



Province takes action to raise minimum wage, review Labour Code

The B.C.'s government's January 8 announcement about its plans to raise the minimum wage to \$15.20 an hour was welcomed by the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU) and other advocates for fair wages.

However, the delay in implementation will mean 500,000 low-paid workers, who currently make less than \$15.20 an hour, must still wait until June 1, 2021 before their wages climb above the poverty line.

“Across the trade union movement, we believe work should lift you out of poverty, not keep you there,” says HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside. “We welcome the news of the increase, but B.C.'s low-income workers deserve a \$15 minimum wage sooner.”

Other provinces, like Ontario and Alberta, have moved to achieve \$15 an hour minimum wage much faster. Ontario's minimum wage will rise on January 1, 2019 to \$15 an hour, while Alberta's minimum wage will hit \$15 an hour by October 1 of this year.

HEU members, along with hundreds of community groups and members from other unions, have worked hard to put the fight for a higher minimum wage on the political radar screen and have mobilized significant public support for \$15 an hour.

Currently about half a million B.C. workers, or 25 per cent of the province's labour force, earn poverty level wages – less than \$15 an hour. Some 60 per cent of low-wage workers are women, while 80 per cent are adults.

For 16 years, the previous government kept B.C.'s minimum wage among the lowest in the country, putting downward pressure on wages across the economy including in the health care system.

In addition to the news about the \$15 minimum wage, the government also announced a review of the Labour Relations Code earlier in the week. The review, which will wrap up by August 2018, will examine the existing laws for workers and businesses to make sure they are consistent with the labour rights and protections enjoyed by other Canadians.

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