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Releases

Labour Day Message from President Irene Lanzinger

Plight of low-wage workers symbolic of Premier Clark's abject failure to deal with poverty, inequality

As we celebrate the holiday—Labour Day—that honours the contributions working people make every day to our economy and our communities, I'm asking all British Columbians to take a moment to think about this.

Imagine you work full-time and support yourself or your family on less than $20,000 a year in Canada's most expensive province.

Imagine how would you put food on the table, or meet the rent? How would you be able to make a car payment or the fare for public transportation? Pay for school fees or a visit to the dentist for your son or daughter?

While it's hard to imagine for most British Columbians, it's a reality for far too many people in our province who work hard every day but earn less than $15 an hour.

Thanks to Premier Clark and her government, BC's $10.45 per hour minimum wage is the lowest in Canada. And their policies which foster a low wage economy means nearly 500,000 workers earn less than poverty level wages.

Some 60% are women. Four out of five work for companies with more than 20 employees. Eighty percent are adults. And one in seven poverty wage earners holds a university degree.

That's why the BC Federation of Labour and our affiliate unions are working closely with community groups to push for a $15 per hour minimum wage.

Our Fightfor15BC.ca campaign is the solution to improve living standards for hundreds of thousands of workers and their families. It's a concrete poverty reduction strategy to address the widening gap between rich and poor that's at the root of our festering economic inequality crisis.

Tens of thousands of British Columbians have already directly supported the Fight for $15 by signing our petition.

We know most of the public are on our side. A public opinion survey shows more than 80% believe a person earning minimum wage should live above the poverty line. Three-quarters support raising the minimum wage to $15 an hour.

Backing for a higher minimum wage cuts across B.C.'s ever present political divide. Both NDP (nine in 10) and Liberal (seven in 10) supporters endorse our $15 solution. That broad support among voters from all political parties is one reason that the B.C. NDP has already pledged to implement $15.

Fundamental to labour's commitment to all workers is this basic tenet: Nobody working a full-time job should live in poverty.

That's why on Labour Day, we make this pledge to 500,000 workers earning poverty wages and to the vast majority of British Columbians who believe Victoria should act to address growing economic inequality. In the year ahead, we will continue to fight for government action to implement a fair minimum wage and put an end to poverty wages.

The plight of low-wage workers and the abject failure of the Clark government to tackle poverty and growing inequality are symbolic of what's wrong with our province. It defines the choices voters can make in next May's election.

We live in an incredibly wealthy province.

But when it comes to how that wealth is shared, we are a deeply unequal society where a small group controls most of the wealth.

And for hard working people and our families, it’s tougher to get ahead. Our wages are flat or going down. We’re losing good-paying permanent jobs.

Life is less affordable, and we’re paying more for everything. Prices are rising. Housing costs are skyrocketing.

And Premier Clark and her government are making us pay more for the basics like hydro, car insurance and health care.

Our hospitals and schools and public services are being cut.

Our kids are having to leave our communities and our province to afford a home and raise a family.

For workers, hard work isn’t paying off.

Unless we do something fast and chart a different course, our province is going to be a place where only the rich can live.

I remain incredibly optimistic that we can do better here in BC. Change is possible. There’s a lot that can be done.

Together, we can choose a BC where we all have the chance for a better life – and where our kids can build their future.

In solidarity,

IRENE LANZINGER
President