

# MONITOR

Progressive news, views and ideas



CCPA  
CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
CENTRE CANADIEN  
de POLITIQUES ALTERNATIVES

WINTER 2024



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### Cover illustration by Tim Zeltner

Tim Zeltner lives in the countryside north of Grafton, Ontario. He utilizes a unique combination of layering paint, glazes and stains in his artwork and derives his award-winning folk style from personal experiences, visions, and primitive art from sources throughout the world. His work can be found in many private collections and seen internationally in advertising campaigns, corporate communications, and magazines.



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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*.

**The opinions expressed in the *Monitor* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the CCPA.**

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TRISH HENNESSY

# On hope and seeking common cause in 2024

FOUR YEARS AGO, COVID-19 thrust us into a jolting reality: the world shut down in March 2020. For a moment in time, the world was on the same page. Shelter in place, if you can. Social distance. Social bubbles. Health care s/heroes.

So much has transpired since then. Collectively, we seem to have turned a page. But we haven't all landed on the same page. Some days it's hard to imagine what we might agree upon anymore.

Here at the *Monitor*, we are in search of truth, fairness, equality—and common cause.

Surely we can all agree on the premise of a well-being economy. This edition of the *Monitor* delivers insights from a June 2023 conference—An economy for everyone: mobilizing and implementing a well-being economy in Alberta—hosted by the Parkland Institute, a non-partisan research centre in Edmonton.

What is a well-being economy anyway? It's really about investing in the root causes that improve our health and well-being (the determinants of health), which we call upstream thinking.

Which led us to this *Monitor* cover concept: An image of the rocky mountains in Alberta, with a river or stream running through it, beautifully illustrated by artist Tim Zeltner.

Inside this issue, conference participants share the key takeaways from their June event. Lindsay McLaren, CCPA research associate and Think Upstream research network chair, did yeoman's work coordinating and co-authoring this month's themed section.

The authors shine a light on intersecting societal challenges and

their common root causes: such as the need for more affordable housing, the climate crisis, the negative impacts of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples.

As Lindsay McLaren and Rebecca Graff-McRae write: "Much public and political discourse focuses on these (and other) problems one at a time. A piecemeal approach aligns well with the siloed nature of (colonial) governments. However, it has considerable drawbacks: it leads to *policy incoherence*, where activities in one policy domain offset or undermine those in another."

They show examples of jurisdictions that are implementing doughnut economics frameworks—an economy that prioritizes well-being and sustainability.

Stan Houston, Lindsay McLaren, and Rebecca Graff-McRae drill down on what a well-being economic framework looks like in practice. They illustrate that these aren't 'pie in the sky' ideas—alternatives are possible.

Bob Ascah and Lindsay McLaren write about the role of financialization in exacerbating inequality and the climate crisis. They show how public banking is a viable alternative.

A lot of what we do at the *Monitor*—and at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA)—is to connect the dots; to help everyone understand we can't tackle problems in silos and we certainly can't make systemic changes without looking at the system.

While we continue to take a critical lens to the challenges of our times, we also hold on to hope. As Martin Luther King, Jr., said: "We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope." **M**

## Announcement

As we enter a new year, with new challenges, we will be making a change at the *Monitor* and we want you to understand our decision-making process.

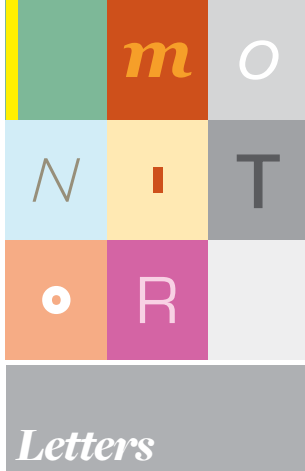
Charities across the sector are experiencing financial challenges and, unfortunately, the CCPA is no exception. We are facing a double whammy of inflation and the downturn in individual contributions after COVID-19 forced economic shutdowns across the country.

For the *Monitor*, production costs (postage, printing, paper etc.) have increased by 68 per cent since 2020 alone.

Rest assured, we remain committed to publishing the *Monitor* and sending it to your mailbox. There's nothing like holding a magazine in your hand. However, we have made the difficult decision to produce the *Monitor* on a quarterly basis in order to cut costs.

What this means for you, dear reader: We value your support for the *Monitor*. We will continue to mail the *Monitor* to anyone who donates \$35 or more. You will receive a (soon!) slightly expanded *Monitor* four times a year: In January, April, July, and October 2024. An electronic version will be on our website at no cost so that a broad audience can continue to read our thought-provoking articles. And, of course, we continue to provide regular content on our blog and website.

At a time when news publications are closing across Canada, the *Monitor* still stands—thanks to you and your support. We hope you continue to enjoy our unique magazine and we look forward, as always, to hearing from you.



**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).

## September/October 2023 issue

### *Climate Action issue*

Thank you for your September/October *Monitor* issue highlighting climate actions that people are taking.

It cannot be said often enough that we are in the midst of a full blown, five alarm, climate crisis. Governments, corporations, media, and individuals have to understand its seriousness and do whatever it takes to stop it.

Wildlife has declined by over 60 per cent since 1970. Sea ice has diminished from the norm by an amount equal in area to the size of India. Land and sea temperatures continue to climb non-stop. Floods, droughts, fires are occurring in ever increasing numbers.

If we reach two degrees (which seems very likely),

feedback loops will quickly take us to four degrees. We are at our “boil the frog” moment. Will we get out of the pot in time?

Later is too late.

**Ron Scott**  
*Chester Basin, N.S.*

If we don't solve the climate problem we can't solve many other serious social problems. The scientific, technological, and social governance glues of society are likely to collapse while sickness, death and anti-social behaviour increase. Such forces will likely favour more zero-sum interactions and extremes of wealth and poverty.

Solving equity and equality problems cannot last while climate chaos disrupts every facet of our community lives.

All of us will suffer, and many will die. The rich and healthy may be, for a short time, the last left standing, with those of middle and working class means unavailable or unable to support the powerful, as the latter often either don't realize or admit.

The top priority must, therefore, be to bring emissions down radically and find scalable and affordable ways of removing a quarter or more of existing greenhouse gases from our atmosphere in order to stabilize supportive environments.

**Glynnne Evans,**  
*Saanich, B.C.*

The Mexican government has made an important decision to protect Mexican farmers and Indigenous farmers against the dumping of cheap,

subsidized U.S. genetically engineered corn. Ultimately, the U.S. requested the establishment of a CUSMA dispute panel.

Why did Canada join the consultations between Mexico and the U.S./CropLife side? Why does the Canadian government have such a cozy relationship with CropLife? The Canadian government should support Mexico and show as much concern for our health and biodiversity as the Mexican government does for its people. Genetic engineering has already cost Canadian farmers canola and flax markets. It's time for all GMOs and gene editing to be banned and to start turning to organic farming, for the sake of human and environmental health in Canada.

Genetic manipulation of seeds encourages farmers to use heavy farm machinery (too heavy for the land), synthetic fertilizers and to plant vast areas with the same seed.

The Canadian government should be fighting for our food sovereignty.

**Margaret Tyson**  
*Ottawa, ON*

## July/August 2023 issue

### *Zombie Neoliberalism issue*

On reading Jon Milton's “Neoliberalism is like a zombie that won't die” in the July/August issue of the *Monitor*, it begs the question: can you kill a fire/cancer without removing those things that sustain it?

Regulation is a great idea but until Canadians have a high enough consciousness to prevent

the election of a party that reverses that process, the corporate parties will still continue to maintain the status quo. Unfortunately, Canadians overwhelmingly still endorse the parties of big business. Voting for and financially supporting the NDP today is a bit like making tea with lukewarm water. Yes, you can certainly drink it. To me, it appears that there is still a process that must take place. I frankly think that it is of greater importance to further ramp up progressive media, such as our *CCPA Monitor*, *Progress Alberta*, *The Maple* and *The Tyee*, just to mention a few. Groups like we have in Alberta: the Parkland Institute, Friends of Medicare and Public Interest Alberta appear to play a major role in raising the consciousness of people and eventually help to elect progressive parties to power. I would also hope to see another peoples' party rise to prominence and compete with the NDP for the best ideas as to how to move forward from the numerous crises that our country and planet face. Left parties will never have the deep pockets that the Liberals and Conservatives access, the battle must be over ideas.

**Allan Hansen**  
*Edmonton, AB*





## New from the CCPA

### CCPA BC

The CCPA-BC has made remarkable strides in 2023, seamlessly connecting research and public engagement to address critical social, economic, and environmental issues in British Columbia.

October marked another significant event in our annual calendar, as we co-hosted the 2023 Gideon Rosenbluth Lecture with the UBC Vancouver School of Economics. The lecture, delivered by Ha-Joon Chang from SOAS University London, attracted over 350 attendees, showcasing our ongoing commitment to facilitating vital economic dialogues.

Senior Economist Alex Hemingway's recent research provided a thorough analysis of B.C.'s public spending, demonstrating the province's capacity for increased investment in key social and environmental areas. His work continues to inform public understanding of B.C.'s economic potential and challenges.

Our involvement in the legislative process for app-based workers in B.C. marks a notable contribution. This development followed a year-long consultation

process, which included a submission by CCPA-BC researchers Véronique Sioufi and Iglia Ivanova to the B.C. Ministry of Labour, focusing on the rights of app-based workers. While this represents progress, it also highlights the ongoing need for further actions to fully protect these workers.

The 2023 *Living Wage Report*, led by Iglia Ivanova and Anastasia French from *Living Wage for Families B.C.*, garnered widespread media coverage, highlighting the critical issue of affordability in B.C. The report is a key component of our ongoing research into economic trends and impacts, emphasizing the need for sustainable living wages in the province.

Addressing health care issues, our associate Andrew Longhurst delved into the impact of COVID-19 on B.C.'s health system, a topic of considerable concern in current health care discussions.

In November, we ended our hiatus with our first CCPA-BC in-person fundraising gala since 2019. The gala, featuring keynote speaker Sundance Chief Rueben George and MC Charlie Demers, wasn't just a fundraiser; it was a vibrant reconnection with our community. Each ticket sold bolsters our mission to champion social, economic, racial, and environmental justice—a cause we've been dedicated to for over 25 years.

### CCPA National

Canada is making solid progress in offering more

affordable child care. Child care fees have been cut by 50 per cent in 18 of the 32 cities where provinces pledged to do so; another quarter were close to that goal; and the final quarter of cities missed the target by a larger margin. Overall, the fee reduction funded by federal dollars has been a big success.

In *Measuring Matters: Assessing Canada's progress toward \$10-a-day child care for all*, CCPA Senior Economist David Macdonald and the Childcare Resource and Research Unit's Martha Friendly surveyed licensed child care in 37 cities as part of their annual parent fee phone survey. Using data from 2023, and previous fee surveys, the report evaluates the first federal target of halving fees by December 2022. The second federal target is an average fee of \$10-a-day by 2026.

"The federal government created a fast-tracked plan of halving fees by December 2022, and the provinces and territories mostly delivered—except Alberta, B.C. and P.E.I.," says Macdonald. "Seven jurisdictions now have set fees, and five jurisdictions are already at \$10 a day or less, three years ahead of target!"

Meanwhile, CCPA Senior Researcher Katherine Scott's *Beyond Recovery* project looks at 17 indicators across the five domains that make up a CCPA index on progress (or regress): economic participation and security, personal security, educational attainment, health, and leadership and political

empowerment. Nationally, the CCPA index reveals that the gender equality gap widened slightly between 2019 and 2022. In 2022, Canada had closed 78.6 per cent of the gap, a decline of 0.4 percentage points compared to 2019.

### CCPA Manitoba

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Manitoba was proud to be honouring Leslie Spillett, a Cree and Métis community and labour organizer, at our sold-out annual Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues fundraising brunch to 400 people on November 12, 2023.

