

IBEW



Local 230

Established in Victoria in 1902

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December 6, 2019

Alastair MacGregor, MP
295 Trunk Road
Duncan, BC V9L 2P3

Congratulations Alistair on your re-election. On behalf of the 1400 Union electrical workers on Vancouver Island, I would like to pass on our congratulations on your recent (re) election win in October.

We are excited for the possibilities that the Green Party and New Democratic Party can work with the returning Liberals to achieve beneficial changes for working class British Columbians.

Working Class British Columbians have truly been struggling over the last few decades. Their wages have stagnated while costs for basic needs items have steadily climbed year after year, meanwhile CEO's pay has way too often grossly outpaced that of workers. A Manulife Bank of Canada survey this past September found 40% of Canadians with households earning over \$40,000 per year surveyed, do not expect to escape debt in their lifetimes, and 45% of those surveyed noted that their spending is increasing faster than their income. More than half (55%) of Canadians reported considerable non-mortgage debt.

When you consider this news alongside of the 2019 Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey, which found Victoria to be the 13th most unaffordable city in the world, more unaffordable than even San Francisco or Hong Kong, it's not a good sign for the working class. Although, Vancouver and Toronto are even worse, Victoria is the most unaffordable small to mid-sized city in Canada.

So, when you put a large mortgage debt, on top of a very fast paced growing non-mortgage debt, financial stress and related health stress is likely not that far away. So, we need champions within the federal government working diligently to turn these large and complex problems around.

We believe some honesty is long overdue in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) market basket costed out each year which determines the increases to the cost of living. We are aware previous governments in the early 80's and 90's removed a number of items purchased by the middle class that once removed resulted in a lower CPI increase, which had the smoke and mirrors effect of creating a false ceiling on real expenses.

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The CPI has been used by many unions in bargaining and non-union employers to determine wage increases for workers. When items that bore large increases were removed, it resulted in an artificially lower CPI increase and lower wage increases across the country.

We would like the market basket reviewed and moved back to include sensible items that working-class Canadians purchase to live.

It's not only imperative that our elected officials work for Canadians with a minority government, but also seen working for us on matters that can really elevate our standard of living, so we can in return continue to elevate the communities we live in. For that to happen, we need a greater portion of the available wealth to shift into working class Canadians hands and pockets, at the same time develop programs that also lower their expenses. Working Class British Columbians are counting on the Green Party and NDP Members of Parliament working with the governing Liberals to get good social policy passed to move more wealth into their pockets, so they can achieve a better standard of living.

Raising Wages

From the standpoint of the construction trades including the 900 IBEW electricians that live and work on Vancouver Island. One of the regressive changes the Harper Conservatives made through Bill C-38 was the elimination of the Federal Fair Wages and Hours of Work Act. A fifty-two-year-old piece of legislation with the purpose to protect workers and the public purse by simply not accepting the artificially low bid as the successful bid when it's off the backs of workers, by paying substandard wages, no health care, no training or upgrading, or retirement funding. The quality of work varies from worker to worker, and workers know how they line-up against their fellow workers; good craft workers demand better wages, benefits, and retirement funding, when there are no regulations or minimums on who can do the work, the old adage, "you get what you pay for!" are the results.

Prior to the Fair Wage Act repeal, if a federal infrastructure project was being tendered with a payroll value of above \$100,000 (I believe) in any given region in Canada, the Act would have applied.

Every two years the federal government would conduct a survey of the wage levels of all construction trades region by region, and an average wage would be determined between the union and non-union workforce and that would become the minimum wage for; carpenters, plumbers, electricians, etc. Essentially all trades would have individual wage rates, which in turn would be applied to all federal infrastructure projects in the region over the coming two years. Establishing a minimum wage and other rules to bid work paid for by Canadians.

We know the Liberals were working on a resurrected Federal Fair Wage Act, and our members are counting on your support to see it enacted.

Our members are looking forward to employing their skills to help move Canadians into the Green Economy. IBEW members across our great Nation are some of the most skilled and technical workers Canada has. We build dams, install solar photovoltaic, wind generation, tidal

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and every other form of power generation for decades, and in some areas like tidal and dam, for over a century in many cities across Canada. As well as newer security and passive energy saving devices in business and homes. When these Green Energy projects are funded in part or whole, by the federal government we would like to see the new version of the Federal Fair Wages and Hours of Work Act apply to these projects as well.

Our members also work in the marine shipbuilding, repair and maintenance industries throughout southern Vancouver Island.

Two hundred of them are your employees and work directly for the federal government and Treasury Board at the Fleet Maintenance Facility at HMCS Cape Breton, the munition depot at Rocky Point, and the Torpedo Test Range Site in Nanoose Bay. They are skilled marine electricians; electronic technicians and technologists; and electro-platers, and as simplistic as I can put it, they make sure the Canadian Navy on the west-coast of Canada is best prepared for the very worst of situations.

They need Phoenix Pay fixed today. Your employees deserve to be paid for the work they perform in a relatively short period after they've worked it, and they need the mental and financial stress from this self-directed hit relieved.

We have another 300 marine electricians and motor winders working in the private sector, on many of our Navy's refits and Submarine maintenance, as well as Cruise ships, Deep Sea freighters, Ferries, Fish Boats, and more.

We have been incredibly disappointed with our previous Provincial Government in their practice of sending work off-shore to countries like Germany, Poland, and Romania.

We have gone on record in the past as being opposed to BC Ferries receiving tariff relief from the federal government for utilizing off-shore shipyards. BC Ferries have been very creative in their bid documents requiring shipyards to be in business for lengthy periods of time, longer than capable west-coast yards have been in business, thereby disqualifying them.

