

# B.C. recruits workers abroad

## LABOUR SHORTAGE: Gov't hopes to import 30,000 workers a year

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STAFF REPORTER

Business leaders and government officials were in Manila yesterday trying to recruit thousands of people to work in B.C., prompting surprise and criticism at home.

It was B.C.'s first job fair in the Philippines, organized to help find workers to head off a labour shortage that the government predicts will otherwise hit six figures by 2015.

The government has said it wants to recruit an estimated 30,000 workers annually, from overseas and from other parts of Canada, from now until 2015.

That's about 210,000 workers. "Generally speaking, we do have a big need," said Ed Wong, the vice-president of immigration and training at the B.C. Business Council.

"But in certain sectors, we have more need than in others."

He said the hospitality, tourism and transportation industries suffer the most from the worker shortage.

But the labour shortage extends "right across the board," with the health and education sectors also in need of more workers.

"This has been going on for some time," he said.

### B.C.'s top 10 jobs that need workers

Top 10 jobs in need of filling in B.C. by outside workers, according to the provincial nominee program:

- Nurses
- Carpenters
- University professors, assistants
- Accountants
- Sales, marketing, advertising managers
- Computer programmers, interactive media developers
- Software engineers, designers
- Information systems analysts, consultants
- Chefs and cooks

surprised Darcy Groves, 40, who uses three different temp agencies to find work as a flagger.

"I find that hard to believe with the size of the welfare population," she said. "There doesn't seem like there should be a shortage of workers."

Richard Plumb, the district manager of job agency Labour Ready, said he thinks the government makes it too easy for people "not to work."

He said his employee population drops by about 80 per cent on the last Wednesday of every month — the day welfare cheques are issued.

"There is no way we should have a labour shortage in this province with the amount of people not working," he said.

B.C. Federation of Labour president Jim Sinclair said hiring foreign workers to fill domestic jobs

contributes to low wages and does nothing to support the fight to increase the minimum wage.

He said the government should invest in programs that train resident workers instead of outsourcing to different countries.

"There are shortages in some of those sectors but part of it is the wages they pay," he said. "They don't support increases in the minimum wage. I mean, c'mon guys."

B.C. employers at the job fair at the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency in Quezon City, part of metro Manila, included A&W, the Wickaninnish Inn and Westcan Bulk Transport Ltd.

The job fair comes nine months after B.C. signed a memorandum of understanding with the Philippine government to get greater access to Filipino workers.

At the time, B.C. predicted there would be about one million new

job openings within the next 12 years, with few domestic hands to fill the vacancies.

A Canada-Mexico labour project, similar to the agreement with the Philippines, is scheduled to begin this fall. Fiji, some Caribbean nations and the Indian state of Punjab have expressed interest in similar agreements.

B.C. employers can recruit workers as immigrants under the Provincial Nominee Program, or as temporary workers through the Temporary Foreign Workers program.

A B.C. government spokesman said it is up to the employer to determine if the worker is hired on a permanent or temporary basis.

He said an employer can only hire a temporary foreign worker if a Canadian worker can't be found to fill the position.

The temporary foreign worker gets the same protections and wages as a Canadian doing the same job.

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