July 8, 2026 |

Statements

In memory of Stephanie Smith

Working people in British Columbia have lost one of our greatest champions.

Stephanie Smith served as president of the BCGEU from 2014 to 2024, one of the most consequential decades in our province's labour history. She fought tirelessly for her union's members, for public sector workers, and for all working people in BC and across Canada.

A childcare worker by training and profession, Stephanie's 30-year career as a labour activist started when she organized her own workplace; it culminated with her election as the BCGEU's president, the first woman in that role. Through it all, Stephanie never lost sight of her roots, saying the skills that helped her thrive in her career in childcare were the same skills she used every day as an activist and labour leader.

Her vision for the BCGEU was simple: a union where every member said "my union" instead of "the union". She never wavered from that vision, and it made her a uniquely powerful and effective leader across the labour and social justice movements.

For Stephanie, diversity was strength, and authenticity was everything. She modelled a different approach to labour leadership for a generation of activists, famous for her skills as an organizer and her ability to turn rank-and-file union members into committed activists.

Stephanie's influence went well beyond her own union. She was both a powerful ally and a formidable adversary, playing an especially critical role in pushing for $10-a-day childcare in BC. On boards, committees and advisory groups, she advocated around a range of issues critical to working people: from poverty reduction, to Indigenous reconciliation, to making unions stronger and easier to join. She was devoted to ensuring making the BCGEU and the labour movement in BC and across Canada a welcoming space that recognized and lifted up people from under-represented communities: from women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people to Indigenous, racialized, immigrant and migrant workers.

During her decade as an Executive Officer of the BCFED, Stephanie was at the front of the line when it came to taking on the work of the BC labour movement. From leading bargaining tables to running elections at convention, from chairing standing committees within her union to stepping up nationally as a Second VP with the Canadian Labour Congress, and from serving her members to creating ways for all union members to find their voice, Stephanie jumped into every task with both feet,

boundless passion, a full heart, and remarkable skill and tenacity.

Stephanie's activism came without ego. Her passion for her members was rooted in deep compassion and an unshakeable commitment to the principles of public service and worker power. Our movement was never stronger, more united or more effective than when Stephanie was at the table with us.

As we honour Stephanie Smith today, we feel the loss of her leadership and friendship keenly: her rich laugh, her warmth, and her wisdom.

To the members and staff of the BC General Employees' Union, to Stephanie's multitude of friends and colleagues in the labour movement, and most especially to her family, we offer our deepest condolences as we share in your grief, and our solidarity as we share in your loss.