricultural workers came to B.C. from Mexico, South America and the

Caribbean Islands, a significant increase from 1,484 in 2006. The total number of temporary foreign workers in B.C. that year was 44,381, according to Human Resources and Development Canada.

In Abbotsford in the Fraser Valley, Lucy Luna does front-line casework with farm workers on behalf of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union.

When I spoke with her, her desk was filled with E.I. claims, employment standards complaints, ICBC insurance forms and workers compensation cases.

“Anything. You name it,” Luna tells me. However, organization is key.

Year in and year out, she and her staff educate temporary workers generation by generation, with the hope that in the future, more workers will want to unionize.

Only one farm is unionized in the Lower Mainland, but unionization is pivotal to protecting the rights of workers, Luna tells me. The low education level of most workers leaves them unable to advocate for themselves.

Some come to Canada with educations as low as grade six.

Opportunities for exploitation are legion.

Workers are bound to be working for one employer by their visa. If conditions are poor, if there is abuse or poor treatment, workers are often too scared to lose their job and opportunity in Canada to bring it to anyone’s attention.

Even if there is a problem, if someone gets hurt or wants to leave an abusive employer, the consulates of their own countries who are supposed to represent workers are often their own worst enemy, says Luna.

“They’re not representing the worker’s interest. They’re representing the employers’ interest,” says Luna.

Back in Vancouver, UBC labour economics researcher David Green confirmed for me that Luna’s clients represent a burgeoning sector of precarious work in B.C..

“What a lot of labour groups are worried about, quite rightly, is that those people just feel like they have no rights,” Green told *The Tyee*. “They don’t know how to complain. They’re worried they’ll just lose their job and get sent back home if they do.”

A better job

On the evening I meet Lyn at her ESL class on Commercial Drive in Vancouver, I enter a world hidden from most Vancouverites. Over 100 people have come from their one, two or more day jobs to gather in small classes at this education centre run by MOSAIC immigrant and refugee services.

They come three nights a week after changing beds in hotels or pulling 12-hour shifts at bakeries, staying from 6:30 till 9:30 to improve their English.

At the break, I hear Cantonese, Spanish, Vietnamese and Arabic spoken. A student sees me interviewing Lyn and steps forward to share her story.

Six days of the week, Yong spends long days making noodles for one of Chinatown’s most popular restaurants. Her schedule is unpredictable and so is her pay. It’s commonplace for them to not pay her on time, she tells me.

For the past year she’s been taking classes at MOSAIC, working her way through the phases of the program.

When she’s not at work, she’s taking care of her daughter and trying to make her way through a citizenship application nightmare.

Months ago, she responded to an ad offering help filling out citizenship application forms and practicing for the test. Eager for a chance to have her forms filed and the application process underway, she went for it.

A botched application resulted in her being investigated by the government and being out thousands of dollars.

Never mind the woes of her working life, she just wants me publicize the fact that there are frauds out there trying to make money off of vulnerable new Canadians like her looking to get ahead.

I listen and write. Eventually she admits that, like so many who spend their working lives dealing with disappointment and exploitation, she wants something else. She would like to provide for her family by providing something to society other than its next bowl of noodles.

“I want to be a nurse.”

Colourful excerpts from the Tyee's Comment Section:

I remember back in the '50s

posted by "VanIsle" on Sept. 8, 2010

I remember back in the '50s when a shoe salesman could purchase a house, a car, and raise a family. His wife would work 1 or 2 days a week down at the local department store so the family could buy the little extras that they may want, like a TV. Boy, are those days long gone. We have been thoroughly sucked into this consumer/economic/financial ponsi game which has made a very few people on top very rich.

One vast service sector...

posted by "warbler" on Sept. 8, 2010

This is what happens when, over the span of just a couple of decades, you shift taxes from corporations and wealthy folk to lower class consumers, stop manufacturing things, sprout a Wal-Mart on every strip mall, import more and more stuff from China, export more and more raw materials and become little more than a glorified service sector economy in which next to nothing trickles down from the top.

And to think that we are better positioned than Americans tells you just how extra-screwed the American Lyns are.

But hey, there is hope in BC - we have state sanctioned online gaming now! And Lyn is just one virtual slot coin away from doing her happy dance!

How far can it go?

posted by "appalbarry" on Sept. 8, 2010

I've returned to school to study accounting at age 53 because I could no longer see surviving in the non-profit sector. I would kill to find a reliable, decently paid job for even three days a week. By reliable I mean - set hours, set days, and a likelihood that it will continue for more than four weeks.

In two years of job hunting in Vancouver I've found I am considered way over-qualified for most jobs, and ruled out immediately for others because of age. Jobs

that I would take in a flash, but that are never offered.

I highly doubt that I'll see benefits, much less dental work, in the next five years. Every employer I've dealt with in two years has offered sporadic or irregular work - there is no long term commitment to employees. One employer delivered notice of a ten percent pay cut to workers by letter. While he was literally on a plane to Bangkok for his honeymoon. Everyone that I know is juggling multiple temp and part time jobs, and is barely surviving. None of them hold out much hope of steady work.

Rip-offs of wages, overtime, holiday pay, and other things are the norm in BC. Employers know that employees will seldom complain, and government will seldom enforce. The latest scam in construction is forcing employees to pay for their own WCB coverage.

