

# MONITOR

Progressive news, views and ideas



CCPA  
CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
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SUMMER 2024

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Based in Matane, Quebec, Sébastien Thibault creates illustrations that provide ironic or surrealist visions of political subjects or current news. He uses graphic shapes, simplified forms, and intense color to create symbolic images for publications like the *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and the *Economist*.

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## MONITOR

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](mailto:monitor@policyalternatives.ca) with feedback or if you would like to receive the *Monitor*.

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Trish Hennessy

# The pandemic's heavy toll on women

In March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit home, the walls rapidly closed in—especially for women.

For caregivers at home and predominantly in the care economy, women's double burden crystallized. As schools and child care centres closed, women bore the brunt of at-home schooling. For many, they also juggled caring for aging parents or worrying about their safety in long-term care facilities as COVID-19 rippled through these vulnerable institutions.

Those burdens were compounded by these realities for women in Canada:

Some lost their job due to the economic shutdown at the start of the pandemic.

Some figured out how to work from home (often with little ones underfoot or home schooling).

Some coped with having to risk their health and safety by reporting to work in hospitals, grocery stores, and other frontline "essential" jobs.

Some decided the stress of work was too much and either quit or retired.

For a brief moment, they were lauded as sheroes. And then, as the pandemic dragged on, showing no mercy, women faded into the background—doing invisible work for low pay and at high risk of getting sick as the economy gradually re-opened, federal government income supports dried up, and duty called.

CCPA Senior Researcher Katherine Scott was tracking women's fate at home and in the workplace at the start of the pandemic, worrying that generations of women's progress in the workplace was unravelling at breakneck speed.

Would women ever fully recover from the harsh realities of the pandemic?

She committed to track what happened to women, from just before the pandemic (2019) to today, as part of a federally funded project called Beyond Recovery.

This issue of the *Monitor* reveals the good, bad and the ugly. It tells the complicated story of women's recovery from those early days of the pandemic.

Some women did indeed recover, landing better jobs with higher pay.

Some women lost their livelihood and never returned to the labour market or retired early.

Some women struggled from day one, forced to keep working under harsh conditions.

As with most things in Canada's colour-coded workforce, racialized, disabled, migrant and immigrant women faced additional barriers to securing decent work.

We learn about some of these women through three case studies that the CCPA and its research associates conducted in B.C., Manitoba and Nova Scotia.

You'll read about harrowing experiences that women working in the hotel industry experienced as they took on more physical labour for low pay and with no job security and health protections.

You'll read about how staffing in long-term care and home care facilities is at a breaking point—and how women are bearing the brunt.

You'll also read about the impact that the pandemic had on migrant and immigrant women's work, where far too many went unprotected against exploitative working conditions.

In each of these stories, you'll likely notice a common theme

woven throughout the Beyond Recovery project: women are the heart and soul of Canada's care and service economy, but the occupations within these sectors are in flux, insecure, and tremendously stressful.

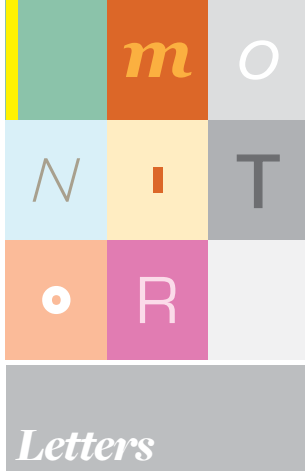
As the federal government rolls out \$10-a-day child care fees across Canada, women who work in those jobs continue to be underpaid and overworked.

As the federal government transfers billions of dollars to provincial health care systems, many provinces aren't using that funding to rebuild and fortify Medicare—they're opening the back door to privatization, they're starving the system of funds needed to adequately pay nurses and other predominantly women workers in the sector. Nor are they recruiting additional staff to deal with burnout and stress—the result of years of overwork in the care economy.

The pandemic revealed just how unprepared the long-term care sector was to deal with the inevitable—pandemics hit the aged, the frail, and the most vulnerable hardest, yet there is no action in Canada to restructure the sector.

Until we reckon with these hard truths, women will continue to bear the brunt of a labour market that prioritizes profit over people and exploits workers. It seemed, in those early days of the pandemic, that the mask had been lifted from Canada's care economy sector; that reforms experts and advocates have been urging for years would happen.

Then the economy slowly re-opened, people tried to move on with their lives, and governments seem to have lost the plot. A reckoning should be coming, but will it? **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](mailto:monitor@policyalternatives.ca).

### April 2024 Monitor

#### *Cities: Contested terrain*

I read the spring 2024 issue of the *Monitor*. I noticed that the articles did not speak about older people and elders in cities. I found that to be problematic.

Seniors are a rapidly growing demographic in Canada. This will have a huge impact on cities.

Within the seniors population, there is a great diversity, and, like everyone else, seniors have intersecting identities. A significant portion of seniors are low income and rely entirely on the CPP, OAS/GIS to survive. In particular, senior poverty adversely affects women, racialized persons, immigrants, Indigenous Peoples, and persons with disabilities.

Many seniors who live in cities struggle to pay

for housing, buy food, and medication, access reliable transportation, avail themselves of needed services, and avoid senior social isolation.

The World Health Organization uses the term aging-in-place to describe the need for cities to have environments that are free from physical and social barriers negatively impacting seniors and are also supported by policies, systems, services, etc. that allow older people to meet our basic needs, learn to grow and make decisions, be mobile (in whatever form), maintain and build relationships, and contribute.

I am hoping that future articles will address and provide a critical eye to how cities can and need to be a place where all seniors can age in place. We need to advocate for truly intersectional cities. It needs to look at how cities can be locations where older persons and elders can exist, grow and thrive.  
**Marion Pollack**  
*Vancouver, B.C.*

Many of us have struggled long and hard in the trenches trying to change police in Canada. Police culture is very powerful, and police strike back at critics claiming they are 'soft on crime.' Those involved in the struggle know that workable alternatives consume less public money and are much more effective at resolving problems. But police oppose such changes and our political leaders hardly ever hold them to account.

"Abolishing police," as Chuka Ejeckam is

recommending, is hardly the policy alternative which CCPA is expected to advocate. It's nothing more than someone saying they don't know what to do. It would have been helpful if an article about changing policing had dealt with some of the terrific ideas advocated in Edmonton, Vancouver, Halifax, Ottawa, Montreal or Toronto.

**John Sewell**  
*Toronto*

### January 2024 Monitor

#### *Anti-trans school panic is about controlling our kids*

I may need to run this idea by some gay and trans people.

Through meeting several non-cis humans, especially lately, it has occurred to me that the discrepancy perceived by the critics, as mentioned in this excellent article, stems from the comparison with the behaviour, mindset, and generally accepted "norms" of the majority of humans. This completely disregards the undeniable fact that every human is inherently unique, thus rendering comparisons of some attributes invalid.

Unfortunately, as in so much of how we live today, the old habits of the past govern our thinking, such as with respect to colonialism. It is only with individual massive paradigm shifts that society will ever achieve justice for all.

**Penny Oyama**  
*Burnaby, B. C.*

#### *Barbie and the real world*

I was a bit puzzled by Katherine Scott's take on *The Barbie Movie*, as per

her review in the Winter 2024 *Monitor*. It was not this movie's intent to portray "Barbie Land" as the real world! In fact, I think even my five-year-old granddaughter, who watched it with me on Christmas day, understood that. It's as if Ms. Scott only watched the first part and decided she knew what it was all about?

Barbie Land is an obvious fantasy—and a boring one at that. Its "female supremacy" features non-traditional Barbies who wear the costumes of powerful and high-status women—but they don't have to actually *do* anything. They, together with the more traditional dolls, simply lounge about looking beautiful, while they act bullying and exclusionary toward the Kens—a mirror image of sex role privilege in the real world.

After an existential crisis, sparked by the awareness that there's such a thing as death, Barbie emerges into our world, where she has a very different experience. This part underscores everything Katherine says about patriarchy, wage imbalance, and the "five Cs." This is why some interpret the movie as having a feminist message. (It is also very funny.)

This satirical message is undercut, however, when you consider that the film was made with Mattel's co-operation and is actually helping to sell their products. (Guess what my granddaughter demanded for Christmas?)

**Anne Miles**  
*Gibsons, B.C.*

## CCPA BC

As the 2024 provincial election approaches, the CCPA-BC office has been diligently developing policy alternatives to enhance the well-being of British Columbians.

Leading these efforts, the *Getting to Net-Zero in Canada* report by David Hughes proposes more robust government policies to meet Canada's net-zero emissions targets, focused on a strategic shift from fossil fuel dependency to renewable energy sources and improved energy efficiency.

Our investigation into the surge of wood pellet exports to Japan has uncovered that this trend is rapidly accelerating the loss of B.C.'s primary forests, threatening long-lasting ecological damage. This report marked Ben Parfitt's final contribution before his retirement, concluding his impactful 20-year tenure at the CCPA-BC.

Building on our environmental research, *Connecting BC*, authored by Marc Lee in collaboration with the B.C. Federation of Labour, lays out a 10-year vision for public transit across the province. This strategic

plan details the steps needed to make transit affordable, accessible, inclusive, carbon-neutral, and a superior experience for users throughout B.C.

Iglika Ivanova and Véronique Sioufi have submitted recommendations to the 2024 B.C. Labour Relations Code Review, stressing the need for sectoral bargaining in the private sector. Due to outdated labour laws, many workers lack access to the benefits of collective bargaining, leading to rising income inequality and persistent gender and racial pay gaps.

*Expanding Democratic Employee Ownership in Canada*, co-authored by Alex Hemingway (CCPA-BC) and Simon Pek (UVic), champions the cause for employee-owned workplaces, proposing policy options that foster more inclusive and equitable business structures, thus reducing economic inequality.

Véronique Sioufi's analysis of B.C. Budget 2024 highlights the inadequate funding for supports for new immigrants, temporary foreign workers, and international students. Contrary to the prevailing narrative, newcomers are not draining resources—they're subsidizing post-secondary education in B.C. and filling gaps in the labour market.

## CCPA Manitoba

CCPA Manitoba commissioned a Probe Research poll that found 65 per cent of Manitobans polled support extending employment rights to gig workers who work for

digital platforms such as Skip the Dishes or Uber.

Employment rights for gig workers is one policy recommendation to address gaps in labour legislation, improve working conditions, and help workers catch up with the cost of living, according to a report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba, *A Progressive Labour Agenda for Manitoba: Eleven policy options to improve working conditions and social wellbeing*.

"Over the last decade, aspects of labour legislation and the enforcement of labour rights have fallen by the wayside," says Niall Harney, Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues. "Provincial governments have the power to significantly improve workers' lives through the legislation they pass. This report provides a policy package to improve working conditions and overall wellbeing in Manitoba this government can work towards throughout their mandate."

"Any improvements to the overall workforce provide even more improvements (for) the lives of those on the margins," says Diwa Marcelino from MIGRANTE, a community organization that advocates for the rights of migrant workers. Workplace inequities faced by women, migrant workers, and recent immigrants are being exacerbated by gaps in aspects of provincial labour legislation. The report proposes updates to the *Workplace Recruitment and Protection Act* to extend protections to migrant workers and

international students, as well as updates to pay equity legislation, among other proposals.

The Manitoba government has announced it will introduce legislation to ban replacement workers and introduce single-step union certification in 2024.

## CCPA National

*Spending What it Takes*, a joint report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) and Climate Action Network Canada (CAN-Rac), highlights three practical steps that the federal government can take to address immediate affordability concerns and bring tangible benefits while cutting emissions:

1. Expand the heat pump affordability program to lower energy bills, improve households' quality of life, and cut emissions from buildings;
2. Establish a youth climate corps to fill skills shortages while bridging youth into good green jobs; and
3. Extend the windfall profits tax to the oil and gas sector, to ensure that polluters pay their fair share, as countries such as the UK have done, which could raise \$4.2 billion or more.

Cities lack sufficient revenue to meet increasing service demands due to downloaded costs from higher government levels over the past three decades. *A Modest Proposal*, a report by CCPA Senior Economist David Macdonald, shows that if the federal government directed the Canada

Revenue Agency (CRA) to collect municipal personal income taxes, cities could decide to implement a local income tax. A one per cent tax on the richest, for example, could raise tens of millions of dollars to pay for public services and infrastructure.

*Canada's Shift to a More Regressive Tax System*, a joint report by the CCPA and Canadians for Tax Fairness, looks at tax changes between 2004 and 2022, examining changes by the Paul Martin Liberal government, the Stephen Harper Conservative government and the Justin Trudeau Liberal government. It considers almost all sources of income, including corporate profits and other sources of income not normally counted in Statistics Canada's tallies, and all taxes paid. It finds that, overall, Canada's tax system is only moderately progressive through the bottom half of the income distribution, and is regressive at the top of the distribution due to several sources of untaxed or lightly taxed income (such as capital gains, inheritances/bequests and employer-provided benefits) that predominantly go to top earners.

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### CCPA Nova Scotia

Things have been busy in the CCPA-NS office. We published *Falling Short: Troubles with the seasonal agricultural worker program in Nova Scotia*. The report, co-authored by Dalhousie professor and CCPA-NS Research Associate Raluca Bejean, underscores the lack of oversight in the

province to ensure safe and dignified working conditions for migrant workers and offers recommendations to both federal and provincial governments to reverse its harmful effects.

We also released *Cooking, Cleaning, and Caring: COVID-19, essential labour and the experiences of immigrant and migrant women in Nova Scotia*; see the article in this *Monitor* that outlines the key findings and recommendations. The authors included Dalhousie Professor and CCPA-NS Research Associate Catherine Bryan. The report looks at the challenging working conditions faced by migrant and immigrant women in low-wage essential sectors.

I also appreciated the opportunity to participate in CUPE Nova Scotia's women's conference. I contributed to a panel discussion on the importance of using a gender lens in policy development and how we incorporate this lens in our work at CCPA-NS. I shared insights about why using a gender lens is critical when developing policy and discussed my personal career path and learnings about leadership to support new women leaders.

In the spring we released a report on municipal politics and policy. With municipal elections slated for October, we are looking to support Nova Scotians to ask questions of council candidates and inspire new and returning councillors with recommendations for an ambitious agenda that will build more inclusive communities.

### CCPA Ontario

It's easy to get distracted in Ontario today.

If you believe Queen's Park, things have never been better. This spring, a major ad campaign from the province painted the rosier of pictures: in the ads, farmers are farming. Workers are working. Students are learning. Drivers are driving.

Day-to-day life in Ontario is simply wonderful—that's the message from our government.

But as recent commentary from CCPA Ontario has shown, the ads have a nefarious purpose: to distract public attention from the big picture.

The big picture is this: chronic provincial underfunding of public services and a near-total indifference to poverty and the cost of living have left millions of Ontarians in very dire straits. For a decade now, Ontario's per-person program spending has been the lowest of any province. For every dollar other provinces spend on programs, Ontario spends just 75 cents.

One consequence? As Senior Researcher Ricardo Tranjan found, our public schools now have 5,000 fewer educators in classrooms than they had in 2018—despite rising enrolments.

That is huge news. But on the same day it published its plans for school budgets, the province also announced a ban on cell phones in class—a clear attempt to keep the public focused on anything *but* school funding. Like bringing back paper bags to the

LCBO, cellphone bans and pricey ad campaigns are meant to distract.

CCPA Ontario brings the focus back where it belongs: we hold the government to account for its policies. Find out more at [monitormag.ca/topics/ontario/](http://monitormag.ca/topics/ontario/).

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### CCPA Saskatchewan

How much trust should we put in the Saskatchewan government's budget promise to return to surplus by next year?

CCPA Saskatchewan Director Simon Enoch and University of Saskatchewan political science Professor Charles Smith write in the Saskatoon *Star-Phoenix* that the government's predictions of returning to surplus next year all rest on very shaky foundations.

With a razor-thin surplus of only \$18 million predicted for 2024-2025, it would only take a small dip in resource prices or agricultural production to wipe out what is already a very slim surplus.

Unprecedented crop insurance payouts already wiped out the government's supposed billion dollar surplus from last year. With drought a virtual certainty for many parts of the province this year, it beggars belief that the government continues to expect the return to historic levels of crop production for next year.

But with a competitive fall election looming, perhaps it is more politically expedient to be recklessly optimistic than clear-eyed about the province's economic future. **M**



iStock

David Macdonald  
National Office

## Canadian cities could raise tens of millions of dollars with one tool: a local income tax

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020, cities across the country were struggling to deliver quality, affordable public services such as public transit, social housing, and even basic infrastructure improvements.

It's partly because senior levels of government—provincial and federal—have downloaded many responsibilities to municipalities since the mid-1990s.

Cities have never been well-equipped to handle the fallout. Cities are considered “creatures of the province” and, therefore, rely on senior levels of government for funding transfers and for permission to diversify their revenue-raising tools.

With property taxes as the main source of revenue for most cities, the tax base is simply too constraining to ensure our cities offer the best and most affordable services and amenities possible.

The pressures that the pandemic has placed on cities only compounded the problem. Many downtown cores have been hollowed out by the rise of remote work, which has also impacted public transit use. Inflation and the outrageous cost of housing has led to a growth in encampments and a rise in the unhoused. When things get rough, the responsibilities land on the doorstep of municipalities.

And city governments are now among the largest subnational governments in Canada. Seven

cities are now larger than the smallest territorial government. The City of Toronto spends more than any territory or Atlantic province.

The property tax as the main revenue source is far too limiting. Canadian cities should be given another option: local income taxes.

The Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) already collects the personal income taxes for the federal and all provincial governments (save Quebec). The federal government could direct the CRA to collect municipal personal income taxes as well. Cities wouldn't have to levy this new tax, but they would be given the right to decide whether to implement it, with flexibility on tax rates.

Cities could, for example, decide to raise a local income tax only on

their richest residents. The payoff would be dramatic.

If cities imposed a one per cent municipal tax on their residents who made more than \$246,000 a year, these are examples of the amounts of revenue that could be raised for specific city governments in 2025: Vancouver could raise \$48 million, Calgary could raise \$67 million, and the Winnipeg could raise \$16 million.

If cities broadened the tax base by imposing a one per cent additional tax on residents with personal income over \$56,000 in 2025, these are examples of the amounts they could raise: Toronto could raise \$340 million, Québec city could raise \$60 million, Halifax could raise \$45 million.

Property tax revenue doesn't grow naturally over time, unless property taxes are explicitly increased. This makes even inflationary increases year to year difficult. However, revenues from income taxes do grow year after year, without any tax changes whatsoever.

If this mechanism had been in place between 2019 and 2022, cities would have seen local income tax revenue grow three to seven times faster than property tax revenues.

Think about how that new revenue could enable cities to immediately build more social and affordable housing and child care spaces, tackle homelessness, improve and expand public transit and other infrastructure, and so much more. And all without "tax increase" debates every year.

This isn't about provincial or federal governments sending more money to cities. Rather, it's about giving municipalities new revenue options so they can decide what's needed locally. It provides autonomy but, also, responsibility.

It would mean cities could live up to their true potential instead of stagnating over neglect, political wrangling, and perma-austerity budgets. ●

David Macdonald is a senior economist at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Jess Klassen  
Manitoba Office

## Tax cuts favour men

Have you heard of the elusive Winnipeg superhero Femme Fiscale?