Spillett grew up in Northern Manitoba near Wekusko Lake and moved to Winnipeg in 1977 and worked for the United Ladies Garment Workers Union, fighting for fair wages and working conditions.

The vast majority of the workers Leslie represented were racialized and newcomer women without English as a first language. Winnipeg garment workers fought a prolonged strike with Peter Nygard, whose wealth was based on the exploitation of women, particularly women of colour.

This seven-week-long strike was one of the most aggressive and offensive ever seen in Manitoba, with threats to workers and extensive delays. Workers won extended maternity leave, enforcement of the overtime clause and wage increases per year for three years of 10 per cent, 10 per cent and 12 per cent!

After she left the union, Spillett saw the need for Indigenous women to have their own political voice.

She says, “Power does not yield any gains without struggle.”

She founded Mothers of Red Nations (MORN) for Indigenous women to advocate for themselves on systemic issues and Ka Ni Kanichiuk to deliver Indigenous-designed and led programs, which are essential to bring about meaningful social transformation. Both were early leaders in supporting families of MMIWG2S and advocating for systemic changes within Canada’s colonial institutions including health, education, justice and child welfare.

She was also involved as an advisor in the National Inquiry for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit Peoples. The inquiry found that Canadian policies promoted the genocide of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirited people—this must be named.

Leslie Spillett has always been ahead of her time, leading healing work in the urban Indigenous communities. Leslie has patiently waited for the rest of us settlers to catch up with her. CCPA Manitoba and the Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues are proud to honour you.

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### CCPA Ontario

The Ontario government’s plan to have for-profit corporations provide more surgeries and diagnostic procedures won’t reduce wait times and will likely

increase them, a new report from CCPA Ontario says.

“Increasing surgical and diagnostic capacity depends on the availability of qualified staff, which is not magically increased by the addition of profit,” says Andrew Longhurst, author of *At What Cost? Ontario hospital privatization and the threat to public health care*. “Expanded outsourcing is likely to worsen public hospital staffing shortages that cause longer waits.”

The report reveals a public hospital system in Ontario that is “not broken, just underfunded,” in Longhurst’s words. While Ontario’s overall per capita funding of health care has been the lowest in Canada for years, Ontario wait times for many priority procedures are short compared to other provinces. Longhurst, a policy researcher at Simon Fraser University, worries that Ontario is set to repeat the mistakes of Alberta, a province that saw wait times increase and surgical volumes decline as public funding—and staff—were diverted into investor-owned centres.

“For-profit delivery worsens public sector staffing shortages, costs more, and introduces conflict of interest in medical decision-making, which can lead to upselling, self-referrals, and unnecessary procedures,” says Longhurst. “Improving the public system, not undermining it, is the sensible approach.”

*At What Cost* calls on the province to fund and staff underused public hospital

operating rooms, perform more surgeries during evenings and weekends, add more hospital beds, reduce unnecessary tests and procedures, increase access to seniors’ home and community care, and improve public health measures. Read the full report and recommendations at [www.monitormag.ca](http://www.monitormag.ca).

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### CCPA Nova Scotia

The NS office had a very successful fundraiser dinner in November, welcoming Chief Bob Gloade as keynote speaker and Dr. Sherry Pictou as MC. This dinner is a primary source of core funding to support our work in Nova Scotia. Child poverty is on our mind this month as we release the newest report card. We know it will show higher poverty rates, given how little additional support has been provided since temporary pandemic supports were removed. CCPA NS Director Christine Saulnier recently spoke to the Eastern Community Health Boards gathering in Port Hawkesbury about how poverty impacts health, where Saulnier shared the words of those living in poverty in Sydney Mines as they had shared with us during our conversation held with Campaign 2000 back in May. Saulnier carry the words of the mostly young, single mothers with her as she does the work to move the needle on social justice in Nova Scotia, breaking the cycle of poverty that is devastating for so many; as one of them said: “I’m struggling the way my grandparents were

struggling.” They shared their vision of a community without poverty, at the centre of which would be that: “Children will be able to be children and have the same things other kids have in the community.” They wouldn’t have to worry about money, they would be able to have enough to eat and time to play. A vision that can easily be realized if only our governments committed to providing the support necessary. As Saulnier said at this gathering, she does not want to live in a society where people are living in tents, where so many have lost hope. It was a wonderful gathering of volunteers dedicated to building community; this is something we have in spades in Nova Scotia, which gives us hope.

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### CCPA Saskatchewan

In November, the Saskatchewan Office released its latest update on the history of privatization and out-sourcing in the province. *Selling Saskatchewan: More than a Decade of Privatization* identifies every instance of privatization, asset sales, out-sourcing of public services and use of public-private-partnerships (P3s) in the province since the Saskatchewan party came to power. Despite often claiming that they harbour no “privatization agenda,” we estimate that the Saskatchewan party government has sold off over \$1.2 billion in public assets and eliminated over 2,000 public sector jobs via privatization and out-sourcing since taking office in 2007.





**Katherine Scott**  
National Office

## Barbie and the real world

**B**arbie was the movie hit of summer 2024. By mid-September, box office returns had exceeded \$1.4 billion worldwide—and that doesn't even account for the revenue from the countless licensing deals Mattel has signed, from Airbnb to Xbox. The company is laughing all the way to the bank, but women aren't.

The movie depicts Barbie Land as a feminist paradise where the supreme court justices, president, and all leading professionals are women. In the real world, women do not run things and don't earn an equal wage.

Women have broken into most occupations since the Barbie doll

was introduced six decades ago, but they remain the minority in many of the high-paying roles we see in the movie. In Canada, only three women made the top 100 CEO list in 2021.

Sixty years ago, the women engaged in the paid labour market were concentrated in traditionally "female" occupations, such as teaching, bookkeeping, and nursing. Not much has changed in the intervening years. In 2021, the majority of women (54 per cent) were employed in just 20 occupations, all involving the "5 Cs": caring, clerical, catering, cashiering, and cleaning. By contrast, just 19 per cent of men were employed in the top "female" occupations.

This follows a pattern: Women breaking into male-majority fields tend to be congregated in particular areas that are seen as inherently or essentially female. For instance, only one in 10 women populate the C-suite, and most are in charge of human resources or the legal department.

### **Women make more money than men in only 40 of 800+ occupations**

The fact that comparatively few women work in the high-paying jobs depicted in the movie is one of the primary drivers of the gender wage gap, which harms all women over the course of their lives, especially those confronting large barriers to employment.

While the few women who do work in non-traditional jobs are typically earning more than other women, they, too, generally earn less than their male peers. Female general practitioners working full-time, full-year, earn just 86 cents for every \$1 earned by male GPs, while women lawyers earn just 84 cents on the male dollar.

In fact, women up and down the earnings ladder experience pay gaps, reflecting entrenched systemic bias, the unequal burden of care and outright discrimination.

Women's work simply isn't valued as highly as men's. The work done

by marginalized women workers is valued even less.

Racialized female lawyers working full-time, full-year, make 69 per cent of what non-racialized male lawyers make. Racialized female cleaners make 85 per cent of non-racialized male cleaners. Highly gender-segregated labour markets depress wages for all women, but most especially the earnings of marginalized women.

### **Barbie is always about profit and the patriarchy sells**

Barbie has always been positioned as aspirational. All girls can achieve their economic dreams (and unattainable body ideal) by the dint of their individual hard work and scope of ambition.

But “non-traditional” Barbies are in the clear minority, even today. Fashion models, retail workers of various sorts, and teachers appear time and again. Cheerleaders, flight attendants, actresses and singers too.

Mattel has long understood, and reaped the benefits of, cleaving to the status quo. This film does not challenge, or question, the power relations at the heart of women’s economic subordination.

If you see the movie, consider all that’s being debated when we talk about Barbie. And consider what’s really needed to improve the quality of women’s jobs and their earnings, particularly for the most marginalized. ●

Katherine Scott is a senior researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and serves as its director of gender equality and public policy work. This article was originally published in Troy Media.

Barbie has always been positioned as aspirational.

**Niall Harney**  
Manitoba Office

## **Reversing the tide on income inequality in Manitoba**

Federal and provincial governments’ rapid responses to the economic fallout caused by COVID-19 taught us important lessons about the capacity of government to reduce poverty and inequality in the 21st century.

Principally, the launch of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) in the early months of the pandemic showed us it is possible for the government to seriously reduce absolute poverty and income inequality in short order. While it was the federal government that footed the bill for CERB, there are lessons from this experience that can, and should, be taken up by provincial governments such as Manitoba.

Premier Wab Kinew’s government, elected on October 3, 2023, faces a challenge to roll back the previous government’s austerity policies while addressing affordability and increasing rates of poverty in Manitoba.

Indeed, the pandemic layered hardship on health and education systems that were already vulnerable due to provincial government austerity.

According to Campaign 2000’s 2023 provincial report card, Manitoba still has the highest level of child poverty in Canada, which unfortunately has been the case for many years. Additionally, income and wealth inequality—and the challenges associated with it—are becoming increasingly visible in Manitoba.

Coming out of the pandemic, many Manitobans are struggling to cope with high inflation and high interest

rates, which are disproportionately impacting working-class households.

Using the affordability crisis for political cover, Manitoba’s previous government (led by former Premier Heather Stephanson) released a budget in March 2023 that included \$486.1 million in tax cuts—the largest single year cut since the Progressive Conservatives took office in 2016.

While official government communications promoted tax savings for low-income households, analysis from CCPA Senior Economist David Macdonald revealed that the top 10 per cent of tax filers would receive more in tax reductions than the bottom 50 per cent of filers combined. On average, the top 10 per cent of tax filers will get a \$1,322 reduction in their tax payments while the bottom 20 per cent will get just \$37 dollars in savings.

Adding up the cost of tax cuts since 2016 reveals that the Manitoba government has eliminated \$1.6 billion in annual receipts to the provincial treasury, bringing own-source revenues (revenue from taxes and levies) to their lowest level in decades.

There is no great mystery as to why provincial services are in such a threadbare state.

Such a significant tax giveaway at a time of crisis for public services, like health care and education, alongside the revelations of rapidly increasing income inequality, bring into sharp relief the distribution of burdens and benefits in our society since the onset of COVID-19.

Since 2021, working-class households recovering from the initial economic shock of the pandemic have struggled to keep up with the rising cost of living while high-income households have generally come out of the pandemic with a significant raise.

Corporate Canada and its CEOs have profited handsomely from price increases, with profits reaching all-time highs in 2022-23.

The need for government income redistribution to support working-class households while raising



revenue to invest into public services is clear.

Reversing the tide of income inequality in Manitoba will be no small feat, but there are ways to alter the pathway set by Manitoba's previous government.

A CCPA Manitoba report, *Funding Our Way: Rebalancing revenues and spending for a fair and prosperous Manitoba*, reveals that moderate changes to Manitoba's 2023 budget could substantially reduce income inequality and poverty while raising money for public services.

These proposals are based around principles of tax fairness and they could directly respond to the urgent needs of low- and middle-income households.

At the core of the model advanced in *Funding Our Way* is a proposal to reform the Basic Personal Amount to make it more progressive. The Basic Personal Amount is a non-refundable tax credit that provides a rebate on income tax paid on the first \$15,000 of individual income.

Raising the Basic Personal Amount from \$10,145 to \$15,000 was the centerpiece of tax cuts advanced in Manitoba's 2023 budget, with the government arguing this would provide hundreds of dollars to low-income households.

The problem with the Basic Personal Amount is that it is non-refundable, so low-income households who already qualify for more tax credits than they can use don't benefit from raising the Basic Personal Amount.

This tax break is actually a well-disguised tax cut for the well-off, mostly benefiting higher-income earners while providing the lowest-income earners no relief at all.

Transforming the Basic Personal Amount into a refundable credit, paid monthly to all Manitobans, could significantly boost the income of low- and middle-income households, acting in some ways like a basic income.

