



International Union of Operating Engineers

AFFILIATED WITH THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR AND CONGRESS OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATIONS

Submission to SOCI

Study on Bill C-50 (Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act)

OVERVIEW

The International Union of Operating Engineers ("IUOE") is a progressive and diversified trade union representing workers in a wide variety of occupational categories. Made up of 17 Local Unions across Canada, our nearly 60,000 members have helped build Canada's infrastructure and have been involved in the production of Canada's resources and delivery of its critical health care and community services since 1896. Our members construct and shape the skylines of Canada—we are the specialists that build roads, schools, hospitals, pipelines, solar and wind farms, and more. The IUOE is one of the four craft unions which build over 90% of Canada's federally regulated pipelines.

The IUOE is at the forefront of advocating for a low-carbon economy that prioritizes the interests of Canada's highly skilled and trained workforce, many who work in the oil and gas industry. The low-carbon economy can be an opportunity for innovation and growth, but only if we act and harness its potential to create career-defining jobs for Canadian workers. Our union firmly believes that protecting our environment and securing the livelihoods of workers can go hand in hand. It is essential to safeguard the interests and well-being of workers who are an integral part of the energy sector, and whose work is at the heart of the Canadian economy.

We recognize that a sustainable future requires the creation of new, quality highly skilled jobs in the energy sector. The IUOE is committed to working collaboratively with the Government of Canada to promote green, clean infrastructure projects that foster meaningful employment, training, and economic growth. By prioritizing the creation of sustainable jobs, we can generate opportunities that will revitalize communities and empower workers. We know, from experience, that the job opportunities available in the clean energy sector can provide comparable wages and benefits to jobs in other sectors, including oil and gas.

To support our members in adapting to the evolving landscape of the low-carbon economy, the IUOE is actively investing in training and reskilling programs through our training centres across Canada. We are helping to provide the necessary skills to thrive in emerging sectors such as renewable energy and clean technologies. By equipping workers with the tools to succeed, we can ensure their long-term employability and professional growth.

The *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act* is a step forward towards a low-carbon future which considers the need to foster dialogue with workers, with the goal of providing meaningful job opportunities, investments in emerging sectors, and support for training and reskilling. We believe through ongoing engagement that the Act can be improved upon, especially in the way it addresses labour participation, quality jobs, and training. This submission outlines three recommendations we believe the committee should consider in its review of the bill.

A FOCUS ON ENGAGEMENT

Through the *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act*, the Government must prioritize its engagement with workers on the transition to a low-carbon economy. Prioritizing inclusive stakeholder engagement with workers can play an important role in whether policy initiatives enjoy public backing or backlash. Participatory processes are also consequential for governments to recognize the full extent of the impacts of climate policies and decarbonization on the labour force. This means addressing the concerns of impacted workers, especially workers in sectors such as oil and gas.

The *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act* must, at its heart, focus on sustainable jobs for those workers most affected by the transition – this must be the primary focus of this transition. Unions must be equal and active partners because workers are the primary stakeholder in this transition and unions exist to represent the interests of workers.

If the Government's Sustainable Jobs Plan is to be effective and successful, it must draw on the expertise of unions. We know through our own experience what is needed to train workers, what can be done to increase diversity and inclusion in the trades, and what workers need to find meaningful and comparable employment opportunities. From recent polling, our members will be looking to their union leadership for guidance on this issue and not rhetoric from elected officials.

Engagement by the Government on sustainable jobs must not cease until all workers that have been or may be displaced are provided with available job opportunities and assistance with training. We are concerned that not all affected workers, especially in the oil and gas sector, will have their voices heard, their concerns raised, and their questions answered on the transition to a low-carbon economy. Past experiences show that a failure in public policy to properly address the transition of workers can be disastrous, both for local economies and for the workers themselves.

The *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act* would create a Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council to provide the Government with independent advice with respect to foster the creation of sustainable jobs. While the legislation acknowledges the important role of organized labour in representing the interests of workers, beyond mention of the Council including 15 members, there are no statutory requirements for representation. We strongly suggest that the Government ensure that the composition of the Council includes at least 1/3 membership from organized labour in the sectors of the economy most impacted by the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Recommendation 1: That the *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act* clarify that a third (1/3) of the Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council is comprised of representatives from organized labour.

A FOCUS ON JOBS

For many hardworking Canadians, employment in the trades provides the stability, security, skills, and salary they need to be successful. Highly trained with qualified transferable skills, these workers are adaptable, experienced, and prepared to take on any challenge made available to them. Their work helps to build the backbone of Canada's economic infrastructure, from roads and highways to nuclear power generating facilities and wind turbines.

Our economy is built on natural resources. In 2020, oil and gas represented around \$105 billion of Canada's GDP, yet also accounted for a significant portion of the country's GHG emissions. In the years to come, as Canada shifts towards net-zero emissions solutions, while still meeting the growing demand for energy, we will need to transition to clean energy options which provide hardworking Canadian tradespeople with meaningful and comparable employment to the jobs currently available in oil and gas.