Almost 20 years ago, Femme Fiscale attended Manitoba budget scrums donning a shiny cape and striped tights. They used their oversized POV (point of view) goggles to look at Manitoba's finances through their gendered lenses, surveying how the budget affected women in Manitoba.

Femme Fiscale was a hero championing women in Manitoba with knee-high boots firmly planted on the ground (while the cherubic 17-foot Golden Boy, Manitoba's symbol of economic prosperity, had his head 'stuck in the clouds'). They worked to bring the issue of women's economic equality to the attention of politicians and the broader public.

What would Femme Fiscale think now that Manitoba ranks the lowest

in gender equality in the country, according to a recently released Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) report? CCPA's update on the gender gap in Canada used a 17-indicator Gender Gap Index to assess progress between 2019-21. Unfortunately, Manitoba reported the lowest gender parity score. Existing inequities worsened during the acute phase of the pandemic, and women and gender-diverse people are struggling to recover.

The rise in inequality in Manitoba—both income inequality and gender inequality—isn't an accident. It's by design due to public policy that does not prioritize women, gender-diverse people, and families. And it has very real consequences.

Manitoba had the second worst personal security score in the Gender Gap Index due to increases in police-reported intimate-partner violence, sexual assault, and criminal harassment targeting women. Manitoba has ranked at the bottom in this area for several years. The numbers are likely much higher as many incidents of violence against women and gender-diverse people are not reported to the police.

Manitoba and Saskatchewan experienced the largest decline in life expectancy for women and gender-diverse people. Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit plus people in Manitoba experience unacceptably high levels of violence and early death. Indigenous women accounted for 65 per cent of homicides in Winnipeg between 2018-22.

Women in Manitoba earn 71 cents for every dollar men make, and the gender poverty gap continues to widen. Racialized and Indigenous women earn 59 cents and 58 cents, respectively, for every dollar a white man earns. Manitoba continues to



Photo courtesy of UNPAC



experience the highest child poverty rate in the country, many of whom live in single-parent families headed by women.

The lack of affordable child care spaces in Manitoba has negative effects on women and gender-diverse people's participation in the labour market. This worsened during the previous provincial government's tenure, with stagnant spending.

It is promising that the new provincial government has named a Minister Responsible for Gender Equity, Nahanni Fontaine. Fontaine and Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness Bernadette Smith are internationally recognized Indigenous leaders and have spent decades fighting for missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIWG2S) and their families. The Manitoba cabinet also includes many other feminist and activist leaders.

Action must continue by investing in women, gender-diverse people, and families in Manitoba. A budget with a gender-equity lens includes investments in health, housing, income transfers, family violence shelters, training and education, and child care.

What a budget with a gender-equity lens does not include, however, is \$500 million in tax cuts. The top earning 10 per cent of men will receive almost 20 per cent of the total amount cut (\$110 million). This is more than the bottom, lower-earning 60 per cent of women. These tax changes will give millions of dollars to the wealthiest men in our province while leaving women, gender-diverse people, and families with what's left.

Tax fairness is key to reducing income inequality and in making real gains in gender equity. ●

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Jess Klassen (she/her) is the Manitoba Research Alliance Coordinator (MRA) at CCPA Manitoba. A version of this piece was originally published in the *Winnipeg Free Press*.

Randy Robinson  
Ontario Office

## Faster internet as slowly as possible

If you live in a city of any size, you might worry about whether you can afford fast Internet service.

But you probably don't worry about whether it's available in your neighbourhood. In rural and northern Ontario, it's a different story. Broadband Internet can be non-existent, or frustratingly slow. Working online, or taking part in video conferencing, can be difficult, if not impossible.

Broadband is a basic utility, an essential service like roads or postal service, but we don't treat it that way. The for-profit corporations that run internet service in our cities are generally not interested in providing it where it's expensive to install. So governments at all levels subsidize the cost, typically by paying the corporations to build it.

Municipalities and First Nations have shown impressive initiative to make concrete progress on the broadband file, but universal access demands more money than local governments can raise. That's why the governments of Canada and Ontario are both in the game. Ottawa has its Connect to Innovate and Universal Broadband Funds; Ontario has its Accelerated

High-Speed Internet Program and other initiatives.

Unfortunately, there's nothing accelerated or high-speed about what either level of government is doing. There is progress happening, it's true. But it's as slow as dial-up.

A recent report from the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario showed that the province had planned to spend \$720 million on rural broadband in 2023-24. But it also showed that as of December 31, Queen's Park had actually spent just over \$78 million of the money—11 per cent of the budgeted amount. Go back into the Public Accounts from the last several years, and it's the same story: budgeting a lot, spending a little. Since 2019-20, the government has budgeted \$1.54 billion for broadband and cellular infrastructure but spent just \$184 million—12 per cent of its target.

It is possible, of course, that the government is spending the money through some other budget line but keeping it secret. This seems unlikely: expanding rural broadband is a good news story, and the governing party has campaigned heavily on it for years. Also, it seems entirely plausible that a budget line in the Public Accounts called "Broadband and Cellular Infrastructure" would be the place to find expenditures related to oh, I don't know, broadband and cellular infrastructure.

Since 2021, the government has repeatedly insisted that it is investing close to \$4 billion to make sure rural Ontario is connected in "every corner of the province." Government talking points stress that "this is the largest single investment in high-speed internet, in any province, by any government in Canadian history."

## The Ontario government is budgeting a lot—but it's spending a little

Maybe so, but when will it happen? The 2021 provincial budget said that the \$4-billion investment would occur over six years beginning in 2019-20. Three weeks from now, we will be at the end of Year Five of that plan. Where's the spending?

Queen's Park has quietly added nine months to its original schedule by saying that it will "bring access to reliable, high-speed internet to unserved and underserved communities across the province by the end of 2025." But that's still very soon: infrastructure takes time to build. The one individual project listed in the Public Accounts—delivery of high-speed Internet to Matawa First Nations communities in northwestern Ontario—began more than a decade ago. Work continues.

Also, in 2021, the province announced plans to invest \$109 million in global satellite company Telesat. The purpose of the investment is to guarantee access for Ontarians to "high-speed satellite bandwidth...at reduced rates." Yet in 2021-22 and 2022-23, according to the Public Accounts, payments to the company totalled just one-third of a million dollars. That's a fraction of one per cent of the planned spending.

To be fair, it's not that the province is doing nothing on the broadband file. In 2022, the government announced that it had struck deals to pay eight companies \$1.3 billion to expand broadband access. By 2023, Queen's Park was reporting that it had signed agreements to deliver broadband to half a million homes and businesses.

With a provincial election campaign just over two years away, it seems likely that the governing party is keen to deliver on its promise to bring fast Internet service to rural and remote areas.

But by budgeting a dollar and spending a dime, it's doing it in slow motion. ●

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Randy Robinson is director of the CCPA Ontario office.

David Macdonald  
National Office

## Why a capital gains tax on the rich makes sense

Ever since we've been publishing an annual report on CEO pay in Canada, I've had a bone to pick: CEOs and the rich generally get a special tax rebate when they sell assets like real estate or stocks at a profit.

That profit is called a capital gain and if you declare more than \$250,000 of it in a year, your tax break will be smaller as a result of the government's surprise change in this year's budget.

As of June 25, 2024, well-off Canadians declaring over \$250,000 a year in capital gains will now have to declare 66.6 per cent of that gain as income instead of only half. This will also apply to corporations.

Put another way, the rich will still get a discount on their taxes for capital gains, but instead of the discount being 50 per cent, it will only be a third, although no doubt plenty of crocodile tears will still be shed over this reduction in their incredible deal.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has been calling for this ever since we started publishing our annual CEO pay report in January 2007. We've been relentless in counting all capital gains income as taxable income. For good reason.

In 2021, CEO pay reached an all-time high in Canada. The 100 best-paid CEOs in Canada pocketed an average of \$14.3 million in 2021.

The richest CEOs in Canada now make 243 times more than the average worker—that's an all-time high. The previous high was 227 times more in 2018.

The new initiative to increase the capital gains inclusion rate will raise an estimated \$7 billion in the first year and \$20 billion over the next five. Roughly half will be

paid by rich individuals and half by corporations.

That isn't exactly chump change—especially since that will only be paid by the top 0.13 per cent of Canadian income earners. We're talking about only 40,000 well-off people making, on average, \$1.4 million a year.

The elite few whose capital gains are over \$250,000 per year can afford to contribute more to public services—it's a question of fairness. In a delicious turn of events, capital gains are the gains one makes as real estate prices rise. So it's investors benefiting from massive gains in real estate who will now pay part of it back as a means of funding the massive rental housing build program expanded in this year's federal budget.

In fact, Canadians used to expect more of the rich. Between 1988 and 2000, the capital gains inclusion rate was at—or above—the proposed 66.6 per cent rate and it was on all gains, not just those over \$250,000.

Even after this tax change, Canada has the lowest marginal effective tax rate on capital gains of any G7 country. Want to get your capital gains in the U.S. or Germany? Their tax rate is 50 per cent higher.

As housing affordability crushes regular Canadians, investors making money on the buying and selling of real estate and shares should see sweetheart tax breaks narrowed. A fraction of their profits will now be put to the greater good: into a critical affordable rental housing build program, along with pharmacare, support for those with disabilities and better support for students. ●

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David Macdonald is a senior economist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

## SPIN CYCLE

The business lobby is spinning a new capital gains tax increase as a middle class problem.

**It's not.**

*Here are answers to some common questions.*

### What about the middle class?

If you're worried the increase in capital gains will hit you hard, turns out it only affects **0.13% of Canadians.**

**On average they make \$1.4 million a year.**

### What about house prices?

If you bought your house for \$300,000 and it's now worth \$1 million and you have to sell it, would you be affected?

**Nope.**

### Will it affect my kids?

You bought a house for \$300,000, it's now worth \$1 million, and you leave the house to your children. If they decide to sell it would this change affect them?

**Nope. Canada has no inheritance tax.**

### What about my TFSA or RRSP?

If you have \$500,000 in your TFSA or RRSP would you be affected?

**Nope.**

### Are you sure it's not a middle class problem?

*Average taxable capital gains by income group, 2021*

**Under \$50k income: \$212**

**\$50k-100k: \$1,015**

**\$100k-250k: \$5,284**

**Over \$250k: \$100,841**

### Isn't this unprecedented?

**Canadians used to expect more from the rich...**

Between 1988 and 2000, the capital gains inclusion rate was at—or above—the proposed 66.6% rate and it was on all gains, not just those over \$250,000.

### Where's my passport?

Want to get your capital gains in the U.S. or Germany?

**Their tax rate is 50% higher.**

Trish Hennessy  
National Office

# Canadian policy innovations



## A new National School Food Program

The federal government will invest \$1 billion over five years to launch a new National School Food Program in Canada. The program will provide meals to 400,000 more school kids, going beyond existing school programs. —Prime Minister's Office.

## New limits on building emissions

The City of Vancouver will require owners of large commercial offices and retail buildings to report their emissions as part of a "first-of-its-kind" bylaw in Canada. The goal is to reduce big building emissions to 50 per cent by 2030 and to 100 per cent by 2050. The bylaw is part of the city's Climate Energy Action Plan. —City News.



## Indigenous communities will co-manage new Windsor park

The Caldwell First Nation has signed a landmark agreement to help manage the Ojibway National Urban Park in Windsor, which sits on the First Nation's traditional lands. The agreement establishes Indigenous communities as co-creators and co-managers of the park. Caldwell First Nation chief Mary Duckworth said: "As First Nations in Southwestern Ontario, we were never given the opportunity to contribute our ways of knowing, being, and doing. We will honour and protect all our relations now." —Windsor Star.

## Peterborough installing small cabins for people without a home

The City of Peterborough installed 50 small, modular cabins in a municipal parking lot for people without homes. The project is showing signs of success. There are now 50 people who are housed; many of whom had been living in a tent encampment or lived outdoors. A neighbouring former city office building has been repurposed staff offices, a kitchenette and laundry services for the cabin residents. —Toronto Star



## Vancouver's Gastown going car-free this summer

The City of Vancouver will turn Water Street into a pedestrian zone this summer. Parts of Water Street will be blocked off from cars in order to expand patios, public seating, plants, art installations and to host events. It's a pilot project under the Gastown Public Spaces Plan. —The Georgia Straight.



## Fort Calgary name change to reflect Indigenous history

Fort Calgary, which is at the Bow and Elbow Rivers in Calgary, is changing its name and logo to reflect the Indigenous history of the land. It will now be known as The Confluence: Historic Site and Parkland, part of a truth and reconciliation effort to acknowledge the city's colonial past (and present). The North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) built Fort Calgary in 1875. The Confluence "shares stories of Indigenous history and tradition, the fur trade era, and the NWMP presence on the land." —CTV News.



Ben Parfitt  
BC Office

## CCPA BC's Ben Parfitt retires

Twenty years ago, an insect attack of biblical proportions in British Columbia's forests became a hot-button topic.

Thanks to unusually warm winters (guess why), mountain pine beetles exploded in number in the province's interior forests, killing millions upon millions of lodgepole pine trees.

The provincial government responded by approving huge increases in logging so that economic value might be "salvaged" from the dead trees. But that decision was bound to come with a high price tag—vastly diminished forests in future years.

It was a fortuitous time to be writing about the topic and I was extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to do so in my new capacity as a resource policy

analyst with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, BC Office.

My first report for the organization would flag significant concerns with the government's approach and I would build on it with further research that raised alarm bells about the unsustainable nature of the turbocharged extractive enterprise then well underway.

Those reports—like the work of my super-talented and devoted fellow researchers—became part of the public conversation, were amplified in media reports and widely distributed by our allies.

I quickly appreciated that the CCPA's work reached a wide and diverse array of people who regarded it as go-to information, be it on anti-poverty issues, job precarity, climate change, housing,

fair taxation, racial inequality, transit or other fronts.

For me—and I venture to say for my fellow researchers Marc Lee, Iglia Ivanova, Alex Hemingway and Véronique Sioufi—our proudest moments are when our work helps bring individuals and organizations together in common cause.

For a number of years, Marc Lee was project director of the Climate Justice Project, a multi-year research initiative in partnership with the University of British Columbia that was devoted to tackling two of the great challenges of our time: climate change and rising inequality.

An incredible body of work was generated under the auspices of that project, thanks in no small measure to Marc's jaw-dropping

research output—what can the guy *not* do?—and the efforts of many others at the CCPA–BC office, including then director Seth Klein and Shannon Daub, whose communications skills helped to significantly amplify that work.

I was able to make a small contribution to the overall output of the project’s research by writing a report that looked at how BC’s forests and forest product streams could be managed in ways that placed a priority on carbon storage.

*Managing BC’s Forests for a Cooler Planet: Carbon Storage, Sustainable Jobs and Conservation* would go on to be endorsed by the three unions representing workers in the province’s forest industry as well as prominent environmental organizations.

Today, a new and exciting multi-year research effort is underway: Understanding Precarity in BC, co-led by Iglia Ivanova, a whip smart economist with one of the greatest laughs out there, and Dr. Kendra Strauss, a labour geographer and feminist political economist. We can expect a body of work tackling the rise of precarious work in B.C. and how that trend might be reversed through changes in policy.

As 2023 gave way to 2024, I entered my 20th year at the CCPA and decided it was time to retire and take some time off before resuming writing again. Fittingly, my last report for the CCPA closes a circle begun in 2005. *Log it and burn it: Wood pellets, climate and BC’s deepening forest crisis* paints a picture of a forest crisis underway and the tangible things we can do to set a new course.

I leave the CCPA excited at the prospect of new adventures and secure in the knowledge that my many comrades will continue the great work that they do, work made possible by the thousands of people like you who call B.C. home and who have given so generously of time and funds to ensure that this great enterprise continues. ●



Photo: Jon Milton

Sheila Block  
**Charles Taylor Prize for Excellence in Policy Research**

## Sheila Block earns prestigious award

**The Broadbent Institute awarded retired CCPA Ontario Senior Economist Sheila Block with the prestigious Charles Taylor Prize. These were Sheila’s remarks as she accepted the award.**

I am beyond honoured to receive this prize. And I am frankly awed to be in the company of previous recipients.

It means a lot to me because my profound belief in the power of public policy to improve peoples’ lives has become, shall we say, increasingly unpopular.

Being nominated for this award caused me to reflect on what matters most in progressive research—what makes it work. And I landed on this: Because public policy is about the collective, effective public policy research needs to be done collaboratively and collectively.

That collaboration should not be shallow or transactional and it can come from unexpected places.

Much of my work has been focused on intersectional analysis of the impact of gender and race on economic inequality. What started me down that path was working with racialized colleagues on a small feminist literary journal in the 1980s and grappling with what an intersectional analysis would mean for our choices about what to publish. That collaboration informed my work for the next 30 years.

### Recipients of the Taylor prize

- 2024** Sheila Block
- 2023** John Borrows
- 2022** Greg Marchildon
- 2021** Martha Friendly
- 2020** Marjorie Griffin Cohen
- 2019** Akwasi Owusu-Bempah
- 2017** Daniel Weinstock
- 2016** Leah Vosko
- 2015** Charles Taylor

In my career, the policy issue that fully used that intersectional analysis and that most exemplified the importance of collaboration was the fight for a historic increase in Ontario's minimum wage under the previous provincial government.

Our analysis was correct: employment didn't tank as a result of that increase. And low-wage workers, in particular Black women, saw a measurable increase in their income.

These collaborations need to be long-term; we worked collectively with the labour movement and workers' rights organizations for a number of years on these issues. And we built on relationships that were developed through earlier research and advocacy.

These collaborations need to be iterative and interactive. Our research informed advocacy groups' demands, and the lived experiences of low-wage workers informed our research.

Collaborative work with other researchers is important. During the most intense period of opposition to the increase in the minimum wage, we were confronted with nearly weekly corporate-funded research predicting catastrophic impacts. We had a team of researchers with different areas of expertise working to respond to them. We literally called one of the blog posts responding to them "whack a mole."

It doesn't matter how sophisticated or insightful your work is. If no one can understand what you are saying, it won't have an impact. And you cannot target just one audience. It has to be the media, policy-makers, politicians and the general public.

Collaborating with editors, media relations people and social media teams can greatly increase the impact of policy research.

Because of the nature of this work, I believe that I am accepting this award on behalf of the colleagues that I have had the privilege to work with. Once again, I want to thank you for this great honour. ●

Katherine Scott  
National Office

## Free contraception a win for all

The federal government announced new legislation in February that lays the groundwork for universal, single-payer pharmacare in Canada and guarantees access in phase one to free birth control and diabetes medications.

This is a victory for reproductive rights in Canada. And long overdue. It's been 55 years since the birth control pill was legalized in Canada. And since that time, community activists, gender equality organizations and health care providers have worked tirelessly to expand access to high quality sexual and reproductive health care for all.

The federal government has moved to fill a critical gap in our public health care system and uphold the right of women to choose if and when to have children, through contraception of their choice—regardless of who they are, where they live, their age or disability status, or their income.

Countries around the world are rolling back reproductive rights and restricting women's access to essential health care. In the United States, the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 has had vast impacts on abortion access across the U.S. Reproductive health care and contraception access are in the crosshairs as well, the subject of disinformation campaigns peddled by right-wing media.

