

British Columbia Federation of Labour

The Voice of BC's Union Workers

BC Fed condemns expansion of temporary worker program—government fails to address rights of vulnerable workers

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Vancouver-Today's latest expansion of the temporary foreign worker program means continued exploitation of foreign workers and fails to address the rights of vulnerable workers, says the B.C. Federation of Labour.

Despite previous calls from the Federation and other groups concerned about the exploitation of these vulnerable workers, again the federal government has failed to dedicate resources to enforcement and monitoring of fair housing and labour standards for temporary workers," said Federation President, Jim Sinclair.

"The federal government is rushing forward with a blind eye to the exploitation of workers despite repeated instances across Canada, where workers have been forced to pay thousands of dollars to so-called labour brokers. Or look here in BC, where even the BC Human Rights Tribunal has found that foreign workers employed on the RAV line construction project were victims of intimidation and coercion by their employer."

Sinclair also took the provincial government to task for failing to act, despite its mandate to monitor employment standards. "The provincial government has openly endorsed every expansion of this program, but also look the other way when it comes time to enforce standards. Even in Alberta, the provincial government has launched a special office to enforce employment standards and investigate complaints by foreign workers. It's time to do the same here in BC."

Sinclair reiterated the Federation's view that a long term labour force strategy should include immigration, with full rights for all workers. "On one hand we're seeing thousands of jobs disappear from the resource and manufacturing sector, but yet there's no discussion of where our economy is going and what the future holds for these displaced workers."

According to Statistics Canada's latest labour force data, BC lost 33,700 full time jobs in December 2007, and despite gains in part-time jobs, BC lost a net 7,000 jobs compared to the previous month.

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