

MONITOR

Progressive news, views and ideas



CCPA
CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
CENTRE CANADIEN
de POLITIQUES ALTERNATIVES

FALL 2024

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Dave Murray is a Toronto-based illustrator and coffee drinker. When he's not in his studio, Dave can be found playing hockey, walking his dog, and cheering for the Montréal Canadiens.

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Joss MacLennan is the creative director of Joss MacLennan Design. She combines a passion for clear, simple language with a strong visual sense. Her background is mainly in design, but includes painting, drawing and illustration as well. Decades of experience help her find the central message and the way to convey it.

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Founded in 1980, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) is a registered charitable research institute and Canada's leading source of progressive policy ideas, with offices in Ottawa, Vancouver, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto and Halifax. The CCPA founded the *Monitor* magazine in 1994 to share and promote its progressive research and ideas, as well as those of like-minded Canadian and international voices. The *Monitor* is published four times a year by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and is mailed to all supporters who give more than \$35 a year to the Centre. Write us at monitor@policyalternatives.ca with feedback or if you would like to receive the *Monitor*.

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Erika Shaker

How the CCPA plans to counter misinformation—and how you can help

Sensational headlines. Viral videos. Harmful “fake news”. Imagine a political landscape where the truth is drowned out by misinformation.

No, we don't live in America. However, our elections here in Canada could look a lot like those south of the border if we don't do something about the rapid spread of misinformation before it's too late.

Canada's next federal election is scheduled to take place on October 25, 2025. But it could happen at any time.

The CCPA is uniquely positioned to combat misinformation. But we need your help.

Policy Horizons Canada sees so much danger in the spread of misinformation they have identified it as one of the biggest threats facing our country right now.

You, I, and many of our fellow Canadians agree. A poll commissioned by CPAC found that 84 per cent of respondents are concerned about the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

Misinformation has the power to undermine our democracy. It clouds judgment, broadens divisions, and twists the truth. It threatens the progress we've made on the issues we care about—income inequality, the climate crisis, our care economy (like health care), and so many other progressive values we hold dear.

With stakes this high, I'm asking you to please consider making a special gift to the CCPA today. Your contribution will support our expert team in responding quickly and effectively to misinformation.

From our flagship annual Alternative Federal Budget to our timely and accessible research on income wealth inequality, housing, affordability, gender inequality, the care economy and climate change, the CCPA has proven itself to be a respected think tank, and a trusted member of civil society.

We may not have the big corporate funding of right-wing pseudo think tanks, but we do have you, and other thoughtful and concerned people who believe in fighting for what's just and fair. I've seen what we can accomplish when we work together.

Every dollar you give today will help the CCPA step up efforts to cut through the noise and provide factual, clear, and actionable insights that can shape the future of our country.

Misinformation clouds our judgment. It twists the truth. We're committed to cutting through misinformation campaigns with the facts, evidence.

When I first started at the CCPA back in 1997, the internet had not yet completely taken over our lives. Do you remember that time? Reporters were held accountable with some degree of journalistic integrity and the pace of life was much, much slower.

Today, as I'm sure you know all too well, everything moves at warp speed. Trust in mainstream news is falling and people get much of their information from podcasts and social media, where algorithms rule and content can spread quickly... whether it's truthful or not.

I think of what it must have been like for my parents to grow up in a world without social safety nets like publicly funded health care, the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). I'm grateful for the people before me who fought hard to bring us these securities. The thought of watching it all be chipped away in the name of “progress” terrifies me.

We can't let this happen. I refuse to look at my kids and tell them that this is the best we can do. I refuse to believe that our country has already seen its best days.

The stakes are high, and the challenges we face are growing. With the next federal election on the horizon, we must be vigilant and ready to dismantle misinformation when it begins to circulate.

Together, let's continue to fight for policies that benefit everyone in Canada, not just the wealthy and powerful.

Erika Shaker,
Director, CCPA National Office

Trish Hennessy

Fighting for our rights

Transnational activism in North America

In the early days of the CCPA, Canada's free trade debate was a galvanizing force.

Our experts joined the movement opposing the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement, on which former U.S. President Ronald Reagan campaigned in 1979.

Negotiations on the deal began in 1986 but reached a fever pitch during the 1988 election, after which re-elected Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney signed the unpopular agreement.

Like many political battles, the road to trade justice can be long and winding. This issue of the *Monitor* looks at transnational activism around trade agreements in North America, with a focus on Mexico.

From NAFTA—the free trade agreement that replaced the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement—to CUSMA, which replaced NAFTA, NGOs, labour and social justice movements continue to resist neoliberal market ideology.

Tamara Kay's lead article focuses on the role labour transnationalism played in supporting hard-fought labour reform victories by and for Mexican workers.

"The profundity of the change in the Mexican labour law regime cannot be overstated," writes Kay.

While CUSMA still tilts the balance in favour of corporations, it's also been the catalyst for unified action among workers in all three countries.

"NAFTA—the concrete embodiment of globalization in North America—had the unanticipated consequence of catalyzing labour transnationalism, defined as ongoing cooperative and collaborative relationships among Mexican,

U.S. and Canadian unions and union federations," writes Kay.

A new Rapid Response Labour Mechanism in CUSMA was "designed to support constitutional and labour law reforms undertaken by the Mexican government between 2017 and 2019," Laura Macdonald writes. It's specific to key facilities, it leads to rapid resolution, and it's tough: "Harsh sanctions can be levied on companies that fail to remedy proven labour rights violations."

Like everything, it takes pressure from the ground up to ensure new agreements and institutions benefiting workers are adhered to—and to push for more.

In Mexico, Indigenous Peoples have been organizing against the Mayan train, a megaproject putatively aimed at providing easier access to archaeological sites and UNESCO World Heritage destinations.

However, the plan is going ahead without consent from the Mayan people, who are resisting it. In this issue, Laura Primeau writes about how that resistance benefited from transnational connections and international law.

"Organizations...took legal action against the government," writes Primeau. "They contend that the Mayan train violates Article 4 of the Mexican constitution, which guarantees the right to a healthy environment, as well as rights to clean water and to information, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples established in international human rights treaties ratified by Mexico and also protected by the constitution.

"Their message was clear: in a commonly used phrase among

activists, the Mayan train is "not just a train, and it is certainly not Mayan." It is a mega project that reorganizes Mayan territories in the name of 'national development.'"

In a similar story of collective resistance, Eduardo Mendoza writes about activism in San Diego and Tijuana—border cities that: "have become a lightning rod for political debates about migration in both the United States and Mexico. The politicization of migration issues, which escalated in the Trump era, has placed extreme pressures on these cities and on the migrants themselves, who are exposed to diverse risks and vulnerabilities."

Mendoza interviewed NGOs that help migrants in both cities, and writes about their role in "shaping the socio-political landscape and fostering cross-border solidarity and resilience."

In a Q&A with Carlos Heredia, the influential Mexican civil society activist and academic who fought NAFTA reinforces the importance of building "joint answers" to the challenges we face: "Over time, what we concluded was that it was not trade measures that were at heart being negotiated.... A national project was being negotiated. A social pact, indeed."

This issue of the *Monitor* is a reminder that, in the two years leading up to the next CUSMA review, people have the power to reshape trade agreements so they work in the public interest. When the resistance goes transnational, wins are possible. **M**



Dear Monitor readers,

You are a vital part of the *Monitor* community—we welcome your feedback and insights! Please keep letters to the editor to 250 words or less, please add your full name and the name of the community that you live in, and please send to: monitor@policyalternatives.ca.

Summer 2024 Monitor

While your Summer 2024 issue makes a strong case for a truly progressive income tax regime in Canada, there is one other area of federal government spending that is often overlooked in our public debates. The area in question is defence spending, which in the latest federal budget is in the order of \$15 billion, with projected additional expenditures of \$8 billion over the next five years and \$70 billion over the next 30 years.

Since government revenues are limited, and discretionary spending in particular, resources allocated to defence priorities inevitably incur opportunity costs in relation to other areas of expenditure.

While the burgeoning defence budget is deemed

necessary to meet our NATO commitment in an increasingly dangerous world, these substantial resources devoted to defence are not available to help address the existential threat posed by irreversible global warming and ecological collapse. The costs of global warming and impacts on climate are enormous, and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projections of accelerated warming pose huge risks not only to ecosystems but also to human communities.

Surely the time has come to address the climate crisis in terms of the financial and human resources that will be needed in Canada (not to mention globally) to ensure the human security of our people, i.e., the necessary transition to a sustainable green economy, including needed upgrading of transportation and urban infrastructure, a robust health care system with a capacity to address future epidemics, etc.

However unrealistic it may seem to contemplate radical changes in government budgets and priorities, the overwhelming threat of climate change is unavoidable, and as Seth Klein has argued in *A Good War: Mobilizing Canada for the Climate Emergency*, our collective response must take the measure of the threat.

Scott Burbidge
Port Williams, N.S.

Re: “Canada’s failure to adequately address the Israel/Palestine crisis” in *Monitor* Summer 2024

During the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the occupied West Bank this is an important article to highlight Canada’s enabling of and complicity in it.

Most Canadians are probably unaware of our government’s active role, on behalf of the U.S.A. and Great Britain, in the UN’s unjust partition of Palestine in November of 1947.

Canada’s foreign policy toward the Middle East and Israel has been and continues to be determined in Washington, D.C., where the “two state solution” fantasy continues to be promoted in spite of the evidence on the ground and the statements by the Israeli prime minister and cabinet members.

It’s highly unlikely that a change in Canada’s government will result in an improvement for the suffering Palestinians.

Ted Turner
Toronto ON

Military industrial complex

Canada’s former Chief of Defence Staff Wayne Eyre commented that the proposal to cut \$15 billion from the federal budget would cost our military \$1 billion off of a military budget of \$26.5 billion for this year.

For Canada, NATO’s (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) demands have resulted increased military spending from \$20 billion in 2014 to \$39 billion in 2023 and, at two per cent,

will add \$18 billion, for an unbelievable, or should I say an unconscionable, \$57 billion for the military,

Meanwhile, the 2024 budget commits only \$8.6 billion for housing, \$9.2 billion for Indigenous programs and \$14.2 billion for badly needed climate change initiatives.

Really! Billions being spent on guns and bullets when we have a crisis in medicine, housing, education, infrastructure and poverty (over 116,000 children in B.C. alone), not to mention seniors and so many others living in tent cities. Cruel and inhumane, to say the least.

I ask, by whom are we being threatened? We are spending 1.3 per cent of GDP on defence, short of the two per cent our country has already pledged to NATO, for what? To interfere, provoke, or wage endless wars, as has been done in countries such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, and, now, the Ukraine, to name a few, and without agreement of what was supposed to be, for all intents and purposes, to end all war, our world parliament, the United Nations.

We have become part of what former General and U.S. President Eisenhower warned against: the unconscionable profiteering world of the Military Industrial Complex.

If we want to spend billions on war, let it be a war on climate change.

Bill Zander
New Westminster, B.C.



New from the CCPA

CCPA-BC Update

As B.C. gears up for its provincial election, our B.C. office is committed to providing policy solutions for the province's most pressing issues. We will soon release research on housing affordability, health care financing, migrant care work and the gig economy—all areas where policy interventions are urgently needed. We're doing this with a new director at the steering wheel—Kevin Millsip.

We're pleased to announce Kevin Millsip as our new director. Kevin has been an integral part of our community, serving on our steering committee before stepping into this leadership role.

Kevin comes to us from the B.C. Libraries Cooperative, where he was the executive director and developed a project to support libraries'



Kevin Millsip joins the CCPA-BC as its new director

engagement in tackling the climate crisis. His pioneering work includes co-founding Check Your Head and Next Up, which foster young social change leaders. His tenure as a Vancouver School Board Trustee, where he subsequently focused on sustainable food systems, underscores his dedication to environmental and educational issues. He's also involved with the Columbia Institute and serves on the boards of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, and the Wilderness Committee.

2024 Rosenbluth Lecture

Join us on October 9 for the 2024 Rosenbluth Lecture featuring Katharina Pistor, the Edwin B. Parker Professor of Comparative Law at Columbia Law School. Pistor's research covers corporate law, governance, and finance. Her latest book, *The Code of Capital: How the Law Creates Wealth and Inequality*, is a must read. The annual Gideon Rosenbluth Memorial Lecture honours Rosenbluth's commitment to social justice and community involvement. Registration details will soon be shared on our website and e-newsletter.

2024 CCPA-BC Annual Gala

Mark your calendar for Thursday, November 7, as the CCPA-BC Gala returns with keynote speaker Dr. Vandana Shiva, a world-renowned environmental activist. For over four decades, Dr. Shiva has driven global change in agriculture,

food sovereignty and bioethics. She has led movements connecting the dots between nature's destruction, societal polarization and corporate greed. This event, held at Fraserview Hall in Vancouver, will be an evening of conversation, good food and celebration. Early bird tickets are \$125. The first 200 ticket buyers will receive a link to stream *The Seeds of Vandana Shiva* in September. Don't miss out—secure your spot now! Get your tickets at ccpabc.ca/gala.

We look forward to your continued support and engagement with the CCPA-BC community.

CCPA Manitoba Office

Bridging the gap between climate change mitigation and affordability has become more important than ever.

In June, the CCPA Manitoba hosted a webinar with Senior Researcher Niall Harney, Zach Rempel from the International Institute for Sustainable Development, and Heather Fast from the Manitoba Eco-Network. They discussed how governments can pursue affordability while maintaining a focus on greenhouse gas emission (GHG) reduction. In addition, the panelists provided critical information on carbon capture and storage, the federal carbon tax, the provincial gas tax holiday, and energy governance. Find a recording of the webinar on the CCPA-MB Youtube page.



Senior Researcher Niall Harney hosted a webinar on climate change mitigation and affordability

The provincial government, elected in Manitoba last October, is serving during a critical four-year window for climate action. Manitoba is one of the only provinces in Canada without 2030 or 2050 GHG reduction targets. If Manitoba is to do its part to meet federal targets—set in line with the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—we need to reduce our emissions 45 per cent below 2010 levels (an 11,000 Mt cut from 2022).

Getting households off of fossil fuels is key to long-term affordability. Research from the International Institute for Sustainable Development showed that volatile fossil fuel prices accounted for 33 per cent of the Canadian Consumer Price Index increase in 2021-22. Meanwhile, as global temperature records continue to fall, the mounting costs of inaction are becoming more apparent.

The CCPA-MB will continue working on this file over the next 12 months, providing insight on how the energy transition can be seized as an opportunity to create good jobs, reduce inequalities, and build resilience. Stay tuned for more!

CCPA National Office

With Parliament Hill back in session for the fall, the CCPA National Office will be watching for the inevitable ramp-up toward the 2025 federal election. It's scheduled for October 2025, but with a minority government, anything is possible.

Of course, we'll be pushing for improvements to health care and seniors' care, an expansion of \$10-a-day child care spaces so that more families can access them, the adoption of the bill to make pharmacare a reality, and an expansion of services provided under the new national dental care program.

We'll also be going into pre-election mode on two fronts: (1) We'll be monitoring any new promises from the federal parties—fact checking and assessing their merit; (2) We'll be countering any and all misinformation campaigns, whether it's about workers' rights, public services, the economy, immigration, taxation...the list is long!

We've also released our newest Alternative Federal Budget (AFB), which is the CCPA's election platform for 2025. We'll be promoting progressive solutions to the key challenges of our time, including the climate crisis, threats to democracy, worsening income inequality, and a vision for Canada that unites us, rather than divides us.

CCPA Ontario Office

Following the retirement of senior economist Sheila Block, CCPA Ontario is delighted to introduce our newest colleague. Dr. Carolina Aragão is a seasoned economist and demographer who comes to us with experience in public finance, the labour movement, and the world of progressive think tanks. As an analyst, she brings special expertise in studying the differential impacts of government policies on different segments of the population. That's a critically important skill when economic inequality continues to plague wealthy societies like ours.

Carolina has her work cut out for her: the core policy of the current Ontario government is all about increasing inequality by transferring wealth from public hands to private operators. In long-term care, in housing, in our hospitals, and in the creation of new child care spaces, Queen's Park's central concern is not quality of service, or even responsible stewardship of public funds: it is the generation of profit.

This motivation was on full display this summer when the government moved to allow alcohol sales in 8,500 new for-profit outlets. The government paid \$225 million to The Beer Store, owned by international brewers, for no other reason than to speed up the handover of alcohol sales to private operators. CCPA Ontario analysis estimates the change could cost provincial coffers \$510

million a year—revenue we desperately need to fund health, education, and the many other services Ontarians rely on.

With the premier refusing to rule out an early election, countering this destructive agenda remains an urgent priority for CCPA Ontario.

CCPA Nova Scotia Office

The Nova Scotia office published *Building Inclusive Communities: A policy agenda for Nova Scotia municipalities that leaves no one behind*, which outlines policy recommendations ahead of upcoming municipal elections. The report lays out ways to turn the values of social, climate and economic justice into concrete policy realities to improve people's lives across this province. It includes sets of questions residents can ask candidates about their values and priorities, and how they would shape the future of their communities should they be elected.

We held our Annual General Meeting, and a discussion with panelists offering thought-provoking insights into equity issues facing different areas of education across the province, and the policy changes needed to address them. The video is available on our youtube channel.

Our living wage rates and the updated report were out just after Labour Day.

Our gala fundraiser will be held on November

7, 2024. It will be a celebration marking the Nova Scotia office's 25th anniversary, with special guests. We hope to see you there!

CCPA Saskatchewan Office

While the next Saskatchewan election is only a few months away, there has been remarkably little discussion of actual policy. Both the Saskatchewan Party and the NDP seem more focused on personalities and character than concrete ideas that can prepare our province for the future. Given the enormous challenges that will face us in the coming years, this lack of ideas seems all the more disappointing. Luckily, supporters of the Saskatchewan Office are not shy about sharing their vision for a better Saskatchewan! We collected some of the best policy ideas shared with us from supporters across the province on how to improve Saskatchewan. We are happy to share those ideas in this issue of the Monitor. While our political leaders might be lacking in policy creativity and innovation, the same cannot be said for CCPA Saskatchewan supporters! Please take the time to read and share what a truly progressive vision for our province's future could look like. **M**

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood
National Office

Wildfires are a warning

It's time to tackle climate change

Another terrible wildfire season is behind us. The link between climate change and wildfires is well established. As the planet warms, it creates more favourable conditions for fires to start and spread during our hot, dry summers. Meanwhile, warmer winters and reduced snow-pack means the buffer between wildfire seasons is becoming shorter and more permeable.

