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FOR DIGNITY AND JUSTICE



**CUPE** / Canadian Union  
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## THE BIG PICTURE **ECONOMIC JUSTICE**

# EQUALITY RISING: GRASSROOTS MOVEMENTS FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

A resurgence of grassroots activism is leading the way for greater equality and deeper changes to our economic system. In most cases, women and members of equality-seeking groups outside existing power structures are leading these movements.

The **IDLE NO MORE (INM)** movement was started by three Indigenous women and a non-Indigenous woman in inner-city Saskatoon, in opposition to federal measures that severely weakened laws protecting the environment. INM soon became one of the largest Indigenous mass movements in Canadian history. It is also changing history. Indigenous peoples are

asserting their sovereignty and rights, and mobilizing to oppose unrestrained resource development. This movement is inspiring many to support more sustainable and equitable alternatives.

The **FIGHT FOR \$15** campaign has become the largest grassroots workers' movement in recent years. It developed from the struggles by low-paid non-unionized fast food and retail workers – many of them women and racialized workers. Unions, workers' action centres and other activists are helping organize and support the workers' strikes and other actions. In response, major US cities have moved to raise their minimum wage to \$15 an hour. The movement has also spread to

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# ECONOMIC BRIEFS

HIGHLIGHTING RECENT ECONOMIC STUDIES AND DEVELOPMENTS



## TAX FAIRNESS

### Canadian corporations stash more tax haven cash

Canadian corporations stashed \$270 billion in their 10 favourite tax havens in 2015, up \$40 billion in one year. This includes \$80 billion in Barbados, \$50 billion in Luxembourg and \$49 billion in the Cayman Islands. While the Panama Papers leak put a spotlight on abuse of tax havens, Panama doesn't even make the list of Canadian corporations' 10 most-favoured tax havens. The amount stashed in tax havens was equivalent to 27 per cent of all Canadian corporate direct investment overseas, and also equivalent to the federal government's total program



spending in 2015. We could add at least \$2.7 billion to federal revenues if the assets held by Canadian corporations in tax havens were taxed at a rate of just one per cent.

## LGBTI RIGHTS

### Trans rights gain big-name support

Transgender people's right to use public bathrooms consistent with their gender identity is under attack in some US states, but gained a lot of big-name support after North Carolina passed a law forcing people to use public washrooms that conform to the sex on their birth certificate. The move sparked economic boycotts by PayPal, Deutsche Bank, Cirque du Soleil, Bruce Springsteen and Pearl Jam, as well as by tourists. The federal justice department says the law violates the *Civil Rights Act*, and the state may be denied federal funds if it is not repealed. In May, the Canadian government finally introduced legislation to protect transgender people, outlawing discrimination based on gender identity or expression. Bill C-16 is an important step for LGBTI

rights after years of hard work by trans rights activists, former NDP MP Bill Siksay and current NDP MP Randall Garrison.

## WORKFORCE TRENDS

### Fewer women working or looking for jobs

Women continued to leave Canada's labour force last year. The last two years have seen the largest two-year drop on record. This was especially surprising in a year in which the number of unemployed women declined and the male participation rate rose to 70.6 per cent, well above the 61.2 per cent rate for women. Until recently, the percentage of women working in Canada, or looking for work, had risen fairly consistently for decades. This contributed to greater equality and economic independence for women, as well as economic growth. An aging workforce plays some role in this recent decline, but with fewer women 25 to 44 working or looking for work and no increase in the fertility rate for that age group, a lack of affordable child care may be a factor.

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Find *Economy at Work* online at [cupe.ca/economyatwork](http://cupe.ca/economyatwork) with links to relevant materials.

An email edition of *Economy at Work* is available. Subscribe at [cupe.ca/subscribe](http://cupe.ca/subscribe).

