

## **An Open Letter To Monte Solberg Minister Of Immigration Citizenship And Immigration**

Dear Minister, as President of the Vancouver Island Building Construction Trades Council and as Business Manager of the Electrical Workers Union we would like to go on record as being opposed to your office streamlining the foreign worker immigration process into Canada.

For years we have had a structured system in place to help ensure new immigrants settle into what I like to refer to as the Canadian salad bowl (my version of the melting pot), whereas most of our new immigrants would prefer to congregate with members of their own ethnic origin, reflected in Toronto's Little Italy, Surrey's large East Indian, or Winnipeg's large Ukraine population.

Canada's diverse population is what helps define what and who we are, and generally speaking I believe our Nations citizenry embrace new neighbors, and co-workers, as is the case generally speaking for our collective membership on Vancouver Island.

However, with your announcement of streamlining the foreign worker application process late in 2006, and our understanding that the unemployment rate is 6.1% for the year-end 2006, and therefore many Canadians still out of work, and with our further understanding that there has been no movement in terms of helping off-set the costs for qualified and certified Canadian tradesmen and women with their moving expenses (transportation, meals and accommodation from their home to their work destination) within Canada to help with any regional labour shortfall, causes us to question the Government's motives.

Now, don't get me wrong, a 30 year low, 6.1% unemployment rate is something for government to lift their chin about, but again that leaves over 6 Canadians out of every 100, in need of a job and struggling to pay rent or mortgage, their utilities, then feed and clothe their families. This also prompts us to consider the horrible child poverty rate of 1 in 5 Canadian children living below the recognized poverty line, now we realize children don't work, their parents do! So, perhaps these kids' parents could use a job, and if they currently have a job maybe they could use a raise.

A recent article in BC Business magazine (included) shines some light on the growing problems of an unbridled immigration process within our borders. Marcos Baac one of our new Foreign Worker Applicants from Mexico who is currently unemployed and seeking refuge status, after speaking out against the cramped and unsanitary living conditions his Pitt Meadows employer had him and the other immigrant workers living in. The story continues with insight from Dr. David Foot, professor of economics at the University of Toronto, who predicts a labour surplus until the next decade, when the baby-boomers really begin to retire. He continues to sight our current situation not as a "labour-market shortage" but a "deficiency in wages". The story carries on page 47, telling of atrocities on other foreign workers being paid \$3.50 an hour to work on the Canada Line Rapid Transit Project, and of other "flashpoints" like the Golden Ears Bridge project.

The problem is exacerbated when neither Federal nor Provincial governments will take responsibility for this issue. The federal government says, they issue the work permits, but we don't deal with any on-site issues, while the provincial government says that it is out of our jurisdiction of how the work permit was issued so they are reluctant to step in? Sounds like the old proverbial Mexican stand-off!

So, although we recognize that there are some areas in need of foreign worker applicants, until both governments find a solution which would prohibit the exploitation of those workers, and until the federal government legislates a tax deduction for skilled certified and qualified Canadian

## **Spring 2007**

### *Inside This Quarterly*

#### **Page 1:**

- **An Open Letter**

#### **Page 2:**

- **Business Managers Report**
- **An Open Letter (Continued)**
- **Feds Provide New Apprentice Incentive Grant**

#### **Page 3:**

- **Bill Supports Mobile Trade Workers**
- **Sector Report**

#### **Page 4:**

- **ITA Publishes Poor Performance Report**
- **Long Service Pins**
- **Sector Report (Continued)**

### **News/Notes:**

#### **Write Us At:**

**204-2780  
Millstream Rd  
Victoria BC V9B 3S6**

# Business Manager's Report



**Philip M. Venoit**  
Business Manager/Financial Secretary

The biggest threat to our Brotherhood at this time is the Temporary Foreign Worker; these workers are being imported to be used as cheap labour, after writing the letter to Minister Solberg I've learned there are almost 6,000 ticketed Canadian electricians, and over 2,000 apprentices sitting at home waiting to go to work, and like a punch to the guts, some Canadian employers are laying Canadian workers off first, because they have no contract to employ us! The more this goes on the faster Canadian construction

workers are going to get pissed off, but can you blame us! more to come...

Motion #1 to reduce the Market Recovery amount deducted from our members working construction went through with; 105 in favour, 31 opposed, and 37 abstained. We've sent off the letter to the International Office and will be contacting an independent auditor to take an in-depth look at our market share. Motion #2 was rescinded.

I have hired Brother Brent Strank to represent the north Island membership, specifically construction, Campbell River TV, Motor Winding Shops, E&N Railway, Westburne Wholesale, and Nanaimo Shipyard, with the primary duty to organize our jurisdiction.

In construction we are still trying to put the collective agreement to bed with CLRA still trying to impose items into the agreement we didn't even touch on in bargaining. We've expressed that our membership ratified a memorandum, and that their contractors did the same, simply write in those changes so we can go to print with a new Agreement, and if there are changes they would like to see, let's begin bargaining a year early instead of a year late next round! The Journeyman wage goes to \$28.85 in May.

# An Open Letter Continued...

workers to help with inter and intra-provincial mobility issues to help further reduce the unemployment rate, we stand opposed to any new foreign construction worker applications coming into Canada.

