

Canada's year in equality: Two steps forward, just slightly less back^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

So many issues, so little time (or space, when it comes to the realm of print that I live in): the world of women's equality remains a complex series of gains and losses - and the losses only seem to be getting worse, while the gains feel painfully slow to appear.

The worst part? Far too many people (especially if those people are reading members of the right wing media elite like The Globe And Mail's Margaret Wente) think that all these problems have been solved long ago - so why all the whining, right?

Income disparity? Soo 1970s! Except, nope - and definitely not for lower income earning women, one of the most vulnerable sectors of our society.

Abuse / harassment / rape? Well sure, it happens - but by gawd none of us will stand for it these days! Yeah, except that victim shaming is still rampant, and only made more horrible by the rise of hateful, horrific anonymous trolling on the Internet.

But wait! Politics! There's some seriously powerful women in this country in 2014, aren't there? Yup. And many of them take a crapload of gender-related abuse both in the political arenas where they work and from the aforementioned anonymous assholes online. How shocking it is that more women don't choose politics as a vocation...

There's more, obviously - and far more than we could fit into this one issue of Planet S. But for a snapshot of where our country's at when it comes to women's issues right now, please read on. /Chris Kirkland

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CHILD CARE

If the Harper government was truly interested in promoting "stable family units," as opposed to trying to put the genie of women's liberation back in the bottle a bit by providing a disincentive for women to work outside the home through income-splitting, they'd invest in safe and affordable child care that would make it easier for working couples to balance family and career aspirations.

In the mid '00s, a universal day care program was close to being implemented - but then Paul Martin's Liberal government (which proposed the plan) fell in the 2006 election to the Harper Conservatives. One of the first things the Cons did was scrap the proposed \$6 billion program and replace it with a \$100 per month payment for every child under six - giving parents, they maintain to this day, the freedom to choose the best child care option for them.

Daycare expenses are also tax deductible. But when you consider that full-time licensed spots for toddlers run as high as \$140 a month in Québec City or Montréal... Okay, those probably aren't the best examples to use in an article arguing for affordable daycare in Canada, because \$140 a month (actually, \$7 a day) is AFFORDABLE. But it's a provincial program that Québec implemented on its own to subsidize non-profit daycare facilities.

The Québec program isn't perfect, as shortages still remain. But compared to everywhere else in Canada it's a dream. In cities like Vancouver and Toronto, daycare can run as high as \$1200 a month. Elsewhere, it's in the \$900-a-month range. And licensed daycare spots are in extremely short supply. The pressure that puts on couples contemplating raising a family is intense.

In an October 2013 Globe & Mail feature, Erin Anderssen observed that women get on waiting lists the instant "the stick turns blue" and then hope they win the "daycare lottery" and secure a spot in a quality facility that would permit them to return to work with the knowledge their child was being cared for properly.

The potential benefits are incalculable: less stress for parents, a good growth opportunity for children, a more productive economy. Already, two-thirds of women work outside the home. And with women now accounting for 61 per cent of post-secondary degrees, the

jobs they're occupying are increasingly skilled and vital to Canada's economic future.

When you consider all the benefits, publicly subsidized universal child care is a no-brainer. But in the Harper government's 7100-word throne just a week earlier, as Anderssen noted in her October article, child care got precisely 64 words. So it's definitely a non-priority for the Conservatives. /Gregory Beatty

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