By making the credit refundable and raising the maximum amounts, this credit could provide \$16,800

to a single adult, \$17,000 to a single parent, \$19,800 to a couple, and \$22,200 to a two-parent, two-child household.

These benefits would be income tested and anyone earning less than the median income would see their income increase, while furthering tax fairness.

The following measures to income and sales tax frameworks are proposed to increase tax fairness and affordability for those who need it most:

- Turning the basic personal amount into an income-tested refundable tax credit.
- Returning tax brackets to 2016 levels and introducing a new high-income tax bracket on income earned over \$100,000.
- Increasing the PST back to its previous level.
- Eliminating a number of small tax credits.
- Increasing the corporate income tax rate by one per cent.
- Reversing business tax cuts to the health and education levy.
- Eliminating the child care development tax credit.
- Eliminating a number of small tax credits.
- Introducing a mansions tax and making the land transfer tax more progressive.

In total, these changes are estimated to net Manitoba an extra \$122.8 million in revenue.

These kinds of tax changes have many benefits. Above and beyond providing a basic income, they would help Manitoba promote well-being by providing additional revenue to fund public services and they would help fund a just transition.

Manitoba can afford to raise revenue. Its share of revenue as a percentage of the GDP and own-source revenue as a percentage of the GDP have trended downwards since 2007-08.

Manitoba is in the middle of the pack relative to other provinces when measuring provincial government revenue as a percentage of the GDP, provincial taxes and fees as a percentage of the GDP, and provincial government income from households as a percentage of the GDP.

Where it ranks near the bottom is corporate income tax revenue as a percentage of the GDP, which has been falling steadily since the early 2000s.

Raising taxes on those most able to pay is not only necessary to sustain our public services and reduce inequality, but may also be popular.

Over 72 per cent of Manitobans support a tax on homes worth \$1 million. Nationally, 89 per cent of Canadians support a wealth tax, including 83 per cent of Conservative voters.

Reversing income inequality while making investments in public services is clearly within our grasp, but the question remains whether Manitoba's new government will act. ●

Niall Harney is the CCPA Manitoba's senior researcher and Errol Black Chair in Labour issues.

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## Worth repeating

“Your periodic reminder that trickle-down economics has never worked. It's a scheme devised by Republicans to enrich their wealthy donors. The real way to grow the economy is to invest in workers and expand the middle class.”

—Robert Reich,  
X [Twitter], November 9, 2023.



PHOTO: ISTOCK

**Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood**  
National Office

## *Shift Storm*: Making sense of the world of work in a changing climate

“Economy versus environment” is a common narrative in our politics. Everyone wants what’s best for nature, we are often told, but not at the expense of our well-being. Saving the planet is nice in theory but simply too expensive and inconvenient in practice.

It’s a false narrative pushed mainly by those who downplay the severity and urgency of the environmental crises at our doorstep. The economy is a function of the environment—destroy the latter, as we are on track to do, and the former goes with it—which means that efforts to

protect the environment are not only beneficial but essential for a robust economy.

To put it another way, we don’t have to choose between jobs, growth and well-being on the one hand and a net-zero emission economy on the other. Instead, we must choose between a fossil fuel-based economy that facilitates its own demise and a sustainable economy that enables our well-being over the long term.

So the real question is: how do we get there?

What do we do with the high-emitting industries that have no place

in the clean economy? How do we scale up the green industries that will create the good jobs of the future? How can we ensure the benefits of transition are broadly shared across different regions? And how can we avoid reproducing the unequal, oppressive and colonial patterns that underlie the economy today?

Finding the answers to these questions and others, and making those answers accessible to workers, activists, researchers and concerned citizens in Canada and beyond, was the driving force behind the creation of the *Shift Storm* newsletter, which the CCPA launched in early 2023.

Each month, we dive into the latest research on the intersections of work and climate from around the world and summarize it for readers. Although we are particularly concerned with the Canadian context, the newsletter has an international bent. Think of *Shift Storm* as your annotated bibliography for all things economy and environment.



Over the past year we've reviewed more than 150 publications from academics, NGOs, labour unions, governments, corporations and others. When viewed collectively, they tell an important story about where the economy (and the environment) may be headed.

These are the main themes and big trends in work and climate as we head into 2024.

### **The push for a just transition is gaining global momentum**

The North American labour movements began calling for a "just transition" for workers affected by climate policies starting in the 1990s. In short, they argued, the costs of moving away from high-emitting and polluting industries should not fall solely on the shoulders of workers but, rather, on society as a whole.

Momentum picked up in 2015 after "the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs" was included in the landmark Paris Agreement. After that, the term was adopted by a wide swath of environmental and social justice movements. Some governments, including Canada, New Zealand and Scotland, also began to integrate it into policy.

That momentum continued apace in 2023. In *Shift Storm*, we reported on just transition dialogues taking place in Australia, Scotland, the UK, Germany, the U.S., India, South Africa and elsewhere. We learned about regional just transitions being discussed in the EU, Africa, the Asia-Pacific and the Global South more broadly. Every context is different, but in each case the dialogue foregrounded the importance of decent work and social protection being paired with robust climate action.

The majority of the work we reviewed on the topic of a just transition came from advocates and experts, not governments. Few countries have formally committed to a just transition, let alone pulled

it off. Moreover, there is an obvious bias in the literature toward wealthy countries.

Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus among both environmental and labour groups that the just transition framework is a shared path forward and governments are increasingly taking note. It is now rare to encounter a climate policy that does not at least acknowledge the social dimensions of transition. Expect global momentum to continue in 2024.

### **Green industrial policy is entering the mainstream**

If a just transition is about minimizing the harm from the shift away from fossil fuels, then green industrial policy is about maximizing the benefits. In short, the term refers to any state intervention in the economy to shift resources from higher-emitting to lower-emitting sectors. Green industrial policy is intended to proactively build the green economy of the 21st century instead of waiting and hoping for the private sector to deliver it.

Industrial policy became a dirty word as neoliberal market primacy took hold in the 1980s, but the past few years have witnessed a reversal. All of the biggest economies in the world, including the U.S., China and the EU are explicitly engaging in green industrial policy today. As we documented in *Shift Storm* last year, that has led to a lot of hand-wringing in middle economies such as Australia, the UK and Canada.

Calls for green industrial policy are now coming from every angle. It's not only labour unions and environmentalists who want governments to play a more active role in the clean economy. The private sector is concerned about competing on an uneven international playing field. Corporations are also starting to see the value in more proactive workforce development programs to fill skills shortages.

There's still a long way to go. To date, the Canadian industrial policy response has been focused

on corporate subsidies rather than prioritizing public leadership grounded in a coherent national vision. But expect to see much more talk in 2024 about how—not whether—the federal government should intervene in the green economy.

### **The tides are turning in the fight over the future of fossil fuels**

Underpinning all of this research, advocacy and policy is a simple truth: the combustion of fossil fuels is driving the climate crisis and, consequently, we must wind down both the production (supply) and our consumption (demand) of fossil fuels in Canada and around the world.

For many years that seemed far fetched. Despite the mounting evidence of dangerous climate change, institutions such as the International Energy Agency (IEA) and Canada Energy Regulator (CER) continued to forecast an ever-increasing supply of coal, oil and natural gas. At best, they suggested, new environmental policies might temper future growth.

Those narratives changed significantly in 2023. Not only have many countries committed to achieving a net-zero economy by 2050, which, in itself, implies a near-total phase-out of fossil fuels, but those same countries are finally implementing policies to back it up.

Make no mistake: the world is not on track to meet its Paris Agreement goals or to achieve a carbon-neutral global economy by mid-century. But the tides are clearly turning in that direction.

In 2023, both the IEA and CER published net-zero scenarios that forecast a decline in oil production of more than 75 per cent in the coming decades—a drastic departure from previous models. Even their more conservative models show fossil fuels peaking this decade, with future policies driving the curve down further.

A growing body of research is turning from the question of whether to wind down fossil fuels to

the trickier question of how. Expect to see more nuts-and-bolts proposals in 2024.

### **Governments are being seduced by lifelines for the fossil fuel industry**

Unfortunately, the acknowledgement that fossil fuel emissions must be reduced has led many governments, and even some labour unions and other advocates, to entertain the solutions proffered by the fossil fuel industry itself.

False solutions pushed by oil and gas companies include carbon capture and storage, blue hydrogen and carbon offsets. It's not that these technologies and approaches can't reduce carbon emissions at all. Technically, they can, and there are certain contexts in which they have a role to play in meeting our climate targets.

The main problem is that these "solutions" are being advocated in place of any actual reduction in fossil fuel production or consumption. In other words, they're a distraction. A related problem is that they are extremely expensive methods for reducing emissions. All of the public money now pouring into lifelines for the fossil fuel industry could be spent far more efficiently on technologies and industries that are actually consistent with a zero-carbon economy, such as renewable energy.

Canada is one of the jurisdictions most evidently captured by fossil

fuel interests. In *Shift Storm*, we documented discussions in British Columbia, Alberta and Atlantic Canada—as well as extensively at the federal level—about providing public support for fossil fuel lifelines. We reported on similar discussions occurring in Scotland and the UK more broadly, as well as in international forums.

In 2024, efforts to make "abated" fossil fuels part of a climate-safe global economy will continue to dog meaningful climate action.

### **Skill shortages are looming over the clean economy**

If there's one area where workers, governments and corporations can agree, it's that building the clean economy will require more concerted efforts to develop the workforce. Already, key occupations in the building trades and other green professions lack sufficient skilled workers due to an aging workforce, lack of diversity, inadequate apprenticeship rates, and other factors. Those problems are only going to get worse in the coming years as the demand for green infrastructure rises.

Most of the reports we looked at that discuss this issue came from businesses and consultants. They called on governments to step up with "net-zero skills strategies" and the like, but they were reluctant to suggest the private sector play any role in paying for training. For their

part, governments have responded mainly by considering narrow upskilling and micro-credentialing approaches that primarily serve the needs of employers.

Workers' advocates share some of these priorities. For example, more widely recognized credentials can empower workers to more easily move to new employers. However, where workers and unions discuss skills shortages, they tend to put a greater focus on building skills and capacity holistically—not only to meet employers' short-term needs—as well as using workforce development programs to address equity issues.

The sources we reviewed in 2023 mainly focused on Canada, the U.S. and the EU, but inadequate workforce development is a problem everywhere. It will continue to be a theme as governments and corporations bump into the hard limits of decarbonizing with an insufficient workforce.

### **Labour unions are thinking deeply about how to make green transitions work**

Some of the most innovative thinking on work and climate these days is coming out of the organized labour movement. Unions play a unique and essential role in enabling the transition to a cleaner economy because they must balance their obligations to current members with their broader commitments to social and environmental justice. Consequently, labour proposals for green transitions are often more nuanced than the calls coming out of other sectors.

In *Shift Storm* last year, we explored publications from groups such as the International Labour Organization, Canadian Labour Congress, European Trade Union Institute, International Trade Union Confederation, Trade Unions for Energy Democracy and others. We also documented some on-the-ground labour organizing. In particular, we were interested in the efforts of Unifor and the United Auto

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## **Worth repeating**

**“Instead of seeing spending on education, school meals and other priorities—such as tackling the climate emergency, health crises or the digital divide—as an expense, it should be recognised as an investment. And one that can drive innovation.”**

—*Mariana Mazzucato, September 18, 2023, The Guardian.*



Workers to win fair deals for workers in North America’s blooming electric vehicle industry.

That labour organizations are, by and large, so stridently supportive of climate action in spite of the risks to their own members is admirable. In their advocacy, these groups tend to focus on the importance of proactive workforce development plans and a robust social safety net so that no workers are left behind by the shift to a cleaner economy. Those are the kinds of proposals that not only benefit unionized workers today but also contribute to a more inclusive economy for everyone.

The labour movement will continue to play an important role in 2024, especially as the principle of social dialogue—where workers are at the table for decisions that affect them—becomes increasingly integrated into government transition programs.

