



Canadian Labour Congress

Congrès du travail du Canada

Do you think that Stephen Harper cares about Aboriginal issues? Think again.

Stephen Harper put a stop to the Kelowna Accord which represented a national consensus to end the persistence of poverty and shameful conditions of overcrowding, unsafe housing, crumbling infrastructure and lack of access to safe, clean-drinking water.

He has not replaced it with any substantive policy measures.

Under Stephen Harper, 116 First Nations continue to endure Drinking Water Advisories which represents almost 20% of the First Nations communities in Canada. In addition, the number of high-risk drinking water systems has increased in the past year. Nearly 65,000 First Nations' citizens could be affected by these on-going water problems – and it does not include communities that lack running water.

The Conservatives attempted to push Bill S-11 through the Conservative-controlled Senate by-passing the House of Commons. This bill would dramatically affect water delivery systems on First Nations. First Nations' organizations noted the bill was developed without the legally required consultation process with First Nations. In addition, the bill would have trumped all First Nations laws and by-laws; absolved all liability for the federal government for the establishment of faulty water systems; impacted Section 35 regarding self-government rights; and contained the right to limit abrogation and derogation. First Nations failing to abide by the bill could have been fined and/or imprisoned. In addition, the bill allowed authority to be assigned to a third party, including to a person or corporation to run the water system.

And along comes Bruce Carson, former senior advisor to Stephen Harper, who is now under RCMP investigation. It has been revealed his fiancé who works for a water filtration company was selling water systems to First Nations and that Carson was a signatory to some contracts.

While Stephen Harper called in the RCMP, *'Will he allow an investigation into the culpability of his government's efforts to advance a bill that allowed for such corrupt behaviour and unethically treatment of First Nations water systems?'*

Stephen Harper has rigidly opposed efforts at the United Nations to make safe, clean-drinking water and sanitation a human right. In 2010 when 122 other UN member nations finally voted in favour of making this fundamental concept a reality, Canada joined with just forty-one other nations in abstaining from this historic initiative.

Stephen Harper's Conservatives refused to endorse the United Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples for three long years. Questions remain as to how sincere this government interprets this historic declaration.

Today, the legacy of colonialism has left Aboriginal Peoples among the poorest of Canadians – 30% lower than non-Aboriginal Canadians. At current rates of policy change, it will take 63 years to erase this income disparity. Yet, at a press conference following a G-20 meeting in Pittsburgh, Stephen Harper boasted that in Canada, *"We also have no history of colonialism."*

In 2007, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society filed a human rights complaint alleging the federal government is racially discriminating against First Nations children by providing less child welfare benefits to those children living on reserves than to those living off reserves. The human rights complaint was supported by a number of unions and other allies. Recently, Stephen Harper successfully sought to have the complaint dismissed arguing that different and inequitable treatment is ok, provided that the provinces/territories provide the service to all other children.

Stephen Harper has failed to revisit the way it funds First Nations schools which are at a severe disadvantage when compared to the other schools in the country. First Nations' schools are forced to operate under funding formulas that haven't changed in over twenty years.

Ghislain Picard, Regional Chief of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, summed it up best: *"How can we possibly fight against the high dropout rate when we have nothing for sports programs, nothing for vocational training and nothing to buy books with?"*

The First Nations Funding Formula originally drawn up in 1988 ignores costs such as:

- Costs connected with the integration of technology in schools.
- Costs connected with running libraries in schools.
- Costs connected to vocational training.
- Costs connected to extracurricular sports and recreation.
- Costs connected to following provincial reforms which have considerable impact on the curriculum, teaching hours and support measures, such as: homework assistance, etc.

The proportion of the First Nations' adult population that has not completed high school or achieved any other educational credential is alarmingly high at 48% about double the level for other Canadians. In 2007, the Centre for the Study of Living Standards released a study that showed that by improving educational attainment levels of Aboriginal Peoples it could contribute an additional cumulative \$160 billion (dollars in 2001) over the 2001-2017 period to our economy.

Stephen Harper has made no meaningful effort to follow-up on this homework.

Stephen Harper has cut or put at risk important advocacy and research work of organizations dealing with vital issues affecting many Aboriginal Peoples: the National Residential School Survivors Society; the Aboriginal Healing Foundation; and the Native Women's Association of Canada's Sisters in Spirit initiative. This project has been developing a national database that tracks cases of hundreds of missing and slain Aboriginal women in an effort to expose such violence.

Stephen Harper said he would "fix" the long standing sex discrimination in the status registration provisions of the Indian Act, but he didn't do the whole job nor is his fix good enough. Stephen Harpers' solution does not offer equal levels of 'status', and still leaves out some Aboriginal women and their descendants for no other reason than sex discrimination.

Think again about Harper's commitments to Aboriginal issues.

On May 2 — Vote for Change.