



August 13, 2008

Opinion Editorial

Jim Sinclair
President
B.C. Federation of Labour

The sheer size and audacity was stunning, leaving most observers with jaws dropped and in a state of shock. No, I'm not talking about the opening ceremonies at the Beijing Olympics. Although, if there were medals being handed out, give Gordon Campbell the gold when it comes to arrogant, out-of touch governments.

Friday's announcement of a 43 percent increase for Campbell's Deputy Minister, putting an additional \$105,000 in her pocket, increasing her salary to \$348,600, is either cronyism at its best, or the sign of a government that's grown wilfully ignorant of the real challenges facing British Columbians. But he didn't stop there; he tossed the Deputy Ministers a 35 percent increase (all these people already got hefty wage increases two years ago). If you listened to BC Liberals politicians, (those not lucky enough to be in Beijing with Campbell,) they were forced to do it, they had no choice, and they had to keep up with other provinces. But, before you feel too sorry for them, let's remember that Campbell's government has shown no desire in keeping up when it comes to the minimum wage.

This year alone, every province, except BC, has increased their minimum wage. Over 100,000 British Columbians are earning the minimum wage, and thanks to the Liberals, British Columbia has the lowest minimum wage in purchasing power and the fourth lowest minimum wage in the country (three Maritime provinces are lower). But these workers are not even on Campbell's radar. For two years, the voices of these workers demanding a \$10 minimum wage, joined by more than thirty three municipal governments and the Union of BC Municipalities, have been ignored.

They say the economy is booming, but in seven years have not only refused to raise the minimum wage, the BC Liberals cut it by 25 percent to six dollars for new workers. It's not just minimum wage workers. This government ignores people who struggle with rising food and fuel costs. They ignore those on the coast who face announcements of ferry fare increases more frequent than announcements for the Sunshine breakfast. They ignore the 15,000 forest workers who have lost their job this year, telling them their hands are tied, while log exports have tripled and as the Auditor General pointed out, orchestrated rich land giveaways for forest companies, some of their biggest political backers.

What does it say about our Premier when he tells minimum wage workers not a penny, but shovels money off the back of the truck when it comes to his own wages (54 percent increase) and the wages of his political advisers? This is disgraceful. Does anybody in Victoria care that we have the highest child poverty rates in Canada? Do they even notice? But it's not just the lowest paid. While the Liberals take care of their friends the average British Columbian is being pounded with price increases everyday. Gasoline at the pump has hit record levels and the Liberals help by piling on another tax for everybody else instead of taxing the windfall profits of the oil companies. On the other side, unless you're a politician or a friend of Gordon Campbell, your wages have remained stagnant for nearly a decade.

But the truth is, Gordon doesn't care and he's counting on all of us forgetting. He and his friends know that three months from now, the media will never mention the raises. They're surprised it's even a story this week. They're counting on the rest of us to forget their arrogance, forget their neglect of forest workers, forget the increases in everything but real incomes, forget wage cuts for health care workers, and forget the cuts for those on disability.

Is Gordon Campbell right and British Columbians will forget? That's a question for the rest of us to answer and answer it we must. Don't wait. Send Gordon Campbell and his MLA's a strong message---the only message they understand---you won't forget and you won't be voting for him and his crowd in the next election. Maybe, just maybe, Gordon Campbell will start listening again when he hears the sound of his own government crashing down.

JS/mz



0500-08oped-lb-Aug 13-min wage