

L'Aquilon

05 May 2000

Economy

Ethel Blondin-Andrew defends herself: Mine Giant

Daniel Huot

Union leaders and retirees gathered at Yellowknife City Hall before starting a short walk to the post office at the sound of the bell tower at noon on May 1, which is Workers' Day. The main theme this year has been to criticize the work of Western Arctic MP Ethel Blondin-Andrew on the Giant Mine Workers and Retirees Pension Fund file.

The participants invited the public to taste "baloney" and Tang sandwiches. "This is the kind of meal that retirees can afford after cutting 25 percent of their monthly checks," said one of the participants.

One of the representatives of the retirees gave a scathing speech to the MP.

"We asked our Member of Parliament, Ms. Blondin-Andrew, to represent us in her party and in the House. We sent her a letter last week demanding that she publicly express what she plans to do for us. Unfortunately, we have not received a response and we can no longer be satisfied with simple promises of support from him. We need concrete action," Don McNenly said during his speech.

Mr. McNenly's monthly income fell from \$ 1,100 to \$ 850 on April 1. He says he is lucky since some retirees now earn less than \$ 350.

He wants the government to make changes to the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and the Wage Standards and Benefits Act. He believes loopholes in these laws allowed the cut to come into effect.

Marc Danis, the president of local 2304 of the national union of auto workers, did not mince words with the MP. "When the time comes to act, we realize that it does absolutely nothing. I would like to see her rise in the House and introduce a bill," he said. Mr. Danis believes that the MP should introduce the bill even if she holds a position in Cabinet. The latter claims that her position prevents her from fulfilling such a role.

"Bullshit! I do not see why we would have to turn to a member of the opposition, as Ms. Blondin-Andrew suggests, to introduce a bill. We elected a representative from the Liberal Party. It should work for us in the first place and defend our interests," replied Marc Danis.

However, the member defends herself. She says she did not abandon the private member's bill. "This project should back up pension funds in such a way that other parties cannot use this fund without notice, consultation and agreement on the part of workers or their representatives. "

Ms. Blondin-Andrew also maintains that she is looking for another MP who can present this bill in the House. It does not exclude the possibility that the document may even be presented to the Senate. She estimates that she will have to collect 100 signatures, including 20 from the opposition before a bill can be tabled in the House.

"Lawyers still have to answer 28 questions and tell us what action we need to take in this regard. All questions are expected to be resolved this week, "she added. She says the bill must be presented to members of the opposition as a whole, without amendment. She argues that amendments to the draft would cause discontent among opposition signatories.

The MP argues that backing pension funds will not allow Giant mine retirees to recover the missing money. Nevertheless, she says she works closely with the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions to achieve this goal.