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Releases

Plight of laid off Sears staff highlights need for stronger protections for workers nationally, provincially, says BCFED

Vancouver - The treatment under existing laws of thousands of laid off Sears employees highlights the need for stronger basic protections and employment standards for workers in Canada, says the BC Federation of Labour.

Sears closed 59 stores and laid off 2,900 staff on June 22. Six locations and several hundred layoffs were in BC. At the same time, the company filed for bankruptcy (creditor) protection under federal law.

In doing so, BCFED President Irene Lanzinger says the company escaped its responsibility to pay severance to workers affected by the store closures. “It means that laid off workers including many long-term employees who would be otherwise legally eligible for compensation will receive nothing,” Lanzinger says. “And that’s wrong.”

Other former Sears employees who were receiving severance as part of an earlier round of buyouts had their payments terminated. Creditor protection laws also allow companies to shirk their pension responsibilities as well.

“While the company’s efforts to use creditor protection fall under federal—not provincial—laws and jurisdiction,” says Lanzinger, “the circumstances highlight why basic protections for non-union

workers need to be strengthened in a number of ways here in BC and across Canada.