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# ECONOMIC DIRECTIONS

## Latest economic trends at a glance



<b>Economic growth</b>	Expectations of economic growth had improved with higher oil prices, but have been dampened by the Alberta wildfires. GDP is now expected to grow by 1.6 per cent this year and by 2.1 per cent in 2017.
<b>Employment</b>	With employment growing slower than the labour force, the national jobless rate is expected to rise to an average of 7.3 per cent this year and then decline slightly to 7.1 per cent in 2017.
<b>Inflation</b>	Overall consumer price inflation is expected to increase by 1.7 per cent this year and by about 2.2 per cent in 2017.
<b>Wages</b>	Average wage increases in major collective agreements settled in the first quarter of 2016 increased to 1.4 per cent from an average of 1.2 per cent in 2015. This is a positive direction, but still not above inflation.
<b>Interest rates</b>	If the economy continues to strengthen and the core rate of inflation rises, we can expect the Bank of Canada to increase its key lending rate towards the end of next year, but longer-term lending rates and mortgages will edge up sooner.



## SPOTLIGHT: Employment Equity

Many Canadians are aware of the need for pay equity, but there's been far less attention paid in recent years to the need for employment equity and better jobs for workers from equality-seeking groups.

Systemic discrimination and other barriers mean women, racialized workers, Indigenous workers, LGBTTI workers and workers with disabilities face greater challenges getting decent work that matches their skills – let alone equal pay. These workers tend to be concentrated in lower paid, insecure and more hazardous jobs.

The federal government, along with Quebec and Nunavut, are the only jurisdictions with legislation on employment equity. The federal law only applies to the six per cent of the workforce in federally-regulated workplaces. Even here, progress has been slow and the Harper government weakened the legislation.

Employment equity and



representative workforce programs give workers from designated groups fair access to jobs and work environments that encourage them to stay and advance in the workplace.

Measures like training and career development opportunities for all members of a designated group, and accommodations for people with disabilities, are also important.

A number of CUPE locals have bargained employment equity programs with their employers. CUPE has also significantly increased employment of Aboriginal people

in the health care and other sectors in Saskatchewan through the *Representative Workforce Strategy*, a comprehensive employment and training partnership to improve the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal workers.

Read our fact sheets on employment equity: [CUPE.CA/EMPLOYMENT-EQUITY-WORKPLACE-REFLECTS-COMMUNITY](http://CUPE.CA/EMPLOYMENT-EQUITY-WORKPLACE-REFLECTS-COMMUNITY), and pay equity: [CUPE.CA/CLOSING-WAGE-GAP-PAY-EQUITY](http://CUPE.CA/CLOSING-WAGE-GAP-PAY-EQUITY).

## Reconciliation takes action, not just words

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report into abuses at residential schools outlines 94 separate calls to action. CUPE immediately applauded the report, pledging to do our part as a labour organization and partnering with Indigenous allies to ensure governments fulfill their promise to fully implement the calls to action.

The Trudeau government has committed to a "renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership."

This is certainly welcome, but Indigenous people need action as well as words.

The 2016 budget commits \$2.6 billion for First Nations education, but \$1.45 billion of that amount won't be available until after the next federal election, when the Liberal Party may not be in power. The funding committed for essential infrastructure is also far below what is needed. For example, it's estimated that it will cost close to \$8 billion to ensure safe

drinking water for all First Nations communities, yet the 2016 budget only committed \$618 million.

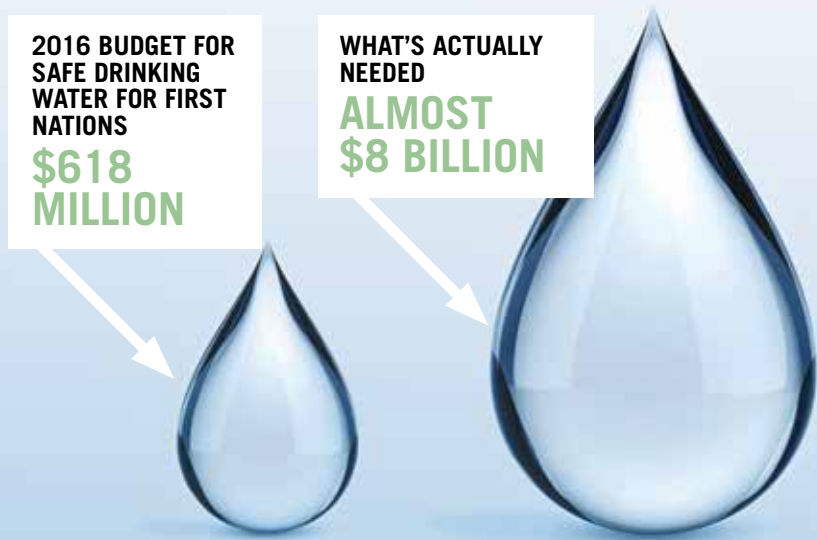
Mi'kmaw lawyer Dr. Pamela Palmater feels the federal government may be backsliding on its commitment to establish a "nation-to-nation relationship" with First Nations and ensure participation of Indigenous people in the economy.

