

## Temporary foreign workers sky-rocket in B.C.

“Flip-flop” is a term used in politics to describe the performance of someone who suddenly abandons a long-held, fervently-argued position to move to a new one, 180-degrees opposite their earlier stance.

That manoeuver was recently performed with unmistakable precision by Pat Bell, the BC Liberal cabinet minister who oversees the increasingly-discredited BC Jobs Plan.

Time and again since last October, Bell had argued that it was perfectly alright with him and Premier Christy Clark that as many as 2,000 foreign miners were going to be imported to work at HD Mining’s proposed coal mine in northeastern B.C.

The new mine first came to the public’s attention in November 2011. That was when Premier Clark, then visiting Beijing, issued a news release stating that investors would finance two major projects, thereby creating thousands of jobs.

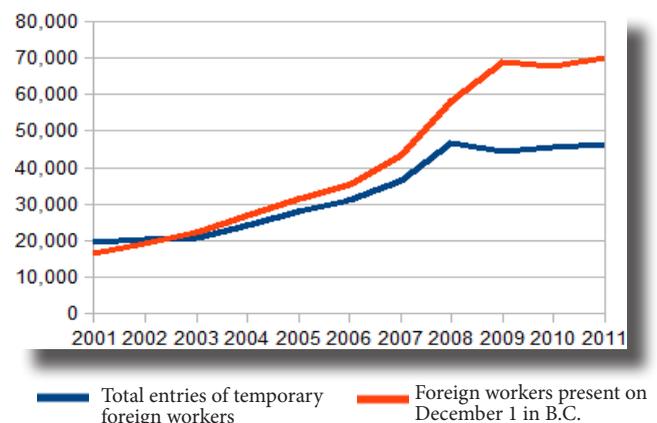
“These two projects support our BC Jobs Plan,” she enthusiastically declared, “and according to the companies will create over 6,700 jobs and other economic benefits for British Columbians.”

Left unsaid by the Premier, however, was that thousands of those jobs would be filled – not by British Columbians, or even Canadians from other provinces – but by “temporary foreign workers.”

That information did not come to light until October 2012, nearly a year after Clark’s Beijing announcement. And it was disclosed, not by the government, but by a Vancouver Sun reporter, Peter O’Neill.

The mining company, it seems, was of the view that Canadian miners did not possess the requisite skills or experience to work at the proposed northeast coal mine.

### BC Liberals’ Jobs Plan working well ... for temporary foreign workers, that is.



(Source: Canada, Facts and Figures - Immigration Overview, Permanent and Temporary Residents )

Consequently, it had asked for permission to import foreign coal miners to put the new facility into operation.

In the resulting furor, Bell passionately defended the decision to bring into B.C. foreign coal miners.

“The company’s obligation,” he said in November during an interview on CKNW Radio, “is to go out and advertise across Canada to try and find workers ....

“They did that, they placed ads in virtually every major paper ... literally every place that a miner would look for work and had no uptake on it at all.”

But the Jobs Minister was singing a much-different tune in February 2012 when the public learned – after the Union of Operating Engineers successfully obtained a court order – that HD Mining had arbitrarily rejected hundreds of qualified, competent Canadian applicants.

Far from having “no uptake on it at all” from interested workers – as was claimed by Bell – it turned out that the company had been inundated with job applications from hundreds of Canadian miners. And many of the rejected job-seekers, moreover, had extensive experience in Canadian coal mines.

And so, faced with incontrovertible evidence that he had been feeding the public a load of hogwash, Bell promptly executed his BC Liberal flip and flop.

“There is no question that people are angry,” he confessed during a February 6 interview with CKNW Radio, “and I accept that.”

He continued: “When people lose confidence in a process like ... the temporary foreign workers [program], you need to revisit that and make sure that it is regained.”

### Did you know?

\* *That more temporary foreign workers – 46,378 – arrived in British Columbia in 2011 than entered the provinces of Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta combined – 38,872 – that same year.*

\* *That the 46,378 temporary foreign workers who entered British Columbia in 2011 are greater in number than the entire populations of cities such as West Vancouver (44,284), Vernon (39,139), Mission (37,5614), Port Moody (34,567), or Penticton (33,318).*

\* *That the number of temporary foreign workers who were living in B.C. in December 2011 – 69,955 – was almost exactly the same as the entire population of New Westminster – 68,534.*

It is important to remember that Bell is the minister responsible for implementing his government’s disastrous Jobs Plan.

Yet he’s had almost nothing to say about the explosion in the number of temporary foreign workers who have arrived in British Columbia since his government assumed office in 2001. In that year the number of temporary foreign workers who entered British Columbia was 19,571.

A decade later, in 2011, the comparable number was a mind-numbing 46,378.

Put another way, between 2001 and 2011, B.C.’s labour force grew by a mere 18.1 per cent – while the number of temporary foreign workers moving to the province soared by an incredible 137.0 per cent.

In fact, under the BC Liberals, British Columbia during the last decade has become a veritable magnet for temporary foreign workers.

Consider that a decade ago, in 2001, British Columbia was home to 13.1 per cent of Canada’s population. Yet in that same year, the province provided employment to 16.4 per cent of all foreign workers who arrived in the country.

Fast forward to 2011 – the latest year for which statistics are available. B.C. now was home to 13.3 per cent of Canada’s population, but we received 24.3 per cent of all incoming temporary workers.

Moreover, many temporary foreign workers stay in the country for longer than a single year. The number of ‘entries per year,’ in other words, doesn’t tell the whole story.

So, on December 1, 2001, the number of ‘guest workers’ employed in B.C. was counted at 16,561. That was 17.2 per cent of Canada’s total number of temporary foreign workers.

By December 1, 2011, the former number had exploded to over 69,955 – or 23.3 per cent of all temporary foreign workers in the entire country.

When all is said and done, it’s evident that the BC Liberals’ much-advertised – with taxpayers’ dollars – Jobs Plan is working extremely well. For temporary foreign workers, that is. For British Columbians? Not so much.