

FACTS & INSIGHTS 2

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (EI)

- Ottawa collects EI premiums from workers and employers and technically there should be a surplus of about \$54 billion in the fund. Unfortunately that surplus, which should be available to help workers in this recession, was long ago siphoned off into general revenues. Now the government says it cannot afford more accessible or better EI benefits.

- Hundreds of thousands of jobs have disappeared in recent months but - thanks to government cuts in the eligibility and services - on average only 40% of unemployed men and 32% of women have access to EI benefits. Why is the government shutting the door on so many unemployed Canadians?

- Generally only those who had permanent full-time jobs before layoff qualify for EI. Why are temporary, contract, seasonal and part-time workers discriminated against?

- The rules for eligibility and duration depend on where you live. But if you're jobless, you're jobless. Why should you be forced on welfare and food banks just because of where you live?

- Those who are eligible for EI receive average payments of less than \$350

a week. That's not nearly enough to pay the mortgage, put food on the table and clothe the kids.

- The benefit amount is calculated based on your last 12 weeks of earnings. In a downturn many people agree to work reduced hours or days, part-time or job share. But the EI program penalizes them with reduced benefits because the last 12 weeks of earnings happen to be their lowest.

- Those who do qualify for EI get on average just 32 weeks of benefits and some only get a maximum of 14 weeks. EI just doesn't last long enough while people search for a new job or upgrade their education and skills.

- EI benefits are also an effective form of economic stimulus to help hard hit communities as people spend their benefits at local businesses.



■ Unlike most other industrialized countries, Canada doesn't have a national industrial and labour market strategy that proactively helps workers transition from jobs in the "old" economy to the jobs of the future.

OBVIOUS SOLUTIONS

- The federal government must:
 - ◆ Reduce the number of hours needed to qualify and apply a uniform standard across the country so that eligibility doesn't depend on where you live;
 - ◆ Raise the rate of benefits;
 - ◆ Increase the duration for which benefits can be collected;
 - ◆ Expand eligibility to include all workers (e.g. self employed, part-time, contract, etc.);
 - ◆ Base the amount of benefits on a worker's best 12 weeks of earnings;
 - ◆ Invest part of the EI surplus to expand training programs at community colleges in order to help workers transition to new jobs that will be created in a new green economy;
 - ◆ Develop a national industrial strategy that will: (a) reinvigorate Canada's manufacturing base; (b) create new jobs by investing in clean energy technologies and industries; (c) create and sustain good jobs that provide decent wages and working conditions in the private and public sector.

TAKE ACTION

- Visit www.peoplesresponse.ca so you can:
 - ◆ Find out about town hall meetings in your community;
 - ◆ Connect with like-minded people and get involved with a virtual campaign;
 - ◆ Make your voice heard by sending an email to your Member of Parliament, completing a short survey, and posting your own note or video;
 - ◆ Download information and other resources such as fact sheets, videos and podcasts.
- Invite your friends, family and colleagues to get involved and speak out.