

## First Nations Peoples Deserve a Real Budget

After taking an extended holiday, the House of Commons will reopen on January 26 and the government will present its budget for 2009. While the Harper government has been taking an untimely break, communities across Canada have been actively mobilizing to demand concrete action to protect our economy and jobs.

As the largest private sector union in the country, with over 250,000 members from coast to coast, the United Food and Commercial Workers of Canada (UFCW Canada), has been at the forefront of the campaign for a fair budget that reflects the needs of working people and all communities in Canada. UFCW Canada and our members continue to be a strong voice against Harper's economic statement of November 27, 2008 which ignored the current economic crisis facing workers in this country.

Our members have sent numerous emails and letters expressing their anger and frustration at the government's failure to act and joined thousands of others at rallies across the country to let Harper know that although he shut down parliament he could not hide from the people.

With efforts like UFCW Canada's *Canadians Deserve a Real Budget* campaign we have succeeded in shifting the public debate back to the issues that matter – the economy and the pressing needs of working people and their communities – however there is a great deal more to do.

As a union, UFCW Canada has an intrinsic commitment to economic and social justice. Our principles of justice, equality and dignity mean a commitment to solidarity with communities who have been historically oppressed. As such UFCW Canada has always stood shoulder to shoulder with First Nations and Indigenous Peoples in demanding that the Harper government respects the needs and rights of these communities.

In the context of an economic downturn, solidarity means raising our voice to join the demands for a First Nations Economic Stimulus Package. First Nations communities have historically been subjected to severe negative economic conditions even prior to the economic downturn. Many First Nations communities across the country are in dire need of fundamental infrastructure due to a lack of investment from the federal government. According to the 2005 Kelowna Accord billions are needed for First Nations communities to address basic needs such as clean water.

An economy that is struggling, as the current Canadian economy is, will only translate to even greater strains on First Nations peoples. As such, UFCW Canada demands that the Harper government provide a *Real Budget* for First Nations peoples. We know that strong First Nations communities mean a strong Canada.

UFCW Canada echoes the AFN National Chief Phil Fontaine's call for the Canadian government to take immediate action on a First Nations Economic Stimulus Package in light of the economic downturn and on addressing the infrastructure crisis in First Nations communities. It is a national embarrassment that not everyone has equal access to clean water and safe and adequate housing.

As the global economic crisis continues to negatively impact Canada's economy, it's time for our federal government to stop this crisis from becoming a devastating catastrophe for First Nations Communities.