Access to contraception is fundamental to realizing a wide set of rights relating to sexuality, gender, reproduction, economic security, freedom from violence, and bodily autonomy. This is of critical importance not only to women and those who carry children, but to us all.

Right now, Canada is the only country with universal health care that does not offer coverage for prescription drugs, including contraceptives. Just over half of Canadians have access to an



employer-sponsored plan, while 10 per cent purchase private plans of some sort, and another 20 per cent are covered by government-sponsored plans that target specific groups like seniors or households on social assistance.

But one in five people have no drug coverage at all. That's 7.5 million people—largely low income, from marginalized communities including young people, Indigenous Peoples, racialized people, precarious workers, and undocumented migrants and newcomers.

Even among those who have access to a drug plan, many are still not able to afford medications because they can't afford to pay the up-front deductibles and co-payments. IUDs can cost up to \$550 in up-front payment. Oral contraceptive pills are somewhat less expensive—at roughly \$240 a year—but that's still a sizable bill for a student or new immigrant working a gig job.

It's the same situation for government-sponsored plans that are supposed to support vulnerable groups. A new review of provincial health plans found that contraception coverage varies widely. On average, less than half of provinces provide financial support for birth control for all or most of their populations.

These so-called programs of “last resort” have holes that you can drive trucks through.

There's also huge variation in what's covered with respect to birth control in the other types of plans. Unlike in the U.S., there are no requirements for government or group plans to cover a range of contraception options such as barrier methods like diaphragms and sponges, hormonal methods like pills and rings, and implanted methods like intrauterine devices (IUDs).

Some plans don't include birth control at all. Not so long ago, this list included Canada Post, on the grounds that contraception wasn't medically necessary. It would be

harder to find a more egregious example of sexism than denying coverage to contraception fundamental to women's quality of life and bodily autonomy—this from a company that spent over 25 years fighting a pay equity dispute with female rural mail carriers.

People with insufficient or no contraceptive coverage opt for less expensive and less effective methods because of cost. Young, low-income women, for example, are less likely to use more effective methods of birth control like the pill, and more likely to use no contraception or to rely on condoms alone.

The consequences of unintended pregnancies are lifelong. In Canada, recent studies suggested that upwards of 40 per cent of pregnancies are unintended, impacting women's health, future economic security and life choices, and that of their children.

Unintended pregnancies are estimated to cost the Canadian health systems millions of dollars annually. Direct health care costs alone are estimated to be more than \$320 million per year. This doesn't even factor in downstream costs to the individuals themselves or to the public purse for supports to families in need.

It's a wonder why universal contraception has taken so long. There are clear economic benefits. Studies show that for each \$1 governments invest in universal contraception, they can save up to \$9 in future public expenditures. What's more, the economic benefits are realized quickly, “with the policy being revenue-neutral by year two and saving money by year three.”

Canadians understand the moral imperative and the economics. Fully 83 per cent agree that free prescription birth control should be available across Canada. Seven out of 10 feel the issue is urgent—especially among young women.

Bill C-64 sets out the building blocks for a single-payer universal system, including the development

of the long-promised national formulary of essential medications and a national bulk purchasing strategy. It commits to long-term, first-dollar coverage for selected prescription drugs and related products—including contraception.

There are lots of questions still to answer about future access. Which provinces and territories will sign on? What type of delivery models will be funded? How will these programs operate and ensure comprehensive uptake—targeting those most in need? How will the feds measure success? (The government's track record on monitoring compliance on bilateral agreements is not stellar—ask the child care folks.)

The government has indicated that it doesn't know how much the program will cost—dependent as this is on what the provinces and territories propose. The federal budget has allocated a relatively modest \$1.5 billion over five years for this first phase of pharmacare (including the cost of diabetes medications). This sum falls far short of what's needed for universal, first dollar coverage of these two classes of drugs alone.

And there are certainly other barriers to reproductive health care in Canada—particularly for Indigenous communities, rural residents, people with disabilities, international students and migrant workers, as well as undocumented and homeless people. New Brunswick's only abortion clinic just shuttered its doors, forced to close because its rent was being doubled and the provincial government's refusal to extend financial support to community-based service providers.

But we can and should celebrate this victory today. Equitable access to safe, voluntary family planning is a human right, fundamental to ensuring the bodily autonomy of women and advancing gender equality. This is a win for everyone. ●

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Katherine Scott is a senior researcher with the CCPA National office.





KATHERINE SCOTT

# UNEQUAL PANDEMIC, UNEQUAL RECOVERY

FOUR YEARS INTO  
COVID-19'S DISRUPTION,  
MANY WOMEN ARE STILL  
STRUGGLING



**BEYOND  
RECOVERY**

TOWARD A  
GENDER-JUST  
ECONOMY

The COVID-19 pandemic that swept the globe in 2020 not only threatened people's health, but it exposed and exacerbated entrenched inequalities. Women bore the brunt.

Millions were working in public-facing jobs that were most affected by necessary public health closures. Millions more laboured on the frontlines at great personal risk, sustaining our communities while juggling an enormous increase in unpaid labour and care at home.

Significant gaps in our market-oriented care infrastructure and the failure of governments to take effective action further amplified the pandemic's impacts—and resulting stresses—on women and marginalized communities, including increased violence, greater isolation and ill health, heightened economic insecurity, and loss of access to vital community supports.

Forty per cent of women polled by Oxfam Canada in 2020 reported feelings of stress, anxiety and depression, while 35 per cent said that they felt isolated and lonely. These impacts were most acute for essential workers and racialized women.

Three years later, the emergency phase of the pandemic is over but critical questions remain about the pandemic's long-term impact. The concern, from the start, was the potential for the crisis to set off a devastating feedback loop that would deepen existing

inequalities. The CCPA's Beyond Recovery project was established two-and-a-half years ago to track the economic fallout for women workers, especially those in hard-hit industrial sectors and the care economy.

At this juncture, it is fair to say that the recovery has proven to be as unequal as the pandemic itself. The rise in gender inequality associated with the pandemic was wholly predictable, given the inequities built into Canada's labour market and welfare state and the failure of governments to pursue a comprehensive response to the pandemic. As it was, there were significant policy gaps that neither provincial nor federal programming

adequately addressed—problems that took hold as the recovery progressed.

### Winners and losers in the pandemic's aftermath

Canada's economy rebounded in 2021 and continued to grow through 2022 and 2023—but strong employment growth wasn't enough to boost the economic fortunes of all women. While some groups of workers experienced little economic disruption, low-wage workers in pandemic-vulnerable sectors and precarious employment situations were trapped on an economic roller coaster.

By the end of 2022, total employment (both men and women) in vulnerable sectors was still 125,000 jobs short of pre-pandemic levels. Women accounted for 80 per cent of the gap. The next year, 2023, was better for this group of workers, but women's employment continued to lag in accommodation and food services, personal services (such as hair salons and laundry services), and in arts, entertainment, and recreation. Young people and new immigrants experienced the biggest losses.

Low wages remain a huge problem in frontline service work. Employers have yet—in any widespread way—to change up their business models and offer higher wages to attract staff back.

Modest wage gains between 2019 and 2023 have been more than offset by the rising cost of living. Restaurant workers and

Low-wage workers in pandemic-vulnerable sectors have been on an economic roller coaster

grocery clerks are making less today than before the pandemic.

As our case study of hotel workers in B.C. documents, the hotel industry has used the crisis to cut costs by increasing flexibilization of labour and understaffing, further increasing the precarity of workers.

Established disparities between low-paid, precarious workers and the growing number of workers in permanent, well-paid jobs appear to be widening.

Workers in low-wage service jobs aren't the only group that has been hammered by the pandemic.

Over three million women working in the care economy are still under enormous pressure. Canada's health and community services, strained and drained by years of austerity, have been running full out for four years trying to keep up with demand. Vacancies have soared as burned-out staff have retired and/or sought less stressful employment and some modicum of control over their lives.

This interminable situation has been made worse by negligible wage growth. The gap between wages and monthly inflation figures has been particularly pronounced in several women-majority care occupations, further entrenching established gender pay

disparities. School teachers, hospital workers and child care educators, for instance, all experienced more than a four per cent wage cut, in real terms, between 2019 and 2023.

The care economy workforce has expanded since 2019. Between 2019 and 2023, hospitals and educational services reported the second and third largest increases in women's employment—a total of 202,000 jobs. Yet these increases have barely put a dent in vacancy rates, which were more than twice pre-pandemic levels in 2023.

Over 50 per cent of long-term care and home care staff surveyed in our Manitoba study indicated that they are either very or somewhat likely to leave the profession in the next five years.

In the child care field, new students are graduating from early childhood education programs only to leave the field a few years later because of low wages and poor working conditions. Recruitment and retention problems have become exponentially worse in the last few years, despite the infusion of new federal funding. These monies have made a huge difference in making child care more affordable, but demand for new spaces has predictably exploded and there aren't enough staff.



### The other side of the story

The pandemic clearly exacerbated existing disparities, impacting millions of women working in essential public and private services. But this isn't the whole story. In the aftermath of the pandemic, as economic bottlenecks resolved and pent-up consumer demand surged, other groups of workers found employment in several high-paying sectors.

For example, the share of women working in professional services—such as computer systems design, legal services and accounting—increased by 1.9 percentage points between 2019 and 2023. The relative increase of women working in public administration was even larger, 2.3 percentage points, pushing women's share of employment in this industry above the 50 per cent mark.

In total, four industries—professional services, information and culture, finance and insurance, and public administration—experienced an increase of 292,800 jobs (or 16.5 per cent), outpacing growth in care economy jobs (167,800 or 5.7 per cent), but not yet knocking health and education out of their position as the largest employers (along with retail) of women.

The pandemic appears to be accelerating the shift away from high-contact, typically low-paid, personal and customer service work to better paying jobs in white collar service industries at a time of profound demographic change. Large numbers of older, Canadian-born workers are leaving the labour market and large numbers of new immigrants and temporary workers are entering it.

This has opened new employment opportunities for

women—including for Indigenous women, new immigrants and women with disabilities.

As a result, a sizable group of female workers has moved up the wage grid from lower-paying jobs to higher-paying jobs since 2020—important progress.

But many of these women have been channelled into lower-paying jobs within these fields. The gender pay gap in professional services—such as law, accounting, finance, and computer systems design—has widened as male earnings growth outpaced that of women.

In professional services, for instance, women earn 75 cents, on average, for every dollar men earn—a decline of three percentage points since 2019. This is the definition of two steps forward, one step back.

Up and down the earnings ladder, women earn less than men,



reflecting entrenched systemic bias, the unequal burden of care and outright discrimination.

The pandemic has illuminated the gender, racial and ableist disparities that shape and delimit women's economic opportunities and security but has done comparatively little to disrupt or dislodge them.

### **Canada's gender pandemic response: Did it measure up?**

At the beginning of the pandemic, all countries took steps to respond to the health crisis and mitigate the ensuing economic and societal shocks. But very few put in place a "holistic gender response" to the unfolding crisis and the erosion of women's rights and well-being. Fewer still considered the unique position or experiences of marginalized women or gender-diverse people in their recovery programs.

In Canada, the federal government clearly acknowledged the gendered character of the COVID-19 crisis in its policy statements. It also marshalled a sizable pandemic response, in comparison to its peers, providing nearly 19 per cent of GDP in total support to keep Canadians and businesses afloat, directing an above-average share of funding to households to assist with the economic fall-out.

A total of \$300 million, for example, was directed to organizations supporting women, girls and gender-diverse people experiencing rising gender-based violence.

Emergency transfers had a substantial impact on household incomes, more than offsetting what would have been a precipitous rise in poverty.

The scale of the federal intervention was also a key factor in Canada's robust employment recovery in 2021 and 2022. Mindful of the lessons of the 2008-09 recession and the damaging, long-lasting impacts of austerity, governments around the world adopted a more proactive response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Government spending helped sustain economic demand across provinces, creating the conditions for a speedy economic recovery for several economic sectors.

At the same time, the response to the crisis in care, and its disproportionate impact on women, fell dramatically short. The federal measures were not enough to deliver on the promise of gender justice—certainly not in a country where a fulsome response to the pandemic hinged on subnational levels of government, many of which were wholly silent on the pandemic's gendered impacts.

Most provinces sat back and let the federal government do the heavy lifting on their pandemic responses, pocketing pandemic funds while turning a blind eye to care services buckling under the stress.

Historic new investments in child care and proposed long-term care standards hold out the promise of strengthening Canada's care infrastructure. Canada

# The economic hammer fell harshly on frontline service workers

is finally creating a country-wide system of early learning and child care that is affordable, inclusive and accessible. Canada is also working toward improving the quality of care available to vulnerable seniors and people with disabilities.

However, these efforts are now at risk, mired in jurisdictional conflict, stymied for lack of staff, and under attack from for-profit providers and private equity interests seeking larger stakes in service delivery.

### **A gender just recovery for all**

The COVID-19 pandemic upended everyone's lives, but evidence from our study shows that not everyone experienced the pandemic or its economic aftermath in the same way.

The economic hammer fell most harshly on frontline service workers in the public and private sectors—two distinct groups that have continued to struggle under difficult working conditions, the value of their wages no match for the soaring cost of living.

Meanwhile, another group of workers—taking advantage of the historic moment—was able to pivot into higher-paying jobs in professional services, technology, finance and public administration.

Unequal pandemic, unequal recovery.

This is a profoundly troubling finding. The pandemic shone a spotlight on the ways in which Canada's economy and care work are intertwined. It blew open our social safety net, revealing the precarity and deadly consequences of our reliance on market-based service in fields like long-term care and the negligent and exploitative treatment of essential workers.

This was an event that revealed the fundamental inequities baked into our economy and institutions.

Yet the scope and scale of the response at the time, and since, has been wholly inadequate to the task of building back better. There was a moment when health care workers were held up as heroes. For the



CP Images

most part, however, Canada's largely female and racialized front-line service workforce laboured in the shadows, with limited supports through the worst of the emergency and its aftermath.

This disconnect reflects the deeply gendered treatment and positioning of women's work, intersecting with racist and ableist stereotypes and immigration policies designed to service Canada's care deficit and the demands of

low-wage employers. The pandemic response did not challenge or disrupt the power relations at the heart of women's economic subordination.

As our study reveals, the pandemic has amplified the divide between low-wage, precarious employment and permanent, white-collar work that is resilient to pandemics and automation.

Moving forward, fundamental reforms are needed to create a

more secure foundation for all workers, with a focus on precarious workers and marginalized communities.

The experience has reinforced the necessity of updating and expanding fundamental income supports, such as Employment Insurance and caregiving leaves, and strengthening employment standards and other workplace measures, such as employment equity and proactive pay equity, so as to value the skill, effort and responsibility of workers, create decent working conditions and equitable access to good jobs, and provide robust protections for all workers' rights across Canada—in all employment situations.

Addressing the low wages and poor working conditions of essential workers is also critical to any plausible or just strategy for reducing the penalty attached to occupational segregation for women and other marginalized groups.

To this end, increased investment in the care economy is vital for the millions of women who work there and for the communities that rely on their services. Immediate action is also needed to expand access to services and protections for migrant care workers and other temporary foreign workers (including international students) whose precarious immigration status creates the conditions for ongoing exploitation.

The imperative now is to apply the lessons of COVID-19 in service of a more sustainable, resilient and gender-just future, ensuring that those who bore the brunt of the pandemic are not again left behind. If there is one message to take forward, it is that change on gender equality is possible—but sustained action is needed to get us there. **M**

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Katherine Scott is a senior researcher with the CCPA National Office and directed the Beyond Recovery research project that is showcased in this edition of the *Monitor*.



Unite Here

Alice Mūrage and Michelle Travis

## The pandemic wreaked havoc on hotel workers

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a devastating upheaval in hotel workers' work lives.

Closures and travel restrictions, especially in the first wave of the pandemic, impacted both international and domestic tourism and recreation activities upon which the hotel sector depends.

The hotel industry responded to the volatility of tourism and loss of revenue by offloading these economic pressures onto their already precarious workforce through layoffs, understaffing and on-call scheduling.

The workers who keep hotels going—from reception to room attendants and food and beverage staff—suddenly faced enormous precarity.

We conducted focus groups and interviews with 27 women working in B.C.'s hotel industry, the majority of whom are older, immigrant and racialized women, to understand what they went through—and how changes in the hotel industry are affecting their quality of work and life.

The hospitality and tourism industry is a major driver of B.C.'s

economy, with accommodation room revenues alone generating \$3.2 billion in 2019.

These workers have long been underpaid for this physically demanding work with limited upward mobility, yet they've made a lifelong career in hospitality by building strong workplace communities to counter the racialized and gendered devaluation of their labour.

Approximately 50,000 B.C. hotel workers were laid off, with little clarity on when or if they would be called back to work.







Unite Here

As early as March 2020, the federal and provincial governments introduced programs to support businesses hard-hit by the pandemic, with the aim of keeping employees on the payroll. The hotel industry benefitted from wage and rent subsidies and loans through an array of programs, including the Tourism and Hospitality Recovery Program, Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS), Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), Canada Emergency Business Account, Tourism Relief Fund and the Highly Affected Sectors Credit Availability Program, as well as other support programs by the provincial government.

Between March 2020 and May 2021, B.C.'s accommodation and food services sector received over \$1.2 billion in wage subsidies alone.

These wage subsidies were not conditional on a return to work for laid-off employees. So even while receiving these significant financial supports, hotels eventually terminated many employees who thought they were only on temporary layoff. And many who were brought back to work, as restrictions eased, were shifted to on-call scheduling and reduced hours.

This loss of income and employment resulted in moderate to extreme financial hardship for women hotel workers. They struggled to meet their basic needs, experiencing increased food and housing insecurity. The unpredictable work scheduling and consequent unreliable income forced some to take other jobs to supplement their earnings—jobs that complicated the challenges of responding to short-notice, on-call work.

Changes made by hotels were in the name of health and safety, such as reducing cleaning services to reduce worker-customer COVID-19 transmissions. In practice, however, the industry showed little concern for the health and safety of their workforce.

Workers reported a lack of personal protective equipment supplies, inconsistent implementation of

public health guidelines, and unaddressed concerns regarding abuse by customers.

Workers were forced to make the impossible choice between their safety and their livelihood.

For workers who lost their job, the loss of extended health benefits added additional financial strain amid a health crisis.

These cost-cutting strategies, initially adopted to cushion hotels from pandemic-related revenue losses, persist even as the industry reports a “remarkable” and “exceptional” recovery.

This has led to ongoing negative effects on workers' health and livelihood, with little regard for their contributions to hospitality and tourism industries, which represent a significant source of national revenue.

All women hotel workers engaged in this project spoke of employment and financial loss due to pandemic closures and travel restrictions. Some were subsequently terminated, while others returned to an increasingly precarious work environment.

With terminations, understaffing, unpredictable scheduling, and low wages, employment in the sector remains below pre-pandemic levels.

In short, the hotel industry leveraged pandemic emergency measures into permanent cuts to labour costs. Now facing self-induced labour shortages, the industry is on a trajectory to drive even more workers away from this line of work, unless steps are taken to meaningfully improve working conditions and compensation.

Instead, the industry has successfully lobbied the federal government to increase the proportion of low-wage workers that it can hire through the Temporary Foreign Worker program to 30 per cent, undercutting the position of all hotel workers.

