

twitter.com/StJohnsTelegram

YouTube youtube.com/StJohnsTelegram

POLITICS/LABOUR

# Repeat offender

*EI changes would hurt Atlantic Canada, say labour leaders*

By DANIEL MACEACHERN  
THE TELEGRAM

Following reports the federal government's planned changes to employment insurance will target repeat claimants, local leaders say the move would disproportionately hurt Atlantic Canadians.

The Globe and Mail reported Friday sources confirmed new rules will define how much less pay Canadians on EI should have to accept in comparison to their last job. An option being considered would let first-time recipients turn down a job if it pays less than 90 per cent of their previous wage, with a declining percentage for repeat users, a policy critics say would directly affect seasonal workers, of which Atlantic Canada has a greater proportion than the rest of the country.

Lana Payne, president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, called the planned changes an erosion of the social safety net.

"Not only are we going to get a new definition for suitable employment, we're going to get an extra dose of nasty medicine in terms of a definition for suitable employment if you're employed in seasonal industries," she said. "This is wrong on so many levels. It's targeting workers who have no control over when they get laid off, if they get laid off. They don't create the seasonal jobs. The employer creates the seasonal jobs. And yet, in my opinion, what they're saying, or what their message is on this, is, 'Well, we want those people to go and take a lower-paying job somewhere else.'"

Payne said the sense is that the government will be considering local labour market conditions, but those are difficult to define.

"In Newfoundland and Labour, we have two EI regions: One is St. John's, and one is everybody else. So I hope they're not thinking that's the region, because that would mean you'd cut somebody off, a plant worker in St. Anthony, 58 years of age. Do we expect her to move to Corner Brook to take a minimum wage job?" she said.

Earle McCurdy, president of the Fish, Food and Allied Workers union, said he wants to hear confirmed details of what the changes will be, but added the federal government looks at repeat users of EI — such as fishermen — as "repeat offenders."

"That would clearly have a disproportionate impact on Atlantic Canada and some other regions, some regions of Quebec, for sure," he said. "It would make it more difficult for seasonal industries to retain workers. It would make it harder for inshore vessels to retain crew, it would be harder for fish plants to retain plant workers. It would make it harder for golf courses and motels and restaurants and all the people in the tourist trade to retain workers for those businesses."

McCurdy said the changes would be just the latest in a list of slights since the last federal election.

"They've taken out the rescue sub-station, which is a very important safety link," he said. "Then they take out two of the communications centres, which are a very important communications link with people at sea. ... Then they come in and they're clearly having a hard look at taking a run at the fleet separation owner-operator policies. Those are under the microscope, to say the least. Then they come in and take a real run at EI as it relates to seasonal industries. You add all that up, you can only come to the conclusion that the inshore industry is really a nuisance to them and they'd like to put an



Richard Alexander

Earle McCurdy

Lana Payne

end to it."

However, Richard Alexander, director of the Newfoundland and Labrador Employers' Council, said he'd applaud such a move.

"We think government needs to move in that direction," he said. "Employment insurance is an insurance system, and almost every insurance system in the world has a model of experience rating, so that if you use your insurance more, you end up having to pay more. So a change to the EI system that increases the due diligence within the system is going to lead to positive outcomes for the system as a whole."

Alexander said employers don't want an EI system that requires workers to take just any job.

"But the definition of what is a suitable job to take, I think needs to be expanded dramatically from what it is within the system," he said. "When we have a labour market where we're looking to fill about 80,000 job vacancies over the next eight years, and we know that we have high levels of EI usage in the province, it makes sense to look at ways to provide incentives and assistance to individuals on EI to take those positions before we have to go outside the province to recruit foreigners to fill those positions."

dmaceachern@thetelegram.com  
Twitter: TelegramDaniel

It's targeting workers who have no control over when they get laid off, if they get laid off. They don't create the seasonal jobs. The employer creates the seasonal jobs.

Lana Payne, president,  
N.L. Federation of Labour

Next Course Starts  
June 2<sup>nd</sup>

College of the North Atlantic  
Prince Phillip Drive



**YOUNG DRIVERS**

Prepare for the road ahead.

737-1695 • 1-800-563-1695

www.yd.com

office@youngdriversnl.com

St. John's • Mount Pearl • Conception Bay North  
Gander • Grand Falls-Windsor

enjoy an  
**ALL NATURAL BEER**

**QUIDI VIDI PREMIUM LAGER**

NO ADDITIVES  
NO PRESERVATIVES

BEER THE WAY IT SHOULD BE  
USING WATER, MALT, HOPS & YEAST.

QUIDI VIDI BREWING  
COMPANY LIMITED

*Sara*  
Rostotski  
579.9247

rostotski.com