



October 15, 2020

Open Letter Regarding “Freedom Rally” this Weekend

We, the signatories to this open letter, have observed with mounting concern the growth of the far-right threat in the past months. They have cynically used paranoia and misinformation about the COVID-19 pandemic to recruit new adherents and coalesce formerly disparate fringe groups.

It is disturbing that recent public manifestations of this dangerous movement in Vancouver have brought out upwards of 700 people to rally and march where previously only a handful could be spotted hanging around the edges of climate and social justice events.

We are particularly alarmed to find out that an alliance of conspiracy believers, anti-vaxxers, white supremacists and neo-Nazis is planning a major two-day event in Vancouver October 17 and 18 which will include the arrival of a convoy of such extremists coming from Saskatchewan and Alberta.

In other times and places, it might be appropriate to mobilize the community in non-violent opposition to their bigotry and hate. The inspiring turnout of over 4,000 at City Hall following the Charlottesville incidents of summer 2017 show what we are capable of. But we recognize the irony of confronting in-person COVID deniers who oppose and refuse to abide by common sense public health measures. Nevertheless, it is crucial that we not remain silent in the face of the danger this phenomenon creates now and as when we emerge from the ongoing crisis.

We are particularly concerned about the immediate threat this full weekend convergence poses to workers in the service and transit sectors. We have already seen members of this extremist movement confront workers and passersby around the issue of wearing a protective face mask. These may or may not have been isolated individual events. We are afraid that weekend will see groups of these extremists instigating violence. Such cowards are emboldened when they have large numbers.

We cannot allow our friends, families, and communities to be put in harm’s way by those who would come to our city to spread hatred and ignorance. We call on our public authorities including elected officials and the police to fulfill their responsibility and duty to maintain public safety in the face of this threat. We are stalwart defenders of the rights of assembly and free speech, but we cannot be so naïve as to allow a violent neo-fascist movement to grow and threaten society – including its most vulnerable members - behind the façade of free expression.

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The following list of endorsing organizations and individuals represents those who have signed on in the first couple of days prior to its public launch. Additional endorsers will continue to be added at www.vdlc.ca

Vancouver and District Labour Council	
New Westminster Labour Council	
Fraser Valley Labour Council	
Chief Judy Wilson	UBCIC Secretary-Treasurer
UBCIC executive	UBCIC
BC Government and Service Employees Union	
MoveUP	
Longhouse Council of Native Ministry Church	
David Suzuki	Environmentalist/broadcaster
Angela Girard	City of North Vancouver, City Councillor
Christine Boyle	Vancouver City Council, One City
Jean Swanson	Vancouver City Council, COPE
John Irwin	Vancouver Park Board Commissioner
Pete Fry	Vancouver City Councillor
Stuart Mackinnon	Vancouver Park Board Commissioner
C. Blake Gilks MD FRCPC	
Sadie Kuehn	Community Leader
Ellen Woodsworth	Quirke the Queer Writing Collective
Mel Lehan	Community Builder
Sustainabiliteens	Youth climate justice group
UBC Students Against Bigotry	
Alan Dutton	CAERS
Ananda Lee Tan	Just Transition Alliance
West Coast Coalition Against Racism	
Andrew Larigakis	350.org - Vancouver
Hannah Kawas	Canada Palestine Association - chair
Independent Jewish Voices	
Women Transforming Cities	
Bill Rees	Professor Emeritus, UBC School of Applied Science
Carl Rosenberg	Independent Jewish Voices
Dr. William Bruneau	Past-president CAUT
John Cashore	Former BC NDP Minister of Labour
Wendy Pedersen	Carnegie Community Action Project
Jeanie Kamins	Artist
Jef Keighley	Retired Unifor staff
Joanne Colban	Concerned resident
Heather Cho	Concerned resident
Michael Lebowitz	Professor emeritus, SFU Economics Department
Peter Thomson	Retired teacher
Sandra Bruneau	Past board member - BCCLA

Sid Shnaid	
Itrath Syed	SFU Graduate Student
Marth Roth	
Marty Roth	
Neil Naiman	
Gail Davidson	
J. Deutsch	Science for Peace
Robert Ages	Community Organizer
Susan Spratt	Unifor retiree

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Stephen von Sychowski
President, VDLC

Cc: VDLC Executive Board

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moveUp