### Canada’s “sustainable jobs” policy is historic but flawed

In 2019, the Liberal party promised a just transition Act in its election platform. Finally, in February 2023, the government presented its *Sustainable Jobs Plan*, which included, among other policies, a *Sustainable Jobs Act*. The latter was tabled in June.

Unpacking the government’s “sustainable jobs” agenda was a big focus for the newsletter in 2023. Although it is a welcome and overdue development, there are some important questions that still need to be addressed. Like, what is a “sustainable job” anyway? To date, the government’s understanding of the term is so vague as to be meaningless.

The shift away from “just transition” language has also left advocates concerned. Indeed, both the “justice” and the “transition” parts of the concept seem to have been lost in translation. The sustainable jobs agenda, as currently presented, leaves an awful lot of space for all of the various fossil fuel lifelines mentioned above.

The *Sustainable Jobs Act* is still making its way through parliament. Assuming it is passed into law, implementation will unfold throughout 2024. Shift Storm will be there every step of the way.

### Cities are grappling with transition roadmaps of their own

One of the bright spots we always like highlighting in *Shift Storm* are local or regional climate action plans. Ultimately, the transition to a cleaner economy needs to happen everywhere, and the more that plans are tailored to local circumstances, the more successful the transition will be.

In 2023, we looked at plans from London, UK, and several cities in the U.S., such as Minneapolis. We also reviewed regional transition plans for North West England and the U.S. Appalachians. Most of these proposals come from advocates, but some are from local governments. Either way, they provide useful models for other communities to follow.

Hopefully we see more efforts like these in the year to come from communities in Canada and elsewhere.

### Hold onto your hats

The world economy is moving away from fossil fuels—gradually, haltingly, but assuredly. The consequences of this shift for workers and the economy are profound. And every government, union and sector has something to say about it.

Through *Shift Storm*, we are trying to make sense of it all. We are trying to stay on top of the flurry of research and advocacy work that is constantly being released around the world. And we are trying to make all of that information accessible to workers, activists and concerned citizens across Canada and beyond.

We hope you’ll join us in 2024. ●

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood is a senior researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives’ National Office. His work focuses on the social and economic dimensions of Canada’s shift to a zero-carbon economy. He is the editor of the *Shift Storm* newsletter.

## Further reading

Get the latest issue of the monthly *Shift Storm* newsletter in your inbox for free by subscribing at: [policyalternatives.ca/shiftstorm](http://policyalternatives.ca/shiftstorm).

In addition to the sources cited in *Shift Storm*, the CCPA has published extensively on the intersections of work and labour. To learn more about just transitions and green industrial policy, we suggest starting with these CCPA reports, which are all freely available on [policyalternatives.ca](http://policyalternatives.ca):

### Roadmap to a Canadian Just Transition Act

*A path to a clean and inclusive economy*

By Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood and Clay Duncalfe (2021)

### Bet Big

*A citizen’s guide to green industrial policy in Canada*

By Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood and Noah Kathen (2022)

### Spending What it Takes

*Transformational climate investments for long-term prosperity in Canada*

By Marc Lee, Caroline Brouillette and Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood (2023)

# Raising the bar for equitable gig work in B.C.

*This is excerpted from the CCPA-BC response to the BC Ministry of Labour Discussion Paper, Proposing Employment Standards and Other Protections for App-Based Ride-Hail and Food-Delivery Workers in British Columbia.*

We are encouraged to see that the B.C. Ministry of Labour is moving forward with plans to extend key employment protections to app-based ride hail and food delivery workers, a particularly vulnerable group of largely racialized and immigrant workers. The B.C. government has a unique opportunity to set high standards for sustainable, responsible platform work and we are pleased to support the government's deliberations on this issue.

Hundreds of thousands of Canadian workers now participate, to varying degrees, in app-based work. Ride hail and food delivery workers are only the most visible examples of this growing workforce. The recommendations in this brief are intended to apply to all location-based app-based service delivery workers in B.C., including those providing services through platforms like Instacart, TaskRabbit and others.

Our 12 recommendations synthesize the key learnings from CCPA-BC's long track record of collaborative, cross-sectoral research on precarious work and economic insecurity.

Underlying these recommendations are two core principles: first, regardless of the technology that mediates their work, app-based

ride-hail and delivery workers deserve and are entitled to all the rights and protections that other B.C. workers receive as employees; second, the platform companies that employ app-based workers must fulfill all responsibilities of traditional employers, including accepting full legal liability for protecting the health and safety of workers and contributing to payroll-based programs.

Any half measures, such as extending only a subset of employment rights and entitlements to app-based workers without classifying them as employees—as was done in Ontario—risk entrenching a second-tier of largely racialized workers in the B.C. labour market, perpetuating racist economic hierarchies and leaving these workers vulnerable to further exploitation.

As platform companies continue to expand their low-cost, low worker protection business model to various service industries beyond ride-hail and food delivery, the B.C. government has a unique opportunity—and responsibility—to set high standards for sustainable, responsible platform-based work. Any proposed new legislation must consider the racialized consequences of redefining (lower) minimum employment standards for what is likely to become a growing group of vulnerable workers in our province.

## Summary of our recommendations

1. Establish a clear test, with the presumption of employee status, to determine whether app-based workers are independent contractors and make misclassification a priority enforcement issue.

2. Extend the full range of B.C. workers' rights and protections available under the *Employment Standards Act* (ESA) to app-based ride hail and food delivery workers.

3. Ensure workers receive at least the minimum wage for all time worked before tips and after work-related expenses.

4. Require platform companies to compensate workers for all necessary work-related expenses and prohibit unauthorized deductions from workers' pay.

5. Apply existing ESA tip protection standards to app-based workers.

6. Mandate pay and destination transparency.

7. Protect workers from unfair account suspensions and deactivations/ terminations, create a pathway to a timely complaints/ appeal process and mandate appropriate compensation when workers are found to have been unfairly suspended or terminated/ deactivated.

8. Require notice of termination for app-based workers and implement unjust dismissal protections for app-based workers and all workers covered by the ESA.

9. Mandate that app-based workers have the full coverage of the *Workers Compensation Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation*.

10. Confirm that app-based workers' full rights to collective bargaining and meaningful access to unionization.

11. Require platform companies to contribute to provincial and federal payroll-based programs.

12. Mandate transparency about the controls that platform companies apply over app-based workers through the platform.

## Business model costs the province money

It has become increasingly clear that the owners of app-work platforms—often large global corporations—derive much of their profit and gain a competitive advantage over traditional service providers by exploiting gaps in the existing employment standards regulation and enforcement, not from genuine advantages in productivity or efficiency.

Platform companies lean on the novelty of managing a large workforce through a digital app to obfuscate the fact that they are de facto employers. By arguing that they are merely digital marketplaces rather than employers, platform companies can offload many of the normal risks and costs of doing business onto workers, consumers and public safety net programs. This serves platform companies well and they lobby intensely against any attempts to apply employment law to app-based work.

When global corporations like Uber, Lyft and Skip the Dishes are allowed to avoid paying employer health tax, WorkSafeBC, CPP and EI premiums, they are not contributing their fair share to support the services their workers will require when they get sick or injured and when they age and are no longer able to work.

This is obviously unfair and costly to B.C. taxpayers and employers that are required to cover the costs of supporting their own injured workers through WorkSafe and other payroll premiums. Without policies to end these practices, the platform business model will spread to more industries, threatening more workers' livelihoods, unduly burdening public health and safety net programs and undermining businesses that shoulder standard employment costs and responsibilities.

### **Employee protections compatible with flexibility**

Platform companies claim employment protections will impact the flexibility of app-based work. In reality, app-based workers' flexibility is already significantly limited by algorithmic controls that force workers to chase decent pay by making themselves available in places and at times that are not of their own choosing.

And where workers have lost employment status under the guise of improved flexibility, as was the case for Deliveroo workers in Belgium, for example, they found

that, "instead, it reduced their degree of autonomy and control in relation to the platform."

Flexible models of work are incredibly important. They contribute to a more diversified and adaptable economy by opening up labour market participation to people with various social responsibilities, health needs, or other barriers to traditional employment. As a province, B.C. should move away from tying workers' protection from poverty and precarious lives exclusively to the standard employment relationship as the people excluded from such models of protection are more likely to be women and/or racialized persons. Changes need to be made to the ESA to provide better rights to flexibility for employees as the CCPA-BC has previously recommended.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that existing ESA protections are compatible with the flexibility app-based workers' value. We can shield workers from exploitation while improving flexibility and allowing room for the important and unpaid labour of social reproduction that society relies on.

While platform companies claim that employment protections will put them out of business, these companies have continued to operate profitably within the parameters of providing decent work without affecting workers' ability to choose their working hours. Research has shown, "employment, as a legal classification, has proven to be adaptable, dynamic and capable of accommodating a range of working time behaviors."

### **Exceptions leave door open for exploitation**

The evidence is clear: where limited protections have been applied, such as in Ontario and California, app-based workers continue to face exploitation. Upholding a platform service business model that offers workers fewer workplace rights and protections places B.C.'s predominantly racialized app-based

workforce in a second, lower-tier category of employment, a move that upholds white supremacy.

All B.C. workers deserve access to basic workplace rights and protections. The basic rights enshrined under the ESA and the *Workers Compensation Act* are particularly important for vulnerable workers, such as new immigrants, low-wage and racialized workers—who are disproportionately represented among app-based workers and all of whom are less able to secure workplace conditions better than the minimum requirements set out by law.

It is deeply unfair to deny these workers access to the full range of benefits and protections afforded other workers in our province. It goes against the foundational principle of "decent work" put forward in the Arthurs report on Canadian federal labour standards for the 21st century, which states that our legislation "should ensure that, no matter how limited his or her bargaining power, no worker ... is offered, accepts or works under conditions that Canadians would not regard as 'decent.'" Creating new exclusions to the ESA is also contrary to the Fair Wage Commission's recommendations and goes against the B.C. government's broader efforts to address systemic racism.

Allowing for exceptions to the ESA or opening up third categories of employment for app-based work would create a dangerous precedent as platform companies are expanding this model of on-demand work to other industries. Taken together, our recommendations will close the door to further exploitation by extending appropriate rights and protections to app-based workers and ensuring fair competition between digital platforms and other businesses. It's time for B.C. workers, employers, and taxpayers to stop footing the bill for platform companies' cost-saving measures. ●

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CREDIT: TERRA SIMERITSCH

LINDSAY MCLAREN AND REBECCA GRAFF-MCRAE

# ENVISIONING A WELL-BEING ECONOMY

INSPIRATION AND HARD QUESTIONS

**T**HE PROBLEMS ARE obvious. Extreme weather events, including the worst wildfire season in Canada’s history in 2023, make it clear that human-caused climate catastrophe is no longer a distant prospect. Yet, our governments’ approach to phasing out fossil fuel dependency is slow and weak.

There are crises of affordable housing across the country, which should be unacceptable in a wealthy country like Canada, where housing is a human right. Our leaders, however, continue to allow and encourage housing as a financial asset rather than as a home.

Despite formal implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which is critical to a just society, federal and provincial governments persist in placing colonial authority ahead of inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The list goes on.

Much public and political discourse focuses on these (and other) problems one at a time. A piecemeal approach aligns well with the siloed nature of (colonial) governments. However, it has considerable drawbacks: it leads to *policy incoherence*, where activities in one policy domain offset or undermine those in another.

One example is the rebate on fuel taxes offered by some provincial governments, intended to “help people” by offsetting the spike in consumer costs due to inflation and global conflict. However, the rebate reduced government revenue, which could have been used to augment public services. It didn’t support those using more active modes of transportation. And it effectively subsidized fossil fuel companies because the discount was, generally, not passed on to customers at the pump.