Women hotel workers have fought back. In summer 2020, unionized workers in B.C. went on strike to regain their employment.

Women staged a hunger strike on the steps of the B.C. legislature

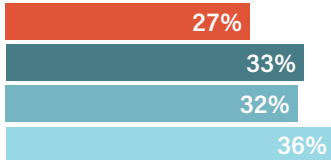
## Labour characteristics comparisons

Canada, 2022

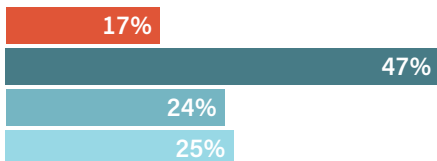
### Women workers



### Immigrant workers



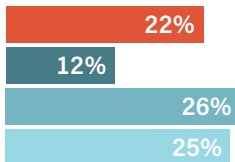
### Part-time workers



### Younger workers (15-24)



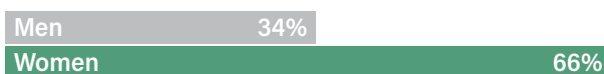
### Older workers (55+)



## Part-time employees by sex and industry group

Canada, 2022

### Total, all industries



### Accommodation and food services



### Traveller accommodation



to urge the provincial government to intervene to protect the jobs of 50,000 laid-off hotel workers by adopting temporary recall protections that would give them the legal right to return to work as business recovered.

The province declined to intervene, citing the primacy of securing recall rights through collective bargaining between union employees and employers, even as other North American jurisdictions strengthened and protected hospitality workers' rights during the pandemic.

In 2021, unionized hotel workers at some hotels launched public actions and went on strike at their workplace over mass terminations and in resistance to employers' efforts to strip away hard-won wage gains and work protections.

The very low and declining rate of unionization in the hotel industry—3.5 per cent compared to 28.1 per cent across all industries—and the prevalence of precarious employment meant that avenues to fight for a return to work were non-existent for most workers.

As the federal and provincial governments reflect on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that the voices and experiences of women hotel workers—particularly those at the intersection of multiple inequities—are at the centre of policy discussions.

The pandemic highlighted how vulnerable racialized immigrant women workers are to economic downturns because of their jobs in gendered care and service work, precarious conditions of work and unpaid care work at home.

Through their collective actions, hotel workers put a spotlight on an industry that treats racialized women as disposable. They have demonstrated that they are a determined workforce with a strong sense of collective responsibility for their colleagues.

However, the federal and provincial governments and industry leaders need to do more to support their agency in the workplace by: safeguarding workers' right to recall, proactively enforcing workplace rights and safety standards, introducing limits to on-call scheduling, and increasing the minimum wage to a living wage.

These changes are essential for improving gender and racial equity in the workplace and for a more resilient hospitality and tourism sector.

This research was conducted as part of the CCPA's Beyond Recovery project, which is tracking how women are faring in the labour market since the pandemic economic shutdowns. For hotel workers, the recovery has yet to begin. **M**

This is an edited excerpt of a joint study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, UNITE HERE Local 40 and Simon Fraser University researchers. Read the full report, *A Paradox in COVID-19 Recovery: Increased precarity of women hotel workers in British Columbia*, by Alice Mürage, Stefanie Machado, Alexandra Selinger, Michelle Travis and Julia Smith.



Niall Harney

## From leader to laggard

### A festering crisis in long-term and home care

In 1974, Manitoba launched its universal, provincewide home care program—the first of its kind in Canada; one that would be emulated by most provinces.

As researcher Amy Twomey has argued, the era of reform this policy emerged from was significant for Manitoba’s long-term care and home care systems. During the 1970s, Manitoba’s continuing care system (long-term care and home care) was brought “in from the fringes” of the provincial welfare state and non-profit, universal care became entrenched.

This is a legacy that would remain salient for decades, with

Manitoba maintaining among the most comprehensive, public continuing care systems in Canada throughout the 2000s.

Since then, however, the system has struggled against underfunding and recurrent experiments with privatization—a story that has played out across the country. This underfunding is connected to the lack of value attached to care labour in Canada’s health care system, which is disproportionately work done by racialized women.

Across the country, long-term care was one of the hardest-hit sectors during the first years of the pandemic.

Manitoba had among the most COVID-19 related deaths, per capita, in long-term care, with some of the worst outbreaks in the country reported at Parkview Place and Maples Long-Term Care Home, both owned by Ontario-based Revera Inc.

The tragedies inflicted by COVID-19 prompted a national conversation on how the precarious forms of employment, razor-thin staffing margins, low wages, and lack of access to sickness benefits were undermining conditions of care.

To better understand the experiences of Manitoba’s continuing

care staff during the heights of the COVID-19 pandemic and afterwards, we conducted a survey of 1,027 home care and long-term care staff in Manitoba's public continuing care system.

The survey results found that the outsized burden placed on continuing care workers during the pandemic has not been lifted and, in many ways, has gotten heavier.

The severe impact of understaffing on stress levels jumped out as a major trend. Among the continuing care workers surveyed, 69 per cent in long-term care and 75 per cent in home care reported that staffing levels in their workplaces were worse than before the pandemic.

Over two-thirds of staff in both long-term care and home care reported working short staffed at least a few times per week.

While around two-thirds of respondents agreed that they are still able to provide adequate care, 75 per cent of staff in long-term care and 68 per cent in home care said that the pandemic has negatively impacted their daily workload.

As well, 84 per cent of long-term care staff and 75 per cent of home care staff indicated that, most days, they feel rushed at work, pointing to an unsustainable workload.

The stress created by short staffing is producing a vicious cycle of burnout, leading to more staff attrition and high rates of time off due to work-related physical and mental health issues.

Close to six in 10 continuing care staff reported sustaining an injury on the job while four in 10

reported taking more than a week off work due to a mental or physical issue caused by their work.

Many workers reported dissatisfaction with wages, hours, and benefits. Most workers in both long-term care and home care work part-time or casually, with young workers and newcomers keen for more hours.

Respondents' average wage was \$20.19 per hour, \$3.81 below the provincial median wage in 2022.

Through the federal Caregiver Wage Support Program, continuing care workers in Manitoba received wage top-ups of \$850 per person, on average, between November 2020 and January 2021—far below other provinces.

Across all sectors, Manitoba spent \$155 million on wage top-ups, leaving \$10.5 million in federal funding on the table. Unsurprisingly, only 15 per cent of long-term care staff and 10 per cent of home care staff felt their income allows them to save for the future.

Continuing care workers in Manitoba narrowly avoided a strike in August 2022, following 21 months of bargaining and over five years without a contract. The contract provided retroactive pay and a wage increase of 9.6 per cent over seven years. However, given that the annual inflation rate was 9.4 per cent in June 2022, workers will be looking for another pay increase when their contract expires this year.

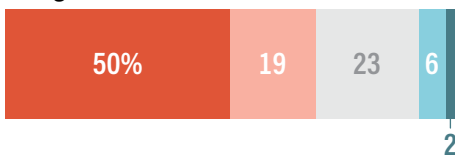
The survey results underline the presence of a highly gendered and racialized division of labour in care work. Women make up 86 per cent of long-term care staff and 91 per cent of home care staff.

## An outsized burden

Results of a survey of 1,027 home care and long-term care staff in Manitoba's public continuing care system

**Are staffing levels better, the same or worse than before the COVID-19 pandemic?**

*Long-term care workers*



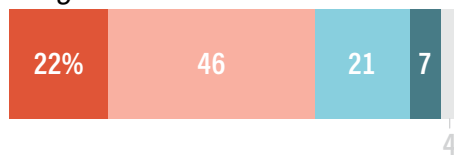
Lot worse Little worse About same Little better Lot better



*Home care workers*

**How often do you work short-staffed?**

*Long-term care workers*



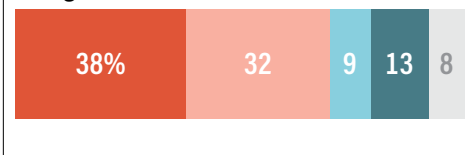
Always/everyday Few times/week Few times/month Rarely/never Unsure



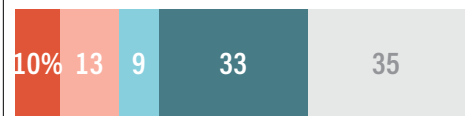
*Home care workers*

**Thinking of your own workplace, how often, if at all, are private agency staff used?**

*Long-term care workers*



Always/everyday Few times/week Few times/month Rarely/never Unsure



*Home care workers*

In terms of immigration status, 28 per cent of staff in long-term care and 38 per cent of staff in home care identified as newcomers to Canada.

Through their research with immigrant and migrant home care workers in Manitoba throughout the pandemic, researchers Leah Nicholson and Mary-Jean Hande found much more needs to be done to recruit and retain immigrant and migrant care workers, who make up the backbone of the provincial system.

This includes support to address the increase in racism experienced at work during the pandemic, improved settlement supports, and improvements to job security, wages, and benefits.

In addition, their research finds a need to curb the growing presence of the private sector in home care, which is driving an erosion of working conditions in some areas.

Which brings us to the ‘stealth’ privatization occurring across continuing care: 70 per cent of staff in long-term care indicated they work alongside staff from private agencies every day or a few times per week.

Over 50 per cent of respondents said they are likely to leave their workplace soon, with many indicating they would prefer to work for a private agency where they can control their hours and earn higher wages.

Four years into the pandemic, another vision for reform and reinvestment in staffing is desperately needed. The signature of a bilateral health agreement with Manitoba in February 2024, which provides \$199 million for long-term care and home care over five years, makes important steps forward, but still leaves gaps in staff support.

The agreement draws \$37 million per year to hire staff sufficient to achieve 4.1 hours of care per day (the minimum safe level of care established by the Health Standards Organization) in long-term care by 2027.

This will be the largest investment in staffing in decades. However, emerging research from the U.S. points to 4.5 hours of care as a more appropriate standard, due to increasing resident needs. Hiring enough staff to achieve 4.1 daily hours of care will be difficult without investments in training, retention for immigrant, migrant, and all workers, and improvements to wages, hours, job security and other conditions.

The bilateral agreement makes new money available for the palliative care and the Self and Family Managed Care program (which provides funding for individuals to arrange their own home care). While this funding is critical, it will not address the erosion of staffing in the public home care system.

As the pandemic becomes more distant in people’s minds, we can’t forget some of its toughest lessons. This includes ensuring long-term and home care workers get the respect they deserve. **M**

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Niall Harney is the Errol Black Chair in Labour Studies at the CCPA Manitoba Office.

Catherine Bryan  
and María José Yax Fraser

## When “survival” jobs become “essential” work

In the lexicon of immigrant settlement services, the term “survival jobs” is used to signal temporary employment intended to ensure survival in the short term, and increasingly framed as an advantage to earn Canadian experience, practice and improve English language skill, and build local networks.

Reflective of labour market stratification and exclusions, “survival jobs” are most easily accessed in sectors where the pay is low, hours are part time, and formal protections are limited.

As a result, migrants and immigrants find themselves disproportionately employed in low-wage care work, food production and provisioning, cleaning and sanitation, retail, service, and hospitality.

In the context of COVID-19, many of these jobs, which are concentrated in feminized sectors, were re-designated as “essential”. This shift, however, has largely been rhetorical, with only nominal improvements made to working conditions and wages. Consequently, the feminized and devalued character of these labour sectors has persisted.

Between 2022 and 2023, our research team interviewed 27 migrant and immigrant women working in sectors that were deemed essential to “flatten the curve” of spread of the virus. We asked them about their work experiences in Nova Scotia during the early days of the pandemic.

At the start of the pandemic, they were working in the care sector, in food production and provisioning, in hospitality, and the immigration and settlement sectors. They had degrees in nursing, social work, psychology, history, arts, law, engineering, IT, and education. Most women worked across three essential sectors as cleaners, food retail workers, and caregivers in both long-term care and home care.

To address population decline and its impact on economic well-being, the province has aggressively promoted immigration through new pathways for permanent residency, notably the province’s Nominee Program and the federally managed Atlantic Immigration Program.

Importantly, these programs also intersect with Canada’s Temporary Foreign Worker Program to facilitate permanent residency for qualifying migrant workers. As a result, the last five years have seen

## In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the care economy like a brick

Hospitals were overcrowded with deathly ill patients. COVID-19 rippled through long-term care facilities, hitting frail seniors with no protections.

The child care sector almost imploded with the sudden shutdown of services.

## Stress at work and at home

Government orders to stay home saved lives, but many women were trapped inside a violent household during a stressful time in our history.

The frontline workers in the care economy haven't had an easy time of it. Nurses and other health care workers, personal support workers, child care workers, and staff in women's shelters. They are underpaid and overworked.

## Years of funding cuts

Governments had been starving the care economy with funding cuts before the pandemic struck. The system had been drained and strained for years. There's not enough staff. There's a huge amount of churn as women leave those jobs, burned out and stressed.

Some provinces are privatizing public care services instead of investing in the system.

Care workers—three-quarters of whom are women—have been in emergency mode since 2020. Something's gotta give.

# RUNNING ON EMPTY



# Canada's care economy is in trouble

About three million people are paid care workers in Canada—working as nurses, personal support workers and shelter workers. They make up one-fifth of the total labour force.

Female care workers earn 80 cents for every dollar a male care worker makes. The pay gap was even larger among Indigenous and racialized women, at 70 cents on the dollar.

Demand for care workers has surged since the pandemic—vacancies in health care and social assistance are now twice the level as in 2019. But it hasn't been enough to push up wages.

With high inflation, many care workers are actually experiencing real wage cuts:

- Nurses down 4.3 per cent between 2020 and 2023
- Community service workers down 2.6 per cent

Care wages are low to begin with. In 2023, the average offered hourly wage for nurse aides and orderlies was \$22.60 and even less for early childhood educators (\$20.23).

Governments have promised to create 250,000 new child care spaces by March 2026, but who will staff these programs?



**RUNNING  
ON  
EMPTY**



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higher than typical rates of immigration to the province.

Despite the restriction of movement across borders during the pandemic, Nova Scotia registered an unprecedented number of approved applications from qualified skilled immigrants in the sectors deemed essential.

It is important to note that while support for immigration has increased, the social and economic integration of immigrant workers remains stratified, with many newcomers—our participants amongst them—working in precarious, low-wage employment in essential sectors.

Such employment renders newcomers particularly vulnerable to social and economic insecurity. Indeed, Nova Scotia's cost of living has increased, rental prices have soared, and food and utility inflation have made these basic necessities inaccessible for many Nova Scotians.

This new reality is further compounded by government divestment from social services, which is a constant feature of the Nova Scotian political economy but has accelerated in the last five years.

These features of current-day life in the province converge with capitalism's externalization and devaluation of reproductive labour, which, for many, came to a head during the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic. In turn, as this study corroborates, immigrant women have become key contributors to the social reproductive activities of Nova Scotian families.

Regardless of immigration pathway, the women in the study spoke of their migration as part of a larger

familial project of care, social mobility, and new opportunities. Most of the women, irrespective of age or length of time in Canada, continued to provide support for family and community in the country of origin during the pandemic.

Our study highlights the contributions that immigrant and migrant women make to the socio-economic health and well-being of Nova Scotians. It also reveals their experiences of employment precarity and stratification by immigrant status as well as the link between employment precarity in essential sectors and mental health—a social and political determinant of health.

Critically, with only rare exceptions, the women held post-secondary credentials and most had considerable experience in their fields of study. Prior to COVID-19, all the women had experienced racism and discrimination both as they looked for work and once they found it.

“Working as a continuing care assistant, you are a minimum wage earner,” said one participant. “My husband was studying, and so he was only allowed to work 20 hours a week... It was the lowest time of my life. In the Middle East, I worked as a nurse and we—I'm not bragging about it—but we were not living paycheque to paycheque.

“When we landed in Canada, we exhausted everything—all of our savings—and so I needed to get a survival job. I needed to do double or triple the job; it was really hard—to the point of it affecting my mental health. So, on top of working as a health care worker, I was cleaning houses just to survive.”





“Most of [my co-workers] were women, and they were really sick. But the sickness wasn’t just related to COVID infection, it was the stress.”

—Survey participant

These working conditions persisted and worsened in the context of COVID-19 as they became responsible for enforcing public health restrictions with an often-hostile public. While many of the women, from different vantage points, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to work in the service of people and community during the pandemic, their more positive feelings were often overshadowed by heightened isolation, anxiety, and concern for their clients and their own families.

While some of the women experienced a decrease in working hours, most felt their workload increase during the pandemic. For some, this was accompanied by additional pay, but for many, it was not. In some instances, this additional workload emerged from the need to enforce public health regulations around masking and social distancing, but in others, it was the result of reduced personnel.

“The reduction in customers meant low profits, and so I was always at risk of losing my job,” said a participant. “My co-workers were sent home, you know, to reduce the number of employees, and then my salary was reduced because there was less profit.”

Staff shortages were, at times, the result of workers resigning because they felt unsafe. In most instances, and particularly for those in food services, it was the result of diminished profit, prompting employers to reduce hours.

During the early period of the pandemic, many of the women struggled to make ends meet. This was exacerbated by an inability to access sick pay, even when they had contracted COVID-19. Each participant spoke about the toll the pandemic took on their mental health and well-being, both physically and emotionally.

“[At times], it became more than [about the physical risk of COVID], the psychological environment was just really hard,” said a participant. “A lot of [my co-workers] had never experienced anything like that or confrontations [like] in that situation; it was really hard for them to manage it. I am talking about women; most of them were women, and they were really sick. But the sickness wasn’t just related to COVID infection, it was the stress.”

In the months following the COVID-19 economic shutdown, the women struggled to recuperate. For many, the rapid acceleration of food prices, housing costs, and other expenses has been impossible to manage, given the lingering effects of the pandemic.

Indeed, the lack of affordability that increasingly characterizes life in Nova Scotia has meant that their Canadian earnings (so highly sought after by many) don’t stretch nearly far enough. A full and just economic recovery remains elusive for most.

Solutions to the longstanding and financially lucrative organization of essential labour, however, need to take seriously the implications of legal status, as well the histories and experiences of migration of essential workers.

Indeed, much of the sector’s profitability follows from the perceived legitimacy of labour market stratification based on immigration status. It also follows from the perception that newcomers, temporary and permanent alike, lack the skills required for different kinds of employment.

This is fundamentally untrue, which was revealed in both the education attainment and previous employment experiences of those we interviewed. Despite their training and education, several women that we interviewed turned to child care work upon realizing that, relative to their advanced post-secondary degrees, their skills as mothers and caregivers would be much more discernable to prospective employers.

Despite the celebration of essential and frontline workers as heroes, they faced ongoing discrimination and renewed hostility from those they served, in addition to a heightened risk of COVID-19 infection. Through it all, with the burden of care and other forms of reproductive labour squarely on their shoulders, they remained steadfast in their work, ensuring, in many ways, our collective survival. **M**

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Maria José Yax Fraser is a PhD candidate at York University and a community researcher and advocate for migrant and immigrant women. Catherine Bryan is an anthropologist and faculty at Dalhousie’s School of Social Work. She is also the chair of Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives—Nova Scotia office’s Research Advisory Committee.

