

BC Workers Vote

Green Party Responses

May 2013

Labour

- 1. Statistics Canada reports that on average, unionized workers enjoy 29% higher wages than non-unionized workers in the same line of work, as well as stronger pensions, superior health and safety standards, longer paid vacation time, better health and drug benefits, and more rights in the workplace. Does your party believe that unions play a positive role in our economy? If so, what policies will your party implement to create a climate that is easier for unions to organize?**

Green policy is found in our Green Book, which is constantly being expanded and improved, based on input from British Columbians. At the present time, we have no policy on union organizing because no one or organization has brought it to us for consideration. With your submission, we will start to address this issue following the election.

Two of our ten core principles (social justice and grassroots democracy) mean that workers have the right to organize and to participate in decisions that effect their well-being. We recognize that there are questions about democratic decision-making in the organization of union shops and in the inner workings of unions, and we are certainly prepared to learn about these issues from unions, from non-organized workers, and from others.

Another one of our principles (community based economy) suggests that unions should be on the same scale as the enterprises they negotiate with, and we are certainly prepared to learn about this issue from unions, from non-organized workers, and from others. For example, it may be beneficial to organize even a small workplace: it may not represent a 'level playing field' to have a very small corporation dealing with a very large union.

- 2. Over the past decade in British Columbia, an average of 150 workers die on the job each year, and 17 workers in the province are permanently disabled from workplace accidents every day. What will your party do to guarantee better health and safety conditions to reduce workplace injuries and fatalities?**

Workplace safety is critical for a productive economy. BC Greens have a comprehensive plan to make BC a healthier, safer province. Greens believe that we can save some of that money by focusing on **prevention**. British Columbians will become healthier (and injured less often) through green initiatives.

Specific to workplace safety, Greens will work with involved parties to advance workplace safety in the province further than it has come so far.

- 3. While corporate profits, productivity and GDP have all increased consistently during the past thirty years, Statistics Canada reports that both real hourly wages and median family income have been stagnant since 1980. Why do you think this has happened, and what does your party propose to change the situation?**

The BC Green Party recognizes that, after taking inflation into account, wages in our province have been stagnant for decades. Big companies have grown their profits enormously, and not passed along the benefit to their own workers.

As a partial response to this reality, B.C. Greens support the implementation of a Guaranteed Livable Income for every one. Inadequate income impacts wage-earners, and their families (especially children), and has secondary consequences that are enormously expensive for the province.

BC Greens will focus on narrowing the gap between rich and poor, while ensuring that the economy is more sustainable than it is today. For BC Greens, a sustainable economy would be holistic, ethical, and equitable. It is a green economy driven by sustainable scale, just distribution, and efficient allocation of resources.

The Economy

- 4. British Columbia has become a deeply unequal province. According to Statistics Canada, the top 20% of income earners enjoy 44.8% of after-tax income, the highest in the country, while the poorest earn only 5%. How will your party reverse this trend and reduce the growing levels of economic inequality in British Columbia?**

BC Greens want to close the gap between rich and poor. We will implement a fairer tax plan so that higher earners contribute more to public coffers. Greens will set an example in our crown corporations by putting reasonable ceilings on executive salaries.

We will move away from an economy that depends on growth and consumption and toward one of sustainability which will improve health and quality of life for us and for future generations. Moreover, sustainable economies can handle sudden shocks and put an end to the boom and bust cycles that hurt our communities.

The new BC economy will close the gap between rich and poor. It will create a province where all British Columbians can afford housing, food, and clothing and find meaningful work through jobs created locally in the business, government, and not-for-profit sectors.

- 5. A recent Environics Research poll showed that 90% of British Columbians think there should be income tax increases for the wealthiest income earners, and 67% believe that major corporations pay less tax than they should. Since the beginning of the new millennium, the wealthiest citizens and businesses have enjoyed tax**

breaks, supposedly to “create jobs,” yet the unemployment rate in BC is the same today as it was in 2000, at 7%. Does your party believe that those who benefit the most should pay their fair share of taxes?

The BC Green Party emphatically believes that the current distribution of wealth in BC is not reasonable. BC Greens will narrow the gap between rich and poor in our province. We would implement a fair tax plan, so that those that can better afford to pay more taxes do so.

Health Care

6. Our publicly administered, universal health care system is cherished throughout British Columbia. More of these services, however, are being de-funded and privatized. What policies will your party implement to ensure that health care in the province remains under public control and is accessible to everyone?

BC Greens are committed to preserving a universal, single-tier health care system. We are proud of our public health care system, and will strive to reform the system so everyone can get the care they need, when they need it.

BC Greens will establish Regional Health Trusts based on the demographic and geographic realities of British Columbia to replace Health Authorities. This will establish public accountability in provincially-funded health organizations. We will institute a health ombudsperson to investigate and resolve complaints, and establish executive pay scales appropriate to senior public sector executives.

Greens will phase out MSP premiums and fund the public health system from general revenue. We will also negotiate access to provincial health programs for members of the Canadian Armed Forces, RCMP, and other federal employees.

7. There are thousands of people in the province on waiting lists for surgery, home care, and finding a family doctor. What will your party do to fund more doctors, nursing positions and hospital beds throughout the province, and ensure that our health care system is there for us when we need it?

We are facing a crisis in BC's public health care system that is more than two decades in the making. The Green Party of BC is committed to creating a robust public health care system that guarantees our children the same standard of care we have enjoyed.