Instead the budget refers to Indigenous nations as people, groups, communities and stakeholders. Partnerships which

were to be based on Indigenous peoples' right to free, prior and informed consent about decisions affecting their lives and lands have been turned into partnerships based on consultation, and where appropriate, accommodation.

True reconciliation will require more substantial and meaningful action to meet the promise of a genuine nation-to-nation relationship.

■ Don Moran



## CUPE and First Nation workers partner for better water

Water quality in First Nation communities has been described as "third world." Two-thirds of First Nation communities have been under at least one water advisory over the past decade. On any given day, one-third don't have safe drinking water.

The federal government recently pledged more funding for First

Nation water systems, but this is attracting for-profit P3 operators. In BC, a CUPE local and municipality have joined forces with the neighbouring First Nation to help increase the capacity of First Nations, instead of profiting off them.

CUPE 401 and the City of Nanaimo have developed an innovative partnership with the

Snuneymuxw First Nation (SFN). SFN workers are job shadowing CUPE 401 members to learn foundational skills in maintaining a quality public water system. The local hopes to expand the mentoring program out to First Nation communities across Vancouver Island.

# Education key in moving from discrimination to reconciliation

Reconciliation and rectifying the inequalities faced by Indigenous peoples will involve comprehensive action and significant investments but the benefits will be much higher. Education is key, but it is only part of the equation.

Inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians start at a young age and persist all through life. Indigenous children are twice as likely to die in their first year of life as non-Indigenous Canadians, three times as likely to live in poverty, only a third as likely to get a university degree and almost twice as likely to be unemployed.

Health conditions are also significantly worse for Indigenous peoples, who are seven times as likely to be murdered as non-Indigenous Canadians and can expect to live five to 10 years less on average than non-Indigenous Canadians.

When Indigenous peoples benefit from the same quality of public services, education and opportunities as non-Indigenous Canadians, these economic, health and social gaps narrow significantly.

Better living conditions, economic opportunities and education are essential, and they are also interconnected. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission revealed how damage from residential schools lasts for many generations. Tens of thousands of Indigenous children continue to be taken from their families and adopted out or placed with foster parents. Indigenous children are still placed in foster care as wards of the state at 25 times

the rate of non-Indigenous children.

Living and economic conditions must be improved to prevent this from continuing.

In a recent landmark decision, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled the federal government discriminates against First Nations children on reserves by failing to provide the same level of child welfare services that exist elsewhere—and then followed up on their decision three months later to press for faster action.

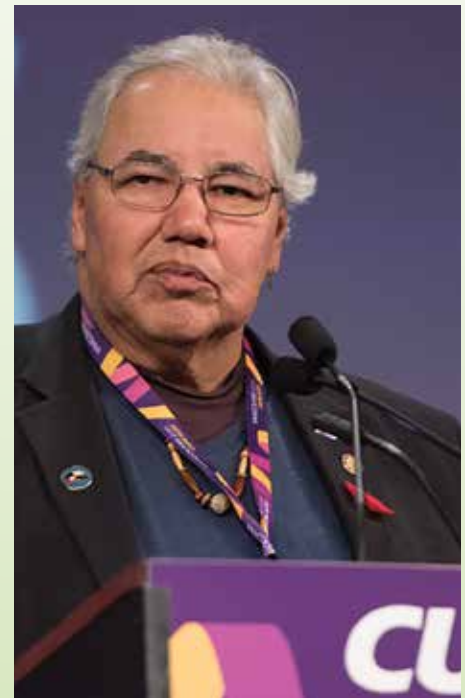
As Truth and Reconciliation Commission Chair Justice Murray Sinclair has said, while First Nations saw education as a right when treaties were first signed, throughout history it has instead been used as a tool for assimilation.