Often, vessel owners utilize the federal government owned Esquimalt Graving Dock and, in many cases, when B.C. shipyards compete on the global stage for work could use a break in the docking and crane fees associated to the project. Docking fees and crane fees can often cost 3 to 5 times the costs of other yards in the United States. Lowering these costs for off-shore work could more than make up for lost revenues through the income tax revenue generated by the workers themselves, and making these fees lower can sometimes make the difference to bringing their vessels to Canada or not. Resulting in hundreds of skilled trades workers continuing their employment and/or getting hired-back off of Employment Insurance.

Our members preference is to work; however, construction and marine work can be cyclical, and when they need their Employment Insurance they have paid into, they should be able to access it unencumbered by senseless bureaucracy.

Another misguided, unnecessary and mean-spirited Harper Conservative change was also inserted in Bill C-38 to the EI Program. Which of course, discriminated against several seasonal or cyclical

jobs classifications. Jobs like logger, fisher, and construction workers were immediately biased due to no fault of their own, and we are thankful the Liberal Government of Canada recognized that and reversed that legislation; while at the same time making some improvements in Parental benefit sharing, adult and child care-giver benefits and elder care benefits. One change which continues to harm workers is the way E.I. appeals are now heard, by forming a new Social Security Tribunal, (really, a one person or Arbitrary process) and removing the "Board of Referees", a truly tri-partite body of people from business, Labour, and government, that came together to assess worker's appeals. We believe that, due to this difficult-to-manage change we saw appeals across the country go from about 83,000 to now just over 3,000 appeals last year. We also saw, what was required in the old system to have a decision on those appeals from 30 days, to some taking over 6 months leaving appellants in limbo for an unreasonable amount of time. So, the federal Conservatives developed a system from the money all workers pay into as in "Insurance" in the event they become unemployed, and made it much more difficult for laid-off workers to actually receive that insurance. This new system in place can only be described as an epic failure on reaching its goal in providing employment insurance in a timely way to those who under the Act should qualify in receiving their work displacement, employment insurance.

We are calling on the federal government to reinstate the Board of Referees so workers can truly find the unbiased local representation they deserve when deciding their appeals in a timely manner.

Training

The IBEW spends millions of dollars across Canada each year up-skilling our members long after they've finished their apprenticeship, in new technologies and changes to the Canadian Electrical Code gazette by Parliament every three years. That can take time. In the 1980's the Unemployment Insurance Commission (UIC) would extend a worker's number of insurable weeks by the same number of weeks they spent in upgrading and re-training in their field of expertise. Currently most of our members spend their weekends and evenings away from their families in these upgrading classes. The electrical industry is an ever-technological changing industry, what we learn this year can significantly change in a few short years, requiring our members to constantly upgrade their skills and knowledge. We are requesting the government, consider changes to the Employment Insurance program to allow for Construction and Industrial electricians who are expanding their trade knowledge through the week (Monday to Friday) not be disqualified from collecting their EI benefits while upgrading their Journey level status in programs that make the worker a better skilled electrician, and therefore more employable.

The Union Training and Innovation Program (UTIP) has been extremely helpful and meaningful for our members in continuing their trades training, on their time away from the job market, so when they return, they are more productive and efficient, this delivers great results for our productivity levels.

Our Workplace Alternative Trades Training (WATT) Program, is another federally funded program we see great things from people that may not have the ability to get into the trades.

Local 230 currently supports and employs 325 apprentices, 12% are female, our WATT students have become a primary stream helping disadvantaged youth, indigenous peoples, new Canadians,

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and women move into the trades. Currently we employ more “youth apprentices” (as defined by the B.C. Industry Training Authority) in our Local Union than the Yukon. In other words, the WATT Program is helping us change people’s lives in the most positive of ways, providing a helping hand for those stuck, often in poverty, in our communities and bringing them into the working middle class. This is something we can jointly take great pride in, and we avidly promoting its continuation in 2021.

Lowering Expenses

Canadians are looking forward to a more cost-effective Pharma-Care plan with the focus on saving Canadians and Canadian Health Care Plans money. Providing universal coverage, is in the best interest of all working-class Canadians. Canada is the only country that has Universal Health Care without a comprehensive universal pharma-care program. Many Canadians today forego medicine because they simply just can’t afford it. Yet, basing relief of the costs on one’s income won’t make much sense, as construction and marine work is cyclical and each year is different, so the year they can afford the medicine they need, may not be the same year their income is based on for coverage. Hanging on to the same difficult system, based on income affordability for cyclical workers will not make any difference, it will continue to leave them behind.

So, we are overdue and we look forward to seeing our federal government moving ahead on a comprehensive pharma-care program that will be universally applied.

Cell-phone and Cable Vision Services are some of the highest cost plans than almost anywhere else, that’s primarily because they truly have a monopoly with that service.

We are also anticipating some work in these areas so our members will have more money to spend in their communities having a greater impact on our local economy.

If you made it this far, I want to congratulate you again for moving into, and/or continuing on in public life. I also want to thank you for taking your time to read this letter, and I look forward to working with you in making the lives of British Columbians better and Vancouver Island the best place to work and raise a family.

Kindest Regards,



Phil Venoit, RSE
Business Manager/
Financial Secretary

CC. The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister
Honourable Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the federal New Democratic Party
Honourable Elizabeth May, Leader of the federal Green Party
Vancouver Island Members of Parliament
IBEW - International Vice-President, Tom Reid

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