Canadian governments have responded by spending more money on firefighting. That is no doubt essential. In this new normal of predictably widespread fires, we need more resources to keep people safe across the country.

But upping our firefighting muscle is a band-aid solution. Like climate adaptation more broadly—everything from flood-proofing homes to requiring climate risk disclosure in the financial system—firefighting is necessary but not sufficient for addressing the climate crisis.

A study published by the National Bureau of Economic Research in the U.S. finds that global warming of three degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2100—roughly the planet's current trajectory—will lead to “precipitous declines in output, capital and consumption that exceed 50%” around the world.

Or, in other words, failing to curb global warming could cut the global economy in half.

For Canada, that means an economic loss of around a trillion dollars per year. A 2022 paper from the Canadian Climate Institute similarly warned of an \$865 billion per year hit to the Canadian economy by the end of the century in a high-emissions scenario.

These projected losses are so big that our economy simply could not survive them. And that's the key takeaway here. Whatever we think of the costs of mitigating and adapting to climate change, it will be dramatically more expensive over the long term if we do nothing.

The wildfires we're grappling with today are just the tip of the iceberg.

The good news is these costs are not foregone conclusions. In fact, we already know what the solutions are for reducing greenhouse gas



emissions to tackle climate change and avoid long-term economic devastation.

At its core, reducing emissions is an issue of eliminating fossil fuels. We must stop producing and consuming coal, oil and gas as quickly as possible. There are other sources of emissions that we also need to think carefully about, such as methane from livestock farming, but dealing with the fossil fuel problem will get us almost the whole way there.

For Canada, that requires a clear plan to wind down oil and gas production just like we did with coal-fired power generation. We need to accelerate the transition already underway from internal combustion engines to zero-emission vehicles. And we need to replace oil and gas heating with electric heat pumps in our homes and buildings.

To ensure there are good jobs in a productive, clean economy, we also need to invest in economic alternatives. There may be no future for the fossil fuel industry in a climate-safe world, but there is also no shortage of new opportunities in clean industries.

We can have an economy that produces zero emissions and raises the standard of living at the same time, but only if we choose it.

Politicians today are afraid to take big steps to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels. Whether due to cynical industry lobbying or ideological opposition to public leadership, we are left with half measures that fail to significantly reduce emissions or inspire Canadians to embrace greener alternatives.

The costs of wildfires today and the costs of inaction down the road should force a rethink. We can't afford not to. ●

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood is a senior researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.



iStock

Ricardo Tranjan
Ontario Office

Rent is driving up inflation, and that's easy to solve

For over a year, the two main contributors to inflation have been mortgage interest costs and rents. Since the Bank of Canada won't lower interest rates unless inflation comes down, controlling rents is the best strategy to rein in inflation.

There are many factors driving inflation that governments can't control. But they can control rents—if they choose to do so.

At the onset of the current high-inflation period, in 2021, supply-chain bottlenecks and energy costs were the main factors behind price increases.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted production in multiple ways, making many products less available and more expensive. For example, new cars became hard to find and prices went up. Russia's invasion of Ukraine drove up oil prices and, with it, the price of goods and services that require fuel and transportation—which is almost everything.

But that's not what's driving inflation today.

Between May 2023 and May 2024, mortgage interest costs rose 23.3 per cent, and rents 8.9 per cent, compared to the 2.9 per cent headline inflation figure.

Like many other countries, Canada is using interest rate increases to fight inflation. The general theory is that as firms and individuals spend more on servicing their debts, they will have less money to spend on everything else, slowing down the economy and pulling prices down. It's a bitter pill. Economic slowdowns fuel unemployment, hurting workers the most.

Higher interest rates also make mortgages more expensive. Homeowners with variable-rate mortgages feel the pinch right away, while those on fixed-rate mortgages are hit when they renew their mortgages.

Data on rents show that whenever interest rates shoot up, rents follow suit. This is because landlords pass increased mortgage costs on to tenants. Even if landlords' costs don't increase much—buildings are often financed through 10-year fixed-rate mortgages, and many have long been paid for—high inflation and high interest rates give predatory landlords a handy excuse to hike up rents.

International production supply chains and oil prices are largely out of the hands of national and provincial governments. Rents are not.

Provincial governments have the authority to impose or strengthen rent controls, but they're not doing so. In provinces where controls don't currently exist—Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador—governments are simply looking the other way.

Nova Scotia has extended its temporary and weak rent controls, which is a wiser, if timid, move.

Where controls exist—P.E.I., Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and B.C.—loopholes like vacant unit exemptions, new-unit exemptions, and applications for additional increases allow landlords to hike rents. Last year, Ontario landlords increased rents in vacant units by an average of 36 per cent.

Blaming the federal government for high inflation is easier than confronting powerful landlord lobbies. So blaming the feds is what the provinces are doing.

That being said, the federal government could act, too.

In the mid-1970s, one of Ottawa's main anti-inflation measures was to persuade provinces to impose rent controls. It worked. When inflation hit 12.5 per cent in 1981, rent inflation was 6.4 per cent. Controlling rents helped tame inflation.

Today, uncontrolled rents are pushing inflation up.

In the 2024 federal budget, the federal government announced the creation of a *Renters' Bill of Rights*. So far, it looks like this bill will not include rent controls; a grave mistake.

If inflation doesn't decline, the Bank of Canada will keep interest rates higher for longer, which will cost tenants and homeowners dearly.

The solution is simple—bring in strong rent controls across the country. Now, not later. ●

Ricardo Tranjan, PhD, is a political economist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and author of *The Tenant Class*.



Carole Clarke helps launch the Polaris Lectures in Ottawa

Karl Flecker
National Office

Good troublemakers

As the Polaris Institute closes, we pay tribute to its founder, Tony Clarke. The CCPA will be sponsoring a speaker's series in his honour.

Decades ago, I met Tony Clarke at a campus event in London, Ontario. He was speaking to a large crowd. You know the type, people who are drawn to challenging corporate rule.

Most of those in the room had either lived experiences and/or a moral compass that drew them to challenge injustice.

Tony was laying out some of the fundamental tenets of corporate rule (greed and a thirst for power).

In listening to Tony then, and many more times over the years, he made me realize how critical it is

to understand how corporate rule and its lackeys operate, what holds their game together, and what, and where its vulnerabilities lie.

This is fundamental to also understanding and strategizing about how to take the thing apart, to re-tool it for a very different purpose—a socially good and impactful purpose.

Admittedly, I was (and still am drawn) to taking the thing apart.

Tony founded Polaris Institute in 1997 "to help empower citizen movements advance democratic social change." Tony invested wholly in a project that encouraged politically disenfranchised people, in an age of corporate driven globalization, to better understand what was/is happening, and to

become informed about how to best challenge corporate rule.

I joined him at Polaris in the early 2000s.

Tony taught a small staff team how to conduct deep research into a corporation. He called it the PI corporate x-ray methodology. He taught us to see how the thing is organized, who the players are, its supply chain links, its governance structure, its legal, environmental and fiscal vulnerabilities.

He encouraged us to apply his x-ray analysis on corporations like Coca-Cola, Nestle, Vivendi—you know, the little players. My shorthand of what we were doing with this research and analytical framework was to expose and strategize how to best kneecap them.

My words—not Tony’s. But he smirked whenever I said it.

Tony stressed one of the important roles we had as PI was to be a catalyst. To bring good troublemakers together to deepen a community’s critical understanding of corporate rule and the vital importance to pursue democratic social change.

Our job was to help tap into local knowledge in many communities and groups, here and around the world. The work involved connecting others facing similar struggles. To collectively and collaboratively envision and advocate for a different world.

Best job ever.

I was privileged to often be alongside Mr. T. when Polaris was exposing and challenging the World Trade Organization and its corporate trade investment regimes. Or when the water barons sought to control and profit from an essential human right. Or when the oil sands cartel and its lobbyists sought barrels of profits on lands that require stewardship—not pillaging.

Polaris tackled the bottle water industry and those who have chosen the profits of the climate crisis over the better interests of the planet.

For years, whenever he took the microphone in a gathering of good troublemakers, be it in India, Brazil, Japan, Europe, Mexico, South Africa, the U.S. or somewhere in Canada, he would hold up three fingers, noting he had three things to share.

Often, in the background, I would hold up five fingers, to signal to the audience, that Mr. T was actually going to make five points. Tony had important things to share with others. I figured it only fair to let an audience be forewarned, whenever he had the mic.

Tony is in good company. He shares something with the likes of Bianca Jagger, Daniel Ellesberg, Amy Goodman, David Suzuki, Medha Patkar, Edward Snowden, Vanadana Shiva, Greta Thunberg, Sima Samar, Chico Whitaker, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and many others.

Tony and Maude Barlow were both awarded the Right to Livelihood Award. I’m referring to an international award that “honours and supports those offering

practical and exemplary answers to the most urgent challenges facing us today.”

It is sometimes called the alternative Nobel Prize. He is deserving.

The Polaris Institute has had a great run. Nearly half a century of good work.

Like I said, best job ever, working alongside a wonderful mentor and friend.

On behalf of the Polaris Board, I am honoured to have worked with Tony and others making good trouble.

Thanks to the CCPA for accepting Polaris Institute’s remaining financial assets that will establish the Tony Clarke speaker’s series.

This initiative will provide a platform that gives voice to others challenging corporate rule. The speaker series, in his name, will hold up their efforts to bring communities together to advance democratic social change. ●

Karl Flecker is a longtime board member and former staff with the Polaris Institute.



We've moved

The CCPA National Office is now located at
**501-141 Laurier Avenue West,
Ottawa, ON
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Wikicommons

Jon Milton
National Office

“Working-class conservatism” is a bait-and-switch scam. Stop taking it at face value.

In 1980, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) was in heated negotiations with the U.S. federal government. The government, under Democrat Jimmy Carter, had led a wave of deregulation and privatization in the airline industry, and air traffic controllers were upset. So they made an unconventional strategic choice—they reached out to the Republicans.

“I pledge to you that my administration will work very closely with you to bring about a spirit of cooperation between the President and the air traffic controllers,” Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan wrote in a letter to PATCO. He promised to “take

whatever steps are necessary to provide our air traffic controllers with the most modern equipment available, and to adjust staff levels and workdays so they are commensurate with achieving the maximum degree of public safety.”

PATCO endorsed Reagan for president. The International Brotherhood of the Teamsters, one of the largest labour unions in the U.S., did so as well.

Observers commented that this might mark a break in the traditional alliance between organized labour and the left. Reagan, after all, had donned a Teamsters jacket in Flint, Michigan and spoken to a crowd of automotive workers about how Jimmy Carter was shipping jobs

overseas, and a Reagan presidency would defend good unionized work. Was it the beginning of a new era of working-class conservatism?

Reagan won in a landslide in 1980. In 1981, PATCO members went on strike. Reagan fired every single striking worker—a total of 11,345 air traffic controllers—and legally decertified their union. It was a watershed moment that broke the back of U.S. labour and instilled a climate of fear among organized workers, laying the groundwork for decades of rollbacks of hard-won gains and unprecedented deindustrialization that hollowed out the American working class. The U.S. labour movement never recovered.

Same as the old boss

The idea of an ascendant “working-class conservatism” is once again a hot topic among political observers. In the U.S., Donald Trump and running mate JD Vance are

trying to make it their brand, with speeches at their party convention vowing to take on corporate elites and stand up for the American worker.

In Canada, Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre has been singing the same tune, speaking to trade unions using class-first language about the injustices faced by working people in Canada.

Speaking to a room full of trades workers in April, Poilievre promised to “put an end to the abuse of the temporary foreign worker program,” to applause from the audience. “Our tax dollars are for our workers in this country, period.”

“When I’m prime minister,” Poilievre said elsewhere, “my daily obsession will be about what is good for the working-class people of this country.”

Fundamentally, such rhetoric is much more about dividing the working class—between citizens and non-citizens, Canadians and foreigners—than it is about supporting workers. But even just mentioning the desire to support Canadian workers represents a break with recent right-wing politics, which had focused on free markets, deregulation, anti-tax populism, and entrepreneurialism.

In that old vision, the small business owner—not the worker—was the main avatar for regular, salt-of-the-earth Canadians. Of course, those imaginary small business owners just happened to have the same interests as the large corporations who benefit the most from right-wing economic policy. Workers were an afterthought, one that right-wing politicians and their communications machines rarely discussed in public, other than periodic shots against unions.

No more, it seems. Right-wing political parties are making a concerted attempt, following the lead of Donald Trump, to appear to be in favour of the working man. Gone are the days when leading right-wingers met any mention of workers’ rights or social inequality

with accusations of socialism—now those actors have seen that they can get a payoff by using populist, anti-elite language.

But really, that’s all it is—language.

Despite Poilievre pontificating about elites, the board of his party is made up predominantly of corporate lobbyists, real estate agents, and anti-worker organizations. It also includes the director of a company that charters private jets for the super-wealthy.

Like Reagan before him, Poilievre (and Trump) are courting the votes of working people by making regular references to their struggles—from rising costs of living and economic uncertainty to increasing perceptions (if not realities) of violent crime. Like Reagan before them, these new right-wing leaders will immediately implement major legislative attacks on workers the moment they are in power and no longer need to court votes.

Of course, such attacks will look different today than they did during the Reagan era. Four decades of economic restructuring mean that it’s less feasible today to openly ship jobs overseas—the trade deals are already in place, there are no more frontiers to open. This new “pro-worker” orientation among right-wing parties is, in part, an acknowledgement of the fact that their previous economic policies are deeply unpopular, and campaigning on them is now a ticket to consistent electoral losses.

The previous generation of business interests wanted to move jobs to low-cost and low-regulation zones in order to increase their profits. Now the strategy is to make the domestic environment low-cost and low-regulation—a race to the bottom.

They’ll promise to bring back the jobs that left in the ‘80s and ‘90s—and companies will pay workers minimum wage and dump toxic sludge in the river where your town gets its drinking water. Of course, it’s an absurd proposal. But

that’s the promise of “working-class conservatism” as it exists today.

Don’t fall for the ruse

Sean O’Brien, president of the Teamsters, stood on stage at the Republican National Convention on July 15, 2024. Donald Trump, being anointed the Republican candidate, beamed a smile in the audience.

“It’s an honor to be the first Teamster in our 121-year history to address the Republican national convention,” O’Brien said, during a speech that tackled corporate profiteering and demanded stronger labour laws. It would have been a good speech if it were delivered on a picket line.

The audience responded coldly to O’Brien’s speech—but the people in the room weren’t the audience that mattered, really. The Republicans, even more than the Conservatives in Canada, have spent significant resources trying to reframe their public image as a workers’ party—despite continuing to systematically push an anti-worker agenda. This was for the TV cameras.

After O’Brien’s speech, a lot of ink was spilled about whether the “new” Republican party is suddenly pro-worker. Frankly, if you’re falling for this, then I’ve got a bridge to sell you.

Just like Reagan courted PATCO workers, Donald Trump puts a hard hat on in coal country, and Pierre Poilievre puts on a plaid shirt and rails against lobbyists and elites. But just like Reagan, this offer is a bait-and-switch scam. We are not undergoing a class realignment among the major parties—we are just seeing pro-boss politicians adapt their language to the growing popularity of the labour movement, without changing the substance of their programs.

Labour would do best by recognizing that for what it is and acting accordingly. ●

Jon Milton is a communications specialist with the CCPA National Office and associate editor of the *Monitor*.

Time for a new transit plan in B.C.

Imagine being able to get from almost anywhere in B.C. to anywhere else on public transit, as one might in Europe or Asia. Or visitors landing at Vancouver airport and being able to get seamlessly around the province without the need to rent a car.

Whether it's dealing with bumper-to-bumper congestion in Metro Vancouver or being able to access a health care appointment in rural areas, B.C. needs to invest in a provincewide vision for zero-carbon transportation that thinks beyond personal automobiles as the preferred means of getting around.

Together with the B.C. Federation of Labour, we published a 10-year, \$22-billion public transit investment plan to significantly increase local

transit services across the province and connect them into a more integrated whole. It would create some 16,800 jobs per year in construction and related jobs, and 23,700 jobs per year in operating transit by the end of the plan.

The plan aims to ensure that transit is affordable, accessible and inclusive while helping to meet B.C.'s greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets. It's also an opportunity to eliminate privatization within an expanded public system, a measure that would allow for better wages and conditions for transit workers and foster improved worker retention and recruitment as we develop a more coherent public system.

Connect B.C. communities everywhere through a new province-wide express bus service. A province-wide public transit network will improve mobility for people in small towns and rural areas, making it easier to get health care and other services, visit family or go on vacation. And stronger transit connections across BC would have a big impact on tourism.

Double the number of buses in B.C. Transit local services within five years. This would ensure more frequent, reliable local transit services in communities throughout B.C. Targeted, customized services including community shuttles, on-demand rides, car and bike sharing, can supplement fixed routes for "first/last mile" challenges.

Expand HandyDART service provincewide with an upgraded electric fleet. This would mean an end to contracting with private companies for services and using taxis instead of buses.

Develop new regional rail connections across the South

Coast and Vancouver Island along historic rail corridors. This could be in partnership with First Nations communities along the rail lines.

Add new passenger ferry options between Vancouver, the Gulf Islands, Sunshine Coast and Vancouver Island. Just as roads can't infinitely be expanded to accommodate more cars, B.C.'s ferries have been hamstrung as almost exclusively car transportation.

Accelerate TransLink's 10-year Access for Everyone plan for Metro Vancouver. Begin implementing next-level rapid transit options across the region.

Expand existing free transit programs to youth aged 13 to 18. This will help young British Columbians develop the habit of using transit, a crucial cultural change in shifting transportation patterns. Free transit programs should also be expanded for people on social assistance not already included in the B.C. Bus Pass program.

Integrate all these transit pieces. For a seamless, coordinated and coherent transit experience—with one-ticket access and synchronized service and information infrastructure so that riders can make connections efficiently and reliably across systems.