Surely all of this is doing immense harm to this province, and to this country.

jobs, jobs, jobs

posted by "kasi_visvanath" on Sept. 8, 2010

another excellent if appalling story on Tyee; excellent comments as well reminding us just how much the Liberals screwed the ordinary folks who live here in B.C., just to benefit their rich friends in the business sector. the ongoing rape and pillage of the former middle classes, being demoted through Government re-regulation efforts to lower, can't pay the bills class.

Super Stamina Strikers

On BC's longest running picket line, Extra Foods workers in Maple Ridge can't get owners to the table, but they're not giving up.

Justin Langille's article was originally published on Sept. 10, 2010, on TheTyee.ca. The electronic version of the story is available at <http://thetyee.ca/Life/2010/09/10/SuperStaminaStrikers/>

Ten days before Christmas 2008, the cashiers and grocery clerks at an Extra Foods store in Maple Ridge, B.C. ushered in some changes.

From then on, they would work out in the parking lot, not inside. Instead of cashing out orders or helping customers, they would manage a picket line.

Seventy-five employees at the owner-operated but Loblaws-controlled store went on strike after working without a contract for five years. They never expected to be out for two Christmases. But it's beginning to look like it'll be three.

Nearly 21 months in, about 40 men and women of all ages still hold the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1518 picket line together daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m..

The Tyee visited B.C.'s currently longest running picket line to find out how strikers have maintained an action for nearly two years and why they're willing to go the distance to save jobs that are becoming expendable and devalued in the new economy.

NOTE: A video accompanies this article. Go to <http://thetyee.ca/Life/2010/09/10/SuperStaminaStrikers/> to view it.

Seeking parity with other stores

The store remains closed, except for a lone pharmacy the union has allowed to stay open, an essential community service to local seniors. Meat, deli and seafood department employees belonging to a different union, UFCW Local 247, were locked out, with some being transferred to work at other Loblaws stores. There have been some negotiations, but not since Nov. 2009. The union is refusing a contract they see as substandard and the company won't make another offer.

Saying no to a rollback

Under the expired contract, wages ranged from \$8.75 to \$20.80 per hour with few, if any, benefits, Daryl Causey, the store's UFCW 1518 rep told *The Tyee*.

Employees want what Safeway and Overwaitea (owner of Save on Foods, Urban Fare) workers got in their 2008 UFCW negotiations: a \$3 increase over a five years, improved benefits and a clause that allows them to be transferred to another store if theirs closes.

Loblaws offered what the union later found out was a "no frills" collective agreement, which would roll back wages and benefits. The offer would cut full-time wages down to \$12 to \$13 per hour with a top rate of around \$15 per hour for a minority of full-timers; for part-timers, wages would recede to \$9 per hour with a top wage of \$11.90. Dental benefits and

extended health plans would be significantly reduced, according to the union.

If they accept the contract, the union and employees fear that their store will become another No Frills store, which they deem less valuable to the community. An even greater fear held by the union is that if the company wins, it could help to set a precedent that might allow other retail food giants to roll back wages.

Owners refuse to negotiate

Despite requests to come to the table, the company won't bargain.

The Tyee tried to reach Loblaws for comment on negotiations and the state of the strike. Craig Ware, director of corporate affairs for Western Canada with Loblaws replied via email, writing, "as you can appreciate, we cannot disclose the details of any union negotiations."

In the "Be a Great Place to Work" section of the Loblaws 2009 Corporate Social Responsibility report, the company included among its priorities"

"Build a culture that welcomes colleagues and encourages them to voice opinions, ask questions and contribute ideas that will make Loblaw more successful;

"Recognize and reward contributions."

Canada's largest grocer, Loblaws reported \$31 billion in revenues last year.

In for the duration

Some Extra Foods employees have since moved on to school and other jobs, coming by for a paid shift on the picket line once or twice a week to support the cause. However, others who have worked at the store for 25 years aren't about to let go of their careers.

Hamid Houssanai is ready for a long fight. The pharmacy technician has taken up school and other work during the strike, but says he'll keep coming down to the picket line for another two years to support his co-

workers if he has to.

The UFCW record for the longest strike action is held by employees at a Canadian Tire in Prince George, at 39 months, from Dec. 1983 to March 1986. Strikers in Maple Ridge hope that they won't be a contender for the record but they'll keep the strike going to get what they want.

Colourful excerpts from the Tyee's Comment Section:

Solidarity

posted by "Lia_K_N" on Sept. 10, 2010

It is heartening to see that there are still people out there willing to stand up for their rights and fight back against mean spirited rollbacks. This is just another example of a corporation in a vibrant fiscal position that refuses to share the wealth. Without champions of labour, willing to stand up and say no we will lose all the good paying jobs that people fought for in this province. I can only imagine the mental and emotional stamina that is required to keep up the fight. Cudos to the workers, you are fighting a worthy cause and I wish for you success.

Great work by Commercial

posted by "Jim" on Sept. 10, 2010

Great work by Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1518 and their leadership. Their members are far better off today than they were 3 years ago. It's good they're looking after their members best interests instead of trying to fight ideological wars.

The actual figures...

posted by "Jerry Munro" on Sept. 10, 2010

...stats from an earlier article here in Tyee... which tells you, since 1983 and the betrayal of Operation Solidarity, (by y'all know who), what has actually happened to the trade union movement:

"In 1983, the percentage of B.C.'s work force in a union (a measure called union density) was at 45.3 per cent while by 2007 it had fallen to around 31 per cent, according to StatsCanada."