Education is key, but as with other public services, it must be culturally-appropriate high quality education controlled by First Nations that celebrates Indigenous culture and languages instead of erasing them, and needs to start at a young age. Early childhood education and care programs, such as the very successful Kat'odeeche First Nations Children's Centre in Hay River, NWT, can make an extraordinary difference for generations to come.

"Reconciliation will not occur overnight. This is not just a problem for Aboriginal people; it is a problem for the entire country," Sinclair told delegates to CUPE's 2015 national convention. "Canada has a shameful past. But we don't need to carry this shame any further, as long as we commit to

a relationship of mutual respect originally envisioned in the treaties."

We all have an enormous amount to gain socially, economically and culturally from diverse Indigenous peoples and communities. In purely monetary terms Canada's economic output would be \$36.5 billion higher and government finances would improve by \$17.7 billion in 10 years if these education, labour market and social well-being gaps were eliminated, according to analysis by the Canadian Centre for the Study of Living Standards. But what's far more important than the economic impact is what we all gain socially and culturally by moving from a relationship of inequality and discrimination to one of greater equality and mutual respect.



*Justice Murray Sinclair*

# Pay equity laws help end gender wage discrimination

CUPE has been a leader on pay equity since our inception, and we continue to challenge gender wage discrimination.

In the 1960s, we forced an end to separate collective agreements for men and women. Since then, we've won pay equity battles in every province – some through legislated pay equity plans, others through bargaining, including strikes. CUPE's equality history timeline documents groundbreaking pay equity wins.

Pay equity legislation has narrowed the gender pay gap, but discrimination persists, and we press for better laws. The complaints-based system that exists in federally-regulated workplaces and four provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador) has failed. Pay equity legislation in Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island boosted

equity but was a one-time initiative and only covered certain workplaces. The New Brunswick law has similar flaws, and adjustments are slow to come.

Our greatest success has been in Ontario (600 joint pay equity plans) and Quebec (300 plans). These two provinces have proactive laws that cover both the public and private sectors. Even in those provinces, we are challenging regulatory gaps. At the federal level, CUPE is currently pressing for federal pay equity legislation.

Better pay equity laws are needed because gender pay gaps persist despite women's increased education and labour force participation. Canada has the seventh largest wage gap of 34 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries. Women working full-time and full-year in Canada earn 72 per cent of what men earn, on average. Racialized,

immigrant and Indigenous women and women with disabilities get paid even less, on average.