# A timeline: The pandemic's impact on women in the workforce



## 2020-21

**March 2020:** COVID-19 strikes, massive job losses

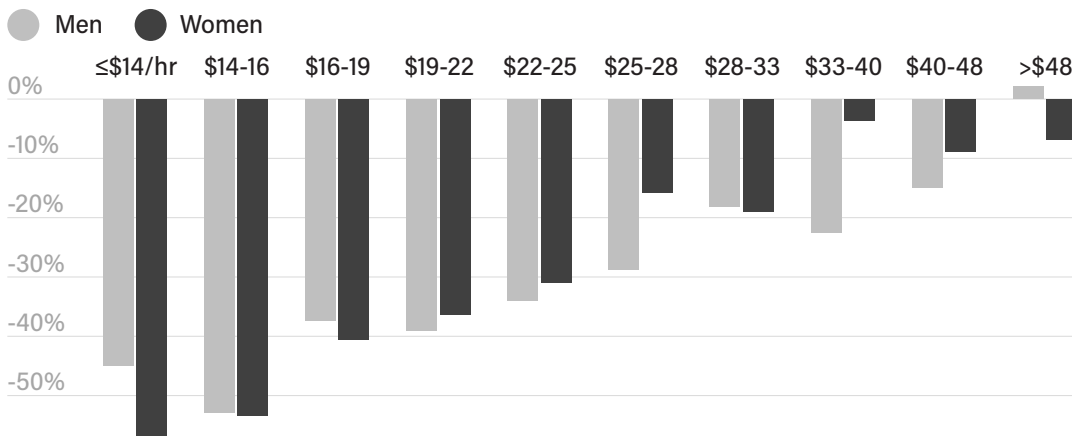
**T**he COVID-19 pandemic upended women's economic gains, wiping out 35 years of progress in two short months.

Between February and April 2020, a total of 2.8 million women lost their job or were working less than half of their regular hours due to the necessary shut down of the economy.

Low-wage workers—overwhelmingly women, highly racialized—bore the worst of the recession. Fully half (52 per cent) of all low-wage workers earning \$14 an hour or less were laid off or lost most of their hours between February and April. This included 58 per cent of low-wage women and 45 per cent of men in this earnings bracket.

### Lowest-paid women were hardest hit early in pandemic

Proportion of each hourly wage range lost jobs or majority of hours, men and women, 15+, February to April, 2020



Source: Statistics Canada, February and April 2020 Labour Force Survey PUMF, excludes self employed

## Fall 2020 and 2021: A slow circuitous rebound

The employment situation started to improve in the fall of 2020—mostly for women aged 25 to 54 years. Their rate of employment reached a record high of 81.7 per cent in 2023, 1.7 percentage points above 2019 levels.

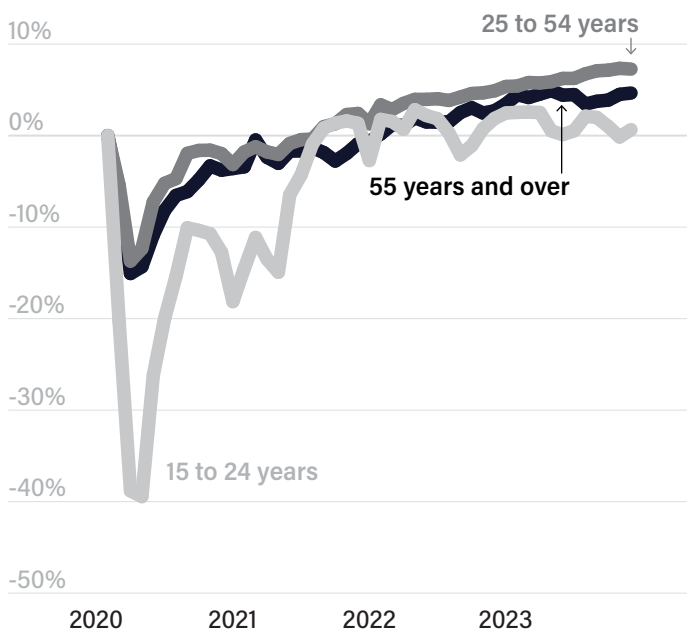
By the start of 2022, most women had recovered job losses, but some had a more difficult path.

Young women continue to struggle, concentrated in areas of the economy that were especially hard hit in 2020. Along with women (and men) over age 55 years, their employment rate has yet to recover; employment opportunities have not kept pace with substantial population growth.

After an initial flurry of retirements in 2020 and 2021, notably among workers in the care economy, the number of older workers is now on the rise, especially those over age 60—not surprising in the face of Canada’s skyrocketing living costs.

## A more difficult path for some

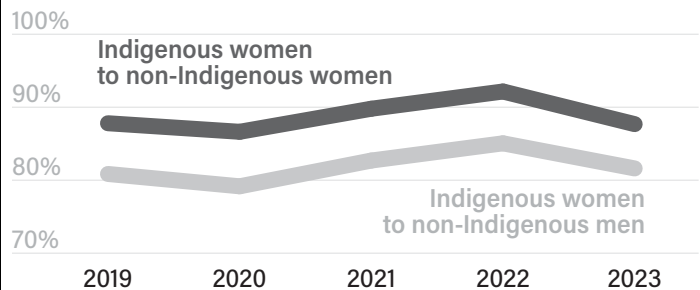
Women’s employment recovery by age group, February 2020 to December 2023



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 4-10-0287-01.

## Are pandemic gains at risk?

Employment gap among core-aged workers, 25-54, by gender and Indigenous status, 2019-23



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0364-01 Labour force characteristics by province, region and Indigenous group

# 2022

*Pandemic supports end, women are on their own*

The employment recovery has been broad-based; women with disabilities, racialized workers, Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized workers all made important employment gains between 2020 and 2022.

The employment rate among women who immigrated to Canada in the last 10 years, for example, significantly improved between 2019 and 2023, narrowing the gap with Canadian-born women.

After a rocky start, Indigenous women likewise experienced a significant boost in their employment rate, reaching 75.1 per cent in 2022, 4.6 percentage points above 2019 levels. But there was a decline in 2023 as employment growth eased. This raises the question: are the post-pandemic gains at risk?

Women with lower levels of education remain hugely vulnerable. When the pandemic hit, their employment levels dropped by 13.3 per cent between 2019 and 2020. In 2023, the gap was even larger (-17.8 per cent). Their economic prospects have continued to deteriorate post-pandemic.

# 2023

## An uneven recovery

**W**orkers in pandemic-vulnerable sectors have truly been on a bumpy ride. By the end of 2022, total employment (both men and women) in vulnerable sectors was still 125,000 jobs short of pre-pandemic levels despite sizable gains in retail, with women accounting for 80 per cent of the gap.

2023 was a better year for this group of workers, notably for male workers. Women's employment, however, continued to lag in accommodation and food services, other services such as hair salons and laundries, and arts, entertainment, and recreation.

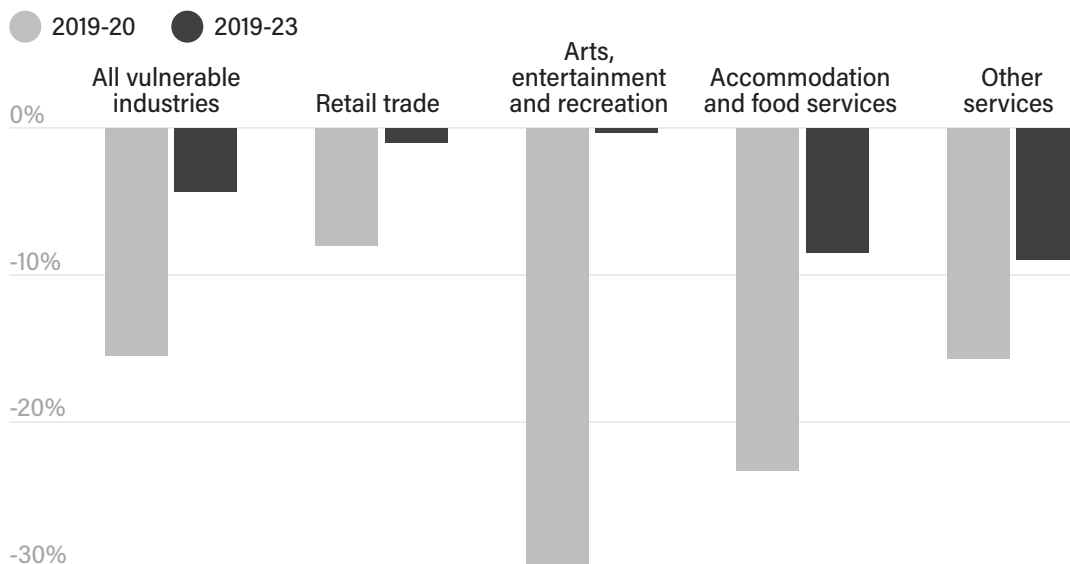
Likewise, the number of self-employed female workers, particularly those working on their own, were still below 2019 levels. With rising bankruptcies, it seems likely that the situation of small business owners will remain difficult for years to come.

The ongoing struggles of pandemic vulnerable sectors and the millions who work there remain an important threat to women's economic security—and the security of marginalized women, who are over-represented in these industries.

Indeed, with the surge in immigration in 2021 and the retirement of older Canadian-born workers, immigrants and non-permanent residents—as well as young people—now represent a larger share of workers in these precarious sectors than in 2019, even as the overall size of these industries has declined.

### A bumpy ride for vulnerable industries

Percentage change in employment, pandemic-vulnerable industries, female workers, 15+, 2019-23



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Custom Data. Employed population by industry, North American Industry Classifications (NAICS) 2017, age and sex, Canada, annual average

# 2024

## Multiple tracks for women

Canada's recovery is best viewed as proceeding along multiple tracks—a description that highlights the vastly different experiences of low-wage frontline service workers, care economy workers, and the workers in industries such as professional and technical services who were largely insulated from the economic turmoil.

Four white-collar industries—professional services, information industries, public administration and finance and insurance—posted high growth rates following the emergency phase of the pandemic, opening job opportunities for many women in the process. Between 2019 and 2023, the number of women working in these sectors increased by 22 per cent, narrowing the employment gap with male workers.

The share of women working in professional services, such as computer systems design, legal services and accounting, increased by 1.9 percentage points between 2019 and 2023. Women now represent 44.1 per cent of the total labour force in this industry.

The relative increase of women working in public administration was even larger, 2.3 percentage points, pushing women's share of employment above the 50 per cent mark.

There was also a boost in women's representation in construction and manufacturing, part of an overall push to expand apprenticeship opportunities. But the impact of the increase didn't significantly shift the gender composition of these male-dominated industries. Only 13.2 per cent of workers in construction are women, and 29.1 per cent of women work in manufacturing.

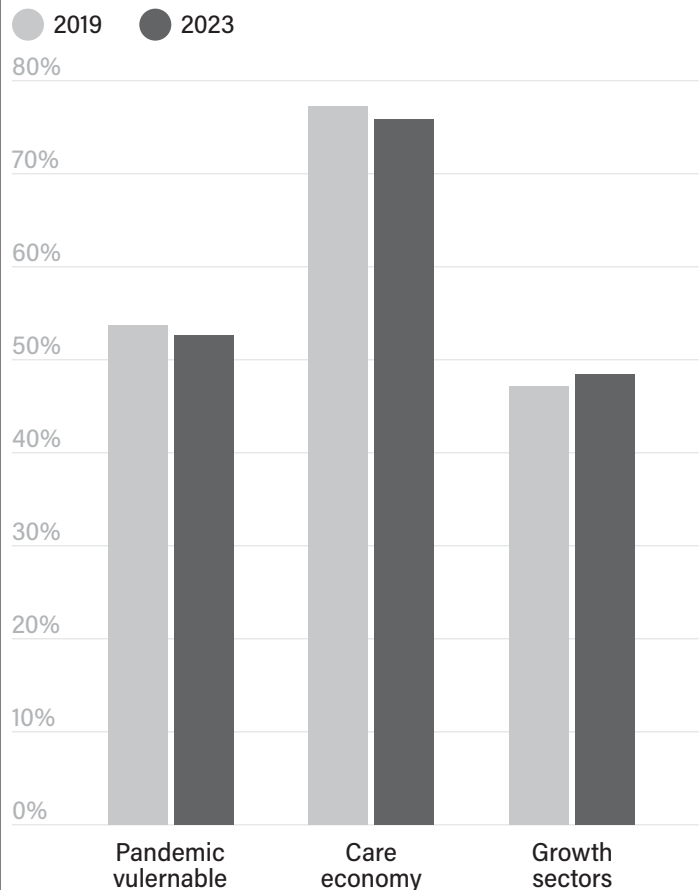
The care economy workforce has expanded as well. Hospitals and educational services reported the second and third largest increases in women's employment between 2019 and 2023—a total of 202,000 jobs. The proportion of women working in health care, social assistance and educational services is

now higher than it was before the pandemic. One in every three female workers (32.9 per cent) works in the care economy.

Men, too, have increased their share of care economy employment—from 22.7 per cent to 24.2 per cent. Given the glacial pace of change in male-dominated industries, the growing presence of men in female-dominated work is an optimistic sign of a more equitable, less gender-segregated workforce.

### Less vulnerable, more growth

Women's share of employment by industry group, 2019 and 2023



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Custom Data.

# But...

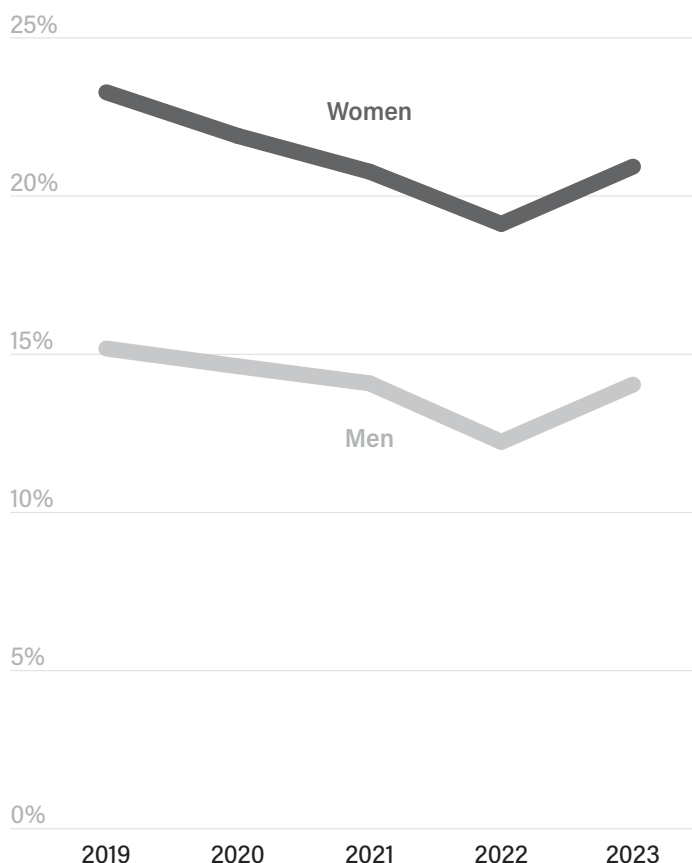
*There's always a but*

**H**as the boost of employment in higher-paid sectors resulted in greater economic security for women? In a word: no.

Lower employment rates, fewer working hours per week, substantial labour market segregation and persistent glass ceilings mean that women are still paid considerably less than men.

## Fewer women earning substantially less

Proportion of employees earning less than 2/3 of median gross hourly earnings, 2019-23



Rising living costs were especially devastating for low-wage workers in industries still struggling to recover. There has been a drop in the proportion of women workers earning less than two-thirds of the median hourly wage, from 23.3 per cent in 2019 to 20.9 per cent in 2023.

But the remaining women are working for less. Restaurant workers and grocery store clerks, for instance, made less in 2023 than in 2019. Recent immigrants have been especially hard hit.

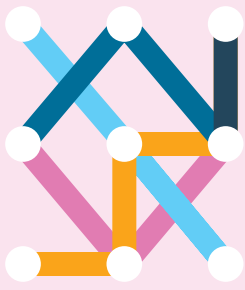
Workers in the care economy also experienced real pay cuts, many subject to wage restraint through the pandemic and beyond. The pay gap between men and women in these services tends to be narrower than in the private sector, but wages have fallen behind.

The wage growth posted between 2019 and 2023 has been almost exclusively driven by gains among white-collar workers. Up and down the earnings ladder, women experience pay gaps, reflecting entrenched systemic bias, the unequal burden of care and outright discrimination.

If there is one message to take forward, it is that change on gender equality is possible—but vigilance and concerted action are needed to get us there. And a laser focus on intersectionality to capture the diversity of people's lived experience and the scale of the challenge in front of us. **M**

Katherine Scott is a senior researcher at the CCPA National Office.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Custom Data. Employed population by industry, North American Industry Classifications (NAICS) 2017, age and sex, Canada, annual average



## Hennessy's Index

### Women and the pandemic

Trish Hennessy

### 10.4%

That's the percentage of employed women in Canada who were more likely to be absent from work because of COVID-19 in 2020, compared to only 6.4 per cent of employed men.

### 60-80%

The percentage of women in their middle years diagnosed with COVID-19 who experienced long-term symptoms.

### 87%

The percentage of people who experience long COVID-19 in a 2021 Canadian survey who were women.

### 3

That's how many industries in Canada have the highest ratio of women workers: health care and social assistance (82.4 per cent), education services (69.3 per cent) and accommodation and food services (58.5 per cent). These are all jobs that make women vulnerable to being infected by COVID-19.

### 56%

That's how many women in Canada were employed in occupations in 2015 involving the "five Cs": caring, clerical, catering, cashiering and cleaning. These occupations were greatly impacted by the pandemic.

### 10%

That's how many women told a Statistics Canada survey that they were very or extremely concerned about the possibility of violence in the home during the early part of the pandemic.

### 53%

Of the 557 facilities across Canada housing survivors of domestic violence, 53 per cent indicated they saw an increased demand for support during the pandemic.

### 12%

Data from 17 police forces across Canada showed a 12 per cent increase in domestic violence calls from March to June 2020 compared to 2019.

### 63%

Women made up 47 per cent of all workers, but accounted for two-thirds (63%) of all job losses in the early phase of the pandemic. Among workers in the core demographic aged 25 to 54 years, women represented 70 per cent of all job losses. Another 1.2 million women had at least half of their hours cut.

### 1.8 million

Altogether, over 1.8 million women in Canada lost their job or lost at least half of their usual hours of employment due to the early pandemic economic shutdown.

### 1/3

In the early days of the pandemic, one third of women in Canada considered leaving their job to better manage child care and other work at home, according to a September 2020 national survey.

"We are shutting down key sectors of the economy, as we must, to contain the devastating impact of the coronavirus and protect our collective future. The costs will be high—especially for women. And we know the people facing intersecting forms of discrimination will suffer the largest and most profound losses and have the greatest difficulty springing back after the crisis."

