September 8, 2016 |

Releases

Evergreen Line contractor SNC should pay heavy price for firing worker over safety concerns

Vancouver - The BC Federation of Labour says big-time fines should be levied against the contractor building the Evergreen rapid transit line after the company was found to have illegally fired a worker who complained about unsafe working conditions, and then lied about the reasons behind the termination.

“The conduct of SNC-Lavalin is reprehensible,” says BC Federation of Labour President Irene Lanzinger.

“They violated fundamental rights protecting workers. And then they fired someone for exercising those rights to discourage other workers from raising safety concerns.

“These are serious violations and the penalties for SNC should be severe,” says Lanzinger. “The Workers’ Compensation Board (WCB) has to be tough, otherwise it will send a message that it condones employer efforts to violate the law.”

Lanzinger says the right of a worker to raise with their employer concerns about unsafe working conditions and the right to refuse to work in unsafe conditions are cornerstone protections for workers in BC that are enshrined in law.

“These are historic protections that were won, literally, from the blood of workers killed and injured on the job. They need to be respected and just as critically they need to be rigorously enforced by the WCB.”

The case involved David Britton, a heavy duty mechanic and millwright, who worked for SNC on the Evergreen Line in 2014. He and a colleague, crane operator Julio Serrano, repeatedly raised health and safety concerns about working conditions on the project and exercised their right not to perform unsafe work. And in late 2014 they were both fired for doing so.

Britton then filed a discrimination complaint with the WCB, which issued the recent ruling that he had been unjustly terminated. The investigation into Serrano’s complaint is still ongoing.

“We admire David Britton for his courage and commitment to winning justice,” Lanzinger says. “This decision will encourage other workers to speak out about unsafe workplaces in the face of employer efforts to silence them.”

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