Our investment plan includes boosting operating support to transit across the province from about \$350 million currently to \$1.5 billion per year at the end of our 10-year plan.

Investments in high-quality public transit will induce new demand, enabling residents to go car-free or own fewer vehicles, saving between \$6,000 and \$10,000 per vehicle annually.

While transit cannot replace the advantage cars have for some trips, we can make transit a viable option for most people most of the time. To facilitate a major shift in trips to transit, the public transit experience must be convenient, reliable and affordable relative to a trip by car. ●

Marc Lee is a senior economist with the CCPA BC office.

Worth repeating

“U.S. officials aren't mincing words when they tell us not to get 'too comfortable' ahead of these [upcoming CUSMA] talks. Longstanding U.S. complaints, whether on Canada's supply managed dairy or digital trade, are on the radar.... Canada cannot approach this review on its back foot.”

—Lana Payne, Unifor national president, on upcoming talks on the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA).

High youth unemployment

A generational crisis

With the school year now in full swing, many young people are likely making some hard financial decisions. Youth unemployment hit 14.2 per cent in July—the highest rate seen since September 2012 outside the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021.

The youth employment rate has been worsening for a year, dropping by four percentage points since last summer. Among full-time students, the decline was even larger—almost seven percentage points. This represents a loss of 112,000 jobs among students in just a year.

Quebec, New Brunswick, Ontario and B.C. posted the largest drops (down 5.7, 5.2, 4.7 and 3.7 percentage points, respectively).

And the groups experiencing the largest losses are those who already confront the biggest barriers to employment—including young Indigenous Peoples, racialized youth and recent immigrants.

A very large group of young workers are bearing the brunt of the economic slowdown caused by high interest rates, competing for a

limited number of openings not only among themselves but with older, more experienced workers too.

The Bank of Canada's aggressive campaign of interest rate hikes is working as intended. Job vacancies are down sharply across a range of industries, not only in sectors like food and accommodation that have yet to fully recover from the pandemic but also in professional services, finance, manufacturing and construction.

The “soft landing” that the business press is celebrating masks the fact that employers are scaling back new hires and offering more part-time work. Given strong population growth, especially among young people, the labour market is simply not growing fast enough to absorb new entrants.

Young people have just come through the huge disruptions associated with the pandemic and are now facing an economic crisis in the context of sky-high rents, tuition and food costs.

The rate of inflation may be easing this summer but the lines at food banks haven't. Food banks

and community pantries are now permanent fixtures on campuses across the country, serving students who have no money left after covering rent and tuition.

The situation for international students is particularly acute. These students come to Canada on the hook for a massive tuition bill (typically more than four times higher than the equivalent Canadian student) only to find the cost of living is much higher than they expected. As a result, many are living in appalling conditions.

The depth of this generational crisis is staggering. Compared to previous generations, young adults are facing a future of lower earnings and more employment precarity, further burdened with high levels of debt.

Young people's experience in summer 2024 clearly demonstrates that governments, post-secondary institutions, and employers need to be doing much more—not only to make education more affordable, but to tackle the surge in youth unemployment and the growing divide between good jobs and bad jobs.

In our economic system, there are winners and losers. At this moment, the economic elites are throwing young people under the bus, collateral damage in efforts to rein in inflation and reassert neoliberal economic orthodoxy that delivers extraordinary wealth to the rich.

The systemic underfunding of post-secondary institutions has further compounded this difficult situation as schools have turned to international students to fill funding shortfalls—opening the door to precarity and abuse.

Make no mistake. As the baby boom generation retires, Canada will need to rely on the next generation of workers—those who were born here and the many we welcome from abroad. This is precisely the time we need to be investing in young people and their future. ●

Katherine Scott is a senior researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.



Policy innovations



Housing Forever Bond

The United Way East Ontario is investing more than \$100,000 in the Ottawa Community Land Trust's Housing Forever Bond as a means of building new affordable housing and community wealth.

"At United Way, we know that when we remove the stress that comes with meeting basic needs like shelter, people can focus on finding the right job for their skillset and planning a bright future. Everyone deserves to build the life they want for themselves and their families."

—United Way East Ontario



Hamilton community bond

Indwell, a Hamilton-based charitable organization, has launched a community bond to fund more affordable housing in that city. They're launching four new projects in 2024. "A community bond is a financing tool that allows individuals and organizations to invest in projects that have a positive social impact within their community, while also earning a financial return."

—SeeChange



Environmental Justice Strategy Act

Canada's senate has passed Bill C-226, the National Strategy on Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act. It will require the federal government to examine the links between racialization, socio-economic status, and environmental risk. It also requires the feds to develop a national strategy.

—The Canadian Coalition for Environmental & Climate Justice



Quebec says no to evictions

The Quebec government has passed a bill imposing a three-year moratorium on evictions for seniors who have lived in their dwelling for at least 10 years. It lowers the age of eviction protection from 70 to 65. However, if the vacancy rate reaches three per cent in all Quebec urban centres with a population of 10,000 or more, the moratorium will end.—CTV News Montreal

Want more public transit riders? Offer free transit

Within five months of making public transit free for all residents, Montpellier, France, saw a 23.7 per cent increase in ridership. There was also an increase in using public transit during off-peak hours, which officials believe "shows people are diversifying their use of public transport for leisure and socialising."

—EuroNews.





Kelowna offers temporary homes for people who are homeless

Sixty new temporary homes are now available to people in Kelowna who are experiencing homelessness.

Trailside Transitional Housing offers modular homes where residents can receive meals, life skills training, care plans, and other services they need on route to securing more permanent housing. It prioritizes seniors and people with disabilities who are mainly living in shelters and are ready to move on.

The development also includes washrooms, showers, laundry facilities, a common dining area, recreation space and bike storage, as well as a charging station for electric mobility scooters.—*BC Gov News*.



Automatic tax filing

The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) has invited more than 500,000 eligible Canadians to take part in its national pilot project to offer automatic tax filing services. It's currently open to low-income Canadians who have never filed a tax return or who

have gaps in filing their tax return. Once they're in the tax system, they will automatically receive government benefits that people can only get once they file taxes. "A 2020 report co-authored by Carleton University professors estimated that between 10 and 12 per cent of Canadians do not file their taxes. The CRA's internal estimates peg that number closer to seven per cent."—*Global News*.

Is public transit good for health?

Yes—and it can reduce government spending on health care, according to a new study by Japanese academics. They studied the relationship between the opening of a mass transit station, Jr-Sojiji Station, that connects Osaka and Kyoto. "Their results indicate that opening this mass transit station was significantly associated with a decrease in average health care expenditures per capita by approximately 99,257.31 Japanese yen (USD 929.99) over four years."—*Medical Xpress*



Atlantic Canadians need a raise

A new publication by the CCPA Nova Scotia, *Atlantic Canadians Need a Raise: One-third of workers earn less than \$20 an hour*, underscores the challenges faced by workers in Atlantic Canada. Data obtained from Statistics Canada’s Labour Force Survey (2023) show that one-third of workers in Atlantic Canada, and in each Atlantic province (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island), earn \$20 or less an hour. This represents just over 368,000 workers across the region.

Workers in the Atlantic provinces bring home some of the lowest wages in the country. Despite recent increases, Nova Scotia’s minimum wage (\$15.20) remains the third lowest among all provinces in Canada. Other Atlantic provinces are not much farther ahead.

The report underlines the large gap between current minimum wages and the calculated living wages. In 2023, living wage rates ranged in Atlantic Canada from

\$21.65 in Bathurst, New Brunswick, to \$26.80 in Newfoundland and Labrador. Halifax’s living wage of \$26.50 is the highest in Nova Scotia.

Calculated by assessing the costs an average household requires to cover all basic necessities, a living wage allows families to enjoy a decent quality of life and avoid severe financial stress. This “living wage gap” between what minimum wage workers earn and what they need to earn to afford basic expenses is significant.

As we outline in the report, raising the minimum wage to \$20 is an important market reset to narrow the living wage gap.

Statistics Canada data also dispel common misconceptions that those who would benefit from such an increase are predominantly teenagers or students. In reality, the vast majority of these workers are not students—they are over 20, they are women, and they are employed in permanent, full-time jobs.

In all Atlantic provinces except P.E.I. (where it is 43 per cent), more

than half of workers who earn \$20 or less an hour work in firms of 100+ employees, easing concerns about hurting local “mom-and-pop” small businesses.

Low-wage workers contribute meaningful labour that sustains our regional economy—but nevertheless struggle to keep themselves and their families afloat. They include retail workers at our grocery stores, corner stores, restaurants and coffee shops; those who provide essential services in health care, education, administrative services and waste management; and workers in the food, accommodations, and tourism industries.

The need for a significant minimum wage increase

We cannot underestimate the positive impacts of decent wages and labour standards on workers’ health, nor underestimate the negative impacts of a low-wage economy and the steep systemic and economic costs of poverty. A robust minimum wage policy is an upstream support for workers’ health and well-being, which also stimulates the economy from the bottom, resulting in additional revenue to fund essential public services (such as health care, child care, and public transportation) and affordable non-market housing to help lessen the cost-of-living burden.

Ensuring workers are supported with significantly higher minimum wages, pay equity, and robust labour protections would positively impact local economies across Atlantic Canada.

It’s high time Atlantic Canadians get the raise they deserve. ●

Christine Saulnier is the Nova Scotia Director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. She has a PhD in Political Science from York University. She leads the living wage calculations for communities across Atlantic Canada, coordinates the alternative budget, and co-authors the child and family poverty report cards. Kenya Thompson is a PhD student in Political Science at York University and a Research Associate with CCPA-NS.

Profile of low wage workers, Atlantic provinces, 2023

Share of employees earning \$20/hour or less

	NS	NL	NB	PEI
Women	56%	60%	54%	51%
Full time jobs	65%	67%	71%	72%
Not students	82%	83%	86%	85%
Over the age of 20	85%	82%	85%	86%
Permanent	79%	76%	81%	74%
Work at firms with 100+ employees	55%	53%	52%	43%

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey Microdata, 2023



iStock

Simon Enoch
Saskatchewan Office

Policy solutions for a better Saskatchewan

As we head into what may be the most competitive provincial election in years, we want to ensure that we use this opportunity to advance ideas and solutions that can make our province better. Thanks to our supporters, we have identified the issues that many believe need to be given priority in this election:

Become a leader on climate education: Despite the best efforts of teachers, Saskatchewan regularly demonstrates some of the poorest understanding of climate science in the country. Let's make climate education mandatory in our schools. New Jersey recently became the first state in the U.S. to require climate change to be taught in nearly all subjects, from kindergarten to Grade 12, in public schools. Many other U.S. states are now following New Jersey's lead.

Become a leader in energy efficient homes and buildings: Saskatchewan consistently ranks

dead last in energy efficiency programs and policies. We propose creating a provincial energy-efficiency utility that makes Saskatchewan a leader in retrofitting and upgrading homes and buildings to be more energy efficient. Efficiency Nova Scotia—an independent utility funded through electricity rates—is the major reason why that province is now considered a "national leader in cutting energy waste."

Invest in our public health care workforce: Our prized public health care system is in chronic crisis. We need to make historic investments in our health care workforce to ensure the future stability of the system. A Saskatchewan Health Care Workforce Initiative needs to make the investments required to improve working conditions so we can retain our current health care workers as well as attract, educate, train and recruit our future workforce.

Let seniors retire in dignity: Let's adopt higher minimum standards for long-term care facilities, bring in more inspectors, and expand the number of personal support workers so that vulnerable seniors have access to the best care in Canada.

Stop the war on teachers and educators: The current government's adversarial approach to teachers and students has produced weakened teacher morale, diminished recruitment, more work stoppages, legal challenges and alienated some of the most vulnerable students in our province. A more collaborative approach between government, educators and students that secures the urgent needs of our classrooms by making the right investments in our public school system is required to ensure that our schools are preparing our children for the future.

Make higher education more affordable: Saskatchewan charges the second-highest undergraduate tuition rate in Canada. Let's implement a plan to make Saskatchewan the most affordable province for tuition in Canada by 2028.

Become the most affordable place to live in Canada: That starts with building more affordable housing and implementing rent controls. Let's help young families make ends meet by expanding the number of \$10-a-day child care spaces throughout the province. Saskatchewan has some of the biggest child care deserts in Canada. Let's fix that!

End Homelessness: Many cities in Saskatchewan have had to develop their own homelessness strategies without support from the provincial government. That needs to change. Real solutions involve a coordinated Housing First strategy that includes community organizations, Indigenous governments and leaders, as well as local governments. The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation needs to play a role in tackling both housing unaffordability and homelessness.

Getting the best return for our resources: As the owners of our provincial natural resources, we need to ensure a fair return that compensates the people of Saskatchewan and mitigates the environmental impact of extraction. The volatility of resource prices makes it incumbent on the government to ensure that sufficient royalties are in place when prices are high to compensate for those periods when prices fall. Saskatchewan needs to institute a royalty review on all key resources, as well as consider the introduction of a windfall profit tax, the creation of a provincial sovereign wealth fund and sufficient environmental reclamation fees that ensure the public is not left to pay the environmental costs left behind by private interests.

Tackle Saskatchewan's addictions crisis: Last year, Saskatchewan registered its deadliest record for drug toxicity deaths. Let's extend funding for harm reduction institutions—safe injection sites,

more support for people with additions, mental health supports, and community-led solutions, with proper social worker support.

Invest in intraprovincial public transit: The Saskatchewan government made a terrible mistake when it stopped funding the Saskatchewan Transit Corporation. That single decision cut rural communities off from getting to and from our major cities. Let's create a new, energy-efficient public transportation system that connects all Saskatchewan communities to each other.

End violence against women: Saskatchewan has the highest rate of police-reported family violence in the country, at double the national average. This contributes to the worsening homelessness and housing crisis in our province. Coordinated action is needed to provide safe spaces for women and children fleeing domestic violence.

Make sure private companies are accountable for P3 projects: Politicians have fallen in love with public-private partnerships (P3s) because it allows them to push debt way down the road, with bills that come due long after they have left office. Corporations love the P3 model because their size often limits competition and they guarantee a 30-year stream of profits. P3 transparency and accountability legislation would mandate the Saskatchewan provincial auditor to review all P3 assessments and subsequent contracts and inform the public on their accuracy and veracity.

Smart farmland policy: Since 2003, when the government lifted restrictions on the ownership of farmland in the province, non-farm investors have been buying larger tracts of land, increasing competition for prime agricultural land and drastically increasing land prices. These trends make it more difficult for existing farmers to expand their

operations or to allow new, younger farmers to enter the market. Saskatchewan should consider adopting legislation similar to Prince Edward Island's *Lands Protection Act* to regulate the amount of land that individuals or corporations can hold in the province to better ensure the equal distribution of farmland to Saskatchewan farmers.

Ensuring meaningful reconciliation: Establishing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration), UNDRIP, as the province's framework for reconciliation would be an important first step towards meaningful reconciliation. UNDRIP affirms the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, security and well-being of Indigenous Peoples. Both the federal government and the government of British Columbia have enacted legislation to implement UNDRIP. Saskatchewan should do so too.

Making sure every job is a good job: Saskatchewan currently pays the lowest minimum wage in all of Canada. That's outrageous. Let's implement a plan to raise the minimum wage from \$14 an hour to \$16 an hour by 2027. Let's also ensure that all contractors with the provincial government become a living wage employer, which would mean paying their workers \$17.90 an hour in Regina and \$18.95 an hour in Saskatoon.

Protecting workers' and labour rights in Saskatchewan: To protect workers' rights in the 21st century, Saskatchewan needs to address the gaps that have lingered in the *Employment Act* (once the *Trade Union Act*) for several decades. In order to do so, the province should adopt an immediate return to a card-check certification procedure and an immediate ban on scab labour during strikes and lockouts. ●

TAMARA KAY

How domestic and transnational activism helped transform labour law in Mexico



During the last eight years, a monumental transformation of the labour justice system in Mexico has taken place. New labour reform legislation went into effect in 2023, which guaranteed basic labour rights, including secret ballot votes during union elections. The new system is significantly more representative, impartial, transparent and democratic.

The profundity of the change in the Mexican labour law regime cannot be overstated. Although labour protections and standards in the U.S. and Canada leave much to be desired, workers' rights to organize and negotiate collective bargaining agreements have historically been limited in Mexico. "Ghost" unions aligned with the government and employers were ubiquitous. Independent and democratic unions have been thwarted by widespread state interference, voter intimidation and retaliation.

Low wages and exploitation by corporations, particularly in the maquiladora industry (low-wage factories that assemble goods for export to the U.S.), resulted in significantly lower standards of living and fewer labour rights and protections for Mexican workers. These widespread practices prevent workers in Mexico from organizing to improve low wages and dangerous working conditions, and they block the spread of democracy and the rule of law in Mexico.

Mexico's dramatic shift in the way labour relations are governed came about as a result of both domestic and transnational forces. While U.S. and Canadian labour have played a useful role, their importance should not be exaggerated. Mexican democratic unions and their allies struggled for decades to reform the system of labour relations that dominated the country since the 1940s. For years they had little support from U.S. and Canadian unions.

This situation began to change with the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations (1990-93) and the formation of tri national coalitions opposed to the North American deal. Prior to former U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to renegotiate NAFTA (in 2017), U.S. and Canadian labour activists played an important role in supporting their Mexican allies' efforts to promote domestic labour law reform. The NAFTA re-negotiations provided these same unions a concrete mechanism through which they could engage with each other and with governments in shaping the successor agreement, now called USMCA—Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) in Canada.

From NAFTA to CUSMA

NAFTA—the concrete embodiment of globalization in North America—had the unanticipated consequence of catalyzing labour transnationalism, defined as ongoing cooperative and collaborative relationships among Mexican, U.S. and Canadian unions and union

federations. As I argued in my 2011 book, *NAFTA and the Politics of Labour Transnationalism*, after years of struggle against free trade, North American labour unions—which, for decades, had been isolated and estranged across national boundaries—emerged with new ties of cooperation and networks of protest.

Labour union participation in anti-NAFTA coalitions that included organizations devoted to many different issues reflected a significant shift in the history of union relations in North America. For the first time, and practically overnight, North American labour unions engaged in an active struggle not only with environmental and other progressive organizations but also with their counterparts across the continent. Some unions even began to build formal relationships with their counterparts that transcended coalitional goals.