—Katherine Scott, "Women bearing the brunt of economic losses," *monitormag.ca*, 2020

Sources: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8091650/figure/f001/>, Canadian Women's Foundation [https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/women-and-pandemics/#:~:text=More%20women%20than%20men%20have,risk%20of%20contracting%20the%20virus](https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/women-and-pandemics/#:~:text=More%20women%20than%20men%20have,risk%20of%20contracting%20the%20virus.), *Report on Pan-Canadian Long Covid Impact Survey*, June 28, 2021, COVID Long-haulers Support Group, <https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/women-and-pandemics/#:~:text=More%20women%20than%20men%20have,risk%20of%20contracting%20the%20virus>, per Statistics Canada, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.htm>, Canadian Women's Foundation <https://canadianwomen.org/the-facts/women-and-pandemics/#:~:text=More%20women%20than%20men%20have,risk%20of%20contracting%20the%20virus>, per Statistics Canada, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.htm>, Statistics Canada <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200408/dq200408c-eng.htm>, Statistics Canada <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00006-eng.pdf>, *CBC News* <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/domestic-intimate-partner-violence-up-in-pandemic-1.5914344>, Katherine Scott, CCPA, <https://monitormag.ca/articles/women-bearing-the-brunt-of-economic-losses-one-in-five-has-been-laid-off-or-had-hours-cut/>, *Global News* <https://globalnews.ca/news/7328279/one-third-working-moms-quitting-covid-19-prosperity-project/>,



## Inside Trade

Stuart Trew

# Ecuadorians reject corporate courts in national referendum

In an April 21 referendum, the Ecuadorian people resoundingly rejected their government's plot to bring the country back under the thumb of international investment arbitration. This should block plans to include a biased **investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS)** process in a planned Canada-Ecuador free trade deal.

Between 2008 and 2017, in response to a barrage of expensive investor lawsuits against Ecuador, several from Canadian mining firms, the government of Rafael Correa initiated a coordinated exit from the investment arbitration regime. All of Ecuador's bilateral investment treaties were terminated, including one with Canada.

Article 422 of Ecuador's 2008 constitution further ensured future governments could not enter international treaties "wherein the Ecuadorian state yields sovereign jurisdiction to instances of international arbitration in contractual or commercial disputes between the state and natural or legal persons of private nature."

The ISDS question in Ecuador's April referendum was an underhanded attempt to grant the current government of Daniel Noboa authority to revisit Article 422. Camouflaged among nine questions on national security policy were two economic questions—one in support of international investment arbitration and another to permit hourly labour contracts.

While the heavy-handed security measures unfortunately passed, more than 60 per cent of voters said no to both ISDS and the neoliberal labour reforms.

"This rejection [of ISDS] has been a giant victory for Ecuador's social movements, which mounted a citizen campaign on a national scale, all in the record time of a month and a half," writes Luciana Ghiotto of the Transnational Institute (TNI).

The campaign from the Union of People Affected by Texaco/Chevron Operations (UDAPT), the Indigenous and peasant movement led by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), and

others like Acción Ecológica was truly top notch. The CCPA joined hundreds of organizations in signing an international letter supporting the campaign against ISDS.

The result of the referendum should put a stop to plans by the Trudeau and Noboa governments to include ISDS in their proposed free trade deal. A footnote to Canada's negotiating objectives states that, "in light of ongoing consideration in Ecuador of the legal compatibility between investment agreements and its domestic legal framework, it is possible that investment and services provisions may be set aside, in part or entirely, from an agreement if necessary during the negotiation process."

While this is a relief, there are reasons to oppose the trade deal even without a problematic ISDS process. Notably, there is very little chance that the Noboa government will consult widely on the negotiations or have any interest—or capacity—to hold foreign mining companies accountable for violations of human rights or environmental standards.

On April 4, the CCPA co-moderated a webinar on the Canada-Ecuador trade negotiations with Amnesty International Canada and MiningWatch Canada. Speakers included representatives of Ecuadorian organizations and communities impacted by Canadian oil and mining projects and currently excluded from debate about the planned trade deal. The webinar also featured comments from UN special rapporteur David Boyd on how ISDS prioritizes the rights of transnational companies over communities and the environment.

It was clear from these presentations that there is growing opposition in Ecuador to any trade deal with Canada that does not have the informed, prior consent of the people who will be affected. The Noboa government has shown no interest in seeking out that consent—for the trade deal or for the expansion of Canadian mining projects that the deal is meant to protect.

On April 17, several Ecuadorian organizations including the Shuar Arutam People sent an open letter to Canada's ambassador to Ecuador, Stephen Potter, to express grave concern about an escalation of violence and conflict associated with a Canadian mining project operated by Solaris Resources Inc. The violence follows the Noboa government's use of armed police and military units to intimidate people opposed to Atico Mining's gold-copper-zinc-silver project in southwestern Ecuador.

In this context, and considering Ecuador's blatant violation of international law in raiding the Mexican embassy in Quito at the beginning of April, "the crucial question we have to ask is whether it is appropriate to move full steam ahead with Canada-Ecuador trade negotiations," said Kathy Price of Amnesty International in a *Hill Times* article. **M**

Stuart Trew is director of the CCPA's Trade and Investment Research Project.



Clare Mian

# Canada's failure to adequately address the Israel/Palestine crisis

Not since the movements against South African apartheid and the Vietnam war has the Canadian public been so engaged in a foreign policy debate.

At university campuses, students and faculty members are defending their right to free speech and calling for Canadian divestment from collaboration in the Israeli war in Gaza.

With an election looming, political parties in the House of Commons are positioning themselves to alienate neither the Jewish nor the Muslim vote.

Among the Canadian public, citizens who think of their country as a just society struggle to understand and take a stand on this issue.

## Background to Canada's involvement in the Israel-Palestine Conflict

The creation of a Jewish state in Palestine dates from the 1917 *Balfour Declaration*, arguably the most important document in the history of the ongoing conflict:

"Britain...view(s) with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people... it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine."

The first part of this declaration is indelibly imprinted in the minds of all who have followed the birth of the State of Israel ("view with favour" interpreted as "support"). The second has been largely

forgotten, except by the "non-Jewish communities in Palestine."

Balfour wrote that supporting the Zionist project was simply of "profounder import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land." That is, Britain needed a "European" ally to protect its geopolitical interests in a part of the world considered volatile.

European antisemitism and the growth of nationalism in Europe fuelled the growth of Zionism. Zionist organizations lobbied Jewish communities throughout Europe and North America to fund land purchases and infrastructure building to accommodate Jewish immigrants to Palestine.

The Palestinian Arab community saw its land holdings and political influence decline, such that a full-blown revolt occurred from 1936 to 1939. It was so brutally suppressed by British authorities that Palestine lost its political, military and economic leadership as it faced its struggle for survival.

In Canada, a sizable Jewish community contributed funds and material to accommodate Jewish immigration to Palestine, thus establishing an early connection between Canada and the Zionist project.

## From Partition to the Six-Day War (1947-67)

Canada emerged from the Second World War with enhanced prestige due to its military performance and emancipation from Britain. The newly formed United Nations asked Canada to assume leadership

in the resolution of the "Palestine problem." Britain had signalled its intention to withdraw as mandatory power on May 15, 1948.

In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) accepted a plan that was profoundly unequal. Two Canadians—Judge Ivan Rand and future Prime Minister Lester Pearson—had largely designed it and lobbied for its acceptance with justifications reminiscent of the *Balfour Declaration*.

The Jewish minority, 35 per cent of the population, received 56 per cent of the land, including some of its more fertile regions. The Arab majority, 65 per cent of the population, received 42 per cent of the land. Jerusalem and its immediate surroundings were designated an international area to be shared among all religious groups.

There were alternatives to this plan. Independent Arab states suggested that a federal option be brought to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), but the UN's urgency to solve the problem, the lobbying efforts of the World Zionist Organization, and American support for the Rand/Pearson plan scuttled this. Ironically, Canada, a federal state, failed to advocate for what was—and might still be—the most just solution to the Palestine/Israel conflict.

Zionists in Palestine saw the plan as a step towards realizing their goal of a Jewish home in Palestine. On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, head of the Jewish Agency, declared the establishment of the State of Israel.

The Arab community rejected the plan. The advisability of this decision has been the subject of much analysis, but Mahmoud Abbas, the current leader of the Palestinian Authority, has called it “an Arab mistake.”

Ongoing hostilities between the two communities became the first Arab Israeli war. By war’s end in 1949, the superior Israeli forces had considerably expanded the borders of the partition plan. An estimated 750,000 Palestinian Arabs were expelled or fled in fear in what Palestinians call the *Naqba* (catastrophe). Arab Palestinians who remained within the borders of Israel were subjected to restrictions regarding citizenship, employment, mobility, housing and access to water and electricity.

Canada posed no objection to this border expansion, nor did it advocate for the implementation of 1948 UNGA resolution that called for the right of “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours (to) be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date.” The right to an Arab state became an uphill fight to reclaim what had been theirs.

In 1949, the United Nations Refugee and Welfare Agency (UNRWA) was established to care for Palestinian refugees, the longest-standing and one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Canada has always supported UNRWA. One can infer that this humanitarian aid was meant to assuage the culpability of abandoning Palestinian Arabs.

In May 1949, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) admitted Israel with the understanding that “...Israel is a peace-loving State which accepts the obligations contained in the (UN) Charter and is able and willing to carry out those obligations.”

Those obligations included adherence to previous resolutions recognizing the right of return of Palestinians and the protection of populations acquired through war.

In 1967, Israel prepared for what was seen as a massive attack by its Arab neighbours. Given the monumental superiority of the Israeli defense forces, the United States knew the Arab attack constituted no threat to Israel. The war ended swiftly and disastrously for the Palestinian people as Israel occupied the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

UNSC Resolution 242 called for the immediate withdrawal of Israel from territories taken in war, the protection of citizens in these territories, in keeping with the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and the right of return for the thousands of new Palestinian refugees.

According to Palestinian-American historian Rashid Khalidi, UNSC 242 was flawed in that it, henceforward, linked Israeli withdrawal to a two-party negotiated peace settlement. This sanctioned the myth of “equivalence”, that is, that two symmetrical powers were and are fighting over Palestine.

Palestinians were only mentioned as a “refugee problem” so that, even by the standards of this highly criticized and ambiguous resolution, it is not clear who the “two parties” in this negotiation would be. This has inevitably played into the hands of Israel and its allies, namely Canada and the United States.

### **From 1967 to attempts at peace accords**

The years following the Six-Day War saw three major developments: Palestinian militancy, UN concern with Israel’s treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories, and Canada’s explicit support of Israel and its chief ally, the United States.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), born in the early 1960s, launched attacks into the occupied West Bank from its Jordanian headquarters until Jordan evicted it due to its militancy.

PLO operations then moved largely to Beirut and Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon until it was brutally attacked by Israel, notably in the 1982 attacks on the Sabra and Shatila camps.

The PLO, in an ironically beneficial development, relocated its operational headquarters to the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza.

During these years, repeated UNGA resolutions “condemned” and “deplored” the continued mistreatment of the Arab population within Israeli borders.

In 1974, a little-known UNGA Resolution (3246) affirmed the legality of “armed resistance by oppressed people.”

In 1974, the UNGA reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to “self-determination”, “national independence”, and “sovereignty”, and granted the PLO non-member observer status in the UN.

During these years, Canada voted to support the human and political rights of Palestinians, remained silent on a future Arab State, and built strong diplomatic and economic ties with Israel.

A shift occurred in the 1970s when Canada’s UNGA votes turned from support of the Palestinian cause to abstention or opposition on resolutions condemning Israel, arguing that blame had to be shared between both sides in the conflict.

By the 1990s, under Brian Mulroney, Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin, this pattern became stronger, and Canada failed to register opposition to such practices as building of settlements in the occupied territories and setting up checkpoints and separation walls.

It is under Stephen Harper (2006-15) that Canada’s support of Israel became unambiguous. Then Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird asserted that Canada has no “better friend” than Israel.

This was not so much a change of substance as of degree and was due to the flourishing of Canadian Israeli diplomatic and commercial

relations, the violence of the Palestinian Intifadas to protest Israeli practices, the influence of Jewish Israeli lobbies in Canada, and the belief of the Conservative party that Canada was better served by strong bilateral relations rather than by a network of multilateral relations.

Canada's official dual commitment to defending Israel's rights to be secure within its borders (which borders are never clarified) and championing Palestinian human rights became an untenable position. Clear defence of Israeli positions has probably denied Canada two requests for a non-permanent seat on the UNSC, as Middle Eastern, Asian, African and Latin American nations no longer believe in Canada's neutrality.

UN attention turned to the urgency of finding a peace settlement. The Oslo Accords (1993-95), still considered a qualified success, were based on the belief that the conflict could be solved only when both sides could be led to some form of two-state. What we are witnessing today is, in fact, the failure of the accords and the structures they established.

A true resolution is not possible without acknowledgement of the fundamental injustice of the situation and the continued fallacious belief in equivalence between Israel and Palestine is addressed in a principled way.

## 2023-24

Since October 7, 2023, Justin Trudeau's government's reaction has been opaque and hesitant.

It rightly and unconditionally condemned the Hamas attacks.

When Israeli retaliation on Gaza began, it voted against UN ceasefire resolutions until it finally supported a humanitarian ceasefire in December 2023.

It withdrew UNRWA funding based on Israeli allegations that some agency employees were supporters of Hamas. Following an investigation, the UN's Office of Internal Oversight (UNOIO) lauded the transparency of UNRWA operations and, in the absence of Israeli evidence, closed most of the cases. Canada has ostensibly restored funds, but it is not clear to what level.

The Trudeau majority supported the NDP's non-binding resolution of March 24, 2024, which it had drastically amended to include a stronger condemnation of Hamas, a call for the immediate release of the Israeli hostages, and a repetition of the Canadian mantra that Israel has the right to defend itself.

In response to public protests concerning government military support to Israel, the government admitted to having approved \$28.5 in "military goods" after Israel began its attacks. However, in a new height of official disinformation, it claimed these were "non-lethal weapons."

NDP pressure saw the government agree to an embargo on military exports to Israel, with the escape hatch that those already approved were excluded.

Conservative pressure is growing as leader Pierre Poilievre made well-received speeches at two important synagogues in Montreal ridings with significant Jewish populations (Mount Royal and Côte St-Luc). Outflanking the Liberals in their support of Israel, Poilievre stands a good chance of stealing Jewish votes from Trudeau.

The NDP is said to be attracting Muslim voters who are angry at Trudeau's lack of support for the suffering Gazans.

In another aspect of government ineffectiveness, Canadian immigration officials have no idea how many, if any, Palestinians have managed to enter Canada.

The Trudeau government continues to pay lip service to the two-state solution, but always with the proviso that it be part of a two-party negotiated settlement. The latest wrinkle is that the recognition of the second state in this plan—the state of Palestine—could be the start, rather than the end, of this process; an incomprehensible development, even by the standards of this government.

Just prior to the October 7 attacks, Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) published an Ekos poll that showed 27 per cent of Canadians view Israel as a state with significant similarities to apartheid, 22 per cent see it as a "flawed democracy" and 14 per cent see it as a state with "restricted minority rights."

In the 18-34 age range, 48 per cent saw it as a state like apartheid.

As the student protests in Canadian and American universities unfolded in the spring, the reported majority seemed to oppose these. American-Jewish journalist Peter Beinart sees in them a beacon of hope of young people who are putting aside self-interest to literally stand up for an ending to the suffering of a people who have been victimized for over 70 years.

On May 11, 2024, the UNGA voted on a resolution to upgrade Palestine's status in the UN, and to accelerate recognition of a Palestinian state. This would appear to be a constructive step towards the two-state solution that Canada upholds; 143 of 193 members voted in favour. The United States and Israel voted against. Canada abstained. **M**

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Clare Mian is a retired educator and is now a student and writer in Toronto.

Kirsten Bernas and Shauna MacKinnon

# How to fix Canada's housing crisis

Now that the dust has settled on the spring federal budget, it's time to take stock of what's needed now to fix Canada's housing crisis.

The budget made significant investments in housing, but the Government of Canada again failed to adequately invest in housing that is affordable to low-income renter households and people experiencing homelessness.

The Social Housing and Human Rights coalition (SHHR) has identified a need for a minimum of 500,000 new non-market, rent-geared-to-income social housing units across Canada over the next 10 years. We use the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) metric of affordability: 30 per cent shelter-cost-to-income ratio and call for public, non-profit, and co-op housing, with rents permanently set at less than 30 per cent of income.

We recognize that 50,000 additional units annually is not nearly enough. We recommend this as a minimum based on the CMHC projected need to expand overall supply by building 5.8 million homes over the next decade. We estimate that because 33.5 per cent of households are renters, 194,300 of this supply should be rental. And since approximately one quarter of renters are in core housing need, a minimum of 48,575 should be at rent-geared-to-income rates affordable to low-income renters. This amount is relatively consistent with calls to double the number of social housing units to align with the OECD average more closely.

"Social Housing is housing that exists outside of the market and

costs less than 30% of household income or equivalent to social assistance housing allowances. Social housing can be owned by public, non-profit or co-operating housing providers."

The federal budget fails to commit to our modest targets. Instead, it continues to focus on "affordable housing" using a different metric, which isn't affordable to low- and moderate-income renter households.

For example, budget 2024 commits to invest an additional \$15 billion for low-cost loans through the Apartment Construction Loan Program (ACLP), which the government says will add 30,000 more new homes. This brings the program's total to \$55 billion in low-cost financing, and the program's total contribution to over 131,000 new homes by 2031-32.

Results, to date, suggest that the government's measure of affordability will mean that very few of these homes will be affordable to low- and even moderate-income renter households.

A recent *Globe and Mail* analysis of rental data revealed that 87 of 177 rental projects approved through Ottawa's Apartment Construction Loan Program exceed what a typical renter household can actually afford to pay: the ACLP program's definition of affordability means that an "affordable rent is so high that most renters would have to double their income to make their monthly payments."

The situation is more dire for low-income households. A 2022 analysis commissioned by the National Housing Council estimated

that only three per cent of units in the ACLP's predecessor's funded developments charge rents affordable to low-income households.

Budget 2024's top-up of \$400 million for the \$4 billion Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) is also unlikely to create non-market housing affordable to low-income households because the metric for the fund defines affordability far too broadly and there are no requirements for the inclusion of rent-geared-to-income units.

Opportunities exist within the Affordable Housing Fund, with an additional \$1 billion for the development of non-market housing and the commitment to create a new rapid housing stream within the fund to build "deeply affordable housing." This should generate fewer than 5,000 social housing units over five years—only 10 per cent of the annual need across Canada.

## Other levels of government needs to kick in

These federal capital dollars will need to be accompanied by operating subsidies from other levels of government to ensure new units have rents set at less than 30 per cent of income.

The \$1.5 billion Canada Rental Protection Fund will support the non-profit sector to acquire and protect the existing affordable housing supply. However, social housing advocates emphasize that these funds should exclusively be set aside for non-market housing providers—public, nonprofit and co-ops. Here, too, without operating subsidies from other levels of government, nonprofits that use

the fund will struggle to provide rents that are geared to income and ensure units are affordable to those in greatest need.

Budget 2024 announces plans to use public land and buildings to develop homes, a policy that SHHR has also called for. However, the coalition would like to see a commitment to prioritize public land and buildings for non-market housing providers to develop social housing.

Apart from some modest steps in the right direction, the federal government continues to rely primarily on failed policies that focus on incentivizing the for-profit private market to produce low-rent housing. This has been the approach for upwards of 40 years and it hasn't worked.

