

# JOB CUTS HURT WOMEN

Public services and the Harper agenda



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And we're fighting back!

The Conservative government's policies are threatening our human rights, our jobs and our security. Women are hit particularly hard by this slash-and-burn mentality and it will get worse in the years to come. But PSAC women are fighting back!

## An absurd choice

The Harper government has announced billions in cuts to the federal public service. The Conservatives want to bring the deficit down to zero and plan to cut up to 10 per cent from government departments to do it. The government has set a Canadian precedent by offering senior managers cash incentives of up to \$15,000 pegged on how much they find to cut in their departments.

The government is asking people to choose between a strong economy and strong public services. That's absurd. Canadians want both. We all deserve a say because public services touch everyone, helping to safeguard our health and safety, protecting the environment and contributing to local economies.



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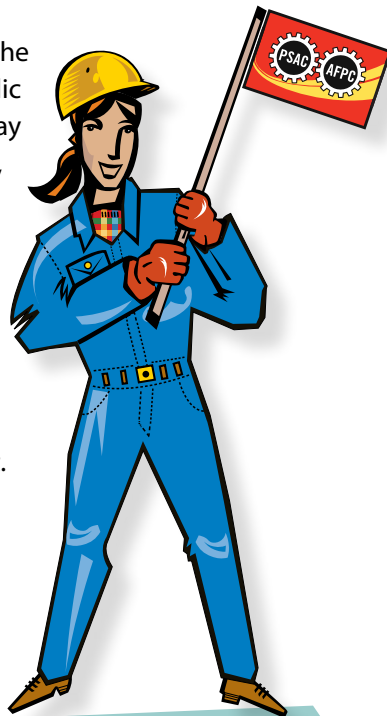
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## Why is the government doing this?

The Harper government claims that it is making drastic cuts in an effort to pay down the deficit. But would you pay off your mortgage if it meant not feeding your kids? Eliminating the deficit quickly may sound like a great idea too, but not at the expense of public services Canadians need.

And that's especially true when it comes to services for the most vulnerable, such as seniors trying to get their pensions or those unfortunate enough to find themselves out of a job.

Since being elected in 2006, the Harper government has cut public funding for child care, attacked pay equity in the federal public service, dismantled the long gun registry and eliminated funding for women's groups that advocate for and defend women's rights. These cuts will directly weaken the government's capacity to protect public health, public safety and the environment.



## Harper's bad track record

Since being elected in 2006, the Harper Conservatives have systematically attacked women's rights:

- ✘ Their first order of business was to eliminate child care funding agreements and destroy the potential for a national child care program.
- ✘ The government shut down 12 of 16 Status of Women Canada regional offices and prevented women's groups from applying for funding for research or advocacy.
- ✘ The Conservatives abolished the Court Challenges Program and led vicious attacks against human rights institutions, such as the Canadian Human Rights Commission and Rights and Democracy.
- ✘ The government barred federal public sector workers from filing pay equity complaints before the Canadian Human Rights Commission.
- ✘ Harper and his MPs have promised to eliminate the gun registry, despite the fact that it has been proven to reduce homicide and prevent violence against women.

## Women will be harshly affected

More than half of public sector workers are women, representing 84 per cent of administrative staff in federal workplaces. This means that jobs cuts in the federal public sector will disproportionately impact women:

- ✘ **They lose good paying jobs.** Federal public sector jobs pay an average of 10 per cent more than private sector jobs, thanks to the successful pay equity struggles that were led by PSAC.
- ✘ **They lose decent pensions and benefits.** In the public sector, two thirds of women have pensions, as opposed to only one third in the private sector. Extended health and maternity benefits are also more generous in the public sector.
- ✘ **They are left vulnerable to harassment.** Job insecurity makes women more vulnerable to discrimination and mistreatment.
- ✘ **They lose the union advantage.** There are much lower rates of unionization in the private sector. When women lose public sector jobs, they often lose union protection.

## Colbey's Story

*I was quite devastated when the [government] announced on August 19 their intention to close the EI call centre in Vancouver. It is incredibly demoralizing to watch my co-workers literally "fleeing" the workplace. The term [employees] are going wherever they can to get a promise of work to the end of March 2012 – even for less money.*

*I have watched our numbers decrease over the past two years – [our employer] has not replaced any of the indeterminate staff who have retired or been deployed to other business lines or department, or left the public service altogether. Our numbers have been reduced by more than 60 per cent since 2009 and we have lost many skilled and valuable members.*

*Everyday I have to attempt to explain to our frustrated, desperate and amazingly patient clients, why it is that they are waiting weeks and months beyond the legislated time frame to receive the benefits to which they are entitled.*

– A PSAC member working at Service Canada in Vancouver



## The impact on women at home

Cuts to public services and programs mean that women will have to do more free work. They will have to compensate – without pay – for lost public services and support systems such as elder care.