NAFTA's effects on trilateral coalitions and relationship-building were unprecedented even though the agreement itself, and activists' efforts to utilize the mechanisms in its labour side agreement, did little to actually improve labour rights in the region. As it became clear that complaints filed under the North American Agreement on Labour Cooperation (NAALC) had little effect, transnational collaboration waned, only to be revived in efforts over the last eight years to transform labour justice in Mexico.

New labour reform legislation that went into effect in 2023 guarantees basic labour rights, including secret ballot votes during union elections. These changes, devised during the NAFTA renegotiations, were reinforced through the labour provisions in CUSMA, which also benefited from transnational cooperation.

What caused this shift in the Mexican labour law regime? The confluence of domestic and transnational forces created the conditions for the wholesale transformation of Mexico's labour relations system. The leverage that allowed activists to apply pressure at both domestic and transnational levels had maximum impact on improving labour rights and protections in Mexico.

Domestic pressure for labour reform in Mexico

In Mexico, there has been a thriving, though marginalized, progressive movement for independent and democratic labour unions since the 1960s. Ongoing and intense pressure from domestic Mexican democratic unions, labour lawyers, academics and citizen organizations to implement labour reform has been reinforced in the transnational arena by more recent efforts to strengthen labour guarantees in free trade agreements—based, in part, on the clear limitations of the NAALC—the NAFTA labour side accord.

In 2016, prior to negotiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), the United States Trade Representative (USTR) attempted to pressure



Protesting the reopening of factories after a COVID-19 outbreak in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez



Protestors in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico demand economic compensation and social justice programs for railway workers affected by privatization. REUTERS/Jose Luis Gonzalez

Mexico to adopt international labour standards on freedom of association and collective bargaining, as laid out in International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions 87 and 98 (which the U.S. itself has not ratified). Mexico eschewed the USTR's efforts to change its labour laws, instead initiating a domestic reform process.

To modernize the labour justice system, the Mexican congress passed a reform to the labour articles of the Mexican constitution. After Mexico's states ratified the constitutional reform, it went into force as federal law on February 24, 2017. But implementation of the reform still depended on the creation of secondary legislation at both the federal and state levels.

While the momentum to carry out the implementation of the reform stalled in congressional battles, Mexican labour activists continued to push the reform process. Within Mexico, the historic July 1, 2018 election of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and the formation of congressional majorities in both houses for his political party, Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (MORENA), brought labour advocates that had long been sidelined in Mexico's dominant party structure into the forefront of the new administration.

This new opportunity spurred Mexican labour rights groups and their allies in national political parties to develop proposals for the secondary legislation that reflected the spirit and letter of the constitutional reform. They had been working on reform initiatives long before CUSMA was negotiated, but they did not have the political power to enact them.

Efforts to reform the Mexican labour regime were, therefore, well under way when the renegotiation of NAFTA began in August 2017.

Transnational pressure via the CUSMA negotiation

On May 18, 2017, Robert Lighthizer, the U.S. Trade Representative and Trump's top trade official, notified the U.S. congress that NAFTA was to be renegotiated—a compromise for Trump, who campaigned on a promise to rip up the agreement. The first round of negotiations began on August 16, 2017, and during the intervening period, the USTR invited businesses and civil society organizations to offer comments on how to improve NAFTA.

Discussions on revising NAFTA's labour side agreement focused almost exclusively on Mexican labour practices, framing them as sources of unfair competition for U.S. workers. After more than a year of negotiations, U.S. and Mexican officials agreed to attach an annex on worker representation in collective bargaining in Mexico to the labour chapter of the new NAFTA. Independent Mexican and U.S. labour advocates endorsed the idea.

The annex provided guidelines on the content of Mexico's secondary labour legislation and tied the entry into force of CUSMA to Mexico passing legislation that met those criteria. On May 1, 2019—May Day in Mexico—that secondary Mexican legislation was signed into law and came into effect in 2023.

In addition to guaranteeing basic labour rights, the Mexican labour reforms established independent labour courts to replace labour boards and impartial organizations to register union elections. It also required unions to ratify, by direct secret vote of each worker, all existing collective bargaining agreements before May 1, 2023.

The new NAFTA also included a rapid-response mechanism endorsed by labour activists in all three North American countries. It is arguably the strongest labour-related adjudicatory mechanism to have been incorporated into a free trade agreement ratified by the U.S.

The rapid-response labour mechanism

There are similarities and core differences between the labour rights standards and adjudicatory mechanisms in NAFTA and CUSMA.

Unlike NAFTA, labour rights are embedded in the body of CUSMA (in Chapter 23) rather than in a side accord. The new labour chapter also borrows language from Mexican drafts of labour law reform bills, reflecting communication and collaboration between Mexican labour lawyers and U.S. union officials.

While the NAALC required signatories to enforce their own labour laws and outlined 11 broad labour principles for signatory countries to adhere to, only the violations of child labour, minimum wage, and occupational health and safety could result in trade sanctions. During the 26 years that the NAALC was in force, no labour cases resulted in sanctions.

The violation of fundamental labour rights, including the right to strike and bargain collectively, could not rise to the highest level in the adjudicatory process under NAFTA. In contrast, the CUSMA labour chapter requires signatories to incorporate and enforce workers' rights protections based on the International Labour Organization (ILO) 1998 *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*.

Enforcement of labour rights in CUSMA can occur through two mechanisms: a state-to-state dispute settlement process in Chapter 31 of the agreement, and a novel facility-specific Rapid Response Labour Mechanism (RRLM) outlined in Annexes 31-A (covering the U.S. and Mexico) and 31-B (covering Canada and Mexico).

The RRLM was an innovation that had not existed in previous free trade agreements. Because the annex creates more narrow criteria for filing claims against U.S. and Canadian companies, it is much easier to

file claims against Mexican facilities, which are the primary target of RRLM processes (see *Laura Macdonald's article in this section*).

The RRLM and labour transnationalism

The legislation implementing CUSMA in the U.S. and Canada included funding to support activities in Mexico to fulfil the new agreement's labour provisions. This funding included money for ongoing transnational cooperation in relation to the promotion and support of labour rights.

Specifically, the United States offered \$180 million for technical assistance projects in Mexico aimed at improving working conditions and labour protections as well as reducing and eliminating labour abuses. Canada also signed an RRLM with Mexico, copying the U.S.-Mexico provision, and committed over \$10 million in funding for Canadian unions and NGOs.

So far, funded projects promote gender equity, workplace democracy, legal training, occupational safety and health in supply chains, worker education on Mexico's labour law reforms, and combat child labour, among other objectives. Beneficiaries of funding include the Mexican government at federal, state and local levels, labour unions, NGOs and other civil society organizations.

The process of invoking the RRLM to dispute labour violations in Mexican workplaces has also renewed and strengthened labour transnationalism among the continent's unions. As of this writing, since the USMCA went into effect in 2020, the RRLM process has been utilized 26 times. All but one of these investigations of labour violations in Mexico was submitted through the U.S. Multiple cases have been filed jointly between U.S. (or Canadian) and Mexican labour unions and NGOs.

The first RRLM case was filed in May 2021 by the AFL-CIO Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the *Sindicato Nacional Independiente de Trabajadores de Industrias y de Servicios Movimiento 20/32* (SNITIS) and Public Citizen, alleging violations of the right to organize and collective bargaining against Tridonex, an auto parts factory in Matamoros, Mexico.

It is important to emphasize that this RRLM case supported workers who, since 2019, had been engaged in an ongoing campaign to organize an independent union and demand a free and fair union election. Tridonex responded by firing workers, and state officials arrested the workers' lawyer, Susana Prieto Terrazas.

As a result of the CUSMA rapid-response labour case and workers' organizing, Tridonex agreed to reinstate fired workers, pay severance and back pay, to allow a free and fair union election and to strengthen COVID-19 safety protocols, among other concessions. In February 2022, workers at Tridonex voted for and won an independent union.

The first RRLM case was submitted in Canada in March 2023 by Unifor and a Mexican union, the *Sindicato Independiente Nacional De Trabajadores y Trabajadoras De La Industria Automotriz* (SINTTIA), against a facility in Silao, Guanajuato for violations of freedom of association and collective bargaining. The Canadian government reviewed the case and the company agreed to a remediation plan that included neutrality in union activities, reinstatement of fired workers and compliance with international labour standards. In June 2023, workers chose SINTTIA to represent them in a union election.

In contrast to the NAALC process under NAFTA, a majority of RRLM cases have resulted in remediation plans that require employers to further labour rights, including holding free and fair elections, providing severance or back pay, reinstating workers, etc.

The general consensus among labour unions, labour advocates and scholars is that the RRLM is a significant improvement over the labour enforcement processes of the NAALC, in that the former has proven it can protect and further labour rights and improved working conditions in Mexico. According to Sandra Polaski of the Boston University Global Development Policy Center, the process has promoted effectiveness, legitimacy and sovereignty.

It is also important to highlight that while public submissions under the NAALC took years to resolve and were often stymied by government and companies' efforts to thwart the process, the RRLM facilitates a fast and unimpeded process.

Conclusion

Both the content and timing of the recent Mexican labour law reform reflects the interplay of domestic and transnational events that shifted Mexican authorities' interest from violating labour standards to protecting labour rights.

Ongoing and intense pressure from Mexican democratic unions, labour lawyers, academics and citizen organizations to implement labour reform was reinforced at the international level by the labour guarantees in free trade agreements. The negotiation of the TPP, and concerns on the part of the U.S. Congress over Mexican labour practices, triggered a labour reform process in Mexico that was then pushed forward by the renegotiated NAFTA.

New labour regulations tied to CUSMA mirror the path of labour reform in Mexico and provide new requirements that will potentially reinforce protections on freedom of association and collective bargaining in Mexico. The trade pressures from the TPP and then CUSMA provided critical support to Mexican actors to legitimize, reinforce and eventually reflect the positions of the democratic labour movement in Mexico. **M**

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Reuters

Laura Macdonald

The CUSMA Rapid Response Labour Mechanism

Thanks to transnational worker organizing, the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) dramatically improves upon the weak labour protections in the original NAFTA. What's more, the new agreement encourages deeper levels of cooperation and coordination between trade unions and labour allies across North America.

Through solidarity with Mexican sisters and brothers, labour activists in the U.S. and Canada can move away from xenophobic responses to North American integration that frame Mexico as a threat and, instead, help ensure upward harmonization of wages and labour standards across the region.

The labour chapter and facility-specific Rapid Response Labour Mechanism (RRLM) in CUSMA were designed to support

constitutional and labour law reforms undertaken by the Mexican government between 2017 and 2019. The new labour law framework counteracts the undemocratic and corrupt system of labour relations that prevailed in Mexico for decades.

Mexico's new labour law requires:

- Universal, free, direct and secret votes for union leadership.
- All collective agreements must be ratified in the same manner by workers, with observation by state authorities and with the possibility of international observation, and must be approved by 50 per cent of the workers.
- The creation of a new Federal Centre for Conciliation and Labour Registration and new labour courts.
- Reform of existing union statutes.

- Provisions on gender parity in union leadership, and a new policy to prevent cases of sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace.

During the NAFTA renegotiations, Democrats in the U.S. Congress and their allies in the AFL-CIO, America's largest trade union federation, felt that simply affirming Mexico's positive legislative reforms in CUSMA's labour chapter would not be enough to ensure state and corporate compliance with workers' rights.

And so, as a condition of securing Democratic support for the new NAFTA, they pushed the Trump administration and Mexican government to include a means for workers to directly raise labour rights violations.

The resulting RRLM has several key elements:

It's facility specific. Unlike labour chapters that target the

A PEOPLE'S TRANSFORMATION OF THE CANADA-U.S.-MEXICO AGREEMENT

From the fierce public debate over the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement through trinational opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement and the important Battle of Seattle against the World Trade Organization, trade relations on this continent have always been contentious.

While these agreements largely serve the profit-seeking interests of multinational corporations, transnational activism has forced governments to include

language in newer trade deals to protect workers, the environment, women, and Indigenous Peoples.

The 2026 review of the renegotiated NAFTA, now called the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA), opens another opportunity for transnational solidarity to shape better, fairer, and more just economic relations in North America.



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5 WAYS TO FIX GLARING FLAWS IN CUSMA

1 BETTER LABOUR PROTECTIONS

Under CUSMA, Mexican workers won tools to uphold their right to organize and vote for independent unions. Let's expand this so workers in all three countries can challenge labour violations and workplace discrimination of all kinds.

2 STRENGTHEN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTIONS

Let's strengthen the environment chapter and make it impossible for countries or investors to launch trade disputes against climate policies.

3 REIN IN THE TECH BROS

As written, CUSMA's digital trade chapter gives tech monopolies too much power. Governments need the room to fight data hoarding and harmful algorithms.

4 END CORPORATE COURTS

Canada and the U.S. said no to investor-state dispute settlement in CUSMA but Mexico is still covered. That's not fair. It means oil, gas, mining and other firms can continue suing Mexico for public interest measures that interfered with their profits.

5 MAKE THE NORTH AMERICAN ECONOMY INCLUSIVE

Let's push for a comprehensive equity review and gender-based analysis of CUSMA that involves women and 2SLGBTQI+ organizations, Indigenous Peoples, workers and other civil society organizations.

Making the Most of the CUSMA Review

Our new report on the possibilities for transnational solidarity in bringing trade justice to North America is available at policyalternatives.ca



states in which the violations are alleged to occur, the RRLM sanctions companies (often but not always U.S.-based) in specific “covered facilities” in Mexico that engage in illegal practices that deny workers their basic labour rights.

It’s rapid. In place of the often endless consultations that followed the filing of a dispute under the NAFTA labour side accord, there are tight deadlines on both companies and governments to respond.

It’s tough. Harsh sanctions can be levied on companies that fail to remedy proven labour rights violations. Under the RRLM’s streamlined dispute process, the United States and Canada can suspend preferential tariff treatment or even block the entry of goods from non-compliant facilities as few as 120 days after initiating the dispute process.

The RRLM process has its limitations. For example, it does not apply to facilities in the United States or Canada, ignoring the many violations of labour rights that occur in these countries. The mechanism thus reflects the continued asymmetry between the CUSMA partners.

How is the RRLM working so far?

The initial rollout of the CUSMA rapid response labour mechanism was slow, but it has been picking up pace. Only two RRLM cases were filed in 2021 and four in 2022; the number increased to 13 in 2023. There were seven new cases as of July 2024, bringing the total to 26 cases.

Up to June 2023, all RRLM cases were in the automotive sector—the most important sector for the regional economy and of keen interest to both unions and the U.S. government. Since then, however, use of the mechanism has spread to other sectors, including non-automotive manufacturing (e.g., a firm that produces small arms ammunition), telecommunications, food production, the supply of services, and mining. Most of the targets of the complaints are subsidiaries of U.S.-based firms.

The Canadian government has only submitted one RRLM case, in 2023, at an auto parts plant. The U.S. Trade Representative’s (USTR) office is doing the heavy lifting, reflecting the Biden administration’s labour-friendly trade policies. The U.S. government considers that 17 of the 22 cases it referred to Mexico were successfully resolved, often through agreements between the parties on remediation plans.

According to the USTR, as of April 2024, the cases have directly benefited nearly 30,000 workers through \$5 million USD in back pay and benefits, the reinstatement of some wrongfully terminated workers, and the securing of free and fair elections in some of those facilities where claims were filed. Where new votes were held, workers have overwhelmingly selected independent unions.

At one worksite, VU Manufacturing, the mechanism was used twice in response to continuing violations.

The plant closed, and the workers involved (mostly women) lost their jobs.

Transnational activism plays a critical role in the success of the rapid response mechanism.

Most independent unions, which are struggling against long-established “protection unions”, are weak and poorly resourced. Mexican workers often know little or nothing about their rights under the new labour reform. Cases are most likely to be submitted in facilities where workers are supported both by independent unions and their international allies from the U.S. and Canada.

However, the failure of the mechanism to address labour violations in the U.S. and Canada is a serious limitation. Moreover, the sectors and geographic areas where the RRLM applies in Mexico should be extended to cover more of the economy. The RRLM does not consider gender-based violence or harassment or gender discrimination as criteria for consideration in cases. The fact that Canada has only submitted one case is a significant concern.

The use of the mechanism is picking up speed—a sign that more actors are gaining confidence in using it. Still, only a small percentage of the Mexican workforce has benefited.

Mexico’s labour law reform has the potential to assist many more workers, in all sectors of the economy. However, critics are concerned that it has failed to significantly transform the culture and practices of labour relations in Mexico.

For example, the reforms required that the hundreds of thousands of Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) covering workers at Mexican facilities be legitimized by workers, through free and fair elections, by July 2023. Only some 20 per cent of CBAs were legitimized by that point, meaning that 80 per cent of contracts were declared invalid.

According to a study by the Centro de Investigación Laboral y Asesoría Sindical (CILAS), barriers to the labour law’s implementation are a result of obstructive behaviour by employers and their continued collusion with corrupt protection unions, which are dragging their feet in adopting more democratic procedures and values.

Clearly, there is a need for continued transnational solidarity and cooperation to ensure Mexico’s important labour reforms take hold. The U.S. and Canadian governments have a role to play as well, in providing resources to democratic labour organizations in Mexico—and by facilitating the RRLM petition process.

All three North American governments should consider further improvements to the CUSMA labour chapter and RRLM, including its application in Canada and the U.S., during a 2025 review of the labour chapter and 2026 general review of the full agreement. **M**

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Eduardo Mendoza

Migrant solidarity and transnationalism in the San Diego-Tijuana region

The border cities of San Diego and Tijuana have become a lightning rod for political debates about migration in both the United States and Mexico. The politicization of migration issues, which escalated in the Trump era, has placed extreme pressures on these cities and on the migrants themselves, who are exposed to diverse risks and vulnerabilities.

Restrictive U.S. migration policies have led to increased deportations and expulsions under the Trump and Biden administrations. In recent years, the arrival of migrant caravans from Central America produced widespread public outcry, leading to significant changes in U.S. and Mexican policies and increased pressure on border cities like Tijuana.

In this context, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engaging in transnational activities play a crucial role in bridging local and international migrant advocacy efforts, often stepping in where government support is lacking.