Which is bad enough a reflection of the ideology then and now prevailing at the leadership levels in the trade union movement, if we are all so much better off today. It all depends on how you measure it. It all depends on how you measure it.

And it is not likely, if a growing body of economists are right, that we are already in the early stages of a Depression, going to get better anytime soon... for

our pocket books or the credibility of unions, and the current ideology that drives them. (They's gonna be picked off one by one, weakest working through to the strongest. With the last to go, turning out the lights as they leave being... the labour bureaucrats, probably in the public sector. The private sector is already practically de-unionized.)

rambling thoughts about work

posted by "alive" on Sept. 12, 2010

Some of you may remember Evergreen press in South Vancouver as a place where union workers struck for ages?

Seems that only so-called essential workers have a chance to avoid long drawn out strikes?

Try telling the other workers that their job is not essential!

Every job is essential to that person, the time is long gone when one could claim that there are many more chimneys smoking and whistles blowing.

In other words all contract negotiations are essential and since it takes so long to negotiate, they should start the next session as soon as the current one starts.

We are getting to be a nation where important things are being delayed for much too long! union negotiations are only one, court sessions another!

Perhaps the reason is that too many long-winded individuals make a living talking about nothing?

There was a time when working meant producing something, watching movies and sitcoms today working seem to be standing at a watercooler somewhere.

A Decade's Slide in Help for Hurt Workers

Liberal changes to WorkSafe BC have eroded payments, rehab for those injured on the job. Computer glitches fuel criticism.

Tom Sandborn's article was originally published on Sept. 29, 2010, on TheTyee.ca. The electronic version of the story is available at <http://thetyee.ca/News/2010/09/29/HurtWorkers/>



First a workplace accident shattered his elbow. Then WorkSafe BC shattered his hopes for proper compensation.

That's the story an injured worker told *The Tyee* recently. Call him Tony. He is afraid to use his real name in a public discussion because he fears retaliation from the government for criticizing the way WorkSafe has handled his crippling injury and its consequences.

Tony, a middle-aged immigrant with an elementary school education, was a proud and successful building tradesman before his accident. But after the accident crippled his arm he could not practice his trade and so lost his livelihood. Since then, he told *The Tyee*, Worksafe offered a little inappropriate re-training and then a small payment (\$500 a month) to age 65.

The WorkSafe payment for the permanent injury to his elbow was far too low, in his opinion, and seemed based on an automatic formula that didn't take into account his circumstances and chronic pain.

Then there are many new rules to reduce the actual amount WorkSafe must pay even using this definition -- lower base wage rates, deducing for CPP pension, discounting cost of living increases, and no interest payments.

At the end of many appeals, Tony's monthly payment has increased but is still less than one-third of what he used to make. Tony still cannot believe that in this compensation exercise, WorkSafe does not consider the impact of his injury on his ability to earn a living or what the loss of his earning capacity means to him and his family.

"I had everything," Tony told *The Tyee*. "I was employed, had a house, and I thought I was insured if I got hurt. I've found out there isn't any social safety net. I feel horrible about how I was treated. It's been a nightmare. People need to know that workers' comp doesn't really protect them. They need to cover their own asses."

'Insult to Injury'

Tony's case is not an isolated one, according to lawyers who represent injured workers. The province's system of workers' compensation has been trans-

formed in the past decade, say a group of B.C. labour lawyers who have worked within it for decades, and the changes have all gone to reduce costs and minimize compensation for those who come to grief at the job site.

Workplace injuries can be a nightmare. A sudden fall or a slowly accumulating exposure to toxins, a hand caught in an inadequately shielded machine or slowly crippled by repetitive stress -- there are a thousand ways to become permanently hurt or killed on the job. For nearly a century, injured B.C. workers have been able to turn to WorkSafe BC (formerly the Workers' Compensation Board) for compensation, re-training and other support functions.

"Insult to Injury," a report prepared last year by Stan Guenther, Sarah O'Leary and Janet Patterson, labour lawyers with decades of experience with WCB/WorkSafeBC cases, sounded the alarm about what the authors see as dangerously retrograde steps taken in the last decade in B.C., steps they say deny many injured workers the loss of earnings pensions that used to be available through the system and slow and reduce the flow of compensation money when B.C. residents are injured on the job.

These claims are made as WorkSafe BC is undergoing a major internal re-organization, a set of changes that revolve around the introduction of a controversial and so far glitch-ridden new computer software designed, say its critics, to reduce the skilled health professionals who rule on compensation claims to data entry clerks.

The authors of "Insult to Injury" say that the changes made since 2002 "were initiated by the Liberal government after an aggressive lobbying effort by employers. The employer lobby advanced the inaccurate view that the system had become economically unsustainable and the resulting changes were based upon no discernable principle other than that of reducing costs for employers. In that regard, the changes were very successful. But these changes have come at a profound cost to workers and to the treatment and benefits that injured workers receive under the compensation system."

Ministry communications manager Linda O'Connor declined to respond to the allegations found in "Insult

to Injury" report, referring *The Tyee* to WorkSafe BC for comment. She did say:

"The main purpose of these changes was to make the B.C. Workers' Compensation system more responsive to the needs of both workers and employers. Bill 49, which amended the Workers' Compensation Act in 2002 sought to ensure that our Workers' Compensation system remains financially sound, while continuing to provide benefits that are among the most generous in Canada."

