

Press Release

THE CNC, THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS AND THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY ASK THE PRIME MINISTER: “MR. TRUDEAU, WILL YOU HAVE THE COURAGE TO ACT? TO ACT NOW?”

Ottawa, February 26th, 2020 - With the federal budget coming, the Conseil National des Chômeurs et Chômeuses (CNC), along with the Bloc Québécois and the NDP, calls on the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, for his government to make concrete improvements to the Employment Insurance program.

During the last federal election, the Liberal Party of Canada, which forms the current government, made commitments to improve two important aspects of the EI program:

- extend sickness benefits from 15 to 26 weeks;
- make permanent and improve the pilot project for seasonal workers.

Along with MPs Alexandre Boulerice, deputy leader of the NDP, and Louise Chabot, spokesperson for the Bloc Québécois (BQ) on employment, CNC representatives, Pierre Céré, spokesperson, and Fernand Thibodeau, from Seasonal Workers Help and Support (SWHS), advocated during a press conference in Ottawa for improvements that will support workers.

The participants present at the press conference argued for expending up to 50 weeks the EI sickness benefits for people suffering from a serious illness. The Bloc Québécois sponsored a motion last week, which received the support of the NDP, to ask the government to expend EI sickness benefits from 15 to 50 weeks in the next budget. The motion was adopted by the majority of the House, with the support of the entire opposition.

In regards to the pilot project for seasonal workers, if the government's intention is to improve it, we share the following proposal: that the measure to extend 5 weeks of benefits become permanent by adding a 420-hour eligibility criterion, with a divisor set at 12, for workers in the seasonal industry living in regions where seasonal employment is higher than the national average. We also propose that this measure be extended to Indigenous communities across Canada as well as regions experiencing structural unemployment. In other words, we aim to "protect" these regions and communities with support measures.

For Fernand Thibodeau, spokesperson for SWSH, from New Brunswick, "the pilot project for seasonal workers ends on May 30th. People are worried! We really need to make this measure permanent, and improve it concretely for our regions and communities." He added that "there are many people who are experiencing the consequences of the "black hole", because seasonal employment in our regions is what shapes our economy. We urgently need fairer and more equitable measures."

The CNC launched in January the campaign "It's time for Employment Insurance to Change". In addition to its presence on social media to raise awareness among decision-makers and the population and increase support for its proposals, the CNC started a new phase of its campaign by publishing a series of advertisements in *Le Devoir* and the *Globe and Mail*.

"With the proposed measures, thousands of workers who are currently experiencing difficult situations would see their situation improve. The government has the opportunity to act quickly by adopting these measures in the next budget," said Louise Chabot.

"After so many years of regressive reforms that have hurt workers, it is time to put in place rebalancing measures and that employment insurance works for everyone," added Alexandre Boulerice.

The two MPs agreed that people need to be able to care for themselves in dignity and that it is important to support workers in the seasonal industry, our regions and Indigenous communities. The campaign's demands are also supported by the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL).

Founded in 2005, the CNC is the organized force bringing together groups working to defend and promote the rights of the unemployed workers in Quebec and New Brunswick. The basis of its activity and its action is the establishment of a fair universal unemployment insurance program.

Pierre Céré, spokesperson for the CNC, concluded the press conference by stating that "workers are still experiencing the consequences of reforms and counter-reforms imposed on employment insurance during the 1990s". Calling on the Prime Minister, he asked the following question: "Mr. Trudeau, will you have the courage to act? To act now?"

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