

# What are the chances feminist Trudeau will provide Canadians with a national gender equality plan? <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

After Harper's reign of terror on everything Canadian, Trudeau was a beacon of hope. But, that light is quickly dimming while my disillusionment grows by leaps and bounds. The self-proclaimed feminist is looking more misogynous with each passing day.

On October 19, 2016 Trudeau whipped his party to vote against NDP MP Kennedy Stewart's private member's Bill C-237, the Candidate Gender Equity Act, which would have enhanced existing financial incentives ensuring greater gender parity during federal elections.

Bill C-237 would have enriched whichever form of proportional representation the Liberal government chooses to implement before the next federal election. Oh, guess that's not happening since Trudeau unilaterally decided Canadians don't want proportional representation. Without these two important legislative changes it will be 2075 before we have gender equity on Parliament Hill.

In 1977, Pierre Elliot Trudeau made progressive changes to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). One very important change entitled parents taking time out of the workforce to care for children to omit those years from CPP payment calculations. Since women predominantly stay home with young children this legislation ensured higher monthly pension payments for elderly women.

However, last fall Justin Trudeau proposed modifications to the existing CPP. As long as contributors work 40 years or more, after their years at home have been deducted, then their benefits remain unaffected. The Liberal government cites the example of a woman starting work at age 20 and retiring at 65. She can take five years out of the work force to care for children under seven years of age without penalty.

But, let's be realistic. Consider the real life situation of a woman who starts working part-time at 16 years of age. After putting herself through university she starts a full-time job. At 30 years of age she starts a family and has a total of five children roughly two years apart. Child care costs prohibit her from returning to work after her third child. She then stays home for ten years before accepting part-time precarious employment because her job is redundant and the labour market has dramatically changed.

Retiring at age 65 after being home with children for ten years this woman would have contributed to CPP for 39 years. Under Justin Trudeau's proposed plan this woman misses the 40 mark and would be penalized. Compounding this penalty are the years spent in part-time precarious work which equates into lower CPP contributions. And, we haven't even begun to address the gendered wage gap which still sits at 72 cents on the dollar, nor the employment challenges faced by marginalized women including Indigenous, Black, disabled, single mothers, and lesbian women.

I'm also terribly frustrated and distressed by ongoing battle between the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (FNCFCS) and the current Liberal government. This case has an incredibly long history that began under the watch of the Harper conservatives.

In 2007, the FNCFCS and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) filed a complaint against Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada (INAC) based on Section 5 of the Canadian Human Rights Act. The complaint accused the federal government of knowingly underfunding family and child support services on First Nations reserves creating inequalities based solely on the children's origins.

Harper's government was criminal in its attempts to have the case dismissed. In fact, Harper managed to drag this case out for nine years and at one point was found guilty of withholding over 90,000 key documents. Eventually, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal heard 72 days of testimony which ended on October 24, 2015.

On January 26, 2016, the tribunal ruled the Canadian government does in fact discriminate against First Nations children by inequitably funding child welfare services and failing to fully implement Jordan's Principle.

Canadians following the court battle celebrated the victory and looked forward to the new Liberal government expediting the tribunal's recommendations. It seems the celebrations were premature and the expectations delusional.

Despite a definitive decision including directives, the Liberal government has continually failed to comply with the tribunal's recommendations which means children on reserve are not receiving services all other Canadian children take for granted. This is nothing short of a disgusting disregard for Indigenous children's human rights.

At a time when truth and reconciliation is imperative to healing this country it is important that there be special provisions for Indigenous women and girls. Francyne Joe, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada, is truthful when she states, "Indigenous women and girls are disadvantaged in every area: employment, health, education, safety, housing, food, clean water, political participation, and simple recognition of our worth as human beings. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has told Canada to design strategic interventions to address the desperate social and economic conditions of Indigenous women and girls. We are looking forward to real action and real change."

Unfortunately, there is an underlying fear that the federal government may eventually appeal the tribunal's findings.

In 1995, Canada was number one on the United Nations Gender Equality Index. Today Canada ranks 25th. In November 2016, CEDAW issued comprehensive recommendations regarding Canada's compliance with the UN treaty on women's rights. All recommendations are to be implemented by 2020 including a National Gender Equality Plan.

According to Leilani Farha, Executive Director of Canada Without Poverty, "The United Nations CEDAW Committee was clear: Canada does not adequately provide the programs and services essential to women's equality. Women need: income equality, equal pay, decent jobs, affordable childcare and housing, adequate legal aid, access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, sufficient protection from violence, and a justice system that responds to their needs in all parts of the country. Women in Canada do not have that yet."

The Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) has joined with over a hundred organizations and individuals to launch a national campaign called Step Up for Women's Equality, designed to advocate for the implementation of the CEDAW recommendations. You can support this campaign by contacting your MP to let them know that it's time for Canada to step up, take concrete action, and implement a National Gender Equality Plan.

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