May 11, 2021 |

Releases

BC commits to permanent, paid sick leave, provides limited COVID-19-related coverage

(Unceded Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam territories — Vancouver, BC)?– BC announced changes to the *Employment Standards Act* today that will bring permanent, paid sick leave to workers in BC. The province promised further consultation with stakeholders on the details of that leave while also announcing a temporary, three-day, COVID-19, sick-leave program that will see employers reimbursed up to $200 per day.

“Future generations will look back on the lack of permanent, paid sick leave like we look back in disbelief on driving without a seatbelt or workers not having paid vacation,” said BC Federation of Labour (BCFED) President Laird Cronk. “It never made sense for workers to go to work sick. Permanent, paid sick leave protects workers and their coworkers, strengthens public health and ensures economic resiliency at the same time.”

As the BC government consults on the details for permanent paid sick-leave provisions, the BCFED will advocate to ensure all workers have access of up to ten days of paid sick leave per year, as a basic public health protection and employment right for all. On May 7th, more than fifty BC employers called on the government to bring in permanent, employer paid sick leave.

The BCFED expressed concern with the limited temporary, paid sick leave program covering only three days for COVID-19-related illness. "Workers struggling with a COVID-19 illness face far greater

than three days of lost pay, they face potential economic devastation," added Cronk. "Ensuring workers don't have to make the untenable decision between staying home with symptoms or working sick to put food on the table and pay the rent is critical during this deadly race between variants and vaccines."

The announcements on paid sick leave come as data from the Workers' Compensation Board confirms significant new cases of workplace exposures on the heels of dozens of businesses in BC's Lower Mainland being forced to close their doors due to likely transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace.

COVID-19 has exacerbated long-existing gaps and inequities in BC and paid sick leave has an important inequity-fighting component-- nearly ninety percent of low-wage workers, predominantly women and racialized workers, currently have no paid?sick leave and are least able to afford missing work.