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Op-Eds

This Labour Day, let’s ensure every worker has the protection they’ve earned

This summer reminded all of us of the importance of workers. And not just because of the pandemic. We’ve all witnessed the dedication of workers fighting fires, caring for heatwave victims, and just showing up for work in extremely difficult conditions.

It also reminds us that workers deserve the basic protections that help ensure you can go home safely at the end of your day, earn a decent living and build a better future for your family.

But those protections are always being challenged, whether it’s by economic changes, misguided political ideologies or employers (not all, but many) cutting corners for short-term profit.

Here are some of the most important protections we’re working to safeguard in the coming year:

> **Paid sick leave:** Nobody should ever have to choose between staying home when they’re sick and being able to pay the bills. But 53% of BC workers and 90% of low-wage workers don’t have access to paid sick leave because provincial laws don’t require employers to offer it.
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> Paid sick leave can help stem the spread of infectious diseases. And when workplace transmission is prevented, it means a better bottom line for businesses too.

The BC government will bring in paid sick leave by next January, and they're conducting a public consultation about what it should look like. You can share your thoughts with them online at engage.gov.bc.ca/paidsickleave — but don't stop there. Join our campaign for permanent, universal paid sick leave at https://www.futureforall.ca/paid_sick_leave_petition.

Workers' compensation: It's been clear for years that BC's workers' compensation system is broken. Drastic changes and cuts by the old BC Liberal government stacked the deck against injured workers.

While we've seen some welcome reforms under the NDP, they don't go nearly far enough. The Patterson Report clearly identified sweeping changes needed to create a truly worker-centered Workers' Compensation Board. Every day of delay puts workers and their families at risk.

Protection for gig and precarious workers: Many workers can't count on even the most basic employment standards — like the minimum wage, Employment Insurance, the Canada Pension Plan, and access to workers' compensation — because employers misclassify them as "contractors."

With our economy shifting toward app-based gig work and temporary and part-time employment, it's time to make sure employment standards apply to everyone.

The right to organize: The evidence is clear: Unions are the single most effective factor in increasing workers' standard of living and reducing income inequality. They level the playing field with employers on issues like workplace safety, harassment, pay and benefits, and many more.

But often when workers try to organize, they face major barriers — including grossly unfair tactics from employers. We can tackle one of the biggest barriers by certifying unions in a workplace when the majority of workers there have signed union cards, which helps prevent employers from manipulating the certification process.

Labour Day is a celebration of workers. And the best way to make that celebration meaningful is by ensuring every worker has the full protection they've earned.

Laird Cronk is the President of the BC Federation of Labour, and Sussanne Skidmore is the Secretary-Treasurer.