



Take action

PESTER the politicians. Call, fax and email your local Member of Parliament or Prime Minister Harper. Tell them the needs of Canadian women must be included in the economic recovery.

SHARE this leaflet widely with friends and colleagues. Encourage them to take action (order more at www.nupge.ca).

WRITE letters and articles for your local newspaper.

SUPPORT your local women's advocacy groups.

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■ 15 AURIGA DRIVE
NEPEAN, ONTARIO
CANADA / K2E 1B7

■ [613] 228-9800
FAX [613] 228-9801

■ www.nupge.ca

■ national@nupge.ca

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of the Public Services International.



WOMEN, STEPHEN HARPER AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS



IN CONSTRUCTION if you don't ensure the foundation is solid, it is useless to build a structure above it. If the ground is unstable it is even more important to ensure that all steps are taken to make the foundation solid.

The same is true of our country. With the economy shaken to its core, we need to address the issues at our foundation. Harper's response to the economic crisis has been laden with physical infrastructure initiatives but has ignored the social infrastructures that ensure the country's foundation — its people — can survive.

By not addressing child care, home support, social work, health care and education, Canadian women are bearing the brunt of the effects of the economic breakdown.

Since the Harper Conservatives took power they have systematically attacked women's equality. Through cuts to the Status of Women Canada (SWC), including closing 12 out of 16 regional offices, eligibility requirements which ban women's groups seeking funding from engaging in advocacy or feminist research and the word "equality" being removed from the mandate of the SWC, the message that has been sent is that women in Canada have obtained equality.

It is hard to imagine a government that believes this fact to be true can steer our country, whose population is 52% female and where 70% of females work, through an economic crisis. If Canadian women have obtained equality why is it that 2 out of 3 minimum wage earners are female, 1 out of 7 Canadian women lives in poverty and there are twice as many female seniors living in poverty as males.

This was the reality before the economic crisis began — and with the government turning a blind eye to these facts — we know that the situation will only become worse for Canadian women. With the situation for Canadian women already on an unstable foundation, the Conservative government in its Federal Budget 2009 literally left women in the quicksand.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (EI)

Women are more likely to work part-time (nearly 70% of the part-time workforce), non-standard hours and have extended periods of time out of the workforce to handle family responsibilities. It is harder for women to accumulate the number of hours to qualify for EI — in fact, less than 33% of unemployed women qualify. For those who do qualify, the low weekly benefit often means that they and their children are driven into poverty.

The Federal Budget 2009 extended EI for 5 weeks; however, this does absolutely nothing to help the vast majority of women who cannot qualify for benefits in the first place.

They actually call this equality! What the heck do they call

PAY EQUITY

The pay gap between genders is staggering — a Canadian woman earns 71 cents for every dollar a Canadian male earns. The gap is even larger for those who have earned a post-secondary degree. The Harper government has steadfastly refused to implement Pay Equity Legislation to rectify this issue.

As part of the 2009 budget, the Conservatives introduced legislation which prohibits female public sector workers from filing a pay equity complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. The new "equitable compensation" rules move pay equity to the bargaining table and also make it subject to the prevailing market conditions within the private sector.

CHILD CARE

In 2004, the OECD ranked Canada last among developed countries in terms of access to early learning and child care spaces and last in terms of public investment. For those able to find spaces, the child care fees are among the highest in the world. For female single parents, many of whom are poor and cannot afford any child care fees, a universal early education and child care program is essential for them to seek further education, train for work, obtain decent jobs or accept job promotions.

Early childhood education and child care promotes economic stimulus through job creation, labour-force participation, and increased local economic activity — research indicates that for every \$1 spent on child care there is a ripple effect of \$1.58 in the local economy. It has been shown to be instrumental in reducing poverty and lowering social program costs. Despite these facts, the budget does nothing to provide or improve access to affordable child care.

TAX CUTS

Canadian women as a group are poorer, have less secure jobs, own less property, have fewer savings and less pension income. Those most affected

Child care, EI and pay equity are just a few of the issues confronting Canadian women as the economy tightens. Governments must invest in social infrastructure which puts money into fields with high female employment and at the same time provides services which support our children, our elderly and our sick. Let's address the issues that form the foundation of our country and ensure that Canadian women are on equal ground in this country.

are Aboriginal women, immigrant women, women with disabilities, single women with children and older women who live alone. During economically good times, 40% of Canadian women do not earn enough to pay income taxes and 38% fall into the lowest tax bracket. Simply put, tax cuts do not benefit the vast majority of women in this country.

JOB CREATION PROGRAMS

Investing in physical infrastructure benefits those employed in the construction industry — a male dominated industry. Only 7% of construction workers and those in the trades are female; however, in the social infrastructure of child care, home support, social work, health care and public school teaching, women dominate the workforce. These programs also provide essential supports to women who often bear the brunt of care giving responsibilities.

The budget's heavy investment in physical infrastructure and not social infrastructure discriminates against Canadian women by not providing stimulus into areas where women are more likely to be employed. It also provides no incentives to train and employ women in the trades or construction fields. Women, especially marginalized women, work in precarious jobs which often are the first to be eliminated during an economic recession.



inequality?