BC Greens will provide increased and new training programs for health care professionals for both acute and preventive care, while also facilitating the recognition of the qualifications of foreign-trained doctors, nurses, and other health professionals. We will provide payback incentives for graduating doctors, nurses, paramedics, and other health care professionals who staff facilities where recruitment is currently a problem.

Greens will establish 24-7 clinics in rural areas staffed by salaried doctors and nurse practitioners who can perform emergency surgical services.

To help control costs, Greens will gradually change from the fee-for-service MSP billing towards salaries for doctors.

Education

8. One of the most important policies for creating a better education system is reducing class sizes. What specific policies will your party implement to hire more teachers and reduce class sizes in primary and secondary schools in British Columbia?

Universal public education has long been the pride of Canadians. Education is an essential building block of our society and a well-educated province will be a top priority for Green MLAs. The Green Party of BC supports education policies that will foster within the present generation of children and young people the dispositions and knowledge needed to adapt to the impacts of global ecological, social, and economic shifts.

BC Greens will improve affordability and accessibility as we move towards a more equitable system of adequately funded education. By making education more efficient in other areas, more funds will be available for teachers in primary and secondary schools.

9. As a result of cutbacks to post-secondary education over the past two decades, average tuition fees in the province increased four-fold between 1990 and 2010, adding to the already-record levels of student debt. What will your party do to lower tuition fees and reduce student debt in the province?

It is a key goal of the BC Green party to ensure that students graduating from post secondary studies do not start their adult lives so indebted from education costs that they will have difficulty establishing themselves in their careers, gaining independence from their parents, and having to delay starting families and purchasing homes.

To help reach these goals, BC Greens will implement a program similar to that of Newfoundland and Labrador to eliminate the interest on student debt, to be phased in over five years, and introduce a needs-based grants program to assist low-income students with tuition. A student's financial need will be determined by a means test, based upon the students' finances.

We will also increase core funding to colleges and universities by at least \$200 million annually, which will help immediately reduce tuition fees by 20% and increase funding to post-secondary institutions to improve service levels, provide new equipment, and maintain infrastructure.

Greens will explore how we could provide further tuition refunds for post-secondary graduates who work, live, and pay taxes in the province for five years after receiving their degree.

The Environment and Resources

10. Each year, tens of thousands of raw logs and other natural resources are shipped to value-added industries in other countries. What specific plans does your party have to prevent this and instead create high-value added jobs in the resource industry in British Columbia.

The Green Party of B.C. is adamantly opposed to the current focus on exploiting, exporting, and exhausting our resources as though they are mere commodities rather than valuable building blocks.

The Green Party of BC proposes moving to a coherent set of economic policies that promote and develop strong, resilient, self-sufficient, sustainable regional economies tailored to BC's demographics, natural resources, physical environment, and blend of cultures. Our economic outlook will lead to the creation of economic prosperity throughout the province. It will benefit all British Columbians and will require that we live within our ecological means. Each region will add value to the local and regional resources close to home.

Greens will encourage the development of value-added, secondary and tertiary processing facilities, through tax-shifting. We expect that this will have spin-off benefits in fields such as design, packaging, logistics, intellectual property, and risk-management. We expect that it will also have synergistic benefits. For example, there is some engineering work that is transferable to medicine.

For forestry specifically, we will provide low-interest start-up loans to encourage small, labour-intensive eco-forestry, and establish competitive regional log markets that sell all logs from public land through open auction, and in the interim replace the current stumpage tax system with the payment of a percentage tax on the logs sold.

11. British Columbians care deeply about our environment and believe that climate change is a major issue. What will your party do to reduce our carbon footprint and help lower greenhouse gas emissions?

Some of our greatest public assets are the water, land, air, and wildlife of this beautiful province. Clean water, fresh air, incredible green spaces, and recreation opportunities are the foundation of our economy. However, the protection and management of these assets is inadequate and the results increasingly damaging.

The Green Party understands that our continued prosperity and well-being depends on a strong economy.

Greens understand the need to price the cost of pollution and greenhouse emissions into the economy. We will emphasize energy conservation and alternative energy sources. Our package

includes emission targets, regulation and taxation, transportation reforms, increased information sharing and coordination, and adaptation.

BC Greens will amend the Environmental Management Act to include GHG reduction regulations, and mandate the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change to audit GHG emissions and prescribe GHG remediation.

We will increase the carbon tax to \$50/tonne and make the tax incrementally progressive to help reach emission targets on schedule. In addition, BC Greens will:

- Tax all GHG emitting industries
- Capture the full social global cost of carbon emissions
- Exempt British Columbians living below the low-income cut-off as established by Statistics Canada
- Extend carbon emission taxes to oil and gas and cement industries
- Convert fuel taxes to carbon and environmental taxes

Democracy

12. British Columbia continues to use a Plurality voting system (“First past the post”) for its elections. This has allowed parties with a minority of the vote to form majority governments, and has relegated such parties like the Greens, who won over 130,000 votes in the last BC election, to having no representation in the Legislative Assembly. Where does your party stand on reforming British Columbia’s electoral system to one based on proportional representation?

The BC Green party feels strongly that electoral reform is important to ensure voters receive fair election results. A system of proportional representation is necessary to stop governments with the minority of the vote from forming the majority of government and BC Greens will support any reasonable reform of the electoral process in British Columbia that moves toward proportional representation. We believe that an imperfect first step is preferable to no step at all.