Loss of Earning pensions slide

O'Connor said that the government had no immediate plans to amend the Workers Compensation Act.

Changes made in 2002 and 2003 under Bills 49 and 63 have changed the prospects faced by an injured worker in B.C. by effectively eliminating pensions based on actual long term losses to earnings.

The number of so-called loss of earning (LOE) pensions granted has fallen from an annual average of around 1,000 before the legislative changes to only 68 during the 16 month period from February 2006 to June 2007. During that period, 96 per cent of the injured workers who applied for LOE pension were denied.

According to Donna Freeman, who speaks for WorkSafe BC, in 2009 the body authorized 225 LOE pensions, compared with 928 OK'd in 2001.

Other key blows to injured workers delivered by the employer-driven "reforms," say the report's authors, include "an effective elimination of vocational rehabilitation assistance," over-complicated appeals processes, functional pensions that used to be paid for life now ending at 65, a 13 per cent reduction in benefit rates, a reduction in the consumer price index related adjustments to payments for workers, changes in the way an injured worker's wage rate is calculated, and significant restrictions in compensation for psychological injuries and chronic pain.

In addition, they say, power has been concentrated in the hands of the Board, reducing the discretion a claims worker could previously exercise in making case decisions. The changes, they say, have "had a

profoundly negative economic effect on thousands of permanently injured workers and their families.”

WorkSafe defends practices

Roberta Ellis, senior vice president of corporate affairs at WorkSafe, told *The Tyee* that she did not dispute the claims in “Insult to Injury” and that the goal of the changes made early in the decade was to reduce loss of earnings pensions and other expenditures.

“Mr. Guenther and his colleagues are right about the numbers,” Ellis said, “but those changes were the intent of the legislation. There were concerns about the sustainability of the system, and the new legislation was designed to address those concerns. There will always be disagreement between those who represent labour and those who represent business about how much the system should cost.

“Currently, B.C. has some of the most generous compensation levels in Canada,” says Ellis. “In 2009, 65 per cent of the clients we polled indicated that WorkSafe BC services were good or very good. It is important, too, to note that workplace injuries in B.C. are down by 40 per cent over the last decade.”

WorkSafe’s Donna Freeman added that 93 per cent of all claims from injured workers are accepted by her organization.

“There have been no significant changes in the status quo since we wrote our report,” Sarah O’Leary told *the Tyee*. “If anything, it’s gotten worse. This government is going backwards, taking away things people fought for over decades.

New computer ‘has enhanced the trouble’: O’Leary

“Writing the report shocked me,” said O’Leary. “I knew things were bad from my day to day practice, but stepping back and looking at the entire system was a shock. You begin to see the pattern -- reductions in service designed to reduce coverage and the payments going to injured workers. The heartlessness of it gets to you. And now WorkSafe BC is trying to impose a new computer system on its own workers, a system that is hard on both applicants and WorkSafe staff. The new system has enhanced the trouble.”

The program O’Leary mentioned, the Claims Management System, has seen a long and expensive implementation process at WorkSafe BC, and in March of this year the Compensation Employees Union, which represents WorkSafe employees, issued a bulletin summarizing staff response to the new system. According to the bulletin, the new system has created huge overtime bills, massive stress for staff and less efficient service for injured workers.

WorkSafe BC employees are experiencing a “loss of hope,” according to the union.

Compensation Employees Union president Sandra Wright told *The Tyee* that she is hearing reports of increased threats of violence against her members from frustrated clients, and of suicides among those clients.

“I always wonder, when I hear these stories, about whether they are related to the changes brought in since 2002,” she said.

WorkSafe’s Ellis told *The Tyee* that she had seen no evidence suggesting that increased levels of violence and threats against her staff were caused by the Case Management System changes.

“We are aware of these trends,” Ellis said, “but they pre-date the CMS, beginning in the middle of the decade. We are concerned about those who are not coping well in the system, and we’ve created a special team of social workers, counselors and security staff to respond.”

Colourful excerpts from the Tyee's Comment Section:

It is important to...

posted by "Barryeng" on Sept. 29, 2010

"It is important, too, to note that workplace injuries in B.C. are down by 40 per cent over the last decade."

This is not true! I worked in the forest industry As an Industrial First Aid attendant, for 35 years. During the last few years I saw a large increase in the number of "walking wounded" at the sawmill where I worked. My employer was far more willing to have an injured worker sit in an office or lunchroom doing nothing than to file an injury claim with Worksafe BC. It was cheaper for the company to pay full wages for no work to an injured worker than it was to risk an increase in assessment to Worksafe.

The statement should have read . . . "workplace injury CLAIMS are down. . . "

To get back on the subject

posted by "VanIsle" on Sept. 29, 2010

To get back on the subject about Worksafe, my angle on it is that there's basic contempt for people who do physical work for a living by our business and political elite. That's why it seems that big business is more interested in flipping bonds and stocks than in actually making things. Case in point, just look at the lumber industry; more interested in knocking down a tree and sending the raw log offshore than actually making anything out of that log. If you're a trader in some stock exchange, you're a somebody, a big shot; if you're a logger....Heaven help you if you get injured on the job.

The Best Place on Earth

posted by "warp" on Sept. 29, 2010

I have a 19 year old granddaughter in the Fraser Valley that is in first year university and works as a server in a hotel restaurant, where she has been working since age 16. She recently injured herself seriously enough that she is unable to do her job. Her employer told her that she was to take vacation time, and if she

couldn't work after that, she would be let go. She was told POINT BLANK that she was not going to file a claim. She is terrified of doing anything to upset her employer because her younger sister and her mother also work there.