Private sector solutions were the focus of cost-shared federal/provincial/territorial (FTP) initiatives beginning in 2001 through the *Affordable Housing Framework Agreement*. The result was a modest increase in units typically renting at 80 per cent of average market rents for a limited number of years. Rents were not affordable to low-income households and those affordability requirements have since expired.

Canada can learn lessons from past policies, described in a 1999 publication by the Parliamentary Research Branch, and create the kind of housing that we need now. To reach SHHR targets, the federal government will need to put money on the table, with conditions, to ensure that social housing is built and maintained.

New social housing supply requires capital investments for construction, so that new housing can be built, and for acquisition, so that existing properties can be purchased and re-purposed or renovated.

Ongoing capital investments are needed to maintain the quality of social housing and preserve the stock over time. New (and existing) social housing supply also requires investments in ongoing subsidies to support the costs of operating the housing while charging rent-geared-to-income rents. Operating costs may include services and programs that support tenants.

### We need all hands on deck

Canada's low-income housing crisis will not be solved without all levels of government collaborating to reinvest in social housing. Canada must take the lead in ensuring each level of government brings their respective fiscal and policy tools to the table to acquire, build, operate, and maintain new and existing public, non-profit, and cooperative-owned social housing.

There are many simultaneous strategies needed to address housing affordability. The expansion of social housing supply is one. But calls are all too often ignored by governments turning to the private sector for low-cost, quick fixes that continue to fail those in greatest need. This approach has not worked.

We cannot keep doing the same thing and expect a different result. It's clear we need a new approach and the political will to lead it. **M**

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Kirsten Bernas is the provincial chair of the Right to Housing Coalition in Manitoba. Shauna MacKinnon is professor in Urban and Inner-City Studies at the University of Winnipeg and the principal director of the Manitoba Research Alliance, which holds a seven-year SSHRC Partnership Grant hosted by the CCPA Manitoba office. Kirsten and Shauna coordinate the national Social Housing and Human Rights (SSHR) Coalition. You can learn more about the coalition at [www.moresocialhousing.ca](http://www.moresocialhousing.ca)



## Leave a legacy that reflects your lifelong convictions.

Include the CCPA in your will and help bring to life the kind of world you'd like to see for future generations.

By contributing to the future financial stability of the CCPA you will enable us to continue to champion the values and issues that you care so deeply about.

If you'd like to learn more about including the CCPA in your will, call Katie Loftus at 1-844-563-1341 or 613-563-1341 extension 318, or send an email to [katie@policyalternatives.ca](mailto:katie@policyalternatives.ca).

Marc Lee and DT Cochrane

# Bolder moves needed to tax the rich

The big surprise in the 2024 federal budget was a very small, but very important, tax increase on the richest Canadians. Although it is modest, the increase has some on Bay Street fuming. But the reality is we need to do much more to improve tax fairness and reduce the growing gap between the rich and the rest of us.

The 2024 tax changes affect capital gains, or the income received when selling an asset above its purchase price. Currently, only half of capital gains are taxable, with exemptions for primary residences and up to \$1 million in other qualifying assets, such as farming and fishing property.

Under the new rules, 66 per cent of the gains above \$250,000 will be taxable. The primary residence exemption remains, with the lifetime exemption increased to \$1.25 million.

This change is expected to raise \$18 billion over the next five years and to be paid by only the 40,000 or so richest individuals.

But even with the 2024 change, the income from buying and selling assets will be taxed less than from working.

These discrepancies lie at the heart of inequities in the Canadian tax system. The highest-income households benefit from several sources of untaxed or lightly taxed income.

A fair tax system should tax the same amount of income at the same rate regardless of the source. Bay Street accountant Kenneth Carter, who headed a royal commission on taxation in the mid-1960s, captured this notion

with his comment that “a buck is a buck.”

Carter and the other commissioners also advocated an overall progressive tax system. Have we achieved that?

Our new study of Canada’s tax system, which examined all sources of income and all taxes across the income distribution, finds that we have not.

Taxes at the bottom of the income distribution are modestly progressive. Then, there is a flat tax structure through the middle. Finally, it gets regressive at the top with the top 5 per cent paying a lower rate than the bottom 95 per cent, and the top one per cent paying an even lower rate.

Part of the problem is the partial exclusion of capital gains because as you approach the top, ever more income is from owning rather than working. Further, many taxes, such

as property taxes and payroll taxes, are not progressive.

Since 2004, Canada’s tax system has become less progressive, with rates in 2022 as much as 4.7 percentage points higher for the bottom two deciles.

One positive development is that rates for the top five per cent of households are somewhat higher in 2022 than 2004, largely due to the addition of a new top income tax bracket in 2016. The new capital gains inclusion rate will help nudge up rates at the very top.

Outside of the top five per cent, federal taxes were generally lower in 2022 than 2004. However, this reduction was more than offset by higher provincial taxes. Provincial tax distribution is more regressive across the whole distribution and has become more so.

What should be done? First, we need higher top rates and elimination of various tax preferences, like capital gains exclusion, that primarily benefit top earners. In addition, we need to tax inheritances and wealth to level the generational playing field. Finally, we need to increase corporate taxes with a focus on windfall taxes in sectors like groceries and oil and gas.

A fair and decent society should have neither extreme of obscenely rich nor desperately poor citizens. Taxation of the wealthiest is a central means to reduce inequality, provide robust public infrastructure and services that benefit all, and create opportunities for all to live a decent life. **M**

Marc Lee is a senior economist with CCPA BC. DT Cochrane is a senior economist with the Canadian Labour Congress.

Over the past two decades Canada’s tax system has become less progressive



Grieving for My Ancestors / Alex Jacobs-Blum

E.R. Zarevich

## Artist uses photography and visualization to bond with her Indigenous ancestry

Artist and photographer Alex Jacobs-Blum's "Living and Lost Connections," a collection of original digital photographs and video footage, was exhibited at the Art Gallery of Hamilton from February 10 to May 20, 2024. The Art Gallery of Hamilton, also known as the AGH, is (as acknowledged on their official website) built on the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Traditional Territory of the Erie,

Neutral, Huron-Wendat, and Haudenosaunee.

Blum utilizes her cameras as tools for creatively establishing a sturdy bridge between herself and her Gayogohó:no' (Cayuga) background, emphasizing open spaces, nature, and the cycles of the elements. Melissa Bennett, curator at the AGH, describes the experiences of working with Jacobs-Blum as "an honour and a pleasure" and devotes much time and effort towards exhibiting female Indigenous artists at the gallery. The *Monitor* has

been allowed the great privilege of speaking to Alex-Jacobs Blum about her work and her opinions on how Indigenous art is achieving long overdue prominence in Canada.

**E.R.:** One of the prominent themes of your digital photographs is the unstoppable power of fire and water. Is this a statement on how we're at the mercy of the elements, or is there another intention?

**Alex:** I actually haven't thought about that, but I think you can most definitely apply where I was



Echoes from the Stars / Alex Jacobs-Blum

thinking of the themes, particularly in rooting and grounding the work in the land. Our Hodinöhsö:ni' creation story and one of our main teachings in our creation story is to understand how to grieve and how to release. This is kind of all tied with the teachings that we received from Grandmother Moon. She governs all the waters on Earth, all the tides and the tides within our bodies as well, especially as she's so tethered to women's bodies. And so, I was thinking about that in terms of this release and healing kind of in a good way. It was meant to support people through their own grieving processes, because this journey of taking these images was really an understanding of myself and releasing this familial grief that I carried in my body from the residential school system. My family has experience with it. It has resonated within each of us differently, so I wanted to spend time on my homelands. That's where I took most of the images, on my homelands of upstate New York.

**E.R.:** Are your photographs always taken with a predetermined vision or are they ever spontaneous?

**Alex:** I think almost all of them are spontaneous. It is just this kind of feeling that I have on the land when I'm there. And I do a lot of visiting with the land and observing. There are these kinds of special moments, like the one of the waters and the shoreline, where

there are almost sun flares on the rocks. Once, I was just sitting by the beach one night on Cuba Lake and it was my last night there. I just wanted to visit and see the sunset go down and then I saw this beautiful moment. I was like, "Oh my gosh!" So it was just like that. Always circumstantial. It's rooted in the visiting and spending time with and grounding myself on the land. I like to take my shoes off and give offerings of tobacco. The land is very much a part of the conversation. I almost feel like that we're collaborating with one another.

**E.R.:** I was fascinated by your powerful photograph "Grieving for My Ancestors." Your subject, presumably yourself, seems stranded and shipwrecked. Was the blanket covering your face and body meant to be a symbol of protection or a symbol of disguise?

**Alex:** Oh, I love that interpretation! I wanted to show how I embody ancestral knowledge and how my ancestors move through my body. I was kind of thinking of myself as this vessel. I wanted to kind of be this anonymous vessel in a way, that like all of my ancestors move through me and that I'm one of many. I didn't want to have a specific identity in that image and so it was more like I was thinking a lot about how my ancestors would perceive the land. Knowing what it was like, so beautiful then. Now, layers of





Buck Moon / Alex Jacobs-Blum

colonialism have impacted the land and my ancestors seeing how it's been almost laid to waste and how it's been progressing in such a poor way. I wanted to embody that grieving. I wanted to integrate this fabric in with the land. The fabric is kind of sparkly, so I wanted to reference that our ancestors are in the stars and that the stars are a part of us. So that there's this cosmological being.

**E.R.:** Your tattoos are displayed very prominently in your photographs. Can you tell us more about what your tattoos represent on a personal and artistic level?

**Alex:** It's all traditional hand poke. It was done by a Hodinöhsö:ni' artist. I see my Indigeneity like an extension of me, so I wanted to incorporate my tattoos in recognition of this. I am present in the work but without being explicit and having this whole dimensional representation. I also wanted it to be present, so you know, this is me and these are my teachings from like a whole shiny new perspective. So that's why I wanted to have my tattoos present. It's like that with my cedar tattoo, for example. Cedar is one of our medicines. I wanted to have that also present in the work as well but kind of like a contemporary form, so you know our medicines and our knowledge shows up in so many different ways. And a lot of that

incorporates tattoos and other contemporary forms, like beadwork and all that kind of stuff. I wanted to acknowledge that.

**E.R.:** Do you feel that by exhibiting in the Hamilton Art Gallery, you're in a way reclaiming space for Indigenous culture?

**Alex:** I was thinking through that a lot over the first weekend as people were visiting and I was having conversations with folks. I was reflecting on the time when I used to take art classes there when I was really young. I didn't see myself represented in gallery spaces or museums and moving through the city. I didn't understand where I could find a place of safety as an Indigenous person. I was just like reflecting over the weekend that it was so cool to have my show that I've been working so hard towards. It feels so good to have my work be seen in the city that I grew up in. Then there is also Shelly Nero, who I've known and admired for over 10 years, since I started my practice. She is the reason that I do what I do. She really carved that pathway forward for me. I attribute a lot of my pathways to her. **M**

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

# YOUR CCPA

## Get to know Gina Gill

OFFICE: **NATIONAL**  
POSITION: **COMMUNICATIONS  
SPECIALIST**  
YEARS WITH THE CCPA: **2**

**Your communications career has taken you down several paths. Tell us about that.**

While I was in Newfoundland I was a freelance journalist but I then took a job with a non-profit organization where every aspect of communications fell in my lap. From newsletters, to blogs, to social media, to events—and I loved having a hand in everything. It was a great opportunity to see where I had strengths and where I could grow.

**What drew you to the CCPA?**

It's easy enough to have progressive thought, I think action and discussion needs to be backed with accurate information, as well as compassion. For me, CCPA brought those things forward—a passion to change the lives of Canadians with well-conducted research to back it up.

**How did your family's history influence your choice to work on progressive policies?**

My mother used to say to me "make sure what you're saying is relevant to the story." She simply meant that there was no room to invite hatred or unkind words into the narrative and your speech had to be useful. You have to ask yourself what did you gain and who were you affecting when you spoke. My parents led as a team of co-parents in a really creative, open and non-judgmental manner. Their doors were open to all, their laughs were loud and their encouragement to do the right thing.



**What's a good Newfoundlander doing in Ottawa?**

Oh this one makes me tear up. They say the only people you can recognize in heaven are a Newfoundlander, because they are the only ones who want to go home.

My ex partner and I followed jobs up here with intentions to move back but then the pandemic hit and we stayed. My children have grandparents here and now they have friends and a community. We have a big extended family that includes their dad and his partner and my partner. And I really love the trees and the birds. But Newfoundland is where my heart remains.

**What makes you proud to work at the CCPA?**

The people. My coworkers do not just talk the talk, they walk the walk. That genuine responsibility to make the world a better place is impressive. They are brilliant and hilarious, sharp and dedicated.

When bad decisions are made by governments for Canadians, they are not only infuriated, they want to fix it. We all work together to find solutions and then share those ideas with our supporters and all Canadians.

**You're coordinating our social media accounts and newsletter program. What have you learned about CCPA supporters in that role?**

People are ready for change and they appreciate us doing the work to develop alternative policies. Canadians are tired, hitting the grind day in and day out just to pay for a roof and food is exhausting, but there is hope and whenever it's provided, it's applauded.

**When you're not at work, how do you decompress?**

I read, I write, I run and exercise. I eat good food and stretch and play with my kids. I hike and go outside every day. I love the company of good people, great conversation and lots of laughter. I love watching my kids become who they are meant to be.

**What gives you hope?**

Humans are ever growing and ever changing and they really do want their country to be better. Canada has always gotten better as time has passed. We have \$10-a-day child care, we have extended maternity leave, dental care and pharmacare is unrolling. These are all things I never imagined to see in my lifetime. I know it's clear that we can do better, but I do think we will always go up instead of down. The people I work with and our supporters prove that to be true. **M**

The CCPA's work is powered by people like you

# Meet Emily Andrew

## A long-time CCPA monthly donor

**Tell us about someone who was a big influence on you early in life and how you became a CCPA supporter (how your ideals and those of the CCPA became aligned).**

My mother was a postwar refugee to the U.S., so, through her example, I learned about a history of dispossession and vulnerability, as well as remarkable endurance. Though she wasn't explicitly political, except when it came to feminism, she led by example. My father was, and remains, explicitly political; he attuned us to international struggles and taught us to question authority. A social democratic with a Red Tory bent, he's long supported organizations like CCPA, Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. My parents were good teachers; I learned their lessons.

**Tell us why you decided to donate monthly via your bank account?**

I know that the reliability and regularity of donations helps with long-term planning. The CCPA must have asked me to do this at some point long ago and I was happy to comply. Since, I have started giving to other organizations and charities monthly, but to the CCPA longest—a group ahead of the curve!

**What has the CCPA done lately that's made you feel proud to be a supporter? In your opinion, what**



**makes the CCPA special?** I love the work that the CCPA does around the alternative federal budget, presenting us with possibilities and counterfactuals to stretch our collective imagination, then getting this information out to the media.

**Could you tell us what it is about the CCPA that galvanizes you to continue to support the CCPA year after year for 21 years?**

Progressive policy needs amplifying—especially in this day and age, when our allies in parliament need research to bolster their platforms. This is certainly true in the case of environmental responsibility, as well as housing affordability, and food security—among many other issues. The need hasn't diminished, nor has my commitment.

**Tell us about someone you find particularly inspiring right now.**

I am drawing inspiration from the reporters at *Breach Media* who bring us properly contextualized, thoughtful, progressive journalism—news stories that help tip the scales towards evenness in domestic and international coverage. Of course, it takes funding to do such investigative research, which is why I also proudly support their efforts with a monthly donation.

**What have you read or watched to keep your mind busy and your soul fed lately?** Well behind the times,

my partner and I are watching "Succession", which is marvelous. We also recently finished "Reservation Dogs", perhaps one of my favorite TV shows of all time, and of course, "The Bear". I've also had the great pleasure of reading an advance copy of Minelle Mahtani's memoir, *May It Have a Happy Ending*, due to be published this fall—and I can't wait for all of you to enjoy it, too.

**What is your hope for the future? Name one policy the government should adopt today that would make people's lives better.** It

seems that housing and affordability is really the nut to crack right now, and many people are wondering whether municipalities should have more financial jurisdiction to fund such projects. **M**

Simon Enoch

# Gutting our civil service for consultants undermines democracy



## **THE CONSULTING TRAP: HOW PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRMS HOOK GOVERNMENTS AND UNDERMINE DEMOCRACY** CHRIS HURL, LEAH B. WERNER

Fernwood Books

For the past 40 years, neoliberals and conservatives told us that the civil service was too big, too expensive, inefficient and unnecessary. Any expertise government needed could be provided by the private sector more cheaply and more efficiently. We could have a lean, inexpensive bureaucracy with no loss in capacity or competency.

*The Consulting Trap: How professional service firms hook governments and undermine democracy* by Chris Hurl and Leah B. Werner demonstrates the profound consequences for our democracy by pursuing this mistaken vision over these past decades.

By gutting our civil service—along with its policy capacity and expertise—liberal democracies have become dependent on big consulting agencies like Deloitte, KPMG, PwC, and McKinsey.

Different levels of government across the globe exclusively rely on these firms for everything from municipal policy advice to Information Technology infrastructure to administering national COVID-19 tracking programs.

For the authors, this reliance—or better yet, *dependency*—on these firms constitutes a “consulting trap.” As these firms come to exert a greater influence over the public services they are paid to advise on and sometimes deliver, they organize these services in ways that benefit themselves and their interests—often at the expense of the public.

This is illustrated by how these firms help their wealthy clients evade legitimate taxes to governments, then advise governments to pursue austerity due to lack of revenues, then design and organize the processes of privatization and

outsourcing required to implement the austerity that they themselves advised!

While I am simplifying here, the authors go into detail to reveal the strategies and tactics that these firms have used to insinuate themselves into the inner workings of government to such an extent that governments often appear paralyzed to make any policy decision without the support of these firms.

This is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book, as it shows how these firms leverage their existing influence and power to further expand their dominance. A particularly striking example is how the Ontario government justified an untendered and expensive contract to McKinsey to set up the province’s pandemic command structure—a decision based on the fact that McKinsey was “already supporting other jurisdictions in Europe and Asia where the COVID pandemic exists.”

“In other words,” the authors write, “because McKinsey already had their foot in the door on pandemic management in other jurisdictions, they were deemed to be qualified to work in Ontario.”

The real danger of these firms is to our democracy. While these firms are often positioned at the core of our public service delivery and procurement, they are subject to little accountability or transparency.

Conflict-of-interest concerns abound when these firms often lobby, advise and assess government policy at the same time.

Consulting firms leverage their existing influence and power to expand their dominance

Thankfully, the authors end the book with concrete advice on how citizens can effectively combat the power of these firms within our government. While there is a wealth of valuable advice for researchers on how to track and monitor the activities of these firms, it is perhaps the authors' first bit of advice that will be the most important for citizens: do not concede that these firms are an unassailable source of knowledge and expertise.

Local residents often harbour more extensive knowledge of the issues and concerns that affect them than a few high-paid consultants that may have never stepped foot in your city.

The book uses the devastating example of how Toronto city councillors, workers and residents used their own knowledge and experiences to push back against the so-called expert recommendations of a KPMG report designed to slash city services.