Transnationalism theory and practice

In the academic world, transnationalism is an approach to migration studies that focuses on relationships, activities and processes occurring beyond national borders. In general, though, transnationalism can be thought of as a process by which migrants maintain ties to both their countries of origin and destination.

Communities often form associations that engage in transnational

activism, maintaining ties to their countries of origin and advocating for migrant rights in their destination country. These associations help build social, cultural and economic networks for migrants, despite challenges such as discrimination and limited resources. They exemplify the transnational ties that arise from migration and the importance of cross-border cooperation.

The U.S.-Mexico border, particularly the San Diego-Tijuana region, serves as a critical area for studying these trends due to its high migratory flow influenced by economic, political and social factors. The region is notable for its strong transborder economic and social relationships, influenced by globalization and economic integration. Tijuana has seen significant inflows of migrants from Mexico and other developing countries, while San Diego has a diverse population with strong migrant communities.

The economic integration of San Diego and Tijuana has fostered local political, social and familial relationships, attracting migrants from Mexico and Latin America. The region's combined population is over 7.5 million, with significant commercial and social exchanges between the two cities. San Diego, with its high-tech industries, contrasts with Tijuana's manufacturing and service sectors, reflecting different levels of economic development.

Economic interconnection across borders has resulted in positive impacts, like medical tourism from the U.S. to Tijuana, as well as

challenges, such as infrastructure deficiencies for border crossings and pollution control. Migration control remains a contentious issue, further complicated by stringent U.S. migration policies.

Cross-border civil society connections

Migrants and members of civil society in the U.S. have developed support activities and implicit activism to assist migrants seeking to reach the United States. These include social services, advocacy, human rights defence, and providing legal services to deported migrants and refugees. NGOs have notably strengthened relationships with U.S. organizations working for human rights in the region.

These organizations face challenges, such as limited resources and hostile governmental policies. But they continue to advocate for migrant rights and provide essential support to individuals struggling to make a life in their new place of residence, whether in the U.S. or remaining in Mexico, as recent U.S. and Mexican policies have encouraged.

For example, an NGO called Via International has worked on both sides of the San Diego-Tijuana border to assist with deportee repatriation. They have also organized "Chaparral tours" for people in the U.S. to see the border situation firsthand, which can encourage continued support and donations.

Carecen SF, another NGO, focuses on supporting Central American migrants by offering legal services to represent migrants in



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deportation proceedings, asylum applications, and by defending them against deportation threats. They have also supported asylum cases for juvenile visas and helped young children of migrants with legal issues. This organization collaborates with entities on both sides of the border.

The International Community Foundation is part of a broad network, including groups like Catholics San Diego, the Binational Resilience Initiative and the Environmental Grantmakers Association. All contributed to food security for migrants during the pandemic, along with the Northern Baja Food Security project. An example of their success includes helping deported veterans return to the U.S. after years of separation.

The American Friends Service Committee supports coalitions in San Diego and Tijuana working on migrant asylum issues, collaborating with groups for around 15 years, focusing on improving access to Friendship Park—a binational park offering friends and family a way to connect across the U.S.-Mexico border wall—and reviewing conditions at detention centres.

Transnational activism in the San Diego-Tijuana border region predominantly supports migrants seeking asylum, deported migrants and those requiring legal support. Efforts also focus on strengthening family ties for those divided by deportation. These services require constant communication, coordination and joint efforts between NGOs on both sides of the border. The NGOs receive financial support and

training from international organizations or Christian churches, indicating a high level of transnational activity and cooperation.

Challenges

The challenges faced by transnational NGOs vary according to their circumstances. Via International faces challenges related to entry restrictions imposed by U.S. immigration authorities affecting families. Friends of Friendship Park are concerned about plans to replace the current border wall with a taller one, which could hinder family communication across the border.

Carecen SF needs increased financial resources to expand their legal services, as the demand for assistance continues to grow. The Rhizome Center for Migrants highlights the difficulties in building coalitions and securing resources for their initiatives.

The American Friends Service Committee points out that the Biden administration's stance on border issues mirrors previous administrations, limiting their ability to support migrants effectively. Additionally, the region lacks the capacity to accommodate the current influx of migrants, both in Tijuana and the U.S.

Restrictive U.S. policies, as well as the high levels of economic and social integration in the San Diego-Tijuana region, have led to an increasing number of NGOs focused on defending human rights and providing social assistance to migrants. These NGOs have formed transnational social networks, working locally but engaging in transnational activities with local, national and international impacts.

Beyond the provision of aid to address immediate migrant needs, NGOs advocate for policy changes, social justice and community empowerment. Operating amid uncertain political and economic conditions, they strive with limited resources to assist marginalized individuals on both sides of this contested border, and to promote compassionate policy changes.

In this dynamic setting, the role of NGOs extends far beyond mere service provision, shaping the socio-political landscape and fostering cross-border solidarity and resilience. Ultimately, though, governments need to reconsider harsh anti-migrant policies that threaten migrants' lives, well-being and capacity to contribute to the region's future. **M**

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Esther Jiménez Atochero

Finding joint answers to common problems

An interview with Carlos Heredia

Carlos Heredia is an influential Mexican civil society activist and academic who played an important role during the debates on NAFTA in the early 1990s. He has held senior positions within Mexico's treasury department and the government of Mexico City and was a senior advisor for international affairs to Lázaro Cárdenas, the former governor of the State of Michoacán.

Carlos is an advisor to the Foundation for Democracy, a title he has held since 2000, and a founding and associate member of Comexi, the Mexican Council of Foreign Relations, where he co-directs the Binational Task Force on the United States-Mexico border. His expertise and experience with NGOs such as *Equipo Pueblo* and *Iniciativa Ciudadana para la Promoción de la Cultura del Diálogo*, among others, make him an important figure and leader in transnational activist movements.

EJA: Carlos, what are some of the most important things you have learned during your many years of transnational activism?

CH: First is that sharing citizenship does not equate to sharing a vision of the world, much less public policy proposals. In the traditional political system of Mexico, it was assumed that any international action of a Mexican had to conform to the Mexican government's view of things. That is, sharing citizenship automatically translated into sharing the same vision of things.

When I participated in the [creation of] cross-border alliances between Canada, Mexico and the United States during 1992-93, it became very clear that this old-time view corresponded to a vision of a single party, in a closed economy, and became evident that this was something that could no longer be expected.

A second lesson closely linked to the first one is the fact that I was obviously much more in agreement, and I still am 30 years later, with my American and Canadian colleagues with whom we made alliances than with the Mexican negotiating team, whom I knew but [with whom I was] on politically opposed sides.

I found much more affinity in labour, environmental, social, and cultural aspects with the allies with whom I worked. I found rather important differences with the Mexican [NAFTA] negotiating team, which maintained a very orthodox position, and, to a large extent, I would say it was subordinate to Washington's position.

Perhaps the third lesson is that, although we lost the vote in parliament and in the two congresses (U.S. and Mexican), two decades later, several of the approaches that we had put forward [on labour and the environment] had gained traction. Therefore, our proposals were fundamentally ahead of their time. The Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) recognized that labour and environmental issues were not parallel or complementary agreements but part of the central content of [CUSMA] instead.

In one of the memoirs of [former Mexican president] Carlos Salinas de Gortari, he mentions that we—the Mexican groups that were critical of NAFTA 1.0 and formed transnational alliances—were traitors to the homeland because we preferred to ally ourselves with foreign interests than support our government.

[However], over time, what we concluded was that it was not trade measures that were at heart being negotiated. A country project was being negotiated. A partnership project was being negotiated. A national project was being negotiated. A social pact, indeed.

Over time, of course, we realized that free trade agreements were a way to codify the kind of society that was sought. These treaties and negotiations ensured that whatever government was in the leadership, it would implement a policy that consisted of trade liberalization and the privatization of public enterprises and public goods.

EJA: During the negotiation of NAFTA, what was the role of civil society?

CH: As activists, we were focused on demands for social justice, inclusion, care for the environment and recognition of multicultural societies. We were defending the territories, the water, the public goods, the nature. We thought the treaty was going to undermine our societies' ability to decide on their own futures...by promoting counterproductive policies in



environmental matters, labour matters, and so on.

So, our role, as activists and popular organizations and social movements, was to fight for the society we were aspiring for. A society that does not privilege a small handful of people, namely the exporters. We outlined the kind of social contract that should exist.

As an academic, [I think] we did a very thorough job of critiquing structural adjustment, not only in the United States, Canada and Mexico, but with researchers from practically all over the world. We had a network of economists who helped us look at the same issues but from a different geopolitical perspective. The role of the academics with whom I was linked was basically to critique hegemonic arguments from a perspective of international political economy.

We participated in many international forums, and I systematically attended the annual meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. We went to the meetings of the OECD, the meetings of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, and other United Nations agencies.

We pushed for a recognition of Mexico's comparative advantage regarding labour. However, at the time, the Mexican government refused to even raise the issue of labour mobility on the grounds that it would never be approved by the U.S. congress nor the Canadian parliament—although, as we later saw, this was not the case.

At the end of the 1990s, we began to propose that the problems of the three countries should be addressed from the perspective of widening economic, gender and

racial inequalities, where the one per cent has most of the wealth and income, and keeps amassing it in an accelerated way, to the detriment of the rest of the population. This would mean that we faced common challenges.

Back in the early '90s, the position of some of the Americans and Canadians was of solidarity with Mexico, which was the junior partner, the weakest, and the “underdeveloped.” But for us, the political economy approach implied that we needed to build joint answers to those common challenges.

The United States and Canada were also polarized societies, where the concentration of wealth and income was sharpening and where financial capital was causing that inequality to be perpetuated and become eternal. And this remains [true] today too.

EJA: Carlos, what are you working on now? What are your next goals?

CH: I am preparing a piece in which I discuss how comfortable it is to say that violence, the climate crisis, and even political crises are the root causes of migration when I think that extractivism and its predatory economic model are the main roots of migration.

The promise of NAFTA 1.0 was that wages were going to converge and that there would no longer be northward migration because NAFTA would create many jobs, and everyone would stay in their home country. It turns out that the predatory model that reproduces this violence, this systemic violence, has expelled a huge amount of the population. **M**

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Laura Primeau

Not just a train, and certainly not Mayan

Tren Maya and the transnational Rights of Nature movement

Among the many Indigenous struggles taking place throughout North America, the high-profile resistance to a flagship project of the Mexican government shows how transnational alliances can have a profound impact on public dialogue about the rights of Indigenous Peoples and nature.

While the so-called Mayan train, or *Tren Maya*, seems to be moving ahead, by mobilizing international law in an innovative way, these alliances have highlighted the dangers from, and alternatives to, existing models of regional integration.

Tren Maya, a megaproject in southeastern Mexico that is partially operational, was announced in 2018 and rapidly became the flagship project of outgoing president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO) and his populist left-wing MORENA government. The Mayan train project entails a 1,500 km railway system connecting the nine principal cities and over 50 municipalities of the states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo.

Indigenous resistance to the “Mayan” train

While AMLO received national and international support for the Mayan train, the project was harshly criticized by environmental groups, archeologists and other experts, Mayan communities and the general public. This opposition ensured the project escalated into a transnational issue.

After construction on the project started in 2020, 150 civil

society and Indigenous organizations from the Yucatán Peninsula voiced their dissent in a letter to the government, citing grave violations of human rights, especially the rights of Indigenous communities, as well as environmental risks to the fragile ecosystem of the peninsula.

Organizations—including the Mexican Centre for Environmental Law (CEMDA), and Indigenous groups like the Regional Indigenous and Popular Council (CRIPX), the Múuch’ Xíinbal Assembly, and the Chuun t’aan Collective—took legal action against the government. They contend that the Mayan train violates Article 4 of the Mexican constitution, which guarantees the right to a healthy environment, as well as rights to clean water and to information, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples established in international human rights treaties ratified by Mexico and protected by the constitution.

Multiple organizations also denounced the train on national, regional and international human rights platforms. In 2020, a group of Zapatistas and Indigenous leaders from Mexico travelled to Europe to raise these and other problems with neoliberal projects like the Mayan train.

In 2023, Mayan groups, accompanied by various non-Indigenous groups, organized the *El Sur Resiste* caravan (“the South Resists”) travelled through seven states over 10 days to draw attention to the relationship between the train and the capitalist export-oriented development model.

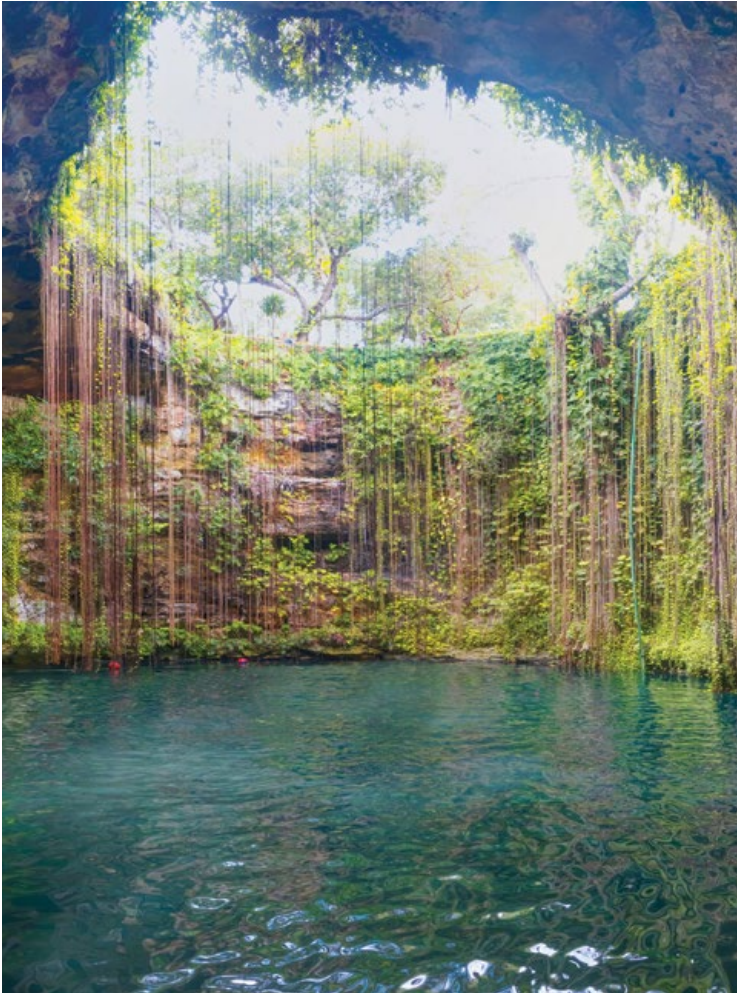
Their message was clear: in a commonly used phrase among activists, the Mayan train is “not just a train, and it is certainly not Mayan.” It is a mega project that reorganizes Mayan territories in the name of “national development.”

The train, which is advertised as a tourism project, in fact plays a key role in the development of the region’s energy and agribusiness sectors. It is connected to other megaprojects, like the modernization of the Interoceanic Corridor of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which aims to connect the west and east coasts of Mexico to increase the country’s competitiveness in global markets.

Both projects are part of the larger Mesoamerica Integration and Development Project, formerly known as Plan Puebla Panamá, which promises to deliver development and well-being to local populations through the construction of massive infrastructure projects. Tren Maya thus operates on established principles of modernization theory, which posits that investing in infrastructure will eventually benefit local communities by integrating local economies into globalized capitalist markets.

The Mayan train is certainly not Mayan, as it is not a political project that emerges from Mayan communities, nor has it been carried out with appropriate participation and consent from Mayan people.

While the nationwide referendum held by AMLO on the Mayan train in 2019 suggested



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overwhelming support for the project, consultation with Mayan populations was widely criticized for not respecting the principle of FPIC, especially regarding accessibility to information in Indigenous languages.

Protecting local territory through global alliances

The demands of domestic groups were taken up by global human rights organizations including Amnesty International, Greenpeace and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA). This international advocacy played a crucial role in bringing visibility to criticism surrounding the Mayan train project.

In June 2022, organizations submitted the case of the Mayan train to the International Rights of Nature Tribunal, a body of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN) that monitors violations of the *2010 Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth*. The tribunal ruled that the project represented an ethnocide and ecocide, as it violated the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Rights of Nature.

The case of the Mayan train at the International Rights of Nature Tribunal is part of a global

movement for the protection of the Rights of Nature, in which the Americas are leading the way.

Organizations like the Earth Law Center and the Center for Democratic and Environmental Rights in the U.S., and the Environmental Law Centre in Canada, work in partnership with international organizations like GARN and Indigenous collectives who protect the Rights of Nature locally. This collaborative effort has resulted in notable achievements, including the recognition of the Klamath River in Northern California (2019) and the Magpie River in Quebec (2021) as entities with legal rights.

These international alliances facilitate exchanges among social movements, non-governmental organizations, Indigenous groups, and intellectuals involved in territorial struggles, thereby enhancing the ability of local communities to defend their territories.

The importance of human rights instruments

Civil society organizations in Mexico have denounced the government in multiple national, regional and international human rights platforms. They cite established Indigenous rights conventions like the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and ILO Convention 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in independent countries, as well as the 2018 Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement). The Mexican constitution and Interamerican human rights system also provide substantial jurisprudence to back up opponents to Tren Maya.

The global movement for the Rights of Nature and instruments like the Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth reflect the process through which local groups navigate and reimagine international human rights standards. The Rights of Nature approach combines human rights discourse and Indigenous principles of reciprocity with nature, uniting diverse groups with overlapping interests and fostering innovative strategies of resistance.

In this sense, the verdict of the International Rights of Nature Tribunal regarding the Mayan train is closely related to the recognition of the legal rights of the Klamath and Magpie rivers. All three outcomes involved transnational alliances that combine human rights with Indigenous knowledge to safeguard established human rights, creating new avenues for addressing socio-environmental issues.

The case of the Mayan train serves as a powerful example of how collective resistance and global solidarity can influence and reshape the discourse on development and justice. **M**

Laura Primeau is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science and the Institute of Political Economy at Carleton University.