I told her that there are a number of avenues available to her, but she knows that the owners are vindictive enough to get rid of her family if she makes waves, and there are not enough jobs available in the small town they live in to allow that to happen. It is also a town run in the "old-boys-club" mentality. Workers that stir up trouble are black-listed, and find it virtually impossible to get another, unskilled position.

She needs her job so that she can afford university, and needs university to enable herself to get out of this horrendous cycle.

Obviously it's more than just a WCB problem, but it is indicative of the whole workplace climate in this, "THE BEST PLACE ON EARTH"! The second half of that should read "IF YOU ARE WEALTHY!"

Hard Thanksgiving for Injured Farm Workers

BC pickers were hurt while riding unprotected with produce bound for holiday tables -- adding to history of carnage.

Tom Sandborn's article was originally published on Oct. 11 2010, on TheTyee.ca. The electronic version of the story is available at <http://thetyee.ca/News/2010/10/11/InjuredFarmWorkers/>



AT LEFT: Greenway Farms boxes from stuck truck ended up in wet ditch with workers.

edly driven by an impaired driver) struck the flat bed trailer they were riding, scattering the workers and the cardboard boxes of produce they were sitting on into a roadside ditch. On Oct. 7, one of the injured workers was reportedly still in hospital with serious injuries.

So, just to be clear, the workers had no safety belts or other safety equipment to protect them as they rode down a public road on top of a pile of boxes, with little to no lighting visible on the flat deck trailer, and any lights on the tractor obscured by the load on the trailer.

“We are lucky we aren’t looking at a mass funeral this weekend,” said Jim Sinclair, president of the BC Federation of Labour.

“British Columbians don’t want to sit down at the table and see farmworkers’ blood on their plates,” Sinclair told *The Tyee*. “What this incident shows us is that, despite all the breast beating in Victoria about worker safety, we have a government that is sending the employers in agriculture the message that they can get away with treating their workers as second class citizens.”

No charges for Greenway Farms: Mounties

A civilian employee of the RCMP’s Surrey detachment told *The Tyee* on Oct. 7 that charges of impaired

When B.C. residents sit down this weekend to their Thanksgiving dinners, few will pause to think about those who pulled the vegetables from the fields, or to give thanks that we don’t have to live with the dangerous working conditions and government neglect that can turn the lives of farm workers into a long harvest of heartbreak and injustice.

That’s how it looks to trade unionists and worker advocates, who say that B.C.’s farm workers are still not adequately protected from exploitation and unnecessary workplace injuries.

A multiple injury traffic accident near Surrey last week suggests that the critics might be right.

While we feast, a group of workers from the Greenway Farms are recovering from injuries incurred on the evening of Oct. 5, when a pickup truck (alleg-

driving were being considered against the pickup driver, but no charges were being contemplated against the farm that employed the injured workers or the driver of the tractor that was towing them and boxes of produce down a darkened 168th Street that night.

WorkSafeBC regulations have this to say about the responsibility of employers regarding transport of farm workers:

“If workers are to travel in a worker transportation vehicle, the employer must ensure that (a) reasonable measures are taken to evaluate road, weather and traffic conditions to ensure the safe transit of the workers,

(b) an inspection of the worker transportation vehicle has been conducted by a qualified person before first use on a work shift, and

(c) any defect which might affect the safety of workers is corrected before the vehicle is used.”

WorkSafeBC, *The Tyee* was reminded by its spokeswoman Donna Freeman, cannot lay criminal charges. It can investigate, levy fines and recommend that the Crown lay charges.

‘How many more have to be killed?’

The employer of the workers injured on Oct. 5, Greenway Farms, was the site of a fight to unionize B.C. farm workers over the past two years. In 2008, workers at the farm, including a large contingent of foreign workers brought to B.C. under a federal temporary work program, voted to join the United Food and Commercial Workers of Canada, in what was hailed as a landmark victory for unionization in Canada’s farm sector.

The following year, after Greenway owners reportedly did not rehire most of the temporary workers who had voted to join the union and recruited a workforce of more compliant local workers, farm management was successful in winning a decertification vote that removed the union from the farm.

Greenway Farm management did not respond to *Tyee* requests for comment on this story.

“The way the system is working now, cattle are trucked more safely than agriculture workers. How many more workers have to be killed or injured before the authorities in British Columbia, and Alberta and Ontario stop treating agriculture workers like disposable commodities, and start ensuring that the health and safety of the workers who put food on our tables is properly protected?” asks Wayne Hanley, the national president of the UFCW, which in cooperation with the Agriculture Workers Alliance, operates farm worker support centres in Abbotsford, Kelowna and Surrey, B.C., as well as other help centres across Canada.

Hanley said that the B.C. government refused to implement most of the recommendations made by a coroner’s jury that investigated the 2007 accident that killed three and injured fourteen workers outside Abbotsford.

Unions, ministry at odds over safety requirements

The BC Federation of Labour has also criticized the Campbell Liberals for failing to respond adequately to the coroner’s jury suggestions, saying this April that: “The government rejected a crucial jury recommendation that said the person who repairs a farm van should not also be in charge of doing safety inspections on that vehicle... The RCMP called for the same change, but government rejected this important recommendation.”