The problem of policy incoherence is compounded by the deeply embedded challenge of a short-term orientation in government, which underpins disproportionate attention and public spending on downstream activities like medical care, prisons, and clean up of environmental disasters, rather than an upstream approach to collectively providing the conditions for all people and our planet to be well in the first place.

At a certain point, it becomes important to look beyond the piecemeal approach and ask: how are these problems connected and what are the systems and structures that underlie all of them?

The answer has much to do with our current economic system of neoliberal capitalism. While capitalism has been the dominant global political economic system since the 17th century, neoliberal capitalism is a harsher version that emerged in the early 1980s and embodies a particularly aggressive pursuit of the capitalist vision of protecting and accumulating private wealth.

It does so through policies of deregulation (permitting companies to pursue profit in ways that are unencumbered by accountability for things like environmental stewardship); austerity and privatization of public services, which erodes their quality and viability; and trade liberalization, which promotes global diffusion of health-damaging products (e.g., ultra-processed foods) and processes such as growing precarity of labour markets.

Clearly, neoliberal capitalism does not promote the well-being of all people nor of the planet.

Contrary to neoclassical economic hegemony, economic growth under neoliberal capitalism does not “trickle down;” rather, most growth accrues to those who already have high levels of income and wealth

while those at lower levels stagnate or actively decline. The ensuing inequality is toxic to societal well-being.

Moreover, under neoliberal capitalism, nature and intact ecosystems—which are essential to the well-being of our planet, on which we all depend—are not only not valued, they are actively destroyed as an acceptable side effect of a narrow vision of economic growth.

The system’s devotion to the myth of infinite growth is matched only by its equally untenable repertoire of fragmented, reductive, and technological “solutions” that leave harmful social and political structures untouched.

As progressive economists remind us, there is a well-orchestrated tendency to view “the economy” as fixed, natural (inevitable), and external to us. In contrast, history shows that neoliberal capitalism is “an” (not “the”) economy.

Moreover, far from a value-neutral and highly technical domain of experts, the economy is inherently social. We are all experts—perhaps especially those (human and non-human) whom our current system excludes.

The purpose of the economy is to meet societal needs: not only to survive but to thrive. If those needs are not being met, then the economy is not doing its job. Naming our economic system and calling out its very significant, but inherent, consequences is a key step in transformative change.

### **An alternative political economy vision**

A well-being economy offers a potential alternative to neoliberal capitalism. While definitions and details may vary, the crux of a well-being economy is a guiding principle of ‘people and planet over profit’.



It draws theoretical anchoring from diverse intellectual and political traditions (e.g., Keynesian, Marxian, feminist, Indigenous, ecologist), which share in common a critique of the human and ecological consequences of conventional free-market economic policy prescriptions and support for cross-cutting progressive democratic structural change in the policies and institutions that currently govern the economy. The critical and heterodox nature provides key foundations for transformative change.

What constitutes “well-being” can be, and is, vigorously debated (indeed, there is a considerable risk of getting ‘stuck in the weeds’ of definitions and measurement). One heuristic that offers some basic contours is the doughnut economy, where the inner ring of the doughnut signifies the social foundations that everyone needs to be well (e.g., safe and affordable housing, nutritious and acceptable food, ability to live and participate in society with dignity and free from violence and discrimination) and the outer ring represents the ecological ceiling (e.g., levels of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, biodiversity loss, and pollution beyond which our way of

living is not sustainable for future generations).

The doughnut itself represents a well-being economy and society. By identifying areas of shortfall (where social foundations are not met for everyone) and overshoot (where ecological ceilings are exceeded), the framework offers a tangible guide for governance and policy.

Several jurisdictions are working towards elements of a well-being economy vision.

New Zealand, for example, has been working to align public spending with public and planetary well-being through a well-being budget.

Wales, as discussed by Houston et al. in this issue, legislates and empowers long-term thinking through its *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and Commissioner*.

New Zealand and Wales, along with Finland, Iceland, and Scotland form the Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership (WEGo), which is a collaboration of governments interested in sharing expertise and transferable policy practice around well-being economies.

In Canada, the federal government in 2021 developed a Quality of Life framework, which aims to

better incorporate quality of life measurements into government decision-making and budgeting.

These are important efforts which, in some cases (see Houston et al., this issue) have demonstrably benefited our publics and our ecosystems. However, we must keep in mind that the differences between our current political economic systems and the vision of a well-being economy are very significant. While the vision holds appeal, there are key questions that must be asked, in which a critical perspective around inequities of power is foregrounded.

### **A well-being economy: some hard questions and ways forward**

Drawing from critical scholarship in the field of public health, a helpful heuristic for framing a critical discussion is “looking out” and “looking in.” Looking out refers to keeping one’s gaze focused on damaging social, political, and economic systems and structures that constitute the root causes of human and planetary suffering. Looking in is about inward reflection and humility around potentially harmful assumptions and blind spots of the well-being economy community and movement itself.

While a well-being economy represents a potentially transformative vision, it could alternatively be simply a new label that serves to maintain the status quo. Take Canada’s Quality of Life framework, for example. While the framework has important features, including explicit “beyond GDP” language and a holistic vision, its application is, so far, limited to measurement and budget impact statements. It is clear from the CCPA’s analysis of budget 2023 that the framework is not guiding policy in substantive ways towards human and planetary well-being.

As seen with other potentially transformative concepts, such as the social determinants of health, there



PHOTO: ISTOCK



is a distinct risk of well-being becoming a depoliticized policy framework that upholds the harmful capitalist vision.

One illustration is ‘green capitalism’, where a well-being economy is put forth as co-existing with economic growth, when, in fact, the two are almost certainly incompatible. More generally, ‘keeping the pressure on’ will entail being skeptical of any well-being economic vision that does not name and engage deeply with structures that perpetuate relations of power and exploitation, including capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and others.

A well-being economy involves displacing structures of oppression and unfair competition with ones anchored in care and reciprocity. It involves centering social and ecological goals and then considering what activities need to be expanded to reach them. It involves shifting basic human and planetary needs away from market influence and profit and into the public realm.

It requires new conversations and processes to rethink our collective values and shift discourses. As emphasized by the Wellbeing Economy Alliance’s work on changing the narrative: “We need new stories about what is possible. By changing the narrative, we can make a Wellbeing Economy common sense, the way the neoliberal economy is now.”

As a social movement, a well-being economy brings people together around a shared vision. A shared vision, however, brings potential for blind spots; thus, community self-reflection from a place of humility is necessary. To support looking in, guiding questions may include: Who is the well-being economy for? And, who gets to decide?

First, a well-being economy is sometimes described (including by us) as an economy for everyone. But who do we mean by everyone? Even initiatives that were applauded for their inclusivity have omissions. Canada’s post-WWII welfare state, despite threads of ‘universalism’, was, in many ways, anchored in an exclusionary ideal of white citizenship. More recently, Canada’s COVID-19 Canada Emergency Benefit (CERB) income support, while lauded for its broad and generous scope, focused on those with ties to the paid labour force, thus reinforcing the commodification that is built into neoliberal capitalism.

Admittedly, when placed in the broader context of neoliberal austerity and privatization, both CERB and post-war social welfare policies feel enviable. But we can do better. Asking ourselves, and responding honestly, to questions like “Who is everyone?” and “Who is a well-being economy for?” is an important place to start. This must include acknowledging the roots of well-being threaded throughout many Indigenous ways of knowing, and a deep commitment to decolonizing intersecting social movements by excavating the ways in which the dominant economic paradigms of the last three centuries have disproportionately harmed Black

people, Indigenous Peoples, and other racialized people in Canada and elsewhere.

Second, while the well-being economy movement engages communities worldwide, it is predominantly driven by wealthy countries. But who are we—as members of wealthy countries—to push for a new global economic paradigm when other parts of the world continue to be left behind from the current one?

Indeed, it will not be easy to disrupt the entrenched dynamic of ‘rich countries calling the shots’. We can start by being explicit that a well-being economic vision itself represents a new ideology; by being transparent about its values (this is in significant contrast to the current system whose contours are largely and deliberately obscured by those seeking to maintain the status quo); and by working to ensure that processes align with those values.

For example, if we can agree that our social, economic, political, and climate crises are interconnected, and that a lack of democracy and participation lie at the root of those intersecting crises, then the only way forward is through radical participatory processes, where the processes themselves are key to building shared visions.

## How different could our world look?

Our current political economic paradigm is predicated on harm, and suffering is necessary to sustain it.

It is empowering to realize that it does not have to be this way. We can come together to ask, what if, instead of greed, blame, and private material gains, we began from assumptions of solidarity, co-operation, participation, humility, and respect? How different would our world look?

A well-being economy offers a frame for reflecting on these “what if” questions, and a way to move beyond cynicism, hostility, and fear, to a place of hope. We warmly welcome you along for the ride. **M**

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STAN HOUSTON, LINDSAY MCLAREN, AND REBECCA GRAFF-MCRAE

# A well-being economy in practice

## Spotlight on Wales and Nanaimo

WELL-BEING ECONOMIES ARE designed to serve people and the planet. They do so by creating and empowering institutions, such as governments, to deliver an equitable distribution of wealth while protecting the planet’s resources for future generations.

The idea that the economy should exist to serve people and the planet seems sensible and appealing. But because of the carefully orchestrated narrative of the economy having a life of its own, whose needs we need to accommodate, some may perceive the idea of a well-being economy to be naïve and unfeasible, and thus hesitate to embrace its application.

In fact, the well-being economy is not just a nice idea. Its principles are being adopted in various ways and at various stages, in countries such as Iceland, New Zealand,

Finland, Scotland, and even in Canada. The process is arguably most advanced in Wales.

In 2015, Welsh parliament passed the *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act*, following a “national conversation” around “The Wales We Want” for our children and grandchildren.

Wales is a country of approximately three million people, with a parliamentary system of government. As a “sub-national” jurisdiction (governed by its own Welsh government as well as by the Government of the United Kingdom), its experiences may be relevant to Canadian provinces and territories. When the national conversation was initiated, the country had suffered from the decline of mining and heavy industry, and it was apparent that prevailing neoliberal economic ideas weren’t working for them.

The *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act* set out seven goals. The goals are about prosperity, which, notably, makes no mention of Gross Domestic Product and emphasizes the need for all people to be able to take advantage of wealth generated through decent work; resilience, which is understood in terms of healthy functioning ecosystems; health, including physical and mental well-being with a preventive orientation; equality, where people can fulfill their potential regardless of socioeconomic background or circumstances; community cohesion, meaning communities that are viable, safe, and well-connected; cultural vibrance, which includes robust arts, sports, and recreation sectors; and global responsibility, where global implications of local initiatives are considered.

There are 50 national indicators to assess progress, which range

from healthy life expectancy at birth, including the gap between the least and most deprived (#2), to concentration of carbon and organic matter in soil (#13), to percentage of dwellings with adequate energy performance (#33).

Significantly, the Act recognizes that tackling inter-connected challenges of climate change, poverty, health inequality, etc. requires all of society working together from foundations of long-term thinking, prevention, and integration (coherence).

Nearly 50 public bodies are engaged, including Welsh and local government, local health boards, and local councils, along with public health, health services, national park, higher education, arts and culture, natural resources, and sports authorities.

The Act mandates the formation of local boards to assess local needs and decisions through a future generations lens. While private industry is not bound by the Act, there are indications that companies are seeing the value of its principles.

A critical component is the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, whose role is to provide advice and support to government and public bodies in taking a longer-term and coherent view on decisions. The commissioner's job, in short, is to be the guardian of future generations. This individual is independent of government.

The commissioner is empowered to assess progress in relation to goals and to call out areas where progress is insufficient or inconsistent. Government ministers and other public bodies are obligated to respond to concerns brought forward by the commissioner.

The current commissioner, Derek Walker, noted in his remarks at the Well-Being Economy for Alberta conference that the position conferred considerable "soft power" in terms of providing an opportunity to raise concerns and to facilitate conversations between relevant players.