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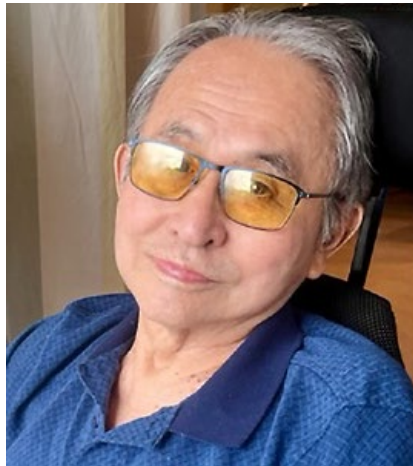
Meet Maryka Omatsu, sister to CCPA legacy donor Rick Akira Omatsu

Maryka, please tell us about Rick Omatsu. My brother Rick was born in 1939 in Vancouver, on the cusp of WWII, which would change his life—a life that was sadly marked by racism. As a Japanese Canadian, in 1942, Rick was sent to the B.C. interior. After the war, the family was forced by the government to leave the province. We relocated to Hamilton because our father was told it was less racist there.

Rick lived, went to school and worked his whole life in the city. He was a bachelor, a humble, private and shy man who worked 16 hours a day, seven days a week for most of his life.

He was also a working class intellectual, a lifelong socialist and supporter of the NDP. He had a few friends: my husband, Frank Cunningham, a professor with whom he liked to discuss politics and current affairs, and Dave Everett, who worked for him for 26 years and to whom he left his landscaping and gardening business, Innisfree Gardens, named after the poem, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", by W.B. Yeats, whom he admired.

What would Rick do with his free time? Rick enjoyed reading Chekov and Jane Austen, listening to Mozart and CBC Radio, photography, woodworking, being in nature:



Rick Omatsu

hiking, birding and salmon fishing. An accomplished cook, Rick took great pleasure in preparing elaborate Japanese meals for familial celebrations.

What's your favourite memory of Rick? Rick spent his boyhood as a Canadian "enemy alien". This "shame" he carried for many years. He was a secret supporter of the Japanese Canadian Redress movement, of which I was a leader. In 1987, we organized a nationwide postcard campaign. Supporters signed the cards that were addressed to then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. My brother went up and down Keswick Court in

Hamilton and asked his neighbours to sign the cards. He had lived on that street in our family home for most of his life. He told me that everyone signed and wished him good luck in our fight for redress.

How has Rick influenced your own life? Rick was my elder by almost 10 years. He went to Queen's University, a conservative university, for one year. I didn't know the significance at the time, but he had a wall-sized photo of Che Guevara on his bedroom wall. Rick spoke to me about politics and struggles for justice.

What is it about the CCPA's work that led to this generous legacy gift? Although I was unaware that Rick decided to leave half of his estate to the CCPA, I did know that injustice and racism shaped his life and beliefs. Perhaps I shouldn't have been surprised that he would have made a bequest to enable a left-wing think tank to thrive and influence Canadian discourse.

How do you wish Rick to be remembered? I like to think of Rick smiling at the thought that a shy and humble worker would be remembered for funding a column, allowing others to write on subjects close to his heart—and his life. **M**

Changiz M. Varzi

Lost dreams and grim realities

The struggles of Iranian women immigrants in Canada

The Omatsu Files

In appreciation of Rick Omatsu's transformative legacy gift to the CCPA, and in recognition of Rick's life, we are establishing The Omatsu Files in the Monitor (print and online) to provide dedicated space—as well as mentorship, support, and financial compensation—for young, racialized researchers as they explore issues of racism, inequality, and the experiences of racialized communities. It is intended to reflect and pay tribute to Rick's dedication to future generations, including through his lifelong appreciation of nature.

Mina*, 44, often dreams of Tehran, her home, and her mom. “I feel like I’ve forgotten something there, as if I’m back home to get what I left behind and then return here,” she says.

Before arriving in Canada, she taught English as a second language for 25 years. Now, she works at an electronic devices booth at a wholesale supermarket, is paid under the table, and considers herself lucky to afford the rent for a room that she shares with another Iranian immigrant in Toronto.

“There’s no need to talk about the pain and madness of it,” she adds. “Soon after I arrived here, I started taking anti-depression pills. So, you take a pill, and then you feel happy!”

Mina is one of the thousands of Iranian women who entered Canada after the 2022 anti-establishment protests in their home country. In September 2022, the demonstrations began after the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman, in the custody of the Islamic morality police.

Amid international support for the protesters, Canada introduced a special immigration plan for Iranians to support women’s rights in Iran in March 2023.

However, many Iranian women, like Mina, who made it to Canada now face various issues. These women, despite their professional backgrounds, are now enduring vulnerable conditions and significant economic challenges with an uncertain future.

“I feel lost, because I have no idea how my life will be in the future,” explains Mina, who has a bachelor’s degree in French literature.

She and other Iranian women told the *Monitor* that political pressures, as well as social and economic issues, were the main reasons they decided to leave everything behind in their home country. However, what they encountered in Canada was a struggle to survive.

Karl Flecker, an immigration policy consultant, notes that Iranians with open work permits face similar challenges as many immigrants from other Global South countries.

He explains that while these immigration programs may seem “the right response” to global displacement, they are also meant to ensure Canadian employers a supply of affordable labour.

“Employers in agriculture, services, manufacturing, and retail sectors are reaping the benefits of bad immigration policies,” he says.

“These employers, who have been clamouring for low-wage, low-skill labor for jobs that many Canadian residents are unwilling to take, are now gaining access

to a vast pool of workers who are desperately seeking employment.”

From teacher to fast-food worker

Mona, a 40-year-old school teacher with 17 years of teaching experience in Iran, is another Iranian immigrant who obtained an open work permit based on the measures introduced in 2023.

Now she works at a McDonald’s. This single mother works 40 hours per week for \$15.76 per hour. However, she still faces many difficulties meeting all the needs of her eight-year-old daughter.

“I’m really careful about spending and cannot get everything my daughter needs,” she explains.

Mona arrived in Canada in December 2022 with a student visa, after paying \$6,500 to an immigration lawyer. She studied education for three terms at Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, paying \$16,500, but had to drop out due to divorce and financial pressures.

“It feels as if all my past turned to dust, into nothing. Since childhood, I wanted to be a teacher, but it seems that fate has chosen something else for me,” she says.

Hoping to provide a better life for her daughter, she applied for an open work permit. However, the federal government bans those with an open work permit from working in the education and health sectors.

Mona, who has pre-existing heart issues, explains how her hands get numb after long working hours. “I miss the days when, even if I was tired after a long day of teaching at school, I liked that tiredness because I loved my job,” she says.

Flecker highlights the costs associated with employing skilled labour in jobs that require no specialized skills. These costs impact immigrants, their families, and their host country.

“It has a tremendous mental health cost for newcomers and their families,” he stresses.

“Consider the impacts to people who have trained their whole lives for one occupation, but due to economic necessity and a host of systemic barriers, they have no option but to take a survival job.”

Flecker also highlights occupational health and safety studies that show newcomers working in service and manufacturing fields have a significantly higher injury rate due to occupational mismatches.

Need for fundamental policy change

Iranian women with a three-year open work permit, regardless of the occupation they are hired for, are in a less precarious situation compared to those who arrived in Canada but had their permit requests rejected.

Elham, 36, is one of the few Iranians whose application was denied. Formerly the director of an accounting department in Iran, she now faces an uncertain future in Canada.

She used up her \$9,000 in savings while waiting over seven months for a response from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

“They told me my case was missing proof of entry, even though visitor entries are automatically recorded,” she says. “IRCC claimed they requested this proof, but I never received such a request.”

After the rejection, she again reapplied for an open work permit, including additional documents like phone bills and a photo of her at Niagara Falls to

prove she is in Canada. Yet, she remains unsure how long the wait will be. She is now working as a sales associate under the table, earning less than \$10 per hour.

“I didn’t expect to have the same status here as an experienced accountant in Iran, but I wish I could at least do my current job legally and with a proper contract,” she says.

To address the challenges these immigrants face, Flecker proposes that the Canadian government significantly scale up programs that facilitate the transition from Temporary Residency to Permanent Residency.

Flecker also emphasizes the need for collaboration among all relevant stakeholders, including federal and provincial governments, settlement agencies, immigrant rights advocates, industry groups, and unions.

For the long term, Flecker argues that a fundamental shift in the perception of immigration is needed.

“We need a huge revamp of how we view immigration, because there is a misguided perspective that links immigration just to the labour market” he emphasizes, referring to the UN data showing that over 120 million people have been globally displaced due to wars and conflicts.

“Immigration is about people. Sure, there are economic motivations, but there is also family reunification, and humanitarian objectives we are all obligated to meet. It is also about nation building, not just staffing Tim Horton’s or Amazon with low-wage, vulnerable workers.” **M**

Changiz M. Varzi is a journalist and photographer covering the direct and indirect impact of conflicts around the world.

*All the women quoted in this article requested to use pseudonyms and remain unnamed due to their work and visa conditions in Canada.



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Julie Segal

Want a safe climate and a more equitable society? Modernize financial policy

The flow of money today defines tomorrow's economy. This statement is not values-based—it is a fact of our current economic system.

Government policies oversee and guide the financial system. New ones are needed to better align financial decisions with the long-term good of people and the planet.

As oil and gas combustion is the leading cause of climate change, global climate negotiations commit to “transitioning away from fossil fuels” in an equitable manner. Yet Canadian banks, pension funds, and insurers provide enormous financing to oil and gas and underfinance clean energy relative to global peers. Climate adaptation projects and solutions like clean energy also need investment, but find it harder to access.

While many activists have demonstrated in front of a bank branch or individuals have shifted their savings to more sustainable investments, likely fewer have confronted how their bank or pension fund is regulated. Instead of playing whack-a-mole trying to address each dollar or institution individually, now is the time to fix the full financial system. Modernizing the policies and regulations that guide banks, pension funds, and insurance companies is a key lever for a just climate transition.

The Canadian financial system is massive. Three of our pension funds rank among the top 20 largest funds in the world. Due to their size, their decisions about investments affect not only our

savings but also shift the trajectory of the global economy. This warrants strong accountability.

Historically, Canada has been respected for its governance over pensions funds and the financial system. Yet financial policies still lag with respect to climate and sustainability, despite the size and impacts of our financial institutions. According to the Principles for Responsible Investment, Canada has shown “insufficient action by policy makers to encourage and enable responsible investment” and is a “low-regulation jurisdiction” relative to other peers like Europe or the United Kingdom.

Financial institutions have taken some proactive measures to reduce their own climate-related risks, to limit how much money they would lose when a flood or wildfire occurs. Action often stops there. Many institutions feel they don't have a mandate to address the impacts from their investments. As a result, they may not address how their investments potentially worsen climate change, nor align their organization with climate action.

According to the fiduciary duty of a financial institution, the priority might be understood as generating higher financial returns. Given that climate damage creates its own financial risk, an institution should not ignore how its investments contribute to global warming and climate change. In Canada last year, climate-related damages exceeded \$3 billion. Legal opinions confirm that, in Canada,

leaders in the private sector have an obligation to consider climate risks and opportunities. The best way to reduce climate-related risks is to invest in ways that reduce the severity of climate change.

Existing policy proposals could ensure that financial institutions consider their impacts on climate change. The solution is not to simply tinker with where an institution puts the money but to modernize our understanding of these institutions' mandates.

The Climate-Aligned Finance Act (CAFA) in the senate is a package of policies that would align financial institutions with global climate goals. This would mean limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius in a way that prioritizes equity, biodiversity, and the best available scientific evidence.

To achieve this, the legislation would update the duties of private sector leaders to ensure they advance climate action. It would upgrade the abilities of regulators to more strongly consider climate change. And, importantly, it would require credible climate transition plans from financial institutions to demonstrate how they would shift their investments away from polluting activities and into climate solutions.

Requiring credible climate transition plans from financial institutions and large companies has been a standing recommendation from environmental groups, with an increasing number of stakeholders gathering to highlight this policy solution as a priority. The credibility of plans and

alignment with keeping warming below 1.5°C is key, as is ensuring oversight bodies are empowered to evaluate the plans.

Other jurisdictions, like the European Union (EU) and United Kingdom (UK), have advanced beyond Canada towards these policy solutions. Both regions have clarified the mandates of their central banks and financial regulators to consider climate change. They are implementing policies to require credible climate transition plans.

The UK's Labour government, elected in the summer of 2024, committed to require financial institutions and large companies "to develop and implement credible transition plans that align with the 1.5°C goal of the Paris Agreement." Similar policies in the EU require successful implementation of a climate transition plan aligned with domestic climate commitments.

Within Canada, policies like CAFA have received endorsement from over 120 Canadian environmental organizations, financial institutions, and academics, as well as multiple members of parliament. Existing examples in the economy show how different rules or mandates can shift finance to actually advance climate and social goals.

For example, the public pension plan in Quebec (Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, CDPQ) has a dual mandate to support Quebec's economic development and achieve financial returns. This dual mandate is seen as the spur for CDPQ's climate commitment in 2019, one of the earliest among Canadian financial institutions. Civil society groups in Quebec advocate for the mandate to be further extended to directly require alignment with climate action. Fondation is another Quebec pension fund with a unique mandate, driven by labour through the *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* (Confederation of National Trade Union). It is seen as a leading institution in

prioritizing investments that have a positive societal impact.

Credit unions in Canada have more opportunities within their existing governance models to prioritize climate action compared to their bank counterparts. As member-owned nonprofit organizations, they are accountable to the broader membership instead of to shareholders. This yields a longer-term view, with climate action and social development being advanced as a result.

As the federal government moves towards an election year, new rules for a climate-aligned financial system should be a priority.

People want climate-aligned finance policy. In polling earlier this year, two-thirds of people surveyed across Canada supported implementing new rules for sustainable finance; this rose to over three-quarters for policies that directly counter greenwashing. Civil society has encouraged the government to act, with over 70 Canadian climate organizations putting their weight behind the issue in recent letters to the minister of finance.

Support for accountability over the private sector has been growing, and political parties have demonstrably leaned into this language. Financial policy for climate action is the heart of where to begin.

The federal government has signed global climate commitments and has a legislated commitment for climate action. It sets rules over financial institutions. Action is missing where the two roles overlap. Policies should be implemented to require credible climate transition plans across the economy, to end the tug of war and align the financial system with equitable climate action. **M**

Julie Segal is senior program manager of climate finance at Environmental Defence Canada. She was a member of the advisory committee for Bill S-243, *The Climate-Aligned Finance Act*, and for the Quebec government's sustainable finance roadmap.



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Viewpoint

Peter G. Prontzos

The crisis in Canadian politics

Although there are many causes for the anger and polarization in Canadian society, there are also many policies, at both the federal and provincial levels, that would reduce these problems by making life easier and more fulfilling for Canadians.

A dramatic example of this problem was the so-called “truckers convoy” in 2022. The immediate cause was Canada announcing that, because of COVID-19, no unvaccinated truckers could cross into the United States. Life for many of them became much more stressful. The attempted coup in Washington on January 6, 2021, was also an inspiration.

The convoy also gave participants a sense of community and “meaning”. For many who occupied Ottawa, “it was a great party,

a joyful and peaceful expression of freedom and togetherness.”

The experience was different for most residents. As Stephen Maher wrote in the June 2024 issue of *The Walrus*: “Many protesters were uncouth, drunk, and aggressive, taunting the masked and refusing to wear masks in stores and restaurants. The massive Rideau Centre mall had to shut; small businesses lost their customers... Staff at the Shepherds of Good Hope soup kitchen reported being harassed and assaulted.”

The most important causes of this extremism are the economic, political, and cultural developments resulting from the neoliberalism that began in the 1980s, and the resulting economic hardships for working Canadians—along with an increase in

the wealth and power of large corporations.

Corporate power increased in the workplace (e.g. destroying unions, keeping wages down), the economy, (e.g. “free trade” and globalization), and the political sphere (such as putting more corporate allies into governments at all levels).

The main consequence was greater economic inequality. A CCPA study by David Macdonald found the average CEO collects \$7,162 an hour. It takes just over eight hours in the new year for the top 100 CEOs to clock in an average of \$60,600—what the average worker in Canada makes in an entire year. By 9:27 a.m. on January 2, 2023, Canada’s top CEOs would have already made \$60,600 while the average Canadian

worker will toil all year long to earn that amount of pay.

CCPA-BC Senior Economist Marc Lee points out that the distribution of market income is much more unequal than in the 1970s. By “the late 2010s, individuals in the top 10% received over \$23,600 more per person than they would have under a 1970s-like income distribution.”

Increasing social isolation is another problem. Bruce Alexander (Simon Fraser University) points out how a corporate-driven economy “...breaks down every traditional form of social cohesion...creating a kind of dislocation or poverty of the spirit that draws people into addiction and other psychological problems.”

To the degree that society approximates a free-market society, dislocation is not the pathological state of a few, it is the general condition. Because the expanding reach of free-market economics engulfs ever more aspects of life, dislocation is increasing.

One result is “deaths of despair” from suicides, overdoses, and alcoholism, and the cardiovascular effects of obesity. In Canada, there were “44,592 apparent opioid toxicity deaths reported between January 2016 and December 2023... Most accidental apparent opioid toxicity deaths occurred among males (72%),” Bruce Bower writes in *Science News*.

Anger, despair, and toxic “masculinity” are other major problems, as these deaths disproportionately impact white males without a college degree.

In *The Myth of Normal*, Dr. Gabor Maté, who spent years in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside working with people addicted to various drugs, emphasizes that the global health problems that we face, such as, “burgeoning stress, inequality, and climate catastrophe”, have been created by a culture of globalized capitalism that condemns countless numbers of human beings “to suffer illness born of stress, ignorance, inequality, environmental degradation, climate change, poverty, and social isolation.”

In his Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Study, Dr. Vincent Felitti found that the more trauma that a child has experienced, the more troubled that child (and that adult) is.

In political terms, socialization usually begins in the home. George Lakoff (UC Berkeley) showed that children whose parents are more nurturing tend to be liberal and open-minded—and more likely to use empathy as their moral foundation. Children raised with a traditional “strict father” style of parenting tend to be more conservative, individualistic, authoritarian, and patriarchal—and see morality as being based on obedience.

We are first governed in our families, and so we tend to understand governing institutions in terms of the governing systems of families.

In the strict father family, father knows best. He knows right from wrong and has the ultimate

authority to make sure his children and his spouse do what he says, which is taken to be what is right.

This reasoning shows up in conservative politics, in which the poor are seen as lazy and undeserving, and the rich as deserving their wealth. What you become is only up to you; society has nothing to do with it. You are responsible for yourself, not for others.