In a point by point response to the recommendations of the coroner’s jury posted on the website of the Ministry of Labour, the government says that it has adopted “alternative action” on the inspection/repair issue because of concerns that private sector garages, if not allowed to both conduct inspections on farm vehicles and repair them, would opt out of the inspection business.

B.C.’s Labour Minister Murray Coell disagrees with union criticisms of his government’s track record on farm worker safety.

“B.C.’s agriculture employment standards are backed by some of the highest penalties in the country. We will continue to target safety inspections and educate farm workers, employers and van operators about

their rights and responsibilities,” the minister told *The Tyee* via email.

Coell also rejects union claims that his government failed to respond properly to the recommendation of the coroner’s jury that looked into the 2007 deaths.

Worker transport inspection to be beefed up: Coell

This is not the first time that the agriculture sector in B.C. has seen casualties, and critics say the government is not doing enough to end the farm-related carnage in the fields and on the roads of the province.

After they came to power in 2001, the Campbell Liberals cut a program that did safety inspections on vehicles used to transport farm workers. Six years later, lax or nonexistent safety regulations in the sector had led, critics say, to at least four deaths and 30 injuries in farm worker transport, including the nightmare crash on Highway 1 outside Abbotsford in 2007 that killed three workers and injured 14.

The van involved in the fatal accident had 17 workers crammed into a vehicle designed for 10, with wooden benches without seatbelts having been installed to up its capacity. A \$2,000 fine was imposed on the driver of the van, but despite the fact that RCMP recommended 33 criminal charges in this case, none were laid.

Donna Freeman, who speaks for WorkSafeBC, told *The Tyee* that her organization had already been implementing the changes of practice recommended for it when the coroner’s jury delivered its assessment last year of the fatal 2007 crash on Highway 1.

According to Labour Minister Coell, the province “responded to each recommendation that was within the scope of the province. We’ll be asking police agencies to report regularly on random checks of 15-passenger vans. And we have introduced legislative changes to the Motor Vehicle Act that will improve monitoring and enforcement of both facilities and inspectors. This gives government staff the authority to enter inspection facilities to conduct inspections of the vehicles.”

Freeman told *The Tyee* that her agency conducts extensive inspections of workplace conditions and van safety in the agriculture sector. She said that

WorkSafe conducted 951 inspections on farms and at roadside in 2009, 605 in 2008 and 805 in 2007. She was unable, by the time this story was filed, to tell us how many of these were roadside van inspections and how many represented farm visits.

She did say, however, that 13 days of roadside inspections of farm worker transport vans were planned for the 2010 season. These are multiple agency operations involving WorkSafe, the RCMP, Commercial Vehicle Safety and Enforcement and the Employment Standards Branch.

Inspections rare: farm worker organizer

Lucy Luna is a worker advocate and organizer at the Agricultural Workers Alliance storefront in Abbotsford. She told *The Tyee* that she talks to farm workers every day, and no one she meets reports a van or trailer being stopped for safety inspection.

Workers at Greenway Farms tell her that riding on an open trailer with no safety belts, perched precariously atop piles of boxed produce, is a regular occurrence for them at the farm.

“I feel so bad for all the workers,” Luna said. “If we still had a union contract at that farm, there would have been a safety committee and this accident wouldn’t have happened. This is a sad story that will continue until farm workers have a union to protect them.”

Andy Neufeld, who speaks for the UFCW in B.C., says that this latest accident in the farm sector shows that the government has no respect migrant workers.

“The terrible tragedy in 2007 killed three and maimed others. Three years later, we have a similar situation. The farm owners have no fear under this government of being held to account. The BC Liberals have devastated employment standards and protections for workers and the obligations of employers.”

Colourful excerpts from the Tyee's Comment Section:

Farm Workers

posted by "Roisin Dubh" on Oct. 11, 2010

This is the same story of weak regulation and/or non application of the law as the valiant Murray Coell practised while Minister of Advanced Education. He kept Liberal cronies safe from any ramifications that might affect their business interests because of their noncompliance with the assurances of "accreditation" in the private post - secondary education field. He is demonstrating the same high principles regarding the conditions of farm workers today. Many students were harmed/cheated in these private schools and "universities". Many of these students were foreign too in addition to the Canadians. Continue the good work, Mr. Coell! High Liberal principle at work for all the people of B.C.

The safety game briefly explained

posted by "AHHA" on Oct. 12, 2010

The official discourse from WorkSafeBC is that it believes that the financial administrative penalty (which is a tax-deductible expense) aspect of its enforcement and prevention division is the most effective means of holding disreputable employers to account. However the introduction of Bill C-45 in 2003 was in itself proof that this type of dated thinking is extremely limited and naive or perhaps negligent in itself?

Bill C-45 got away from this type of limited thinking of disreputable employers as knowingly not in compliance with safety regulations and standards and called them what they really are; criminals.

As we, the workers of Canada approach the six year mark for the introduction of CCC. 217.1 I have to wonder where are the criminal charges? Hundreds of workers have continued to die and thousands continue to be seriously injured. Is this the proof that the administrative financial penalties are working? Of course not. The truth and facts of the matter are that this provision of the criminal code is scarcely used, and when it is used plea bargaining will almost inevitably follow.