When women lose good jobs in the public service, they must often fall back on precarious, contractual, part-time or minimum wage work. Many women lose income and become more dependent on their spouses or family. This trend will be reinforced by Harper government's fiscal policies: income splitting makes having women stay at home make "economic sense." Men will get tax deductions while women work for free at home. Given all of the cuts in public services and programs, women will have a big job on their hands!<sup>1</sup>

When women are poorer, they also become more vulnerable to abuse, violence and sexual exploitation both at work and at home. Economic dependency makes women less able to leave abusive situations. The lack of affordable housing makes it impossible or incredibly risky.

<sup>1</sup> Of course, some men will choose to stay at home and care for children and family. But the reality is that because of how the labour market is currently structured, it is women who will be more likely to "choose" to stay home, or work part-time, as they do now.

## Cuts impact rural women

The importance of *Enabling Rural Women's Economic Empowerment* is being discussed this year by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

PSAC, along with the Canadian Labour Congress is raising the issue of protecting public services, providing decent work and promoting human rights for rural women across the country, including those in Aboriginal communities.

This is an important issue, since Canada is mainly a "rural" country, with 90 per cent of our land mass considered geographically rural. Just over 20 per cent of the population lives in rural and small towns. Rural women have lower labour force participation rates and a higher likelihood of being poor and certain groups such as Aboriginal women and elderly women are particularly disadvantaged. Improving public services and programs in regard to health care, child care, education, public transportation and housing are particularly important for rural women.

Job cuts and privatization in areas such as environmental protection, the Coast Guard, and the dismantling of the Wheat Board are simply not ways to "empower" rural women.



## Job cuts hurt equity

Thanks to the federal Employment Equity Act, women from historically disadvantaged groups are more equitably represented in the federal public service than in the private sector, even though the situation is still not fully satisfactory.

Working in the federal public sector also usually means better protection against racism than what can be found in the private sector. The same is true with disability related issues. Institutional policies and mechanisms are in place to deal with these issues and unions are there to help women from equity groups defend their human rights.

Job cuts and privatization hit women of colour, those with disabilities as well as women from immigrant and Aboriginal communities the hardest. These women are often the last hired and the first to be let go. They are also more likely to be term workers, with no job security.

PSAC is working hard to protect all of our members, and to make sure that employment equity is well defended in “workforce adjustment” measures.



## Shocking disregard for Aboriginal women

Violence against Aboriginal women and girls is a national tragedy that has been decried both in Canada and by the United Nations. Despite several calls over the years for a national action plan against violence against Aboriginal women, the Harper government has done nothing.



On December 12, 2011, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women released its report entitled *Ending Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls: A New Beginning*. The report from the Conservative-dominated committee demonstrates a shocking disregard for the plight of Aboriginal women, and a refusal to even acknowledge the facts and data on violence against Aboriginal women.

The report fails to provide any recommendations that would effectively address the persistent violence, inequality and human rights violations endured by Aboriginal women. It miserably fails to rise beyond short term and partial solutions. This constitutes a most inadequate response to the ongoing human rights scandal of racism, discrimination and violence against Aboriginal women and girls.

## Racist and sexist law reform

The government's amendments to the *Criminal Code* will drastically increase the number of people who will be arrested and ruthlessly punished by long, mandatory sentences. Aboriginal women, racially visible and low income women, youth and women with mental health issues will be severely affected by these draconian measures. Billions of dollars will be pumped into prisons and criminal law systems, instead of being invested in important social programs and quality public services. Aboriginal children in particular need schools and social services, housing and health care, not more jails.

The Harper government has also introduced new rules for those seeking refugee status in Canada, potentially removing the basic human rights of whole groups of refugees and making family reunification more difficult. Sponsorship rules have been changed in ways that will make more women's status precarious.



## Attacks against workers' rights

The Conservative government is engaged in a full blown attack against unions and workers' rights. In 2009, the government unilaterally imposed wage rollbacks on some of PSAC's bargaining units – a clear violation of collective bargaining rights. And in 2011, the government ruthlessly bullied locked-out Canada Post workers with threats of back-to-work legislation, mandating arbitration that was clearly biased in favour of the employer. In media interviews in January 2012, the Conservatives signaled that their next target will be public sector pensions.

## Fighting back

The government is asking people to choose between a strong economy and strong public services. That's absurd. Strong public services are an essential part of a strong economy. In reality, the Harper government is sacrificing public security and the public good, to give even more generous tax cuts to corporations. As of January 2012, corporations will be receiving more than 13 billion dollars a year in tax breaks from the Harper Conservatives.

## Does this make sense to you?

We invite you to talk with women in your union and in the general public about how the Harper government's policies are affecting you and discuss how you can make a difference.

Let the government know what you think of their attacks against our jobs and against federal public services.

Together, let's challenge these bad policies, and demand better choices.

## Let them know that PSAC women are fighting back!

For more information and in-depth analysis on some of the issues raised in this booklet, visit the Women's Program section on the PSAC website: [psac-afpc.com](http://psac-afpc.com).

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