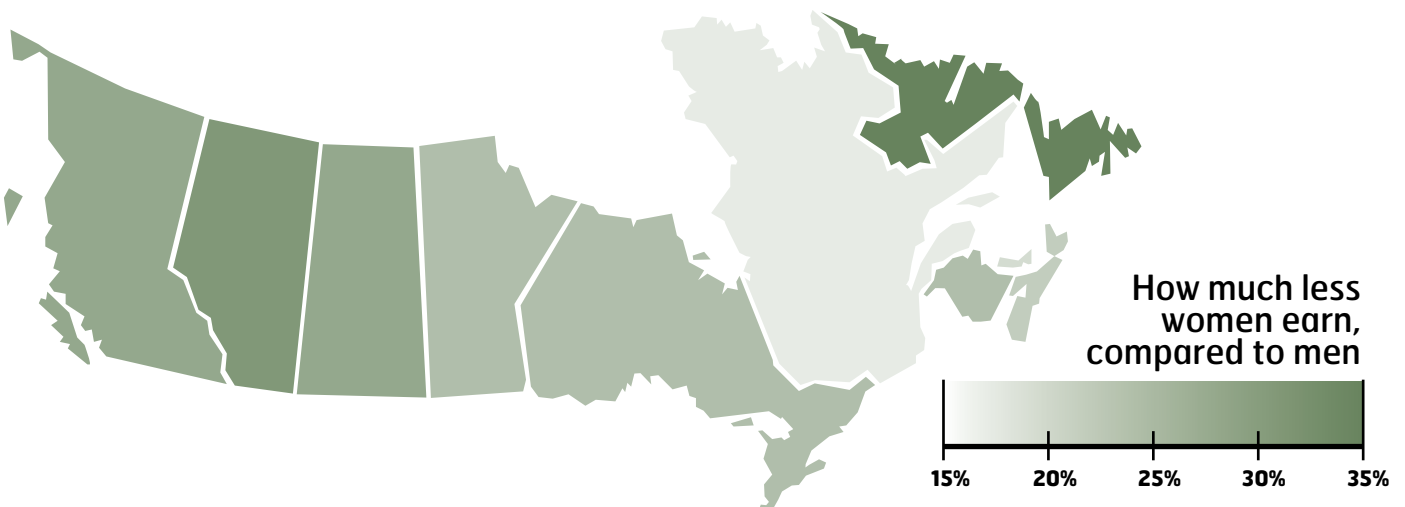
Pay equity laws are only part of the solution. We also need employment equity, universal child care, strong public services, decent work, living wages, free collective bargaining, tax reform and other measures to end the gender earnings gap.

See CUPE's submission to the federal House of Commons Special Committee on Pay Equity for more on our campaigns for stronger pay equity laws and the part they play in ending wage discrimination.

■ Irene Jansen

Check out our equality history timeline: [CUPE.CA/CUPE-EQUALITY-HISTORY-DIGITAL-TIMELINE](http://CUPE.CA/CUPE-EQUALITY-HISTORY-DIGITAL-TIMELINE), and our submission on pay equity: [CUPE.CA/CUPE-RENEWS-CALL-FEDERAL-PAY-EQUITY-LEGISLATION](http://CUPE.CA/CUPE-RENEWS-CALL-FEDERAL-PAY-EQUITY-LEGISLATION).

## Gender wage gap bigger in provinces with no pay equity law



## Minimum, living and fair wages: What's the difference?

**Minimum Wages** are the lowest wage employers can legally pay workers according to legislation or contract. Minimum wages were first introduced in Canada in 1918 to protect female workers in certain jobs. At the time, unions felt they could more effectively ensure adequate wages for men, but women were largely unorganized and so more easily exploited.

In Canada, hourly minimum wages range from a low of \$10.40 in British Columbia to \$13 in Nunavut. Minimum wages have not kept pace with inflation. The average remains below what it was in 1976, after adjusting for inflation. One in 14 workers receive only the minimum wage, with women, young, racialized and part-time workers much more likely to be paid the minimum wage.

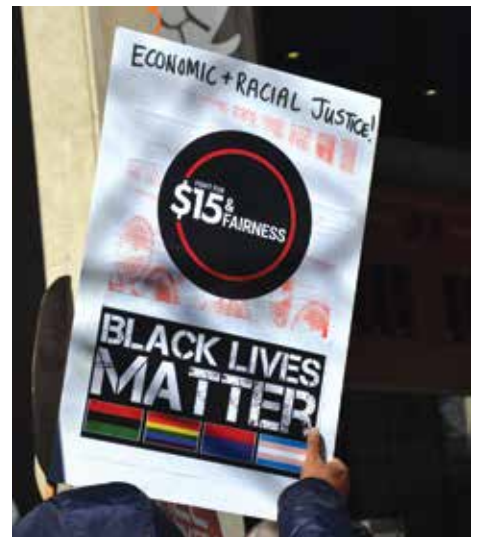
**Fair Wages** are minimum wage rates for specific occupations. They must be paid by contractors doing work for governments with fair wage policies. These policies generally apply to construction, trades and sometimes cleaning and security workers, and are often tied to union wage rates. They're intended to ensure contractors pay decent wages on government contracts instead of slashing wages and benefits.



The City of Toronto introduced the first fair wage policy in 1893, before minimum wages existed. Since then the federal government, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, the Yukon and a number of municipalities have adopted (and sometimes subsequently repealed) fair wage policies.

