



Media Release November 21, 2003  
BC Carpenters vote to leave International

British Columbia Carpenters Union members have voted decisively to sever ties with their International parent in Washington DC.

In a referendum, members voted overwhelmingly to cease their affiliation with the Washington dominated United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America and seek an alliance with a Canadian Union.

“Our members are clearly demanding freedom from American control,” said BC Carpenters Union president Len Embree in a statement issued today.

The ballot mailed to members asked “Do you wish to transfer the affiliation of the British Columbia Provincial Council of Carpenters and its affiliated Local Unions from the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America to a Canadian Union?” The membership voted 83 per cent in favour.

BC Carpenters Union president Len Embree said, “This is the clearest demonstration yet that the members of the BC Carpenters Union are determined to control their own destiny. They demand the right to elect their own officers and representatives and to vote on decisions that affect their livelihoods.”

Reacting to numerous American takeover attempts, BC Carpenters have indicated in several referenda that they will not tolerate American interference in their elections of officers and business representatives or the merging of Local Unions or negotiating collective agreements. Embree said that those collective rights have been fought for over generations and “We are not going to hand that over now, or ever.”

Embree continued, “Only as a free and autonomous organization will we be able to make the changes necessary to grow and properly represent Canadian workers.”

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Backgrounder attached

## BACKGROUND

### BC Carpenters sever ties with UBCJA

In September, 1995, Douglas J. McCarron was elected as the General President of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. In 1996 he introduced his plans to restructure the entire union. The restructuring included the forced mergers of Local Unions and the transfer of all assets and authority to newly established Regional Councils. It also provided that McCarron would appoint all the officers and delegates of any newly established Councils. The membership in BC solidly rejected the proposed restructuring, and instructed the BC Provincial Council of Carpenters to take any steps necessary to resist the structure being imposed in BC.

Negotiations facilitated by former Labour Relations Board chair Stan Lanyon failed to find a resolution between the parties.

In July, 1999, McCarron came to a meeting in Port Alberni where the membership walked out after they were told that there would be no vote on mergers of Locals and no elections for the founding officers of any new Locals or Councils. Attempts by the International to force mergers and form a Regional Council on Vancouver Island failed when the Provincial Council successfully defended a Labour Relations Board decision that prevented any transfer of bargaining rights without a vote of the affected membership.

In the summer of 2000, the International and a few of their supporters in BC filed a lawsuit against the Provincial Council when we refused to turn over our books to their auditor. The International lost this suit when Madam Justice Brown found that they had acted in bad faith in attempting to use the General President's constitutional authority to further their political battle against the Provincial Council.

In October, 2001 the Provincial Council applied to the Canadian Labour Congress, under the justification provisions of their constitution, seeking a CLC supervised vote of the membership that would allow BC Carpenters to affiliate directly to the CLC. This led to another failed round of mediated negotiations and ultimately, over a year after our application was submitted, the CLC advised us that they would not proceed with a vote because in their view our application did not meet their constitutional requirements.

Delegates at the Provincial Council's 2003 convention then endorsed a resolution directing the Council to negotiate an affiliation with a large Canadian Union. Before we can proceed with these negotiations we need to be able to demonstrate that this is clearly the wish of the membership in BC. That is the reason for this referendum vote. And that is the reason why it is important to remember what the issues are. McCarron has said that restructuring is necessary to make the union more accountable. Where his views differ from ours is that he believes the membership should be more accountable to the leadership — we believe the leaders should be accountable to the membership.

Aligning with a Canadian Union is probably the only means left to prevent the International from taking away those vested rights that the membership in BC have cherished for over one hundred years.