

Labour Day

BCGEU marks a century of fighting for shared values

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Optimist contributor

Like thousands of labour activists, I'll spend the first Monday in September surrounded by my family — my labour family. It's a family I've been a part of since I joined a union as a child-care worker more than 30 years ago. It's a family I cherish.

Labour Day 2019 is special for me and every member of the BCGEU because this is our centennial year.

The Provincial Civil Service Association of B.C. opened its first convention on July 26, 1919 in Vancouver's Eagle Hall. That convention was attended by 37 delegates representing a total membership of 980 — all of whom worked directly for the provincial government.

What a difference a century makes.

The BCGEU's membership is now over 80,000 strong and growing. And, while we still proudly

represent tens of thousands of provincial government workers, well over half of our members work outside government in the broader public service and the private sector.

But one critical thing hasn't changed.

One hundred years ago, those convention delegates and the workers they represented came together because they shared values — values like dignity and respect; equality and fairness; opportunity and security — and they knew that by working together in solidarity they could bring those values to life in their workplaces and their communities.

One hundred years later, those values are still the foundation for everything the BCGEU stands for and fights for.

Labour Day 2019 is a chance for BCGEU members to celebrate those



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values and what we've achieved because of them. It's also a chance for us to acknowledge how far we still have to go to create a society where those values are a reality

for all working people.

Unions are under attack across the world and in our own country; the cost of necessities like transportation and housing continues to grow faster than wages; and we continue to see a shift from family-supporting full-time jobs to part-time, more precarious employment.

The workers of tomorrow are counting on us to come through for them as our predecessors did for us. And this Labour Day I'm full of optimism for what we can achieve together.

Stephanie Smith is president of the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union.