September 29, 2021 |

Statements

Statement on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

(Unceded Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam territories — Vancouver, BC) September 30, 2021 marks the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. This is a day for all of us to recognize the legacy of colonialism and genocide, and how the practices that reinforce and amplify them continue today.

The discovery of the unmarked graves of 215 children on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School on Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Territory, and subsequent discovery of hundreds more at the former locations of many others, lend that legacy an especially painful weight this year. The grief and pain of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people everywhere are enormous. We share that grief and will not forget these children or the experiences of all Indigenous survivors and non-survivors of residential schools.

For years now we have known September 30 as Orange Shirt Day, named for the story shared by Phyllis (Jack) Webstad, whose brand-new orange shirt, bought by her grandmother, was stripped from her on her first day at residential school when she was six years old. Now we move forward together with a day recognized nationally as a statutory holiday. And while the BC government is still discussing the best way to mark this day provincially in the future, the BC Federation of Labour has chosen to close our offices on September 30 in observance.

We will take this day to reflect on the damage done by colonialism and genocide: through the residential school system, through measures ranging from land theft to the suppression of languages and cultures, and through the many ways colonialism continues today. We will consider what it means to live and work in a colonial province and country. We will look at how labour in British Columbia and beyond can play a more effective role in dismantling those structures of oppression and serve as better allies to Indigenous peoples. And we will recommit to the work of decolonization, within our own walls and in the broader community.

The BC Federation of Labour encourages workers everywhere to join us in this day of reflection and acknowledgement, and we have compiled a list of events and actions happening around the province.

We recognize the path of reconciliation and healing will be long, but all of us — Indigenous and settler communities alike — will be stronger and better for it.