

# New shoes and a haircut: Budget 2013 not so pretty for women in Canada <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

The Finance Minister got a new pair of shoes. Canadians got a new federal budget. And women in Canada got another haircut.

Budget 2013 is all about Jobs! Jobs! Jobs! And who wouldn't like a job. Maybe some training. Maybe even a full-time job. With benefits. And a pension plan. Oh go crazy, let's throw in equal pay.

Not so fast girls! NO JOB FOR YOU!

Why not?

### 1. Women and the extractive industry

The federal budget's job creation strategy is largely focused on sectors where women are significantly under-represented: construction, manufacturing, mining. 18.6 per cent of jobs in the mining, quarrying, oil, and gas extraction industries in Canada are held by women. If you are part of the 18.6 per cent, you are still going to take a 20-30 per cent haircut on your wages. Because, oh yes, pay inequity is alive and well in the extractive industry.

Although the extractive sector anticipates increasing shortages of workers, only 14.6 per cent have recruitment policies targeted at women. But do women want those jobs? (Mucky! Dirty! Unfeminine!) Yes Virginia, there are women who want to work in the extractive sector. But those women have identified several barriers to taking up that work, including: 1) the lack of child-care and flexible work practices (because who is going to look after the kids while you spend two weeks on the mining site?); 2) a hostile "work culture"; and 3) the lack of women in management positions.

Oddly enough, managers in the extractive industries did not identify these barriers. Could it be that the real mismatch is between the needs of workers and the perceptions of employers?

### 2. Women and infrastructure spending

Budget 2013 appears to set out a fresh wave of much-needed infrastructure spending. However, this budget actually represents a reduction in spending. The Building Canada Fund has been reduced to \$210 million in 2014-15 from its previous level of \$1.25 billion a year. All other funding for infrastructure in the federal budget is a re-announcement of pre-existing programs. The infrastructure spending that is included in Budget 2013 is also set to create new jobs. Unfortunately, infrastructure spending creates jobs where women are not.

According to the most recent labor force survey, there are 382,100 Canadians working in construction. 6 per cent of those workers are women. Budget 2013 argues that we are going to need to fill an additional 319,000 jobs in construction by 2020. If women's participation in the construction trade were increased to 30 per cent by the same year, that would contribute 194,730 new workers to fill the shortfall (with 124,270 new jobs for male workers).

If we are going to support the workers we need to fill those jobs, however, we are going to have to look at the same set of barriers women in the mining industry identified -- the need for child care and work hours that accommodate the fact that women still do two-thirds of all unpaid labor; a shift in workplace cultures that subject women to harassment and bullying; and more women managers whose presence will signal to young workers that this is a field in which they can advance.

How does Budget 2013 propose to solve this problem of connecting workers and jobs? By investing \$300 million in a "Canada Job Grant" program. The Canada Job Grant Program provides federal matching funds of up to \$5000 per person to the employer. In industries where there is a clear mismatch between employee needs and employers understanding of those needs, putting these "job grants" in the hands of the employer seems like not such a good idea -- particularly when there is a skilled workforce out there, looking for these jobs, but unable to access them for lack of social supports, such as child care, and equity guarantees.

Here's a thought, how about we start saying pay equity like we mean it and how about we put that \$300 million into safe, quality childcare for workers in those industries? Given the ridiculously long waiting lists for unaffordable and significantly unregulated child-care spots across Canada, there are bound to be plenty of women (and men) who would take any job anywhere if it came with safe, quality, subsidized child care.

### 3. Private sector jobs

Budget 2013 continues the program of shifting job creation to the private sector, while cutting jobs in the public sector. Women looking for work in the private sector can expect to make \$2000 less a year on average than they do in the public sector, have less support for savings for retirement, and see the discount on their pay increase.

The public sector is one of the few places where women see smaller pay gaps (only a 20 per cent discount on their work vs. 28 per cent on average) and greater gains in hiring and promotion. That said, even these gains have been significantly undermined, first in the 2009 Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act, which stripped public employees of the right to pay equity and again in 2012, when Bill C-38 made similar changes to the Federal Contractors Program, leaving compliance with the Employment Equity Act for contractors of the federal government to the discretion of the Minister. Marjorie Griffin Cohen points out that "there would be no reason to change this legislation if the Minister intended to continue to apply the employment equity provisions."

It's clear that an investment in creating jobs in the public sector (or at least not cutting them) would be good for women's employment, but what else has it done for us lately? An investment in public sector social infrastructure, in fields such as health care, child care, and education, would yield a double benefit. It would create more jobs in sectors in which women are likely to be employed and would decrease the burden of unpaid work for both men and women. It's not a big, shiny bridge or sexy "cyber-infrastructure," but it is what keeps us healthy, educated, and just a little less sleep-deprived.

And that is some action I'd like to see.

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