Social problems, such as hopelessness, anger, and poor health, are worse when there are high levels of poverty and inequality. In *The Inner Level*, Wilkinson and Pickett explain that “...inequality—the large income gaps between rich and poor, damage us all”, including rising levels of mental illness, depression and self-harm.

Most people who die by suicide do not have mental health conditions. For many, negative environmental and societal conditions, e.g. low wages, poverty and the need for housing, contribute to stress that may increase suicide attempts (Case and Deaton, 2020).

Authoritarian leaders use emotions such as anger and despair to their advantage. As the *CBC Ideas* reported in October 2024, authoritarians see the world as dangerous. They are conservative (rate high on Fascism-scale). They had difficult childhoods. They identify with powerful figures. They are tribal. They feel like victims and they feel threatened.

Tribal authoritarians are often racist, but the problems of focusing only on racism are many. The most important reason for the rise in racism and violence is the growing stress and alienation resulting from increasing social and economic inequality. That anger is redirected to various scapegoats by many on the right. “Divide and conquer” is one of the oldest methods to seize and maintain political power.

The most effective way to combat racism and authoritarianism is to focus on the real problems facing Canadians—which are primarily about economic class—and on inclusive solutions.

First, enact policies based on economic need, such as increased services and fairer tax rates. Millions of working people will benefit when the minimum wage is a living wage. Likewise, a “Green New Deal” would create millions of well-paying jobs to address the existential danger of the climate crisis. Free college education is another progressive option.

Making more comprehensive health care available to everyone is not only the humane thing to do, it will also lower overall costs. Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman notes that every dollar invested in children’s well-being results in huge savings of future costs.

Programs such as these will improve the lives of most Canadians while reducing the division, anger, and violence that are a growing threat to democracy. **M**

Peter G. Prontzos is professor emeritus of Political Science and Interdisciplinary Studies/Continuing Studies, Langara College, Vancouver.

Armine Yalnizyan

The care economy is the foundation of the economy

Caring has long been seen as a woman's issue. It took forever to get the care economy on the political agenda because, historically, care has primarily fallen to women to provide care at home for those too young, too old or too sick to work. This was most often the case when one breadwinner could support a family, and that breadwinner was most often a man.

Caring only recently became viewed as an economic issue of consequence. That's for two reasons: 1) More working-age people are turning to paid care supports because they have to work to survive. They are unavailable to provide unpaid care. 2) The system of care is in crisis. Almost everyone has witnessed how the undersupply of care underscores the degree to which it is a foundation for virtually every other aspect of human endeavour.

My focus is on the aspects of the care economy that are becoming profoundly dysfunctional: child care, long-term care and health care.

Beyond its role in our individual lives is its relevance to the economy. That's very odd, because it plays such an outsized role as an input to the economy. Citizens and governments go nuts when roads and bridges are washed out or electricity grids collapse, but social infrastructure is as critical to daily functioning as physical infrastructure. Witness what happens when child care centres, long-term care facilities, primary care clinics and hospitals can't serve our needs.

You may be surprised by the facts. Most people are.

To describe its scale: combine Statistics Canada's measures of the industry of health and social assistance with the industry of education. (The health and social assistance sector includes long-term care, child care, hospitals, home care and primary care.) Together, these two sectors contribute to and ultimately define human development and the economic potential of individuals and whole societies. That definition of the care economy accounted for 13.4 per cent of GDP in 2023. Its closest rival is real estate, which clocked in at 13.2 per cent of GDP.

In 2023, the care economy was over a third bigger than all manufacturing (9.7 per cent), almost twice as big as construction or finance (7.5 per cent), and almost three times as large as the mining and quarrying sector (5.1 per cent), which goes well beyond oil and gas.

You'd never know it from the way the business press and decision-makers talk. Economic

growth and productivity are rooted in exports, innovation, and investments in machinery and equipment in this view of the world. So much thought goes into the production of cars, oil and new homes, yet the care economy, already a dominant source of growth and innovation that could transform the economy and lives, faces chronic disregard and underinvestment.

Nonetheless, demographics and the increasing privatization and profitization of care have expanded the footprint of formal, monetized care in the economy over the last 20 years; and it's still growing. Indeed, the care economy may become the biggest single driver of future economic growth in the slow growth environment that is gripping every nation that had a baby boom after the Second World War and falling birth rates since.

I'm going to say that again: the care economy may become our biggest driver of future economic growth. Wow, right?

And here's another "I bet you didn't know": the care economy already provides over one out of five jobs in the economy (21 per cent), eclipsing all other industrial sectors of the economy as a source of income for Canadian workers.

The care economy has the potential to become the backbone of the Canadian middle class, just as manufacturing was in the 1950s and 1960s. As it was in manufacturing at that time, the goal is to make every job a good job. Or at least more of them.

We treat the care economy as a derivative part of the economy, a nice-to-have once we've dealt with the "real" public policy priority,

The care economy is poised to become the biggest driver of future economic growth



iStock

economic growth. But economic growth can't be sustained without the care economy. Delivered with or without love, care is the foundation of economic growth.

Economists debate whether the richest nations in the world are entering an era of slow growth. I mentioned three drags on growth earlier: population aging, climate change and increasingly fractious geopolitics. Investors are finding it harder to make money from endogenous, organic growth, not only domestically but at the global level. A lot of money was made during the pandemic, and a whole lot more when the global economy reopened after the pandemic, Russia invaded Ukraine, and a wave of inflation not seen in 40 years was unleashed on the world. But that spike in profitability had two features: it was temporary, and a lot of that money migrated from the usual types of investment—publicly traded stocks and bonds—to private equity.

Private equity is a form of capitalism that is hard to monitor. That spells trouble for us all.

Private equity is becoming a gigantic problem

You may recall Canada's federal finance minister saying in the fall of 2022 that she was being fiscally responsible by "keeping our powder dry" to explain why she wasn't increasing federal spending to support those struggling with inflation-induced affordability

issues. She wanted to reserve funds to deploy if the economy fell into recession.

There's another, far more explosive form of "dry powder" and it's not being held in reserve to help you. It's the term used in private equity markets to refer to cash ready and available to be put to work to make money for its owners, not you.

How much dry powder is available in the world of private equity is a question mark because—by definition and by law—it's private. We only know what these investors want to tell us. Estimates from Prequin put the amount of dry powder available in early 2024 at \$4 trillion USD globally. And that money is increasingly eyeing the care economy.

Just a few weeks ago, a huge conference in Washington, D.C. brought together thousands of investors to talk about the potential for deal-making in the home care and long-term care businesses. In early March, Lina Khan, chairperson of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, put the investment world on notice that, given the acceleration of private equity deals in anesthesiology, which consolidated market power and drove up prices across the entire acute care system, more interventions and possibly new regulation may have to occur to prevent that contagion from spreading. Meanwhile, the U.S. Senate is studying how private equity has advanced to own a quarter of all U.S. hospitals, changing costs and access in the

process. California just tabled a bill that aims to lock private equity out of health care.

Here in Canada, we are walking towards a world of pain with our eyes wide shut.

We need to pay much closer attention to trends in private equity in the U.S., U.K., New Zealand, Australia, Europe, the Nordic nations, and in South Asia. The same patterns are playing out around the world. They reveal two truths, learned at high cost in the past few years.

Truth 1: Care workers go to work so that you can go to work

If there aren't enough care workers to do the care that is needed, other workers will be unable to work to their potential. They will need to provide some amount of unpaid care. That will undercut the latent economic potential of a nation. If you're worried about flagging productivity, at least prevent it from getting worse. And it will get worse if you don't pay attention to the care economy.

Not to fetishize paid work, but we are in a new moment. Soon, one in four Canadians will be seniors, the biggest cohort of elderly in history. The dependency ratio will be the highest it has been in 60 years, when the boomers were born. It will continue not for a few years, as it did in the 1950s and early 1960s, but for decades; and this reality will unfold against a background rate of economic growth not of five or six per cent, as was the case more than half a century ago, but with growth hovering around two per cent or less. It won't take much to push the system into long-term recession if we don't get this right.

This is happening around the world as well: rapidly growing demand for paid care services, rapidly growing government financing, and a light touch on the rules to facilitate a rapid expansion of supply. The care economy is

turning into an economic wild west.

Truth 2: These are the perfect conditions for attracting private sector investors

But not just any kind of investment. Not publicly traded companies, by and large, who are regulated by security commissions, but private equity, for whom there are fewer legal requirements and fewer legal restrictions. They work within the rules (or lobby to change the rules) to shield themselves from scrutiny, responsibilities and liabilities through complex corporate structures.

As I have learned from my own recent look into private equity investment in the long-term care and child care sectors, we now need forensic accountants to help us follow the money. Taxpayers' money. *Our* money. And there's a lot more money to come. The business of child care alone is expected to double globally by 2030 (less than a decade!) to almost half a trillion dollars. But governments aren't tracking what's happening here. Neither are academics. Or journalists. Or think tanks.

Governments and economists may be moving slowly, but these private equity giants are flying high and moving fast. A private equity asset is held, on average, for four to seven years before it is sold.

The care economy is an appealing target because, in the era of slow growth, it is a sure source of organic growth and provides a

Every aspect of the care economy is ripe for the private equity playbook

guaranteed, government-backed stream of regular revenue.

Billions of taxpayer dollars are being unleashed in Canada, the UK, the U.S. and the Anglosphere in general as societies struggle to address the twin pressures facing the smallest cohort of working age people in 60 years: high costs of care colliding with a high need for workers. Improved affordability and access, not profit, are the goals. But when billions of dollars suddenly appear, so do the profiteers.

Further, virtually every aspect of the care economy is ripe for the private equity playbook, with high potential to squeeze profits by lowering costs, hiking prices, and lobbying governments for new rules regarding staffing levels and qualifications, as well as fee rates.

Economists have long debated the pros and cons of privatization. This isn't your daddy's privatization, and these aren't your typical corporate giants. Small-cap private equity creates the chains, which are bought by big-cap private equity firms. The game is ever-accelerating corporate concentration and a quickening pace of bankruptcies. Private equity is creating momentum for plunder capitalism everywhere. It's coming for the care economy.

Private equity isn't new—it's new in the care economy

Though private equity comes in different sizes—family offices, institutional players like pension funds and banks, and other alternative investors, small cap, big cap—only deep pockets can come to the table. It's a big stakes game. The lowest ante I've seen is \$100,000. That's what Wealthsimple says you need to have to even think about playing. But Wealthsimple is a bit player, taking a gamble to bring private equity 'to the people'. The entrance fee to this world is usually in the multi-millions.

Private equity is a ruthless, even monstrous giant, because it's



always a big-foot strategy. Few of these investments produce more care—that is, add capacity. They are mostly “roll-ups,” purchases of existing operations with known capacity, revenue flows and profit margins. The “bigger is better” strategy of adding companies to one owner produces economies of scale in back-office functions, supply chains for bulk purchasing, standardized procedures to minimize costs and maximize revenues, and extra-billing for anything but the most basic service.

That’s all key, but the biggest payout comes from extracting higher rents (a sad irony for the many operators that sell their business with real-estate assets) and saddling the acquired companies with the debt payments used to buy them in the first place.

The pattern repeats with each sale: mergers and acquisitions grow market share, lower costs come from economies of scale and cheaper payroll costs, higher revenues come from using growing market share and/or captive markets (with little or no options) to set prices. However, the recipe for success has its limits.

What happens when you can’t juice more profit out of the enterprise? It goes bankrupt.

The Body Shop and Red Lobster are just two recent examples of successful brands unable to survive the rapacious appetites of takeover by private equity. This storyline has been repeated for decades and is now mushrooming across new sectors of the economy, including the care economy.

When it comes to the business of care, the extraction of profits always reduces the potential amount of care people receive, primarily, but not exclusively,

through cutting labour costs by lowering staffing levels, reducing qualifications, eliminating benefits and pensions. As Canadian sociologists Hugh and Pat Armstrong have said for decades, “the conditions of work are the conditions of care.”

CBS aired a two-part series on how the arrival of private equity in the U.S. long-term care sector is leaving the elderly with substandard care and a shrinking set of choices as more facilities go bankrupt. In my *Toronto Star* column, I did the same analysis in Canada by examining how this model of acquisition is stripping real estate values from our long-term care homes, jeopardizing care by reducing staffing or simply closing the operation to build condos. Wait lists for care are soaring, with consequences spilling back upstream across the whole system. We taxpayers are left paying for this mess.

The Norwegians call it the tapeworm economy: parasitic investments that grow in size as they absorb nutrition from public funds, weaken care and degrade jobs.

In Canada, at best we’re sleepwalking through it; at worst, actually, we’re rewarding companies that are providing allegedly criminal levels of long-term care.

Not just big in scale, these big-foot owners are proliferating in number across the economy. They are the new giants of capitalism...and now care. The same patterns are unfolding across long-term care, hospitals and home care, and child care in nation after nation: public and non-profit operators are struggling to keep things running while private investors reap growing profits. All fuelled by the public dime.

In Canada, we're not learning fast enough from others' experiences to meaningfully apply the brakes. The U.K., the U.S., and Australia have all seen private equity investment rip and strip its way through multiple sectors of the economy for two decades or more.

Sadly, there are many, many, many international examples of how overleveraged owners drove successful operations into the ditch, but in the care economy, the consequences are starkly different than from retail or restaurants or journalism.

Paid care is already chronically undersupplied. What happens when the enterprise that goes bankrupt serviced the care needs of 10 or 20 per cent of a community? Who will take care of preschoolers, the majority of whose families require all available adults to work? In long-term care, more elderly are being evicted from their nursing homes so owners can cash in on the real estate bonanza, but there's no other capacity to turn to. Where will people without supports or bags of money live out their lives? And what will it mean to productivity and GDP, per capita, when the smallest working-age cohort in more than half a century can't get their own health care needs met?

The dynamic now at play in the care economy has terrible human consequences. It has devastating economic consequences too, on workers who provide care and workers who need paid care to be provided. When the inevitable happens—accelerating numbers of companies providing care bought and sold by private equity, driving more of them to collapse—the disruption faced by individuals and the economy at large will be fearsome.

The care economy is too important—economically and at a deeply personal level—to surrender it to market forces.

Economist John Kenneth Galbraith knew this. He worried about

“our tendency to overinvest in things and underinvest in people.”

That's my worry too. We need guardrails on our public investments to make sure our money is being used to finance our long-term needs/interests—caring for each other—and not some investor's short-term gain.

We can wait for these predictable disasters. Or we can pay attention to how the story is unfolding in other nations and learn from their defensive strategies.

This isn't a murder mystery. We can write the next chapter of this story.

What is to be done

One of my favourite Galbraith quotes is this: In all life one should comfort the afflicted, but verily, also, one should afflict the comfortable, and especially when they are comfortably, contentedly, even happily wrong.

Today, the comfortably contented are afflicting the afflicted. It's a situation light on poetry and hard on the soul.

But, as Galbraith said about Marshall, “you had to know what was wrong before you could know what was right.” Empirical evidence and good theory help prevent oversteering, in any direction. We don't have either at the moment.

We need all orders of government to monitor these investments and provide transparent reports to the public.

For that to happen, we need to change laws to require more disclosure. For a start, if a corporation receives public funding to provide care, it should have to disclose:

- The number and size of care facilities controlled by that owner.
- How that ownership fits into more complex corporate structures, including shells and interlocking directorships.
- Its financial backing (Public? Non-profit? Publicly traded? Private equity?).

- Turnover, of both ownership and staffing.

We also need to place limits on market shares. Perhaps a threshold on the number and scale of operations held by a single owner. Perhaps market share in a given geographic catchment area. Few categories of consumption are more inelastic than the demand for paid care. What does that mean? We'll pay whatever we have to pay or do without.

Given how debt charges are a leading cause of bankruptcies in acquired facilities, there should be limits on the amount of debt used to purchase care operations. Would-be homeowners need to put down 20 per cent of the purchase price of a home, or purchase mortgage default insurance and pay higher borrowing fees. We should exact similar rules when it comes to the purchase of care facilities.

That giant sucking sound you hear is the withdrawal of dividends and fees from the revenues of acquired companies, irrespective of what that means to the provision of care. In some cases, this has bankrupted operations within months of new ownership. In the U.S., there have been federal bills tabled, barring the extraction of dividends (and further outsourcing, often to other companies owned by the shell organization) for two years after purchase.

Finally, we need to come up with a system-wide plan—across child care, health care, and long-term care—that ensures we have the right person to do the right job at the right time, and that we train, attract and retain the right number of people, along with the right labour-enhancing technologies. **M**

Armine Yalnizyan is the Atkinson Foundation Fellow in the Future of Work and is the recipient of the 2023 Galbraith Prize in Economics, awarded by the Progressive Economics Forum. This is an excerpt from her May 31, 2024 lecture to the Canadian Economics Association at Toronto Metropolitan University.

YOUR CCPA

Get to know Jess Klassen

OFFICE: **MANITOBA**
POSITION: **MANITOBA RESEARCH ALLIANCE COORDINATOR**
YEARS WITH THE CCPA: **6**
(with a break in between)

Tell us about why you returned to the CCPA Manitoba office and what you're working on these days. I was so happy to return to the CCPA to coordinate the Manitoba Research Alliance (MRA). The MRA, hosted at CCPA Manitoba, is a SSHRC-funded community-based research alliance of faculty, students, and community partners engaging in research around community-driven solutions to poverty. I find myself drawn to roles where I can help bridge the gap between systemic inequities and policy solutions, and that's precisely the work of the MRA.

Part of my role with the MRA is to mobilize the research and facilitate the translation from research report to policy impact. We are working to strategize the second half of our project to mobilize our community-based research to have a deeper impact in Manitoba's current provincial political climate. This is exciting work for me and it speaks to why I returned to CCPA!

How does your Masters in Social Work inform your daily work? I pursued a Masters in Social Work with a focus on policy, research, and planning, which is somewhat different than what most people think when they imagine a social worker. The social work code of ethics, which includes respecting the dignity and worth of all people, promoting social justice, and pursuing truth and reconciliation, certainly informs the work I do in coordinating a



Jess made this jean jacket

community-university research alliance. Imagine if these tenets of the code of ethics were the principles on which our public policies rested? I think this is what we're pursuing here at the CCPA.