As I say nearly six years have passed. What is keeping the unnamed WSBC officials from recommending criminal charges or are they being turned away by crown prosecutors? Is it the Board of Directors at WSBC that are holding progress back? Is it WSBC management and their pensions and continued mandarin like existence? Are the WSBC OSO's and OHO's handcuffed, burnt out and too few in number? Is it the big business lobby and it's political party funding arm that is holding health and safety hostage? Is it the fear of legal expenses and in turn driving the employers (WSBC clients) premiums up?

I predict more small and medium sized employers will be trotted out for public scorn and administrative financial penalty (mostly small operators) and because of public pressure a strategic, token and very limited laying of criminal charges say within the next twelve months. The very large prime contractors and employers however will continue to enjoy the benefit of "connections". From where I view the situation there is a co-opted silence out there and a real and palpable fear that is holding good men and women back from doing the right thing.

Those who do speak up usually find themselves unemployed and shut out of other available occupational health and safety endeavors. WSBC calls that discrimination and has a process to investigate it, this investigation typically takes a year or so, leaves a hole in your resume, provides no letter of reference, and invariably alerts the other workplace criminals that if they hire you that you will be doing your job.

In my and others view increasingly the private and public safety business has become an exclusive country club for WSBC sycophants, ripe with nepotism, and big on talk with an acute inability to do the walk.

Ten Books to Read on the Job

Want to understand the shifting world of work? Read these works. Recommended by BC leaders in the field of labour.

Justin Langille's article was originally published on Sept. 9, 2010, on TheTyee.ca. The electronic version of the story is available at <http://thetyee.ca/News/2010/10/11/InjuredFarmWorkers/>



As part of *The Tyee's* Labour Week coverage, we asked a range of leaders and experts in B.C. to share the books that keep them informed, inspired and up to speed on the changing landscape of work. Here is what they recommended reading:

B.C. Labour Minister Murray Coell's choice for history and context around unions and labour solidarity in B.C.:

No Greater Power: A Century of Labour in B.C.
by Dr. Paul Phillips

This is a definitive account of the initial trade unionist movement that flourished in B.C. during the early 20th century.

Beginning with the fur trade, the book works through the tumultuous depression and wartime eras, and the

unification problems faced by the B.C. Federation of Labour as it amassed a membership of 125,000 in 1966.

The book's author, Dr. Paul Phillips, noted in 1967, "The trade union movement in B.C. is older than the province itself. It bears the character of the province's rapid yet often unstable development."

Phillips' life could have been its own lengthy volume. Born in Hong Kong to missionary parents and raised in British Columbia, Phillips worked as an economics researcher and Royal Canadian Air Force pilot to finance his Ph. D. in labour economics. A collector of labour and protest songs, Phillips was also a noted folk singer/multi-instrumentalist with skills on the guitar, banjo and autoharp. *No Greater Power* emerged from research done while completing his thesis. When it was published in 1967, he was the research director for the BC Federation of Labour.

NDP MLA for Vancouver-Kensington Mable Elmore on what to read to understand the plummeting standards of work for new Canadians in B.C.:

Work and Labour in Canada: Critical Issues
by Andrew Jackson

This book puts in perspective what Elmore considers "a growing polarization in Canada's labour market" that includes an increase in irregular, low paid jobs and an increasing number of temporary foreign work-

ers taking up these occupations, who are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

“Another very important note is that the Canadian (and B.C.) economy is moving towards a more knowledge-based economy, which necessitates the importance of training and skills upgrading, especially with workers in low paid work,” says Elmore.

In particular, the MLA thinks, “the issue of systemic racism [Jackson] raises in the area of governments failing to recognize credentials of foreign trained professionals is an issue that we can improve here in B.C.”

Jim Sinclair, president of the BC Federation of Labour recommends reading about an epic labour battle of the past:

Big Trouble: A Murder in a Small Western Town Sets Off a Struggle for the Soul of America
by J. Anthony Lukas

Here is a dramatic account of the warfare between a radical miner’s unions, company interests and the government in turn-of-the-century Idaho.

Despite being set in the U.S., the book hinges on “the roots of power and class in society. The battles that were fought by the Western Federation of Miners,” says Sinclair, “were many of the same battles that were fought here.”

Sinclair sees further parallels between events in B.C. and Lukas’s book. “In the late 1800s and early 1900s, when all this was happening, it was also happening here. There was a major coal miner’s strike on the island where Mother Jones came and spoke to them. Miners felt connected.”

The book is “partly a reminder; it’s partly an inspiration,” says Sinclair. “This strike was all about some miners getting ripped off and all the other miners joining with them to have a strike so that they kept the standard of the industry up. This is not just about miners, it’s about working people in general.” Though the book is historical, Sinclair says the issues haven’t changed. “All these things are more important than ever.”

Barry O’Neil of CUPE on what to read to understand how to benefit local economies and communities:

The Small-Mart Revolution
by Michael Schuman

One reason for O’Neil’s book choice is that he relates with Schuman’s ideas: “*The Small-Mart Revolution* itself really talks about what I’ve talked about for a long time, and that’s really not about stopping anything, but starting something different.” O’Neil believes “if we’re inundated with global, global, global everything... I think people want to see some initiative that’s closer to home, that they can participate in without reading NAFTA.”

The book is “really about how you develop new kinds of revenue streams in communities” says O’Neil. It offers advice on “the kinds of things that you can do in rural communities that can make a difference to quality of life. It’s more relevant now than it’s ever been.”

“I think that if local communities get behind something, there’s nothing more powerful than that.”