Walker provided a few examples of the impact of the Welsh initiative. One concerns plans for a major motorway, which was "practically a done deal," even though it would have destroyed delicate wetlands and placed an immense burden on national finances.

After review by the commissioner, who challenged its impact in multiple domains, the project was cancelled. In addition to its immediate significance, this example sets an important precedent.

As another example, which Walker believes would not have happened in the absence of the Act and commissioner, the country is piloting a new funding mechanism—essentially a basic income—to support young adults who have aged out of the care system. The scheme provides approximately \$2,600 in Canadian dollars (\$2,100 after tax) per month to those leaving care at age 18, for two years.

In line with a well-being orientation, the stated rationale is that "Care leavers have a right to be

supported as they develop into independent young adults. Yet, too many young people leaving care continue to face significant barriers... Basic income is a direct investment in this cohort of young people, giving them the space to thrive whilst securing their basic needs."

Moreover, as described by former Commissioner Sophie Howe in a September 2023 address at the University of Vermont, the Act has underpinned a whole new transportation strategy, where walking and cycling are at the top, followed by public transit, followed by electric vehicles—with private motor vehicles at the bottom.

The strategy has permitted broad-scale reductions of speed limits, as well as a major shift of funding, from roads getting two-thirds of transport funding, to two-thirds now going to other means of transport.

The placement of electric vehicles (EVs) near the bottom of the strategy signals that while EVs may reduce emissions, they do not address global equity issues around extraction, nor do they resolve congestion and safety, thus aligning with the global responsibility goal.

We could learn many things from the Welsh experience, including the importance of clear foundational principles (coherence, long term orientation, equity), strong and cross-cutting legislation, broad buy-in, and the significant role of the commissioner.

Nanaimo, B.C., a city of around 100,000 people on Vancouver Island, is using a very different set of legislative and policy tools to address similar challenges. Demonstrating the applicability of well-being economy principles here in Canada, the city has adopted doughnut economics, which aims to ensure that everyone has the social foundations needed to be well while not exceeding the earth's life-supporting limits.

In his remarks at our conference, Nanaimo City Councillor Ben Geselbracht explained that city council developed a community plan guided by doughnut economy principles but tailored to the Nanaimo context.

The plan, which is anchored in principles of integration (coherence) and adaptability (resilience), has five interconnected goals emphasizing, among other things, greenhouse gas emission reduction, healthy watersheds, urban tree canopies, affordable housing, walkability, and active and public transportation.

All city council decisions are made through a well-being lens and city staff have been directed to integrate the Nanaimo Doughnut into decision-making and the development of an outcome-based budget.

Nanaimo's doughnut economy vision has supported important initiatives. One example is a municipal sustainable procurement policy, where procurement decisions must factor in greenhouse gas production, local vs. more remote origin, good labour practices, waste production, etc.



In other words, procurement activities are leveraged to advance environmental, social, and ethical objectives from the city's plan.

Geselbracht highlighted challenges and tensions inherent in such a broad vision. For example, placing environmental limits on development is essential but can exacerbate housing shortages. This example points to the need to enhance advocacy to other levels of government that share responsibility for these important and interrelated goals.

Recent events further illustrate challenges. In the context of a B.C. provincial update to its building code to limit greenhouse gas emissions from new construction, Nanaimo recently announced that, starting July 1, 2024, newly built homes in the city will not be permitted to have natural gas as a primary heat source.

Almost immediately, this prompted a “cross-border political campaign” by the Canadian Energy Centre (neighbouring Alberta’s oil and gas “War Room”), including over 2,300 letters to Nanaimo’s city council urging them to reverse the move (which has, so far, not happened).

The Welsh government has likewise faced resistance to initiatives to reduce speed limits and limit road expansion—despite the potential of these policies to save lives, lower carbon emissions, and generally improve well-being, those opposed (including the UK prime minister) have labelled them “anti-motorist.”

While these challenges can feel disheartening, this is perhaps a good opportunity for us to remember that opposition to a well-being economy is to be anticipated, coming from those who benefit from the status quo. Moreover, resistance signals that we are working on something important. Let’s continue the good work together. **M**

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BOB ASCAH AND LINDSAY MCLAREN

## The role of financial institutions

**S**IMPLY STATED, A well-being economy values sustainable relationships between people and the natural world more highly than material objects and money.

Our capitalist economic system privileges protection and accumulation of private wealth, to the detriment of most people and of the planet.

Financial institutions, such as banks and investment institutions, play a very important role in this capitalist vision by supporting initiatives that are “profitable” but usually at the expense of social and ecological well-being (e.g., companies whose profit stems from cutting costs on workers’ pay, security and safety, or on environmental stewardship).

These engines of capitalism operate within a broader neoliberal context of deregulation, privatization, and austerity when it comes to public services and supports.

Thinking about a well-being economy, therefore, demands that we consider the role of financial institutions in an alternative vision. Here we ask the question: What are some opportunities for financial institutions to embody a well-being economy vision?

Drawing inspiration from A Well-Being Economy for Alberta conference, we first discuss potential benefits and challenges of public banks, followed by brief comments on two other important ideas—namely, alternative budgeting and complementary currency.

All three contribute to thinking about the role of finance—i.e., the management, creation, and study of money (currency) and investment—in supporting, rather than working against, a well-being economy. We are grateful to conference presenters Thomas Marois, Niall Harney, and Jared Blustein for their compelling and inspiring insights.

### Public banks

Public banks—banks that are in the public, rather than the private, sphere—potentially have a significant role to play in efforts to decarbonize our society, reduce financialization, and democratize decision-making.

In his book *Public Banks: Decarbonisation, Definancialisation, and Democratisation* and conference presentation, Thomas Marois noted that public banks are a significant part of the international financial system—more so than most people realize. There are over 900 public banks in existence and they control approximately \$49 trillion. They range from full service commercial and personal banks, like Alberta’s ATB



PHOTO: CANADIAN PRESS

Financial (the only public retail bank in Canada), to international development agencies.

Public banks include local development banks, such as Banco Popular in Costa Rica, where most Costa Rican workers have an account. A workers' assembly of 290 members from 10 social and economic sectors, with gender equality inscribed in the governance structure, makes Banco Popular the most democratic public bank in the world. Another democratically governed institution is Germany's Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau, (KfW), which was originally established to fund reconstruction.

Marois argues that public banks are neither essentially good nor bad, and that each has a unique history whose structure and function are defined by social and institutional forces.

In many cases, powerful neoliberal forces result in public banks, including ATB Financial and the Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB), supporting capital accumulation rather than embracing a goal of public and planetary well-being.

CIB's function, for example, is to underwrite project risks to guarantee investors' expected rates of return. While this includes investment in green infrastructure, it must be emphasized that the driving principle is not decarbonization, it's private capital accumulation. More recently, some public banks, including the *Nordic Investment Bank*, have ceased lending to fossil fuel projects, thus illustrating these institutions' potentially significant leverage.

Financialization refers to the power of financial institutions (private banks, insurers, institutional investors) to fuse their financial interests with those of state agencies. This pernicious symbiosis seeks to ensure that the dominance of capital accumulation pervades key public sector institutions.

In Canada, this agreement is manifest in federal legislation that limits provinces' ownership of bank shares and a long-held policy that does not allow Canadian governments to apply for a bank charter. This makes it very difficult, although not impossible, for provinces to pursue de-financialization through public banks.

From the point of view of well-being, Alberta's public bank, ATB Financial, provides an unfortunate example of a mandate that supports private capital accumulation in an oil and gas-dominated economy.

In 2019, the new United Conservative Party (UCP) provincial government explicitly reinforced ATB's support for capital accumulation by amending the *ATB Financial Act* to require the institution to "seek to earn risk-adjusted rates of return that are similar to or better than the returns of comparable financial institutions in both the short term and the long term."

In 2018, the Parkland Institute published *Alberta's Public Bank*, a report that offered some modest suggestions to make ATB more of a policy instrument for public—social and ecological—good.

As one example, ATB Financial would be an ideal vehicle for Alberta to fund programs to decarbonize Alberta's fossil fuel economy. ATB could show

leadership by helping people finance the retrofitting of homes, the deployment of solar or geothermal energy sources, and the purchase of heat pumps without requiring a capitalist premium of profit.

However, in the past 12 months, ATB has grown its mining, oil and gas extraction loans by a whopping 28 per cent, at a time where climate catastrophe is no longer a distant prospect.

A second example is housing. A critical problem facing most provinces is the absence of affordable and acceptable shelter, which is a basic human right. Canadian governments at all levels have failed to create sufficient, affordable housing.

In large part this is due to the financialization of housing, which has changed many Canadians' attitudes from seeing housing as a home to seeing housing as an instrument for investment speculation. ATB could help to address the housing crisis by, for example, providing at-cost mortgages to low-income households.

With respect to public banks' potential for democratization, ATB's current governance structure is undemocratic in that appointments are controlled by the existing board and the finance minister. While efforts have been made to obtain gender balance, the absence of labour, not-for-profit, scientific, First Nations and Métis, and local government representatives reinforces the top-down, for-profit model. Broad civil society mobilization is required to redress this situation.

### **Alternative public budgeting**

Powerful neoliberal trends have led to widening inequalities of resources and power, and financialization has led to state agencies and processes adopting the financial interests of private entities. Government budgets, therefore, are not in the interests of the public; they operate in the interests of a small minority of powerful people.

In his comments, Niall Harney of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' Manitoba Office described an important form of civil society resistance against these dynamics, namely alternative budgeting, which was developed in Winnipeg in the 1990s by progressive economist John Loxley and a community group called Cho!ces.

It was in response to cutbacks to program spending orchestrated by then federal Finance Minister Paul Martin in the mid-1990s, which were downloaded to provinces and municipalities under the "TINA" ("there is no alternative") narrative. This forum of citizen participation pushed back against the fiscal austerity budgeting.

Alternative budgets for the City of Winnipeg and for the province of Manitoba have had important influences. Examples include the implementation of an impact fee on suburban land development to more accurately reflect the costs of suburban development for municipal services and the implementation of low-income transit passes. The Winnipeg alternative budget has also created space for discussion on property taxes. Areas of focus are developed by community activists from various sectors, including labour, non-profit, and First Nations. They include issues like housing, recreation, libraries, parks, transit, zoning, and policing.

For more information about this important idea, the reader is directed to *Alternative Budgets: Budgeting as if People Mattered* by John Loxley, recent iterations of the Winnipeg municipal budget, and the CCPA National Office's annual alternative federal budget.

### **Complementary currencies**

Efforts to transform our economy to one that works for people and the planet requires thinking not only about large institutions, such as governments and banks, but also "hyper-localized civil society" solutions. An important example is complementary currency.

Jared Blustein of the Arusha Centre in Calgary situated his comments in the context of growing economic inequality and commodification.

Calgary Dollars have been Calgary's local currency since 1995. This currency, which can only be spent in Calgary, is a tool that can be used in ways that support a circular economy and reduce Calgary's ecological footprint, including supporting local vendors and businesses to create a more resilient economy, building community, and earning supplementary income.

As one important example, residents of participating agencies earn Calgary Dollars through a variety of community building and maintenance tasks. The Calgary Dollars earned may, in turn, be used to pay a portion of rent and to spend at local businesses.

Complementary currencies like Calgary dollars represent a community development approach, which takes on the incredibly important task of removing corporate influence by reframing money as a medium of trade and nothing more. It thereby acts to build a bigger space in society to push back against corporate capture of the nation state.

### **Conclusion**

To envision a well-being economy, we must consider alternatives to neoliberal capitalism and the institutions—including banks, government budgets, and currency—that perpetuate it. Public banks, alternative budgeting, and complementary currency represent three important and energizing ideas. **M**

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BOB ASCAH, PAUL BRODOWAY, AMANDA DICKSON, REBECCA GRAFF-MCRAE, LINDSAY MCLAREN

# INSIGHTS INTO A WELL-BEING ECONOMY

LEARNINGS, THEMES, AND REMAINING QUESTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS  
IN A WELL-BEING ECONOMY FOR ALBERTA CONFERENCE

## SOME GENERAL THEMES...

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY WELL-BEING AND WHAT IS THE VALUE OF A WELL-BEING LENS?