Further to this, we recommend that your office on behalf of the Canadian Government open discussion with Dr. Emilio Gonzalez, the Director of Citizenship & Immigration Services of the United States of America, prior to any other country to obtain foreign construction worker applicants for British Columbia, for several obvious reasons such as common language skills (there are 3 language barriers foreign workers must overcome, the English language, the legal diction most of our Building Codes are written, and then our individual trade slang), they have similar worker classification skill-sets, resident proximity (for example an electrician living in Seattle can drive to Vancouver to go to work and return home to be with his family on the weekends) and that these discussions should be with the intent to provide reciprocation in the event the USA requires skilled construction workers from Canada.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this correspondence, please do not hesitate to contact me in our Victoria business office.

Sincerely,

Philip Venoit  
Business Manager/  
Financial Secretary

# Feds Provide New Apprentice Incentive Grant

The Federal Government has introduced a new Apprenticeship Training Incentive Grant for "Red Seal" Inter-provincial Trades which includes; Appliance Service Technician, Construction Electrician, Electronics Technician and Electric Motor Systems Technician, apprentices in these trades may apply for a grant. The Apprenticeship Incentive Grant provides direct support of \$1,000 to apprentices in the first two (2) years of an approved apprenticeship training program. The grant was established January 1, 2007 with the intent to help apprentices cover some of the expenses related to tuition, travel and tools. Apprentices that qualify must complete an application and submit it along with the required supporting documents to your local Service Canada Centre, or mail it to;

*Calgary South Service Canada Centre  
100-6712 Fisher Street East  
Calgary, AB T2H 2A7*

The supporting documents you will need to apply for the grant will

show proof of registration with the Industry Training Authority (ITA) your wallet card will be good, and your school transcripts from 1st or 2nd year of schooling. You can find and download the application form # EMP5391 on the Local's website under the "Work" tab then click on the "Training" button.

## When to Apply for the AIG:

You can apply for the Grant if you have completed your in-school training and on-the-job training for the first or second level of your apprenticeship after January 1, 2007.

You will have until June 30th of the subsequent calendar year to submit your application. For example, if you complete your 1st year in March 2007, you will have until June 30th 2008 to apply.

However, keep in mind, although the Government has provided for this Incentive Grant, they have not allocated any monies for the approval of these grants as yet. A decision on funding approval is expected to be made this spring. Applications will be processed when funding for the grant has been approved.

# MP Chris Charlton Introduces Bill in Support of Mobile Trade Workers

**New Legislation would help address skilled labour shortage in boom areas.**

Chris Charlton, MP Hamilton Mountain announced on November 30, 2006 that Canada's tradespersons should not be forced to decline distant employment opportunities because of the burden of heavy out-of-town expenses.

The Hamilton Mountain MP is introducing a new bill in the House of Commons, an Act to Amend the Income Tax Act (travel and accommodation deduction for tradespersons) which would allow properly accredited tradespersons and indentured apprentices to deduct from their income taxes and the travel and accommodation costs that result from working at a job site more than 80km away from their primary residence.

**The Bill C would read:**

## Sector Report

**Appliance Repair** – We've been served notice that MABE has sold the service department to Direct Energy out of Ontario, and we are in negotiations with both parties this coming April/May.

**Cablevision** – We've received a decision from the Canadian Federal Privacy Commissioner's Office which although was a good decision we have written them back explaining how and why we believe their decision is flawed.

**Construction – Commercial/Institutional** – Houle Electric picked up the RJH Microbiology Lab, Phoenix Theatre and the Mearns Building Power and Controls at University of Victoria, the Regional District Puntledge Water Treatment Plant upgrade and the Fire Alarm upgrade at the Royal BC Museum; Emery Electric has picked up the south Island Letter Carrier Depot, the Cobble Hill Fire Base, the Pacific Sports Institute on the Camosun College grounds, and the Deep Cove Pump Station; Canem Systems is just finishing up London Drugs at Rutherford Mall. Raylec Power picked up an expansion at Natural Glacier Waters in Fanny Bay, along with several Island intersections

**Industrial** – Vicar Electric is beginning work at the John Hart Dam and along with Surgenor Electric is finishing up Fibre Optic backbone and

Subsection 8(i) of the Income Tax Act is amended by adding the following after paragraph (q):

(q.I) amounts expended in the year by a taxpayer in respect of travel and accommodation expenses incurred by the taxpayer in order to secure and maintain employment as a duly qualified tradesperson or an indentured apprentice in a construction activity at a job site that was located at least 80km away from the taxpayer's ordinary place of residence, if the taxpayer

(i) was required under the contract of employment to pay those expenses,

(ii) did not receive from his or her employer an allowance in respect of those expenses that is excluded from the

tax payer's income under paragraph 6(r) (b), and

(iii) does not claim those expenses as a deduction for the year under any other provision of this act.