Jim Britton, vice president of CEP western region, on what to read to understand the history of the oil industry and labour in Canada:

Tracking the Canadian Formula
by Wayne Roberts

“It’s an interesting book for workers to understand how the oil industry evolved along with the labour movement in Canada,” according to Britton.

Tracking the Canadian Formula explores how there used to be “a much larger, viable oil industry in B.C. than there is today. Right now on the coast, there is only one operating refinery, which is Chevron, but at one point there was Chevron, Shell and Petro Canada all operating. Before that was Petrofina.” Britton thinks the book “may be of interest to Canadian workers” because it explains “that the west coast, at one point, was a major player in the oil industry. It wasn’t always just about Alberta. We were a thriving refining province.”

“What’s happening with the economy in British Columbia, with the solid wood sector closing down,” says Britton, is that “there are a great number of people living in B.C. but working [in the oil sands] in Alberta. It’s created this transient workforce from Alberta to B.C.”

Kelly Pollack, executive director of the Immigrant Employment Council of B.C., on what B.C. employers can read to better their relationship with immigrant employees:

Recruiting, Retaining and Promoting Culturally Different Employees

by Lionel LaRoche and Don Rutherford

Pollack is enthusiastic about this read, touting it as an essential resource for employers who want to “do a better job of attracting, hiring, and retaining immigrants” as employees. Pollack notes, “with the coming demographic shift and potential labour shortages in many areas in our labour market,” employers “can use all the tools they can get and one of the tools is this book.”

“Our workforce has changed,” says Pollack. This book is about how to “use that changing workforce to assist your business to grow and also to [ensure] that the employees within your business work as a team.”

Marc Lee, senior economist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, suggests a book that details the economic benefits of living and working in a society where equality counts:

The Spirit Level: Why more Equal Societies Almost Always Do It Better

by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett

“It is not a huge tome, as one might expect from such a broad topic, weighing in at just 265 pages of text (including lots of figures mapping inequality against some health and social statistic, and some clever cartoons). That space, however, offers up a rich synthesis of empirical findings and some theorizing about how unequal societies -- largely (except for the poorest countries) irrespective of per capita income -- do worse on almost every important health and social

indicator we might care about,” wrote Lee in a review of *The Spirit Level* that appeared here on The Progressive Economics Forum blog.

B.C. author and activist Allan Engler offers this book to understand how the modern financial industry came to be, and how it falls short:

The Myth of the Rational Market: A History of Risk, Reward and Delusion on Wall Street

by Justin Fox

Engler considers Fox’s work “a biography of the ideas and the people involved in supply-side economics.” He was particularly interested in “the central role that this ideology, the notion that moving money, moving income from wage and salary workers to profits, to corporations, to the owners of the wealth, would actually be a good thing for the economy.”

“With globalization,” says Engler, “there is no reason to think that putting more money in the hands of investors in British Columbia is going to lead to more jobs in British Columbia. It can actually mean more money going to places with cheaper labour and higher rates of profit, and that is, in fact, what is happening.”

Mark Leier, history professor at Simon Fraser University and director of the SFU Centre for Labour studies, on how to understand what it means to be in the throes of late capitalism:

Capital

by Karl Marx

“This book tells us is that in the last 150 or 200 years, the best brains that capitalism has put up to look after itself have been unable to come up with a single new idea,” says Leier. “The minute the profits dip, the only response they have is ‘How do we cut wages, how do we cut people?’” Marx’s work is a reminder that it’s “the system itself that we have to be critical of,” and that it’s not always about “an inept premier or evil capitalists.”

Looking forward, Leier says that “Even in the worst of times... progress is made when people organize. That’s the key for people to think about the future. It’s not about electing Vision Vancouver, it’s about all

kinds of struggles that people need to take up. If we sit back and let the bosses do it for us, we're going to get more of the same."

Leier offers three bits of professorial advice on how to read *Capital*:

Skip ahead. "The beginning is awful. I would absolutely not start at the beginning. I would start with part eight, which is actually a historical account of how capitalism got started. I would end up with reading part one. I would read part eight, then parts three to seven."

Read with your friends. "I think it's a good to try to read it in a group with people. Everyone reads this and comes away with something different. In fact, while the ideas are couched within this dry, odd language, the ideas are not that difficult to grasp." Marx's racy references to oral sex, employee violence and the vampiric tendencies of capitalist economies should get your reading group going, Leier told *The Tyee*.

Consider your personal circumstances. "If you ask yourself, 'How does this work itself out in my workplace?' it becomes much easier to figure out. Because, as I said, the rules of the game haven't changed at all since he was writing."

Bill Saunders, president of the Vancouver and District Labour Council, recommends a book to help people resist the daily grind of the future:

The End of Work
by Jeremy Rifkin

Rifkin's book suggests that "In the future, we're going to value personal services a lot more... things that help us live a better quality of life, like recreation leaders... which are actually very low valued jobs right now," says Saunders.

"I think it's important for people to understand that we're looking at a future where maybe we're really not so based in heavy industry," Saunders notes. In the future, it may be that "we're paying a lot more attention to our quality of life and especially things that help us live as better human beings."

"The labour movement has to start focusing a lot more on not on just more wages, more benefits... but the essential aspect, which is that we want our families to have a good quality of life." That means a good environment, a job that's meaningful to us and that we appreciate doing. "This book opens the door to thinking that it's not just about grinding more stuff out of the earth, that's just not the direction. It's about people. That's what's important."