

July 27, 2022

Via email
Alexandre.Boulerice@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Alexandre Boulerice
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

To the Honourable Alexandre Boulerice,

Re: Bell Canada union busting during negotiations with Unifor

We are writing with an urgent update regarding a labour dispute that is currently unfolding between Unifor and Bell Canada, including the disgraceful behaviour of the company during this round of negotiations.

Nearly 6,000 Unifor members comprised of the Bell Clerical and Aliant groups across six provinces – Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador – are in negotiations with the company. Bell Clerical members voted in favour of strike action on June 21, 2022. Meanwhile, the Bell Atlantic group filed for conciliation on July 8, 2022.

Bell Clerical workers will set a strike deadline of August 19, 2022, and intend to negotiate up until this deadline in good faith.

The employer, on the other hand, is acting in a shameful manner. On July 21, 2022, Reno Vaillancourt, Senior Vice President, Labour Relations at Bell, sent an email to unionized Bell clerical employees asking for people to declare their intentions to continue working during a potential strike.

This email is nothing less than an open invitation for unionized Bell clerical workers to act as scabs during a potential strike, an invitation we see as an offensive and unacceptable form of union busting.

In a follow-up memo, with the subject line, “Reminder: Choosing to work during potential strike,” Mr. Vaillancourt says, “If you decide to work during a strike, you will work exclusively from home and your pay and conditions will remain the same, with the exception that union dues would not be deducted.”

The implication here is that if any unionized Bell clerical workers chooses to act as a scab during a potential strike or lockout, they would actually make *more* money than

normal. What Mr. Vaillancourt doesn't mention, of course, is that it is the collective bargaining power of the workers that delivers them their better-than-average pay, benefits, and working conditions.

In closing, Mr. Vaillancourt says, "If you have not already done so, please let us know by Tuesday, August 2 whether you do or do not intend to continue working during a potential strike." Of course, the point of a strike is that the unionized employees will not be working, and that is their right under the law. **Keeping a list of who intends to exercise their legally-protected right to strike, and who intends to scab seems like an implicit threat.**

As you know, Unifor has been advocating for strong anti-scab legislation at the federal and provincial level for some time. In May 2021, Unifor released [Fairness on the line: The case for anti-scab legislation in Canada](#)

In that discussion paper, we showed conclusively how the use of scabs:

- Undermines the collective power of workers;
- Unnecessarily prolongs labour disputes;
- Removes the essential power that the withdrawal of labour is supposed to give workers to help end a dispute, that is, the ability to apply economic pressure;
- Contributes to higher-conflict picket lines;
- Jeopardizes workplace safety;
- De-stabilizes normalized labour relations between workers and their employers; and
- Removes the employer incentive to negotiate and settle fair contracts.

In a supplemental report, we showed how the current anti-scab language in the Canada Labour Code is completely ineffective, with language that would make it almost impossible for a union to prevent an employer from using scabs.

We were pleased when, in March of this year, the Liberal/NDP "supply-and-confidence agreement" (SACA) included the following commitment:

"Introducing legislation by the end of 2023 to prohibit the use of replacement workers, "scabs," when a union employer in a federally regulated industry has locked out employees or is in a strike."

However, we believe that the time to pass meaningful anti-scab legislation is now, and there is no reason to wait until the end of 2023. **In fact, as Bell's actions have shown, employers at this very moment are relying on the use of scabs – or even the threat of the use of scabs – to undermine the collective power of workers in Canada.**

It is unfortunate that Bell has chosen to so brazenly threaten the use of scabs as contract negotiations are ongoing, especially before the commencement of a strike or lockout. I have included the full text of the emails from Mr. Vaillancourt in an Appendix below, and I would respectfully ask that you take the time to read the full communication.

Canada's telecommunications workers deserve better. Unifor members at Bell have been seeking a fair pay increase, continuation of work-from-home arrangements, and an enforceable floor of employment in these bargaining units. Job security and the contracting out of work overseas (or "offshoring") has been a critical issue in these bargaining units for many years.

Bell has increasingly contracted out various parts of its operations overseas. This practice of offshoring directly removes jobs out of Canada and is intended to reduce operational costs without consideration for strong labour and human rights standards. As a company that receives substantial federal subsidies for broadband infrastructure, there is little accountability and transparency for Bell with regard to this work that should be done by workers in Canada.

These government-funded regional infrastructure projects have not included any "strings attached" related to good, local jobs. We have previously called on this government to implement legislation that would require any Canadian telecommunications company who receives government funding to publicly report any operations that are contracted out, both domestically and overseas (offshored).

This lack of accountability has contributed to the erosion of good telecommunications jobs in Canada. Our members have built Bell Canada to be the backbone of the telecommunications industry, and a massively profitable company. Yet, we can't trust that our jobs will be there in the years to come.

Despite our efforts to engage Bell with these issues in negotiations, Bell has turned walked away from the table without meaningfully addressing them.

Bell's actions perfectly demonstrate the urgent need for strong anti-scab legislation at the federal level. The end of 2023 is too long to wait, especially for unionized Bell clerical workers as they face down the aggressive anti-worker, union-busting actions of Bell. We ask that you place pressure on this government to accelerate this process and find a way to take a very public position on what Bell has done here.

Sincerely,



Naureen Rizvi
Ontario Regional Director



Chris MacDonald
Assistant to the National President



Olivier Carrière
Assistant to the Quebec Director

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