MP Charlton was confident that the bill would find supporters throughout the House of Commons. He says that he doesn't know how anyone could oppose this when the implications are win-win-win and that this bill would help increase employment, bring balance to our labour markets, and put money back in the pockets of working families. He is confident that the government will recognize this as an important step towards realizing its election promise as outlined in the Stand up for Trades plan.

robotic insertion at Elk Falls; Western Technical Installations is finishing up the Port McNeill gravel conveyor for Orca Developments; FMI has picked up the Strathcona and Ladore Falls Dams spill-gate re-furbishment, French Creek wastewater treatment plant, Trent street sewage treatment plant and Zebalos lake Hydro.

**Residential** – Canem Systems picked up the sales office of the Hudson in Victoria, 2nd Phase at Dockside Green, and a Kiwanis assisted living in Campbell River; Houle Electric has picked up the Oliver Road Rec. Centre; Mazzei Electric has picked up The Texada in Nanaimo and the Old House Inn in Courtenay; Emery picked up Len Barrie's House; Raylec is continuing strong in underground Hydro/Tel Utilities in many sub-divisions in the Nanaimo and Parksville area

**Dockyard** – Management is pursuing Broader Employability full speed ahead! This military driven styled exercise will attempt to model itself after the navy; we are meeting with our shop stewards, as contrary to what you've been

told, the Union was not permitted to provide input into EET. When management had us all carrying paint brushes and burning torches we said we were not interested in encroaching on other unions jurisdiction! But call us when you really know what you want EET to look like,

that call never came. I have since requested from Production Superintendent Steve Anderson, to meet and help improve the EET Document he has to this date not replied to this request.

**Motor Winders** – whereas Western JETS couldn't accommodate most of the courses for

our motor winders the Local has started our own training fund for our motor winders on Vancouver Island.

**Municipal Government** – Our Agreement with the City of Victoria opened up at the end of 2006 and we will be in Negotiations with them soon, any members wishing to submit proposals can send them to me at [bmfs@ibew230.org](mailto:bmfs@ibew230.org)

**Private Marine** – Victoria Shipyard began the year with an extensive refit to the mv Sonia



The Northern Adventure refurbished in Victoria Shipyard

## ITA Publishes Poor Performance Report Press Release

To: Island Newspaper's  
February 14, 2007

The Industry Training Authority (ITA) who is responsible for training British Columbia's 30,000 trainees (apprentices) has released their latest "Performance Measurement Report". This report (found on the ITA website) supplies the statistics on many issues facing apprentices today, however the most disturbing statistic is the very low completion rate, only 42% of the trainees (apprentices) entering into skilled trades jobs today are completing their training. We are more than a full generation (a 4 year apprenticeship) since the BC Liberals dismantled the Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission (ITAC) which admittedly had it's problems, but it would have been much easier to fix them than build a new apprenticeship system, especially when you fire the 120 apprenticeship counselor's that was the life-line to the apprentices, and remove 1 of the 3 stakeholders in the industry since the inception of apprenticeship, Building Construction Trades Unions. The same Unions who represent the construction workers (including apprentices) who have built British Columbia, now, when you consider these unions represent 1/3 of the total apprentices and those union apprentices still have an over 90% completion rate, the 2/3 in the non-union have a 18% completion rate. Less than 1 in 5 of the non-union apprentices will become a Journeyman or woman. Those are the numbers. It's a shame that Phil Hochstein, the non-union advocate, had the ability to convince the BC Liberals to turn their back on all those apprentices who will never finish their apprenticeship.

## Sector Report Continued...

(Northern Adventure) the northern route replacement vessel and the ccg Sir Wilfred Laurier topping out at 120 members, with more work coming this year with cruise ships, ongoing work on the Orca Class ships and the 4 deck superstructure to the Bowen Island Queen replacement there will be little slowing down, CME is rebuilding the 150 ton crane, and we currently have 2 grievances against them for contracting out our work on the Queen of Capilano and not providing the appropriate overtime remittances for RRSP and Health and Welfare contributions, at Nanaimo Shipyard we are finalizing their Collective Agreement.

**Provincial Health Care**—We've been very busy with our construction capital crew cleaning up interpretations to our agreement on items such as overtime calculations for RRSP & Health and Welfare contributions, foreman pay, and RRSP information attached to our members' pay-cheques, I would like to thank our members for their patience in this matter as it is difficult to get the Provincial Government payroll system to do something different for our 12-20 members than the rest of the 50,000 workers in health care.

**Railway**—Although our collective agreement with the E&N Railway came into it's open period at the end of 2006 as a Council we received direction from the membership to hold off on Negotiations until we know we have commitment from the new employer Southern Railway, whether they will continue rail service on the Island, we should know this in June.

**Wholesale** — Westburne Electric Supply has moved their Nanaimo operations into a larger building, the facility will become the centre of operations for the Island.

## Long Service Pins

It was humbling and a complete honour to present many Long Service Pins to the membership at the Christmas Meetings in 2006. Some of elder retired Brothers worth mentioning were; for 50 years of membership Brothers; Joe (Andy) Charron, Gordon Eells, Bruce Ingram, Derek Brouard, and John Schippers. We also presented Gerald Bishop (Upper Right) and Percy Strong (Lower Right) with their 60 year pins. Finally, we presented Brother John (Jack) Archer (Immediate Right) with his 65 year pin.