What drew you to the CCPA? I've cited the CCPA's work for as long as I've been in post-secondary education. It was kind of a pinch-me moment when I was hired to work alongside those I've been citing for years! All to say, it was a privilege to join an organization putting forward progressive, systemic solutions that help imagine new and just ways of organizing the world.

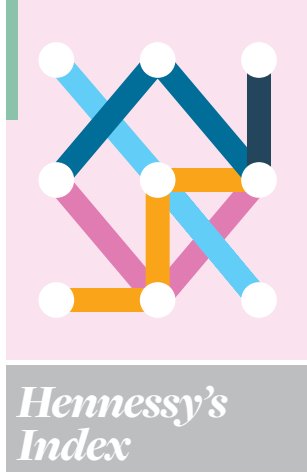
What are you reading these days? I perpetually have a stack of dog-eared books on my nightstand. The three in current rotation are: *The Quilts of Gees Bend* (telling the stories of a small, remote, Black Alabama community that have

created gorgeous quilts since the 1930s out of mostly spare fabric that are masterpieces recognized worldwide), *A Little Devil in America: Notes in Praise of Black Performance* by Hanif Abdurraqib (essays reflecting on everything from Aretha Franklin's funeral to Beyonce's Superbowl performance), and *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer (solely responsible for the tripling of my garden this year).

When you're not at work, how do you decompress? I am a textile artist who sews clothing and tufts wool rugs—my very favourite way to decompress. Making and mending the clothes I wear is both a way for me to express my creativity and my values. I recently made a denim jacket with material I thrifted. It's like a small corner of my life where I can almost step aside capitalism for a second.

Which is better: Winnipeg winters or summers? The third option—both! I love our seasons here in Winnipeg. Winter is for playing on frozen rivers and holing up in my house to make art. Summers are for heading to the many lakes in Manitoba, growing flowers and vegetables in my garden, and taking some time off.

What gives you hope? The student encampments in support of the Palestinian people, pressuring their institutions to divest from the state of Israel, give me hope. Across the globe (with two in Winnipeg), these sites are beautiful examples of peaceful solidarity, leveraging the power one has, creating safe communities, and speaking truth to power. **M**



**Hennessy's
Index**

Canada's
growing—and
glaring—gap
Trish Hennessy

+24.6%
First, the good news:
Wage gains for the
lowest-income Canadian
households grew by this
much in the first quarter of
2024 compared to a year
earlier.

One percentage point

Now, the bad news:
Canadian households in
the middle 60 per cent
of income earners saw
their wages decrease by
one percentage point in
the first quarter of 2024
compared to a year earlier.

67.6%
The top 20 per cent
wealthiest Canadian
households accounted
for more than two-thirds
(67.6 per cent) of Canada's
total net worth in the first
quarter of 2024. Canada's
poorest 40 per cent of
households account for
only 2.8 per cent of wealth
in Canada.

7.7%
It's always sunny at the
top: The richest 20 per
cent of Canadian house-
holds saw their average
disposable income
increase by 7.7 per cent in
the first quarter of 2024
compared to the year
before.

\$3.4 million
That's the average wealth,
per household, held by
Canada's richest 20 per
cent of households in the
first quarter of 2024.

64.8%
That's the wealth gap
between the richest 20
per cent and the poorest
40 per cent of households
in Canada in the first
quarter of 2024.

58.4%
More than half (58.4
per cent) of Canada's
wealthiest households'
asset holdings were
financial assets in the first
quarter of 2024. Compare
that to only 28.8 per cent
of financial assets for the
least wealthy.

22.8%
That's how much of their
income homeowners in
Canada spent on housing
in the first quarter of
2024—up 0.4 percentage
points from the year
before.

-3.7%
Average mortgage
debt for the youngest
households (those under
the age of 35 years)
decreased by 3.7 per cent
in the first quarter of 2024
compared to the previous
two quarters—possibly
due to prospective young
homeowners turning away
from an unaffordable
housing market.

264.2%
That's the whopping
debt-to income ratio for
households with a major
income earner aged 35 to
44—down from 268.4 per
cent a year earlier.

33.3%
That's how much of their
income renters in Canada
spent on housing in the
first quarter of 2024—up
0.9 percentage points
from the first quarter of
2023.

\$2,835
That's net savings for
homeowners in Canada
in the first quarter of
2024—up 43.2 per cent
from the year before, while
renters had net dis-saving
of -\$707.

91%
Homeowners accounted
for 91 per cent of all
wealth in Canada in the
first quarter of 2024, due
equally to real estate and
financial asset holdings.

"If inflation doesn't decline,
the Bank of Canada will
keep interest rates higher
for longer, costing tenants
and homeowners dearly.
The solution is simple—
bring in strong rent controls
across the country. Now,
not later."

—Ricardo Tranjan, CCPA Ontario senior researcher

Sources: Statistics Canada, "Distributions of household economic accounts for income, consumption, saving and wealth of Canadian households, first quarter 2024," *The Daily*, July 17, 2024, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240717/dq240717a-eng.htm?utm_source=mstatcan&utm_medium=eml&utm_campaign=statcan-statcan-mstatcan

E.R. Zarevich

Immigrant complexities

THE SYRIAN LADIES BENEVOLENT SOCIETY CHRISTINE ESTIMA

Astoria 2023

The Syrian Ladies Benevolent Society is an in-depth analysis of complicated Syrian Canadian immigrant experiences from the perspectives of characters who are hardened survivors.

“Montreal sits on the slope of a hilltop, and everyone walks on a slant as they move from Viger up Saint-Hubert to the Plateau. Fiacres will take you up the mount to the Belvedere lookout for sixty cents, if you’ve got that to spare, and the view is well worth it. Looking down upon the Saint Lawrence, it’s easy to imagine the waters that flow under the Cartier Bridge once ebbed from the shores of Beirut. We all come from somewhere—why shouldn’t the current?”

This is from “Montreal Awaits You,” a short story told in the form of an affectionate 1949 letter from Alzira, a plucky widow woman, to Nasir, an old flame. He is her lost love, the one she had to leave behind when she and her family fled war-torn Beirut. She’s attempting to summon him to another continent where they can pick up their relationship where they left off decades prior. Her letter to him is tinged with equal parts optimism and desperation. She hopes that by forging her abandoned, idealized former life with her acceptable adopted one, she can redeem herself for years of living abroad in a sham loveless marriage with a closeted transsexual. But, unconsciously traumatized by her experiences, she’s not entirely living in reality, and may be imagining an impossible future with what

she’s deluded herself into believing is a vital missing puzzle piece.

This is the overarching theme of *The Syrian Ladies Benevolent Society*. Reconciling old existences with new ones, and not always succeeding in the endeavours. Published in November of 2023, Christine Estima’s bold and audacious collection of short stories leads readers on an uncomfortable but enlightening journey through time by following a series of assorted sagas of Syrian Canadian refugees and immigrants who replanted their roots in Montreal after leaving home behind for good. The journey starts with another widow woman, in 1860, who flees her war-ravaged village on foot with her six-month-old daughter strapped to her body. Her only chances of survival are the kindness of a sympathetic wet nurse and a weapon she barely knows how to use. She’s instructed by her fellow woman to board a ship out of Beirut and only disembark in Canada. There, maybe, she might be safe. This first story is called “The Castle of Montreal.”

From this starting point, there is no moment of rest or reprieve for these troubled characters, as life, predictably and relentlessly, continues to bombard them long after they’ve escaped the dangers of their homeland. Canada offers better opportunities, but not necessarily full protection for the yearning lost souls it embraces. In one story, titled “Ortona,” the estranged daughter of a respectable family gets roped into conducting spy missions for international political powers. She sacrifices everything, including her own birth name, for her treacherous missions, having given up on ever receiving love or validation from her blood relatives. This is in 1943,

when war has completely taken over the world.

And in “The Syrian Ladies Benevolent Society,” a Montreal-based volunteer organization of Syrian Canadian women with good intentions for their community isn’t quite as effective in its philanthropic endeavours as it thinks it is. In the year 1934, their purpose and competency as a group is inwardly judged by none other than the discontented husband of Alzira, Sayfy, who flirts with his own secretive feminine life in the changing rooms of high-end Canadian department stores, where he dons women’s clothing for his own private pleasure. Emotionally disconnected from his family and highly critical of his expatriate culture of displaced Arabs, he has to snatch quick moments of real happiness wherever he can. Readers will follow similar tales of the anxious pursuit of solid identity and joy all the way up to the prickly year of 2020.

The Syrian Ladies Benevolent Society is more than historical fiction. It’s a psychological exploration of how cultures, philosophies, and memories clash and subside within each individual person. No one is the perfect representation of where they came from and where circumstances have landed them. Immigration experiences are complex and by no means straightforward. Christine Estima succeeds in leaving no one out of the vital conversations she starts in her venturesome stories. **M**

E.R. Zarevich is a writer from Burlington, Ontario. Her literary and cultural criticism can be found in *Shrapnel Magazine*, *Atlantic Books*, *Hamilton Review of Books*, *Mangoprism*, and *Herizons*, among others.



Reuters

Steven Staples

Five controversial lessons to cure health care from Jane Philpott

HEALTH FOR ALL: A PRESCRIPTION FOR A HEALTHIER CANADA **DR. JANE PHILPOTT**

McClelland and Stewart 2024

Dr. Jane Philpott's *Health for All: A Doctor's prescription for a healthier Canada* is exactly what the nation needs right now, but not everyone is going to like her proposals to save Medicare.

From her unique vantage point in medicine and politics, she blames successive governments for “several decades of denial, complacency, and neglect” for the poor state of health care in this country. Her prescription to bring health systems back from the brink are evidence-based, delivered in a clear-eyed compassionate manner, but are sure to rankle those on all sides of the debate.

Health for All is three books in one, intertwining stories that are personal, professional, and political. In a deeply moving recounting that beckoned tears as a parent myself, Philpott shares her pursuit of public medicine, which was sparked by the loss of her older brother to childhood illness, and then propelled from the tragic death of her toddler daughter to an unforgiving infection while she and her family were working in West Africa—24 years later to the day of her brother's passing.

Jane Philpott earned a unique perspective on our health care system. Growing up in a Presbyterian family instilled in her a moral compass based on faith and service. Her journey wound its way through family medicine, development work, advocacy in Canada with many non-profit groups, to serving

as Canada's health minister and, most recently, academia at Queens University.

In my 30 years working on federal policy issues, I have met plenty of politicians of all stripes. I can tell you that Jane Philpott is among those who place their calling working for social change in social movements above all else, pursuing electoral politics as a means to that end. “Nothing drives me forward more than the realization that the world is far from equitable—and the belief it could be fairer,” she writes.

A chance meeting with former Prime Minister Paul Martin convinced her to engage in electoral politics. She was swept into government in the Liberal wave of 2015.

Philpott joined the Trudeau cabinet as the first physician health

minister in 2015 and later led other departments. Her record includes several key policy successes, including welcoming Syrian refugees, harm reduction, physician-assisted dying, Indigenous health and welfare, immigration support.

Sadly, her rise and fall in politics is worthy of a Shakespearean tragedy. The Library of Parliament counts 1,463 days she served as a member of parliament—a remarkable period demarked by a dramatic election, her appointment to a succession of three cabinet positions, ending in a humiliating public dismissal by her own Liberal party colleagues in 2019.

Fortunately for people in Canada, her faith and professional commitment to health equity have not allowed her to become discouraged in the least.

In fact, she has generously shared her experience and advice with me numerous times since I began working on health policy with the Canadian Health Coalition three years ago, and we have shared a platform on two occasions to champion universal public health care.

Her goal in writing *Health for All* is to ensure “every person living in Canada has access to a primary care home, in the same way that every child has access to a public school.” But she acknowledges that it will require a transformation that challenges current thinking, practices and interests.

Five recommendations to improve primary care access from Jane Philpott

1. The federal government has a role in public health care, despite complaints from the provinces. The premiers of Canada’s 13 provinces and territories are as quick to complain about federal interference in their jurisdiction for health care as they are to demand more money through the Canada Health Transfer (CHT) without conditions attached.

Philpott is adamant the federal government has the authority and the duty to act. In addition to the federal and provincial government, municipalities and Indigenous governments have a role to play too: “Ideally, all orders of government would work together.”

2. Don’t change the *Canada Health Act*, pass complementary legislation focused on access to primary care instead. I’ve heard many public health care activists argue that the 40-year-old *Canada Health Act* needs to be changed to include a plethora of issues, including mental health, long-term care, and even systemic racism. But others, including the Canadian Health Coalition, fear that opening the Act risks weakening the federal law that governs federal health transfers to provinces.

Philpott agrees that while the *Canada Health Act* has largely withstood the test of time, it has not evolved with the changing health care ecosystem. She

proposes a new sister act: the *Canada Primary Care Act*. The federal government would link a separate transfer for primary care and establish the overall goal: universal, authentic access to primary care.

3. Phase out fee-for-service payments and put doctors on salary. Evidence in other countries demonstrates that patients in Canada would be better served by primary care homes, where a team of health care professionals works together. Every patient would be assigned a family doctor or nurse practitioner and have access to other specialists as needed.

Implementing this model will require doctors giving-up the prevalent fee-for-service model, where doctors bill the province for their services and pay out of their pocket to rent commercial office space, hire staff, buy equipment, etc. like they are running a small business. In its place, doctors will be paid by salary or by the shift.

4. Indigenous governments should be able to exercise their authority over health care. As the first Minister for Indigenous Services, Philpott recounts learning from the Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs how hospitals placed “birth alerts” on Indigenous expectant mothers. On average, an Indigenous child was taken from their mother every single day and placed into the child welfare system in the province. The child apprehensions were conducted with little empathy for the mother, who could be labelled as a risk simply because she was poor.

In response, working with community leaders, she drafted Bill C-92 which made it clear that Indigenous governments could exert their jurisdiction in relation to child and family services. The bill passed into law in 2019, and she argues that Indigenous governments should have the same authority over health care.

5. Address the social determinants of health by providing primary care for everyone—including refugees. Jane Philpott was appalled by former Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s efforts to eliminate access to health care for refugees, “which seems not only cruel but unwise from a public health and public policy perspective.” Among her first acts as health minister was to reverse the cuts and provide additional coverage to refugees. The right to care for the most vulnerable groups must be a top priority, writes Philpott.

Clearly, Jane Philpott has not given up hope that our elected representatives can do what is required to save public health care. With provincial elections and a federal election on the horizon, her book provides a path forward. **M**

Steven Staples is the national director of policy and advocacy for the Canadian Health Coalition.



The good news page

Elaine Hughes

The largest solar power plant in the world just got switched on

According to Chinese media, the world's biggest solar plant, covering 13,333 hectares in the desert of northwest Xinjiang and capable of powering a small country on its own, has been connected to the grid. / *IFLScience*, June 7, 2024.

Indigenous people in Australia to grow a wildlife corridor

In Australia's Cape Kimberley, environmental charity Climate Force is collaborating with the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people and rangers to create a wildlife corridor that runs between two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the Daintree Rainforest and the Great Barrier Reef. Handed back to them by the Australian government in 2021, the 180-million-year-old Daintree Rainforest is part of the Eastern Kuku Yalanji people's ancestral lands. / *Mongabay*, June 29, 2024.

Deforestation in Colombia reached 23-year low in 2023

Deforestation in Colombia continues to decline, with levels falling to a 23-year low in 2023. According to figures released by the government, there has been a 36 per cent drop in environmental destruction. As one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, Colombia's environmental victory is a victory for the entire planet. / *My Modern Met*, July 11, 2024.

Missing horse reunited with its family

Flex, a championship endurance horse, bolted after suffering a bee sting while his owner, Houston Peschi of Bragg Creek, Alberta, was saddling him. Houston lost all sight and sound of his horse and the frantic search of the remote countryside began. After searching the area with his bike without success, he went to social media for help. A few days later, the pilot and passenger of a small airplane spotted a horse with a saddle standing in a clearing. "By the time I had the halter on him and knew that he was secure, we both just started crying with relief and joy, and all of the emotions that have been bubbling under the surface for the last couple of days," Houston's wife said. / *Good News Network*, July 31, 2024.

What a Canadian did with his surplus potatoes

After fulfilling his normal deliveries and quotas for 2023, Isaiah Hofer's Manitoba farm still had 12 million pounds of potatoes left. He had a few options: leaving them to rot as fertilizer, turning them into animal feed, or selling them at a tiny profit or even at a loss. In the end, Hofer followed his heart and resolved to give all of them away to the needy. His search for help took him to Foodsharing Ottawa's volunteer Executive Director Wendy Leung. Together, Hofer and Leung saw the departure of 115 trucks carrying spuds to food banks and charities across Ontario and as far afield as San Diego, California. / *Good News Network*, May 22, 2024.

People are embracing the 'no-buy year'

The self-imposed rules of the no-buy challenge to spend money only on necessary purchases are simple: participants pledge to stop buying impulse, non-essential items for a set amount of time—usually 12 months. What started several years ago as a blogged-about experiment in budgeting and mindful spending has become a popular trend on social media; a Reddit group on the experience has 51,000 members. / *The Associated Press*, May 28, 2024.

Canada Post worker saves the day

Daya Modayur, a 12-year-old from Nova Scotia attending summer camp at MacPhee Centre for Creative Learning in Dartmouth, wrote a postcard to her grandparents in Nova Scotia, but forgot the postage stamp. She took the problem to her camp counsellor, who taped a note to the outside of the mailbox: "Dear postal worker, at our summer camp we made postcards and one person sent one to their grandma without a stamp. If you find it, can you please return it to the MacPhee Centre or use the stamp on the back of this page? We would really appreciate it." A day later, a reply appeared at the bottom of the note: "Found it and stamped it! Have a great day!" / *Good News Network*, July 15, 2024.

Early 20th-century portraits preserve the heritage of Native Americans

In 1906, photographer and ethnologist Edward S. Curtis undertook the production of what was set to be a series of 20 volumes with 1,500 photographs of Native Americans. While visiting more than 80 tribes, he created 10,000 wax cylinder recordings of Native American language and music, and accumulated over 40,000 images of the tribes he visited and documented a legacy of information about tribal culture. / *My Modern Met*, July 3, 2024.



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The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling—their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability. Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them. Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.

—*Arundhati Roy, War Talk*

