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October 25, 2007

Letter to the Editor
Vancouver Sun
#1 - 200 Granville Street
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RE: A FLAWED BILL

The age old saying “don’t let the facts ruin a good argument” appears well used in John Winter’s recent article calling once again for the use of scabs. Using the last civic strike as a jumping off point, he claims that we should return to the old days of using scabs to break strikes.

Let’s take the civic strike. Putting aside the obvious foot dragging by the City, Winter complains that workers had the right to work elsewhere during the labour dispute. What is ignored in his entire argument is that the City did not shut down completely. Instead, managers worked long (well rewarded) hours doing duties including collecting garbage and parking revenues. A number of city services were declared essential long before the dispute started and were continued throughout the dispute. The City Hall itself was open for those who felt compelled to cross the picket line.

According to Winter’s logic of what’s fair then, there should be a ban on bosses doing any work during a strike. Whether bosses worked or not, their wages should be dropped to the equivalent of the union’s strike pay. Employers would not be allowed any other sources of income. Now the playing field starts to look a little more even.

None of that will happen. So instead, more than 15 years ago, we passed legislation in British Columbia to ban the importation of scabs during a labour dispute. The result has been clear. The number and length of labour disputes has decreased. Violence on the picket line has also dropped dramatically. The results have been positive for not only workers but the British Columbian economy in general. Despite all this supposedly “unfair power” enjoyed by unions members, corporate profits are at record levels while wages are barely keeping up with inflation.

The key to good labour relations is mutual respect and good lines of communications. Canada’s recent Supreme Court decision lays it out pretty clearly. The judges found that not

only was Gordon Campbell's actions (ripping up signed contracts) illegal, they found that the right to free collective bargaining was a charter right.

"Recognizing that workers have the right to bargain collectively as part of their freedom to associate reaffirms the values of dignity, personal autonomy, equality and democracy that are inherent in the Charter," the judges said.

Instead of rushing to embrace archaic ideas, like bringing back scabs, and laughably complaining that bosses have no power, perhaps Mr. Winter would be better off reading the Supreme Court's decision. We would also invite him to drop the coalition's defense of \$6 wages (now that's from another era too) and join with the majority of British Columbians who believe, in 2007, no one should be earning less than \$10 an hour.

Yours truly,



JIM SINCLAIR
President
B.C. Federation of Labour