There is a false expectation that tradespeople in carbon intensive industries, such as oil and gas, can easily switch to other forms of trades work. For instance, there are repeated assertions that it will be relatively easy for workers in the oil and gas industry to change to jobs in the green economy. While a career in the trades is indispensable to broaden job opportunities, and workers often find work on many different job sites, the skills needed, pay available, and work conditions provided are not necessarily comparable across jobs and industries. Many oil and gas workers have spent years, if not decades, building up a specific skillset for their work, and may find it difficult to adapt to new challenges. With the input of labour, the Government must provide these workers with comparable job opportunities and support to help in this transition.

Canada cannot afford to allow workers to flounder and struggle through a transition while expecting the market to solve it for them. Every time that governments failed to support workers displaced by the transition to another economic sector, it has led to intergenerational economic trauma and community decay which persisted for years. The job opportunities made available to displaced workers, especially in the oil and gas sector, must be appealing and comparable. Unfortunately, many green jobs do not offer similar benefits. The Government must invest in green jobs which provide long-term employment and comparable benefits.

This is reinforced by a survey conducted by Cicero for North America's Building Trades Unions ("NABTU") which found that workers were more likely to consider transitioning within the same

occupation type, than to switch to other occupation types, and were concerned by job availability in the clean energy sector. Many trades in oil and gas are not prevalent in the clean energy industry.

The *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act* must ensure that no Canadian worker is left behind in the transition to a low-carbon economy, and that includes having provisions which guarantee that displaced workers in carbon intensive sectors of the economy, such as oil and gas, have comparable job opportunities and benefits on clean energy projects. Nowhere is this truer than with wind power, where our members, especially in Alberta, are eager to work on wind projects knowing that the pay is much more comparable than ever to similar job opportunities in the oilsands.

Recommendation 2: That the *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act* include provisions stressing how quality jobs must be comparable in pay and benefits to jobs in the oil and gas sector.

A FOCUS ON TRAINING

Retraining workers is vital to ensuring their success in other sectors of the economy, especially in the transition to a low-carbon economy. Although it is not directly addressed in the *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act*, and is only briefly mentioned as skills development under the section on the Sustainable Jobs Secretariat, the training and retraining of workers must be a part of this legislation and it must be meaningful and performed through non-profit training centres. This training must be accredited and provided by qualified, experienced instructors. This training will take time; the Government cannot expect workers to achieve the training necessary for new job opportunities from programs that offer quick fixes and/or fast-tracked training. Any meaningful job will require training that will take several weeks to complete. For example, courses offered by our training centres take 8-12 weeks to complete on just one piece of equipment, but that ensures the person is employable on that equipment no matter the job site.

There are existing avenues for investing in the training of Canadian tradespeople that work and are extremely successful. Private sector unionized training centres already provide for the training and reskilling of tradespeople. Canada's private sector unions operate over 197 training centres, representing \$850 million in direct investments by unions for the training of skilled tradespeople, whether they belong to a union or not. Our centres are not-for-profit, meaning that the Government will get real value for its investment.

Our curriculum and courses are determined by a joint employee-union board. All of our programs meet, and even exceed, provincial and international standards (e.g. Red Seals Program). Part of the

success of our training centres is their use of cutting-edge technology and practical hands-on training. Retraining workers must be credible and accredited, which is what we offer with unionized training centres. These training centres represent existing avenues for the Government to invest in the training of Canadian tradespeople without any new red tape or added bureaucracy. Our jointly trusted, people focused, not-for-profit training centres ensure workers are trained to the highest industry standards, which includes employment placement. Our programs are accredited in every province, except Quebec, and training is provided by qualified, experienced instructors.

A focus on apprenticeships is crucial to the training and retraining of Canadian tradespeople. Apprenticeship training combines on-the-job training with theoretical and practical technical training. The apprentice spends most of their time learning the knowledge and skills of the trade on the job, while earning a wage. Apprenticeship matters to all of society because this is the process by which skills and expertise are passed on from one generation of journeypersons to another.

Every building, house, school, hospital, or factory must be made by skilled workers who should have the highest level of expertise to ensure public safety and quality products. Because the skills and expertise of an authentic trade can be used almost anywhere, journeypersons can work almost everywhere, opening up available opportunities. It's through this type of training that sustainable jobs become sustainable.

Recommendation 3: That the *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act* focus on comprehensive training and reskilling provided by non-profit institutions, such as union training centres.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The International Union of Operating Engineers (“IUOE”) appreciates this committee’s willingness to seek feedback on the *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act*, especially given the impact that the transition to a low-carbon economy has on our members in the oil and gas sector. We are eager to continue providing input on adopting and implementing measures to create sustainable jobs. We believe that workers must be front and centre in discussions in the transition to a low-carbon economy, and that no worker is left behind and, in fact, will benefit from action on climate change.

Any transition must include a balanced and fact-based discussion around how we are going to go about shifting to a low-carbon economy without risking the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of oil and gas workers who, quite frankly, are part of one of the most environmentally responsible petroleum sectors in the world. If Canada is to continue to grow the middle class and convince

Canadians that its actions on climate change are beneficial to Canadian workers, its approach to the transition to a low-carbon economy must account for workers' needs through continued and permanent engagement and readily available, comparable, and accessible job opportunities, retraining, and upskilling.

For Canada to succeed in the transition to a low-carbon economy, the federal government must lead and clearly articulate what society must do to ensure a smooth and successful transition. The *Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act* is a key first piece of several pieces which will be crucial to achieving a blueprint for this transition. The Government must continually build off this legislation.