The idea of a well-being economy brought to mind aspects of physical health, mental well-being, social connection, environmental sustainability, and the health of our democratic institutions. Some participants also noted that a well-being lens can help us to draw connections between the interactions of our day-to-day lives (micro) and the dominant systems in which we live (macro). This connection felt powerful in that

it brings potential for well-being to overcome the harms and inequities built into many of our present systems. The lingering ripple effects of the Covid-19 pandemic weighed heavily on the discussion. Participants lamented that prevention, public health, and social determinants of health were politicized and used to divide people. As moderator Gwendolyn Blue stated, “Well-being shouldn’t be a partisan issue.”

### THE PROBLEMS OF OUR CURRENT ECONOMIC SYSTEM ARE FEATURES, NOT BUGS

We live in a system where constant distraction, disinformation, dissatisfaction, and exhaustion are features—not bugs. And, neoliberal capitalism thrives on this: it creates these problems and then offers tantalizing solutions. Although the solution is packaged in many ways, it is ultimately the same: we should consume more, take personal responsibility, and, if those

“solutions” fail (which they inevitably will), we should take a mindfulness seminar and learn some “self-care”. There was a lot of frustration. People spoke about their need and desire to move away from the “laws” of perpetual growth, competition, and individualism, only to find themselves pulled right back in. Could an explicitly intersectional well-being approach offer a way out?

### MOURNING THE LOSS OF FOUNDATIONS OF TRUST, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND THE COMMONS

Participants commented on the massive influence of corporations on public policy and regulations and noted that it caused a growing loss of trust. There is a sense that our systems (e.g., education, health care) are failing to meet people where they are. Many participants expressed that help does not arrive until it is too late. How can we start to rebuild public services and institutions outside of private/corporate interests?

This lack of trust is connected to an erosion of accountability. There is a perception that our institutions, including governments, lack humility. This has been demonstrated when they shut down meaningful dialogues around past decisions and accountability. Participants noted that there is a superficial culture of apology, rather than actual accountability.

Participants had a feeling of loss, especially the loss of common “goods” that supported us as individuals and communities during

past challenges and crises. This includes the loss of public spaces as well as common social experiences and connections to others. The library was noted as one of the last places where one can go without having to buy something. One important pathway to well-being is to expand, rather than reduce, these common spaces.

While some participants had disengaged politically because they felt a lack of choice and voice, others attributed it to exhaustion, or to the ways in which social movements have been fragmented and weakened. This loss of collective organization and solidarity is felt to be a direct effect of things like “hustle” culture, insecure work, and the commodification of time. Participants are tired and frustrated with a continuous string of crises that are exploited for short-term political gain, and the ways in which social media platforms have become politicized and controlled.

## SILOS AND FRAGMENTATION

Participants expressed a sense of being overwhelmed by the many intersecting challenges that people are facing. People have housing problems, income problems, work problems, problems accessing supports and services. How can we help people connect the dots between these problems and see the economy as the common denominator? It seems that no one in government (local, provincial, or federal) is taking a big picture, intersectional perspective.

One group highlighted the problem of specialization: the view that the only way to get a job and be successful is to focus deeply on one area, but we do this at the expense of thinking more broadly and at a system level. Because of this, and because of cuts to higher education, we often don't have the foundations to work through our current political economic system and its rationale and assumptions.

## ...AND SOME SPECIFIC IDEAS

### INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY OF VOICES

What will it take to build a society that supports and prioritizes well-being? A key piece of this puzzle is inclusion. Today, decisions about how society runs are usually based on profit-driven criteria that unduly benefit those at the top. A person's value is equated with their profitability. This decision-making prioritizes projects that benefit businesses financially, while providing little benefit to the greater community and, in many cases, harming it. The needs, wants, and voices of entire groups

of people are left behind in this process. For example, if a person cannot work due to a disability, they are viewed as less valuable and considered a financial burden on the system. This manner of thinking has no place within a society that values well-being. Our unique and diverse viewpoints, experiences, and voices are crucial to building a better, kinder world that respects each person's rights and intrinsic value.

### RIGHTS OF NATURE

Well-being relies on a diversity of voices, and those voices must not belong to humans alone. Humans are just one part of a much bigger ecosystem; the well-being needs of that larger ecosystem must be prioritized, and not only in a monetary sense or because of its benefits to humans. This concept is not new.

Longstanding Indigenous perspectives provide us insight into how people can positively coexist with nature. Nature, including all living creatures, must have the right to exist and flourish. An interesting case can be seen in Costa Rica, where pollinators were granted citizenship based on their significant role in ecological connectivity.

### ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Despite extensive scientific knowledge about the extent and magnitude of the planetary crisis and its main causes, we have largely failed to apply that knowledge to foster environmental sustainability. To do so will require firm commitment to staying within known ecological limits. Environmental sustainability cannot be separated from social sustainability. Indeed,

a "just transition", by definition, requires full participation in a democratic social order. We need to figure out how to act as a collective, where individuals are respectful of the social order and contribute to its long-term well-being. In socioeconomic terms, this implies a more equitable and fair distribution of the rewards gained from economic development.

### WELL-BEING-ORIENTED INVESTMENT OF ONE'S MONEY

Some participants raised the question of how individuals can invest their money in projects that contribute to collective well-being. While the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) movement gives the illusion of well-being-oriented investment, many of those funds have not lived up to their promises. Examples of well-being-oriented investment opportunities in Alberta were mentioned, including the Solar Panel Installation Co-operative of Edmonton and the Bow Valley Green Energy Co-operative. An important aspect of investment is the role that

could be played by public banks, such as ATB in Alberta (see Ascah & McLaren in this section). Raven Trust, which raises legal defence funds for Indigenous Peoples in Canada to defend rights and the integrity of lands and culture, is another example of well-being-oriented investment. It means distinguishing between "investment" in the capitalist sense, which emphasizes profit gains for an individual investor, and the more general sense, which is about devoting resources towards achieving a collective goal.

KENDAL DAVID AND MEGAN LINTON

# “Allowances” trap institutionalized Canadians in deep poverty

ANYONE WHO HAS been institutionalized—whether that’s in group homes, long-term care homes or other residential-medical institutions—knows that conditions inside the institutions are miserable for people who live in them.

In Ontario alone, over 30,000 adults that the government labels with intellectual or developmental disabilities live in, or are on the wait list to live in, state residential facilities.

Decades of budget cuts have created a situation where institutionalized people pay for the lack of food, programming, and basic necessities of life—like toilet paper, bus passes, and Wi-Fi. Instead of accessing social assistance programs like ODSP or disability assistance to cover these costs—which they might be eligible for if they lived in the community—institutionalized people instead receive personal need, comfort, or care “allowances.”

These monthly allowances pass through bureaucrats, social workers, business owners, and personal support workers before a disabled person living in a group home, long-term care facility, or some other variation of a residential treatment facility eventually receives them. They range from \$91 in P.E.I. to \$179 in Ontario and \$380 in Manitoba.

In Toronto, \$179 buys you a monthly bus pass and a pack of cigarettes. In St. John’s, \$150 might cover the cheapest available internet plan and a couple bags of chips. But institutionalized people are supposed to stretch these allowances to cover the costs of cellular mobility plans, personal

support workers for getting to the doctor, clothing, wireless internet, over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, recreation activities, hairdressing, menstrual products, specialty diet products, and all other monthly personal needs beyond basic food and shelter.

These institutional allowances are more than inadequate—they’re immiserating. As the federal government works on implementing the new **Canada Disability Benefit (CDB)**, it’s more urgent than ever that lawmakers fix policies that are trapping institutionalized people in deep poverty.

**Provincial income supports Policy**—both federal and provincial—forces most people with disabilities in Canada to live in chronic, abject poverty.

Over 75 per cent of adults with intellectual disabilities in Canada who live outside their family home live in poverty. Chronic poverty serves as a barrier to community involvement and to the development and maintenance of social relationships. People with disabilities, particularly intellectual and developmental disabilities, are most likely to live in institutional settings. Chronic poverty for persons with intellectual/developmental disabilities who are institutionalized is correlated with higher levels of mental illness and development of co-morbidities.

Poor people with disabilities—regardless of where they live—rely on government and transfers for a larger share of their total income compared to poor people without disabilities across Canada. Despite often being framed as a system

of “last resort,” provincial social assistance programs targeted for disabled people are often lifelines for recipients, especially those who are unable to work full-time, in the long-term or permanently.

Government transfers and social assistance make up, on average, about 65 per cent of poor disabled people’s total income (compared to about 29 per cent of total income for non-disabled poor people). For about 35 per cent of poor people with disabilities in Canada, social assistance is their primary source of income, compared to only 6.3 per cent of non-disabled poor people. Almost half of poor disabled people who live alone rely on social assistance as their primary source of income.

Given that social assistance is the primary source of income for so many people, it is especially important that policy-makers and academics monitor the inadequacy of these programs. Some scholars have paid attention to the adequacy rates of income supports for disabled people in Canada who live in community or family-based non-institutional settings. Other researchers have found that disabled adults who rely solely or primarily on any provincial social assistance program are destined to live in chronic poverty.

Researchers tend to agree on the importance of monitoring income supports for disabled people living in communities—it’s time to apply that sense of importance to institutional income as well.

**Institutional allowances**  
For residents of institutional facilities like group homes,





PHOTO: ISTOCK

personal needs allowances may be their only source of income. Policies often claw back working income, and sometimes require residents to use up all their savings before becoming eligible for the allowances.

Measly allowance rates make it impossible for people with disabilities living in institutions to afford personal effects and maintain an adequate quality of life. The rate of monthly allowances for people with disabilities living in institutions is abysmal compared to the Market Basket Measure—Canada’s poverty line—which covers shelter, food, clothing, transport, and other necessities.

Although the rates vary from \$91 in Prince Edward Island to \$380 in Manitoba, none of them come anywhere close to being sufficient. Across the provinces, allowance rates don’t come anywhere close to the poverty line, even when you take out the food and shelter components.

Policy-makers justify the extremely low rates of support because food and shelter costs are paid directly to the institutions, so, supposedly, residents’ basic needs are met. This justification does not stand up to scrutiny—living conditions documented by residents in institutions describe overcrowding, cockroaches, bedbugs, and moldy food.

Residents are responsible for providing their own cell phone plans, clothing, internet, over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, recreation activities, hairdressing, menstrual products and other essential personal needs—all on \$380 a month, if you’re lucky enough to be eligible for Manitoba’s allowance.

Across Canada, governments continue to unjustly institutionalize people they label with intellectual disabilities. Disabled people should not be forced to live in congregate residential settings because social and health care services aren’t available in their communities. Institutionalization—with the isolation, lack of autonomy, and constant surveillance—can be a depriving experience for disabled people, which is

only furthered by the abject poverty of these social assistance schemes.

In the longer term, governments need to improve community supports so that people are not forced to live in institutions in the first place. But for institutionalized disabled people today, policy-makers need to address the inadequacy of monthly allowances. Personal needs allowances are typically the only income support that eligible residents receive, and they are supposed to use those paltry payments to pay for everything beyond basic food and shelter.

Policies that rely on the assumption that institutionalized people have their basic needs met by institutions are fundamentally flawed. Rates of monthly allowances for residents of group homes and long-term care facilities are woefully inadequate at addressing even the cost of basic comforts they are intended to cover.

Law-makers need to pay attention to the poverty of institutionalized people with disabilities in Canada and the inadequacy of existing income supports.