This is critical advice. From my own experience researching and challenging public-private partnerships (P3s), many of these consulting firms used pre-existing templates and standardized assumptions to produce what is often the same report for different governments.

These can quickly fall apart under the slightest scrutiny, so citizens should not be intimidated to challenge the authority of these firms.

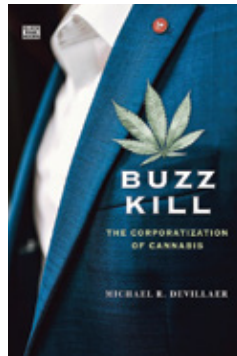
Piercing the veil of impartiality, expertise and competency that these firms portray to legitimize their continued influence over our governments is a first and crucial step to undermining their credibility.

*The Consulting Trap* is an essential read for citizens and activists concerned about the future of our public services and the capacity of our governments to get things done. **M**

Simon Enoch is director of the CCPA Saskatchewan office.

Bruce Campbell

# Corporatization of cannabis allowed profits to trump public health



## **BUZZ KILL: THE CORPORATIZATION OF CANNABIS** MICHAEL DEVILLAER

Black Rose Books, 2023

**B**uzz Kill is the story of how the legalization of recreational cannabis unfolded and how the public interest was subverted to corporate interests, and those of its government and political party enablers.

It is essential reading for anyone wanting to understand the history of the drug industry in Canada and the legalization of the cannabis industry: its origins, its current status, and action that needs to be taken to prioritize public health over corporate profit. Despite the complexity of the issues, the writing is highly accessible to a non-expert reader.

The book is a damning indictment of Liberal government cronyism; actions that led to the legalization of cannabis without decriminalization, legislation that benefitted corporate interests and those of party insiders with ties to the therapeutic cannabis industry, ignoring the scientific evidence

warning of potentially harmful consequences of not doing so. Internationally, decriminalization has been a highly successful approach to cannabis law reform.

Devillaer traces the origins of the cannabis legalization to Liberal party elite members heavily invested in the therapeutic [medical] cannabis industry. Future cannabis magnate Chuck Rifci was appointed to the Liberal party's board of directors in 2011. Shortly thereafter, the party adopted a motion at its convention to legalize cannabis for recreational use.

Having once embraced decriminalization of cannabis as its formal policy position for cannabis legalization, the Liberal party did an abrupt about-face, campaigning vigorously for legalization without decriminalization.

According to Devillaer, the Liberal promise of a public health approach and strict regulation falsely targeted the unlicensed cannabis trade—a longstanding trade that was mostly benign. The Liberal cannabis legalization communication strategy was twofold:

1. Demonize the unlicensed trade in cannabis and extol the virtues of legal, regulated trade as a panacea.
2. Praise the merits of a legal, government regulated, public safety approach, in contrast to an illegal, unregulated and dangerous one.

A task force, created in advance of the *Cannabis Act*, was largely “willing to recommend measures put forward by public health

authorities as long as those measures would not compromise the aspirations of the industry to expand the market for cannabis and to enhance profits.” Consideration of decriminalization as a policy option was not included in the task force’s terms of reference.

In his submission to the task force, Devillaer, a leading authority on drug policy, warned about the decades-long legacy of public health harm inflicted by the profit-driven alcohol, tobacco and pharmaceutical industries, enabled by compliant government regulation.

He highlighted how the legal drug industry has long engaged in illegal activities that were otherwise inconsistent with public health protection, writing: “we may have more to fear from the legal industries that produce drugs than we do from the drugs themselves.”

Health Canada’s enforcement and compliance system had also detected numerous acts of non-compliance, including illegal activity on the part of licensed cannabis producers. Company whistleblowers revealed instances of securities fraud, illegal transport of cannabis, unlicensed cultivation and attempted coverups, financial crimes and connections with organized crime.

Devillaer urged the task force to recommend that the government explore the logistics of establishing a government-controlled, not-for-profit cannabis industry that would prioritize public health over profit maximization and market expansion.

The task force dismissed recommendations for a not-for-profit approach. Nor did it recommend limits on lobbying and advertising. Despite the public health risks, the task force report accepted the industry proposal to market cannabis like alcohol—an approach that, in the author’s words, “not only grants permission to use cannabis but encourages its use.”

Public health and safety were compromised for the increased revenues that would flow to both industry and government from a growing cannabis market. Calls by public health experts for a full ban on product promotion—justified based on years of experience—were dismissed.

The *Cannabis Act*, which came into force on October 17, 2018, largely followed the recommendations of the task force.

A key determinant of the effectiveness of legislation is the strength of surveillance and enforcement regulations. Unfortunately, the *Cannabis Act* was implemented largely without the necessary regulatory measures, another victory for corporate profit over public health protection.

The newly legalized cannabis industry was flooded with companies attracted by the prospect of huge profits. The result was a wave of failures and bankruptcies. An industry takeover by alcohol, tobacco and pharmaceutical companies is currently underway.

Devillaer writes: “The early days of the cannabis industry were characterized by greed, immaturity, and incompetence. The future incarnation may be one of greed, maturity, and competence—potentially a much more dangerous combination.”

Canada’s drug policy, according to Devillaer, continues to be “a domestically tragic and an internationally embarrassing failure.”

He provides an overview of jurisdictions attempting to implement a variety of not-for-profit approaches. He is supportive of these efforts and urges the creation of a national not-for-profit cannabis commission.

Devillaer’s exposé concludes that the most toxic and damaging addiction in our society may be the corporate addiction to ever-increasing profits; an addiction that is enabled by governments and the political parties that form governments.

The findings of Devillaer’s work parallel my own research. Corporate capture-government complicity is a recurring theme that plays out across the number of sectors, as described in my book *Corporate Rules: The real world of business regulation in Canada: How government regulators are failing the public interest* (James Lorimer, 2022).

It is a key feature of the neoliberal order that has shaped public policy and corroded Canadian democracy over the last four decades.

The corporatization of cannabis is an poignant example of the triumph of cronyism, greed and corruption over public health and safety.

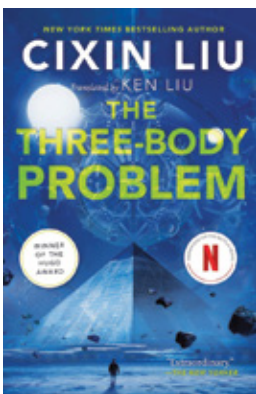
Devillaer’s magnum opus is a cautionary tale of therapeutic cannabis’ troubling history (along with tobacco), the dangers going forward, and what can be done to change course with alternatives that prioritize public health. Even though victories are rare, they are possible; hence his reason for writing the book.

The release of *Buzz Kill* is timely. A parliamentary legislative review committee released its evaluative report on the *Cannabis Act*. *Buzz Kill* provides an indispensable counterpoint to the committee report.

This book can be obtained by your local independent bookstore, or at <https://blackrosebooks.com/products/buzz-kill-michael-r-devillaer> **M**

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Bruce Campbell is former executive director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.



### Niall Harney

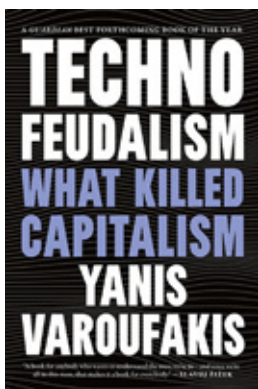
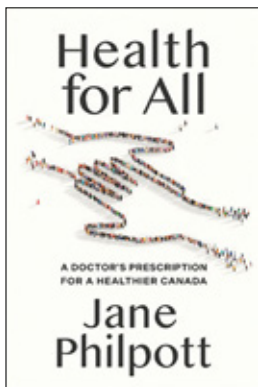
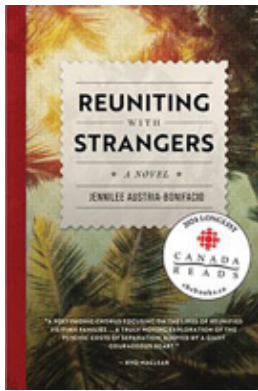
CCPA Manitoba senior researcher  
and Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues

First, *Ecology for the 99%: Twenty Capitalist Myths Debunked* by Frédéric Legault, Arnaud Theurillat-Cloutier, and Alain Savard. This is a wonderfully accessible primer on climate and capitalism. Using the tools of political economy, *Ecology for the 99%* provides a clear picture of who our allies and adversaries are in securing a livable climate and offers a straightforward reminder that corporate sustainability will not be enough to curb emissions. Written through the frame of 20 myths, this book is easy to pick up and put down during the busy summer months. Second, *Doppelgänger*, by Naomi Klein. I'm looking forward to listening to Naomi Klein's latest book, *Doppelgänger*, via the audiobook narrated by the author herself. *Doppelgänger* offers an incisive view of the contemporary political moment and I suspect there will be important lessons for progressives rebuilding grassroots movements amidst a political arena supercharged by what Klein calls 'absurdist authoritarianism'.

### Stuart Trew

Director of the CCPA Trade and Investment Research Project

This summer I'm playing catchup on my reading. First, I'm a late-comer to *The Three Body Problem* party. I can't start the Netflix adaptation of Liu Cixin's Hugo Award-winning 2008 novel until I get through the audiobook I'm listening to on the Libro.fm app. It's very good (the book and the app), and I hope to complete Cixin's sci-fi trilogy by September. For bedtime reading and in-between moments, I'm slogging through an 800+ page history of the reformation period, *Fatal Discord: Erasmus, Luther, and the Fight for the Western Mind*. It's lively and full of trivia about the Greeks, Romans, apostles and popes. Did you know it should be Pandora's jar, not box?!



## Ricardo Tranjan

Senior researcher with the CCPA Ontario office

I'm looking forward to reading François Saillant's latest book, *Dans La Rue: Une histoire du FRAPRU et des luttes pour le logement au Québec*. We have a dearth of accounts of social movements, which is regrettable, because capital should not be allowed to own history, too. François writes with the authority of someone with decades of praxis, and his writing is as informative as it is inspiring. On my bedside table, I have *Reuniting With Strangers*, the debut novel of Filipina-Canadian author Jennille Austria-Bonifacio. For years, I have followed Jenny's devoted work with her Toronto-based community, as a settlement worker and educator. Seeing how she turned that experience into a captivating story has been a delight.

## Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood

Senior researcher with the CCPA National office

I'm currently smitten with solarpunk, a burgeoning subgenre of science fiction focused on themes of radical sustainability and community. We are plagued by a failure of political imagination today and the solarpunk genre offers a refreshing and compelling vision for a better future. Of course, ecological utopianism is not new, and this summer I'm diving into one of the classics of the genre in *The Dispossessed* by sci-fi luminary Ursula K. Le Guin. First published in 1974, the novel explores a rogue scientist's attempt to unify his anarchic home world with its capitalist neighbour. The book is widely acclaimed—it won all three of the Hugo, Locus and Nebula awards at the time—and I'm excited to see how Le Guin's imagination holds up a half century later.

## Trish Hennessy

CCPA National office senior strategist and editor

With Canada's health care system rocked by the pandemic and decades of chronic underfunding, I'm looking forward to reading what Dr. Jane Philpott, a former Minister of Health in the first Justin Trudeau government, is proposing. *Health for All: A doctor's prescription for a healthier Canada*, starts with Philpott's personal stories as a young doctor starting out in Niger, West Africa and moves into a prescription for change in our health care system—change that's informed by the social determinants of health. I'm also planning to read *Techno Feudalism: What killed capitalism* by Yanis Varoufakis. You might remember Varoufakis from his short-lived stint as Greece's finance minister at the beginning of the 2009 global financial crisis, which crushed Greece's debt rating. Varoufakis became a rock-star economist who stepped onto the global stage calling out the powers that be and rejecting a troika of lenders' (including the IMF) prescription for financial restructuring. Now he's taking on the techno feudal cloud lords—Big Tech, “cloud fiefs”—arguing: “Under technofeudalism, we no longer own our minds. Every proletarian is turning into a cloud prole during working hours and into a cloud serf the rest of the time.” To own our minds, Varoufakis argues, “we must own cloud capital collectively.” The great Naomi Klein calls this book “utterly accessible, deeply humane and startlingly original.” **M**



Amanda Emms

# Science fiction author coins term for online digital decay + solutions

Packed into pews of the impressive Knox United Church, people in Winnipeg, Manitoba were looking for enlightenment about the rapid decline of every digital service we depend on. From Facebook to Uber to Audible, Google, Amazon—it’s all kinds of shit these days.

So much so that when science fiction author, activist, and journalist Cory Doctorow coined the term “enshittification” to describe the decay of online platforms; the American Dialect Society made it Word of the Year in 2023.

Doctorow came to Winnipeg for his talk *Escaping the Enshittoscene: Why Everything is Terrible & What to Do About It*, presented by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba as part of their re-activated annual spring public intellectual talks, which were paused due to COVID-19.

Spotlighting the bad and serving up solutions are common themes in Doctorow’s work, including *The Bezzle*, which came out in February. In his introduction, he described himself as “the last real optimistic idealist in science fiction.”

Doctorow likens the stages of enshittification to describing a pandemic: the outward symptoms, or how it feels to be on a failing platform, the mechanism that is taking place inside, and the epidemiology as to why enshittification is taking place across all of these platforms right now.

Using Facebook as an example, he says the pathology is quite recognizable. In the beginning, Facebook was very good to end users. The better it got, the more people piled in, which led to higher



Cory Doctorow / Photo by Niall Harney

switching costs. From activist-led movements to your kids’ hockey carpool—people were locked in.

Cue the advertisers and business makers. Facebook started spying on its users and collecting data for ad dollars. Once businesses became dependent on the platform to reach customers, ad prices climbed. The platform incentivized publishers to post long-form content with likes and views until users stopped clicking the link back to their websites. They don’t have to because it’s all on Facebook.

So here we are. Facebook has locked in both end users and business customers with just the bare minimum while unimaginable wealth is extracted from them and funnelled to shareholders.

Whether it’s Uber with its drivers and riders or eBay with its sellers and buyers, this platform decay happens in two-sided markets across the internet.

This was the part of the talk where everything felt pretty grim. But Doctorow lives up to his self-described optimism.

He stresses how competition law matters. It keeps companies from being “too big to fail and too big to jail.” Nearly every sector is dominated by a handful of major companies. We need to block mergers to break up tech companies.

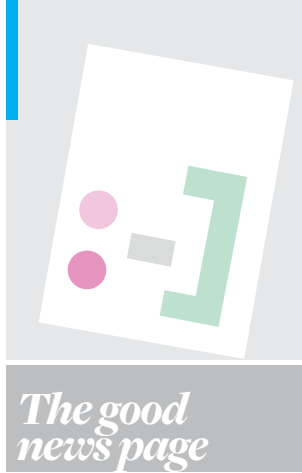
Same with regulation. Tech companies have become a cartel that is allowed to flood the laws. The top results on Amazon are all paid ads. Audible now has a monolithic market share. People created ad blockers to protect themselves. But, when it comes to apps, that same kind of innovation is being blocked in the courts. More fees and penalties are needed.

We need to end regulatory capture. When it comes to privacy, labour and consumer protection, the normal laws need to be enforced on tech companies. Finally, we give tech workers their power back by unionizing.

We are at a moment where these shifts are happening. Globally, we have entered a golden age of competition law enforcement. Gig workers are banding together and the tech unionization movement is mobile. In Seattle, Amazon coders walked out with warehouse workers. The U.S. is finally debating passing a consumer privacy law, the first one since 1998.

If everyone is threatened, then everyone has a stake. **M**

Amanda Emms is a writer, collaborator and community activist based in Winnipeg, Treaty 1 Territory.



Elaine Hughes

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### Takeaways from the Swiss women's climate victory

The European Court of Human Rights has ruled in favour of more than 2,000 Swiss women, affirming their argument that the Swiss government violated their human rights by failing to take sufficient action on climate change. / *Reuters*, April 10, 2024.

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### Map reveals translations of U.S. city and state names

WordTips has created a map featuring the literal translations of U.S. city and state names, opening a window to the history of each area. "To know the meaning of the place names around us is to learn how the land, the history, and the culture of a locality have developed over the centuries," writes the WordTips team. They have uncovered the meaning of all U.S. state names, each U.S. state's capital city, and 178 of America's biggest cities / *My Modern Met*, March 26, 2024.

### Zoo welcomes baby ring-tailed lemur

The Saskatoon Forestry Farm Park & Zoo (Zoo) family has grown by one, with the birth of a healthy ring-tailed lemur. "Mom Lucy is doing great, and the baby is exhibiting all of the major milestones we hope to see," says Jeff Mitchell, Zoo manager. "We have not yet identified if it's a boy or girl because we are allowing time for mom and baby to bond and will be selecting a name in the coming weeks." / *City of Saskatoon*, May 10, 2024.

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### Paleo diet? Study reveals what Stone Age humans really ate

By analyzing chemical signatures preserved in bones and teeth belonging to seven different Paleolithic groups called the Iberomaurusians, (hunter-gatherers who buried their dead in a Taforalt cave in what's now Morocco between 13,000 and 15,000 years ago), scientists have found that plants, not meat, were their primary source of dietary protein. The share of plant resources as a source of dietary protein in the humans whose remains were studied was like that seen in early farmers from the Levant, the present-day Eastern Mediterranean countries where plant domestication and farming were first documented. / *CNN*, April 30, 2024.

### Great Lakes tribes bring back native wild rice

Wild rice, or manoomin, a staple for Indigenous Peoples, once covered thousands of acres and is an ecologically important and culturally revered wetland species native to the Great Lakes region of the United States and Canada. Working with federal and state agencies, scientists, and funding initiatives, Indigenous Peoples have led wild rice restoration programs that have successfully revived the species in parts of the region. / *Mongabay.com*, April 17, 2024.

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### World's largest thermal energy storage to be built in Finland

A seasonal thermal energy storage will be built by Vantaa Energy in Vantaa, which is Finland's fourth largest city, neighboring the capital of Helsinki. When completed, the seasonal energy storage facility will be—by all standards—the largest in the world. The operating principle of the seasonal thermal energy storage, called Varanto, is to store heat in underground caverns so that it can be used to heat buildings via the district heating network whenever it is needed. / *Renewable Energy Magazine*, April 16, 2024.

### UBC prof named in Time's most influential list

Suzanne Simard, University of B.C. forestry professor and author of *Finding the Mother Tree*, made *Time* magazine's annual list, alongside a handful of fellow Canadians. "Her 200-plus peer-reviewed articles have deeply informed the thinking of conservationists and environmentalists working to help preserve forests in a world ever more threatened by climate change and wildfires," the New York-based publication wrote. "The trees, Simard teaches us, are talking. It is our job to start listening." / *CBC News*, April 21, 2024.

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### Doomsday seed vault creators in the Arctic win World Food Prize

Cary Fowler and Geoffrey Hawtin, who were instrumental in creating a global seed vault designed to safeguard the world's agricultural diversity, will be honoured as the 2024 World Food Prize laureates. Situated on the Norwegian island of Svalbard, the Svalbard Global Seed Vault opened in 2008 and now holds 1.25 million seed samples from nearly every country. The largely concrete structure, built into the side of a mountain, provides genetic protection for over 6,000 varieties of crops and culturally important plants. / *The Associated Press*, May 9, 2024.



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companies pay them the minimum  
they can get away with.

—*Barbara Ehrenreich*