A **Living Wage** is the wage needed to provide the minimum income necessary to pay for basic needs based on the cost of living in a specific community. Calculations of living wages vary significantly: from about \$14 an hour in some communities to just over \$20 in Metro Vancouver and Yellowknife. Living wages rely on public and private employers voluntarily agreeing to pay them.

At CUPE's 2015 National Convention, delegates passed a resolution urging our union to push for living wages as the minimum wage across Canada. The resolution calls on members to support living wage campaigns, and to work towards bargaining a living wage for all members. CUPE's Strategic Directions also sets a goal of achieving a minimum \$19/hour wage for all members by the end of 2017.



Continued from page 1

Canada, backed by many labour organizations. Alberta's NDP government has pledged to increase its minimum wage to \$15, and the Ontario and federal NDP both support a \$15 minimum wage.

Three Black women organizing in their community started the **BLACK LIVES MATTER** (BLM) movement to confront racism. BLM activists in many cities – including recently in Toronto – are naming and resisting police brutality, racial profiling, discrimination in the justice system and broader economic and social inequality. BLM's core message of affirmation builds on the civil rights and Black liberation movements.

While initiated by and identified with the rights of specific groups of people, these movements connect us all. They draw strong support from labour unions and everyone pushing for a more equitable and sustainable society.

Political equality and economic equality are interconnected. The 20<sup>th</sup> century “rights revolution” was also a time of increasing economic equality and growth, but it's an unfinished revolution. Movements like INM, BLM and Fight for \$15 show what's possible when people organize and mobilize in their communities in the fight for greater justice and equality for all.

# Migrant workers rising up for dignity and justice

Migrant workers do some of the most important work in our country, like harvesting our food and caring for seniors and our children. These workers often face dangerous working conditions, live in substandard housing, and have little access to protection or social services.

A growing movement of migrants and their allies is organizing to resist this exploitation. In October 2015 the *Coalition for Migrant Workers' Rights Canada* was founded with a simple goal: “to re-build the immigration system to ensure basic dignity and fairness for everyone.”

The federal Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) sets the ground rules for migrant worker exploitation. The program’s system of work permits ties workers to one employer. This makes it very difficult for workers to leave when there is physical or economic abuse. Their temporary immigration status – and the threat of deportation – means workers are vulnerable if they speak out or organize against workplace injustice.

By creating a pool of vulnerable workers, the TFWP gives employers too much power, and creates a disincentive for them to provide better wages, benefits and conditions to all workers. Now, rules about temporary workers are being incorporated into trade and investment deals like the

Trans-Pacific Partnership.

The more insidious impact of the TFWP is the unfounded fear that migrants are ‘stealing the jobs of Canadian workers.’ This divides Canadian workers when we need to unite and fight economic insecurity and the expansion of precarious employment. We don’t need fewer workers, whether Canadian or foreign-born. We need a more equitable economic system. That starts with investment in skills training and apprenticeships, living wages and income security, strong social programs and public services, a robust immigration program and permanent residency for all foreign workers when they arrive.

Earlier this year, labour, community and faith groups organized

a first-of-its-kind forum, *Equal in Dignity, Equal in Rights*, in Fredericton, NB. Participants learned from migrant workers about their experiences, and focused on how to fix the TFWP. “This forum gives me hope,” said one migrant worker. “We are so glad we came. We learned there are people who support us and who do not see us as nameless and faceless migrant workers who steal jobs from Canadians.”

On the heels of this forum, the federal government has announced a review of the TFWP. Migrants and their allies, including CUPE, are mobilizing to stop tying migrant workers to specific employers, and demanding a transition to permanent immigration status upon arrival for all migrant workers. Migrant voices need to be heard.

■ Kelti Cameron

Read our fact sheet:  
**CUPE.CA/FACT-SHEET-TEMPORARY-FOREIGN-WORKERS-PROGRAM-AND-LIVE-CAREGIVER-PROGRAM.**



**CMWRC**

Coalition for Migrant Worker Rights Canada