

Submission regarding the Sustainable Jobs Act

Submitted to the
Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology
(SOCl)
June 11, 2024



Introduction

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) represents more than 3 million workers, bringing together Canada's national and international unions, along with provincial and territorial federations of labour and more than 100 district labour councils. Our members work in practically all sectors of the economy, in all occupations, in all parts of Canada.

Canada's unions support the passage of the Sustainable Jobs Act without delay. We are pleased with the amendments made in the House of Commons Standing Committee on Natural Resources; we submit the bill should be passed in its current form.

Climate change is already affecting our economy and these impacts will only grow with time. Whether it's the shift from coal-fired electricity to clean generation, from internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles to zero-emissions vehicles (ZEVs), or commodity prices, Canada and Canadian workers and their communities understand the benefits of coordinated action and the threats of complacency and inaction. Canada's unions believe we need a forward-looking plan focused on creating and protecting good jobs as our economy changes. The alternative would leave workers on their own, with no say over their future as the world faces the most significant economic changes in generations.

Background

Workers know firsthand the effects of climate change, including changes to industry and emerging hazards, such as extreme heat stress, among others.

Canada rightly has national legislation that sets climate and emissions milestones. Just as the *Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act* creates an emissions roadmap, workers need a roadmap for jobs.

Our demands have been consistent:

- A plan to create and protect good, unionized jobs as we meet climate targets so workers maintain their incomes and quality of life, which in turn supports their communities;
- Protecting good, union jobs through industrial decarbonization;
- Pathways for workers from high- to low-emitting work without loss of job quality, including accredited, not-for-profit training, pension protections, and income support; and
- Inclusion of workers at every level, including from national tripartite social dialogue to bargaining at worksites.

Good jobs

Workers are pleased that the Sustainable Jobs Act was amended by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Natural Resources to define a Sustainable Job as

[Any] job that is compatible with Canada's pathway to achieving a net-zero-emissions and climate-resilient future and that reflects the concept of decent work, namely work — including a job in which the worker is represented by a trade union that has entered into a collective agreement — that can support the worker and their family over time and that includes elements such as fair income, job security, social protection and social dialogue

These jobs are defined as good jobs, with good pay, benefits, job security, and the right to bargain and are part of a net-zero economy.

We understand that unions will need to continue to mobilize and bargain to ensure these goals are met; that said, the definition in the legislation is strong.

Inclusion of workers

Workers have been clear from day one that change must happen with workers participating in decision-making and advice on an ongoing basis. As the old saying goes: if workers are not at the table, they're on the menu.

The Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council gives workers, together with employers, Indigenous peoples, and other key partners, seats on the Council to drive this agenda and provide ongoing expert advice.

We are pleased that the House of Commons Committee amended the legislation to ensure workers and employers would have 4 seats each on this Council.

This forum for national social dialogue ensures that social partners and others are part of planning.

It remains crucial that workers have a voice in sectoral, regional and workplace decision-making; the creation of this national body ensures worker priorities, concerns and solutions are part of the ongoing, national decision-making process.

Planning

Canada's emissions reduction plans (ERPs) are created on a 5-year cycle. We are pleased that the Sustainable Jobs Plans will be developed and evaluated on a similar 5-year cycle.

We were pleased that the Commons Committee amended the Act to include job protection through industrial decarbonization and pathways for workers from high- to low-emitting work.

Workers will be looking to these plans to include things like

- Green industrial planning;
- Investments in decarbonization contingent on meeting labour requirements such as prevailing wages, policies for federally funded decarbonization projects to include Community Benefits Agreements;
- Labour policies to make it easier for workers to form a union in new, low-carbon sectors;
- Pension guarantees; and
- Investments in not-for-profit accredited training for work in decarbonizing and low-carbon sectors, such as those provided by union-led training centres.

Countries around the world are investing and supporting industries that will be essential to a low-carbon global economy. China's investments mean the country is dominating the global market in solar panels and are increasingly powerful in global ZEV production. The United States responded with the Inflation Reduction Act which invests billions in low-carbon energy, manufacturing, buildings, and supply chains.

Canada must act or we will be left out.

In short, we will be looking for these plans to create, and build on, a vision for a strong, dynamic low-carbon Canadian economy poised to succeed and built on good, safe, unionized jobs.

What is at stake

Trillions of dollars are being invested in new, clean energy across the globe. Canada must have a plan and policies to ensure that it gets its fair share, and that these investments in turn create and support good jobs and the communities they sustain.

Workers have gone through poorly managed transitions in the past. The lesson must be that we cannot wait until the last minute, government cannot plan without the involvement of social partners, and cannot simply hope for the best.

Instead, we must have a clear goal: creating and supporting good union jobs and protecting regions across Canada. Canada cannot wait any longer and simply hope for the best, government must plan with workers at the table.

The risk we run is that without the Sustainable Jobs Act Canadian workers will be spectators as good, low-carbon jobs go elsewhere and we are left behind.

Those opposing this legislation oppose a plan for good jobs and oppose workers having a say in their own future.

Canada's unions encourage the swift passage of this bill without amendments.

Hbb:cope*225