May 9, 2013 |

Releases

BC Liberal government pushed for expedited HD Mining temporary foreign work permits

Vancouver – The controversial Liberal government's job program came under fire again today after it was revealed in court documents that a senior provincial official was pushing the federal government on a daily basis to "expedite" work permits for 200 miners to come to China-based HD Mining's coal mine in northern British Columbia.

Internal provincial government briefing notes also document a multi-year strategy of support to bring in temporary foreign workers by the provincial government beginning as early as 2005 when government officials co-ordinated "information sessions for mining companies concerning labour market opinion and work permit processes."

Evidence of government pressure to approve the work permits for the TFWs came in the form of emails sent between officials in Service Canada's Regional Edmonton office and local Service Canada staff overseeing HD Mining's controversial application to bring the miners to British Columbia.

These revelations of provincial involvement come within days of Premier Clark's denial of involvement by her government in pressing for the permits to be granted. During a CKNW interview, April 22, 2013 when Clark was asked about provincial involvement, she replied, "Those applications are made to the federal government and they adjudicate that. We don't even in the provincial government see those documents."

The Service Canada program officer in Edmonton advised a Vancouver officer, William MacLean, working on the HD Mining TFW file that calls were coming in "daily from the Province of BC" regarding the status of the file and that there was a request the file be "expedited" in April 2012.

BCFED President Jim Sinclair stated, "It is the height of hypocrisy for the government to spend $16 million on advertising a jobs program when senior staff are on the phone to federal officials daily demanding temporary foreign workers be brought to British Columbia to do jobs Canadians can do. It's appalling in tough economic times the government is spending money training companies to bring in temporary foreign workers but cutting funding for training British Columbians and strangling apprenticeship programs."

Indeed, briefs related to the HD Mining file were sent from Erin Seeley, Director Program Management and Planning of the Economic Immigration Programs Branch, part of Pat Bell's Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, and Skills Training to the federal government's Edmonton program officer, also in April 2012.

“It’s clear all this provincial government pressure to get approval for the foreign miners worked. In April 2012, the federal government granted a Labour Market Opinion that paved the way for the company to bring in 201 miners,” Sinclair said.

In court testimony in late March, 2013, MacLean said the interference from his superior in Edmonton on this issue was out of the ordinary. “I would say that it was unusual to have a manager communicate to me directly other than my own local manager. That was outside my experience...”

“The Clark and Bell denials of involvement ring hollow in the light of these facts -- as far back as the trip to China when the duo was lobbied by mining companies around securing work permits,” said Sinclair. “The line of command in bringing temporary foreign workers goes right to the top.”

Documents released April 26 under the Freedom of Information Legislation also reveal extensive provincial government involvement in this issue, including a face-to-face meeting in China where Premier Clark and Minister Pat Bell were lobbied directly by the mining companies to help secure the work permits. “PCC mission to China meets mining companies who raise challenges with securing work permits.” (GCP-2013-00043)

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