

Harper Majority results in Women's rights setbacks ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

The federal government promised that one of the priorities of the federal budget would be "supporting families and communities". Unfortunately, the Harper Conservatives have failed miserably on this front, especially when it comes to the women and girls of Canada.

Women continue to face a number of challenges in the labour force. Women rely heavily on public services. They often hold precarious jobs, with less pay than their male counterparts. A lack of affordable, quality child care also places an extra burden on mothers of young children. Senior women are among the poorest in the country.

OAS and GIS cuts

By increasing the age of eligibility to the Old Age Security pension (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) the Harper Conservative government has directly targeted senior women. Women are the majority of claimants for GIS, due to the fact that women are disadvantaged during their active working lives. Low pay and precarious work mean many women have little or no ability to save or build up decent pensions during their working lives, so many must rely on OAS for retirement income. For women aged 65-69 the OAS/GIS represent 38 per cent of their income, while for men it represents 26 per cent. Forcing poor senior women who are already disadvantaged in the workplace to work longer is shameful and wrong.

No child care

This budget did absolutely nothing to address the dire need to establish a national child care program. One of the key factors to preventing child poverty and stimulating the Canadian economy is for women and mothers to be active participants in the workforce. While many women participate in the paid workforce, mothers of young children (12 and under) are unemployed or underemployed because they have no affordable, quality care for their children. But instead of supporting working mothers, this government offers meager payouts for families with young children, covering only a fraction of the cost of child care for most Canadian families.

Child care comes at an initial cost to the government, but provides significant returns through increased tax revenues. Investment in child care virtually pays for itself. At the same time investment in child care creates jobs. Child care investments in Quebec have pumped an additional \$5.2 billion into the Quebec economy. Plus, earnings from increased employment send 90 cents in tax revenues back to federal and provincial governments for every dollar invested.

The federal government must build high-quality, affordable, inclusive and publicly delivered early childhood education and care services across Canada, with equitable access for all children and families. The market-based system we now have clearly does not work.

Cuts to services and jobs

Cuts to federal services and jobs download problems onto provinces, many of which are in the process of cutting their own public programs and services as well. These cuts affect women first and foremost, and hurt those who can least afford it.

Health services at the Assembly of First Nations, the Metis National Council, the Inuit, the Native Women's Association of Canada, and other organizations that support Aboriginal peoples have been cut dramatically or eliminated altogether. Aboriginal women suffer from much higher rates of poverty and violence than the rest of the population. Cutting these services puts this already vulnerable group at even greater risk.

Supposedly aimed at creating jobs, this budget actually does the opposite by eliminating decent jobs for women across the country. The majority of federal employees (55 per cent) are women. CUPE's wage analysis study, *Battle of the Wages: Who gets paid more private of public sector workers?*, showed that the pay gap for women in the public sector is much smaller than it is in the private sector because of pay equity initiatives. The public sector delivers valuable services to women and is also a source of equitable employment, but during Harper's tenure our ability to achieve pay equity in federal jurisdictions has effectively been eliminated.

Tax cuts for rich corporations

Continued corporate tax cuts are a gender-biased initiative that benefit shareholders, top executives, and foreign corporations. Not only do corporate tax cuts primarily benefit men, but the lost revenue from keeping corporate taxes low impairs access to critical services that primarily benefit women.

Women's share of income and wealth in the corporate sector are negligible; just 10 per cent of directors in the top 500 corporations are

women, and just 17 per cent of management positions are held by women. Women own a paltry 30 per cent of corporate shares.

This federal budget has done nothing to improve the lives of women and girls. For many, it has made life worse. We need a federal presence to achieve equality for women, not abandon it.

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