

NB Common Front for Social Justice
51 Williams Street
Moncton, NB
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Hon. Martine Coulombe, Minister
Postsecondary Education, Training and Labour
Fredericton NB

December 1, 2011

Open letter to Minister Martine Coulombe

Minister Coulombe,

You are undertaking a so-called “online consultation” to gather the opinion of the public regarding the “possible introduction of a special New Brunswick minimum wage for servers earning tips”. With this online survey, you hope that New Brunswickers will share their thoughts on “the tip differential issue, as well as on minimum wage in general”.

We, the undersigned, hereby denounce this approach and believe it is absolutely unacceptable to use information received electronically and anonymously to justify a lower minimum wage for workers who receive tips. Furthermore, nowhere in this survey does the government mention the fact that it did not proceed with the planned minimum wage increase in September 2011, as indicated in the New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan. Is this a strategy to make us forget about the minimum wage increase that was planned for September?

We do not believe this online questionnaire is sufficient to establish that the population has been consulted. A true consultation is required before making such important decisions that will impact the working poor. How can anonymous online answers be considered credible? In fact, can we even believe these answers? What about transparency?

Rather, the serious nature of the topic calls for such a consultation to be held during public hearings. In such a context, people in the audience hear various perspectives voiced by individuals who are distinctly identified. Moreover, the time period allowed for the online questionnaire, from November 2nd to December 14th, is insufficient. This period precedes the holidays, a time when numerous activities are added to the daily lives of individuals concerned by these issues.

Does the Alward government intend to use this questionnaire to abandon its prior commitments? Indeed, several public consultations have led to the NB Economic and Social Inclusion Plan adopted in November 2009. This plan recommended to: “Raise the minimum wage to the Atlantic average by September 1st, 2011, and adjust for inflation annually thereafter”. The Alward government has already postponed the effective date of a \$10 minimum wage by six months.

For the following reasons, we oppose your approach.

Firstly, business owners who employ servers pressure the government in order for the province to have a lower minimum wage so they can increase their profits. However, they fail to mention that they often hire seasonal workers and that servers’ total income is quite low. These workers often work split shifts and sometimes, they must even wait around an hour or two for customers,

without pay, to find out if they will work the following hours or be sent home.

The sector targeted is one where there is a high percentage of female workers. We have trouble understanding why you want to reduce the income of women servers since it is already very low and, for the most part, inferior to those of men.

Minimum wage workers already live near the poverty level. For the past six years, the lowest minimum wage in the Atlantic Provinces has been in N.B. Our workers currently earn \$0.25 less an hour. The minimum wage increase was acknowledged as a vital strategy of the provincial poverty reduction plan adopted by Liberals and Conservatives in 2009. This plan recognized there were over 100,000 people in N.B. who lived below the before-tax low income cut-off and that a significant proportion of them were minimum wage workers or workers who receive tips.

We, the undersigned, hereby ask you to organize real public consultation sessions throughout the province in order to guide the government's work concerning public policies pertaining to the N.B. minimum wage.

Names of signatory organizations:

- Association acadienne et francophone des aînées et des aînés du N.-B
- Chignecto Presbytery
- Comité des 12
- Common Front for Social Justice of New Brunswick Inc.
- Council of Canadians, Saint John Chapter
- Fredericton Anti-Poverty Organization
- John Howard Society, Saint John region
- Justice and Solidarity Committee of the Moncton Diocese
- NB Coalition for Pay Equity
- New Brunswick Federation of Labour
- Regroupement féministe du N.-B.

For information

Jean-Claude Basque

Provincial Coordinator

cc- Victor Boudreau, Liberal Leader
Dominic Cardy, NDP Leader
Greta Doucet, Green Party Leader