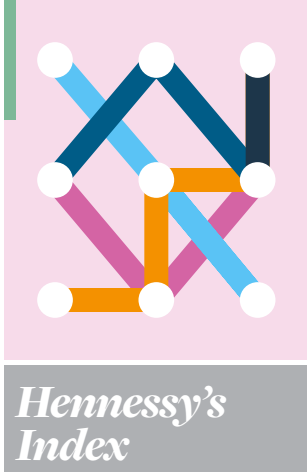
While provinces can, and should, raise the rates of institutional allowances, the federal government has a window of opportunity to address this issue. Federal investments in disability support that seek to address inadequate rates of income across the country should include people with disabilities living in institutional settings—including the recently enshrined Canada Disability Benefit (CDB), which is now undergoing regulation consultation.

In addition to complementing provincial assistance rates for people living in community, the federal income supplement should top off monthly allowances for institutionalized people to ensure that their income does not fall below the poverty line. To ensure that the support actually makes it into disabled people’s pockets, the new CDB should include protections against clawbacks from private insurance companies and punitive asset restrictions.

Setting federal supplements to a minimum rate of \$1,000/month would support people with disabilities who live in institutions to access the internet, basic cable, cellphones, transit, menstrual and reproductive health products, clothing, dietary supplements, and over-the-counter medication. Law-makers must not leave institutionalized people behind as governments work to address disability poverty. **M**

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Kendal David is a PhD student at Carleton University. She studies and writes about poverty and disability justice. Megan Linton is a disabled writer, researcher, PhD student and producer of the Invisible Institutions project.



## Well-being priorities for Gen Z

By Trish Hennessy

### 1997

The first year that Canadians who are considered Generation Z (Gen Z) were born. Gen Zers were born between 1997 and 2012.

### 26

The oldest Gen Zers are now 26. Gen Zers aged 18-26 are Canada's newest workforce participants.

### 2032

That's the year Gen Zers could outnumber Millennials and Baby Boomers in Canada. Millennials are expected to outnumber Baby Boomers in 2029.

### Income

Gen Zers are striving for fair pay and want to negotiate the best salary possible—they're seeking financial stability.

### Six

Gen Zers' six well-being priorities, according to a Point2 survey: Income, cost of living, house price to income ratio, share of Gen Z, perceived mental health, and number of non-profit organizations.

### Cost of living

Gen Zers want a decent cost of living so they can devote more money toward savings and passion projects.

### House price to income ratio

Being able to buy a home remains the middle-class dream in Canada, and that's no exception for Gen Zers. They want to know that homeownership is within their reach.

### Share of Gen Z

Gen Zers want to collaborate with like-minded people; they recognize how important relationships are for their mental health and well-being.

### Perceived mental health

Mental health is one of Gen Zers' core values: they want a work/life balance, fair pay, access to health care services, good air quality, walkable communities, and they want to have fun: they want entertainment venues nearby.

### They like it small

Gen Zers are community-oriented and people-focused. Volunteering and giving back are among their key values.

### Non-profit organizations

Eight of the top 10 cities competing for Gen Zers have a population that's less than 300,000 people.

### St. John's

St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador rakes in the most points for Gen Zers' ideal lifestyle.

### Québec

Québec ranks high for professional Gen Zers—eight cities in that province make it into the top 10 cities for Gen Zers.

### Regina

The Queen City on the Prairies ranks #10 for Gen Zers, beating out cities like Vancouver and Toronto—cities that might offer higher pay but don't meet Gen Zers' full value set (work/life balance).

“Very few of the cities topping the list have populations above 500,000 residents, which could point to Gen Z's preference for smaller, tighter-knit communities in less populous cities. As such, big cities could fall out of grace unless they step up in the areas that are non-negotiable for the youngest generation of workers that's slowly joining the market: Real work/life balance; fair pay; an emphasis on collaboration and community; respect for diversity at and outside of work; access to mental health services; and a dedication to solving environmental challenges.”

—*Andra Hopulele*,  
senior real estate writer at Point2



## Inside Trade

STUART TREW

# The case for re-negotiating NAFTA

It's been over six years since Donald Trump called time on the **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)**, forcing Mexico and Canada to negotiate a new pact to manage North American economic relations.

The resulting **Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA)**, a NAFTA clone with some modest improvements on labour rights and highly problematic new language on digital trade and regulations, came into force in July 2020.

I think there is a compelling case to renegotiate the treaty *yet again*—and a compelling opportunity to do so in CUSMA's approaching six-year review period. Far from representing a “gold standard” in international trade policy, as Trump's trade representative Robert Lighthizer claimed, the “New NAFTA” is a neoliberal relic unfit for handling today's shifting economic, social, and environmental priorities.

For example, CUSMA's digital trade chapter is a glaring anachronism in a world coming to terms with the threat of unregulated artificial intelligence in the hands of opportunistic, profit-seeking tech monopolies. The Biden administration's recent about-face on data localization and source code rules in trade deals make this chapter a clear target for progressive renewal ahead of the 2026 deadline.

As Erika Beauchesne and I wrote in the November/December issue of the *Monitor* (“Canada needs to tax tech giants”), CUSMA contains some of the most restrictive rules of any trade agreement with respect to regulating the activities of data-hoarding tech companies. Restrictive on governments, that is, with profound implications for anti-monopoly and pro-privacy measures.

CUSMA's ban on data localization policies puts our privacy at risk by allowing companies to move personal data across borders without limits, even to jurisdictions where privacy laws are weak. CUSMA undermines governments' ability to access company algorithms or source code that may be discriminatory, harmful, or involve intrusive surveillance practices. This is an important issue for workers within and outside the tech industry or the so-called gig economy.

“Technology companies and other employers are increasingly supervising, surveilling and even disciplining workers with automated artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithmic management systems that can shortchange workers' earnings, expose workers to unsafe workplace conditions, infringe on the right to form unions and exacerbate employment discrimination,” writes the AFL-CIO in a February 2023 paper on a worker-centred digital trade agenda.

The union called on the Biden administration to correct the “narrow, corporate approach” to digital trade and ecommerce in deals like CUSMA, “to allow for broader policy space to protect personal data, strengthen economic security, protect domestic jobs, and tackle the downsides of the digital transition on workers, consumers and society.”

Refreshingly, given the lobbying power of Silicon Valley-based tech giants, the Biden administration listened and has backtracked on several Trump-era digital trade positions in negotiations at the World Trade Organization and in U.S.-led Indo-Pacific trade talks. On October 25, the U.S. told countries negotiating a controversial plurilateral ecommerce initiative at the **World Trade Organization (WTO)** that it was withdrawing proposals on data flows, data localization, and source code.

“It is essential that our approach to digital trade policy is grounded in how it affects our people, both as workers and consumers,” said the U.S. rep, according to an unofficial transcript.

“We also must ensure that our policy takes into account these regulatory objectives, balancing the right to regulate in the public interest and the need to address anticompetitive behavior in the digital economy.”

As a result of this positive change of heart, CUSMA is now out of step with U.S. trade policy and public demands for responsible AI regulations and an end to big tech data hoarding. Canada and Mexico should willingly work with the U.S. to withdraw the treaty's harmful digital trade rules as part of the six-year CUSMA review.

While they're at it, they could further beef up the treaty's language on workers' rights (including migrant workers), the rights of Indigenous Peoples, human rights (including 2SLGBTQ+ rights), gender, and disability, as recommended in this year's Alternative Federal Budget.

Unfortunately, re-negotiation will not be Canada's impulse. Former diplomat Louise Blais, now an advisor with the Business Council of Canada, told *The Hill Times* in October that Canada should aim for “a very smooth rollover of the agreement as opposed to arriving with a list of things to change or improve.”

On the contrary. Canadian, Mexican, and U.S. civil society should come together with a plan for progressive CUSMA renewal or risk the agenda being taken over by big business or reactionary political forces in all three countries. **M**

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



KATHERINE SCOTT

# The rich “won” the pandemic

## Income inequality skyrocketed in 2021

**C**ANADA IS IN a new gilded age. Many Canadians know it already. When asked whether, under capitalism, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, Canadians say “yes” by a nearly two-to-one margin. Canadians support a wealth tax, and view inequality as a problem. But to what extent is it a problem today, if we look at the numbers?

New Statistics Canada figures show that it’s a big problem. In 2021, the top one per cent of tax filers saw a huge boost in their average total income—up 9.4 per cent to \$579,100. The gains were even larger among the top 0.1 per cent: up 17.4 per cent, to over \$2 million.

The more than 14 million folks in the bottom half weren’t so lucky. They saw their average total income decline by \$1,400 to \$21,100

between 2020 and 2021 as government benefit programs introduced during the pandemic wound down.

2021 proved to be a good year for the elite few who held onto their jobs and whose bank accounts were flush with pandemic savings. They were able to catch the run up in the stock market while they watched the value of their homes and cottages soar.

The top one per cent of tax filers reported a 12 per cent boost in salaries and wages, and the top 0.1 per cent reported double that (24.6 per cent). But the real prize came from investment income—the increase in dividend income and capital gains pushed this group of 300,000 people over the top, increasing their share of total income (including capital gains) from 11.5 per cent to 13.4 per cent in a single year.

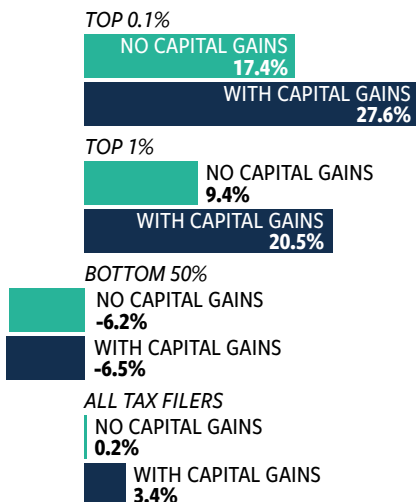
That’s right—one per cent of income earners collected 13.4 per cent of the total aggregate income in 2021. More than one out of every eight dollars went to just one per cent of tax filers.

In 2021, the top one per cent took home an average of \$811,800 after dividends and capital gains were tallied—a 40-year high. The previous peak was in 2007, when they made an average of \$712,000. The top 0.1 per cent took home \$3,230,100 after dividends and capital gains—and the top 0.01 per cent posted a stratospheric \$12,542,100 in total income—a number too high to include in the chart below.

People in the bottom half of the income distribution reported—unsurprisingly—very modest capital gains income—think of seniors with some savings tucked away in an RRSP. Their average total income

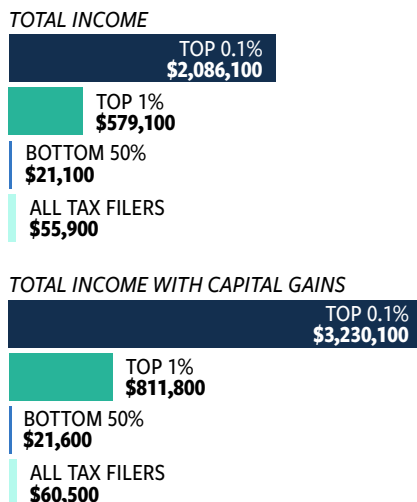
### Percentage change in average total income

By income group, 2020-21



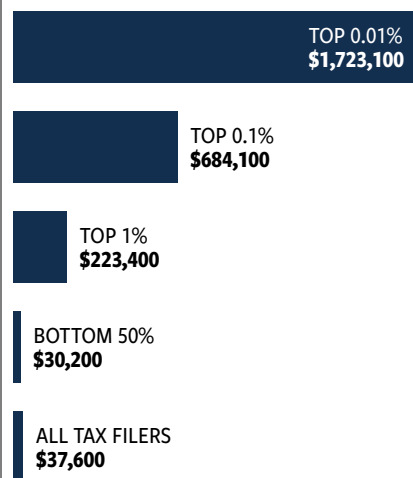
### Average income with and without capital gains

By income group, 2021



### Average capital gains

By income group, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0055-01, Longitudinal Administrative Databank

after capital gains was just \$21,600, a scant \$500 more than their pre-investment income.

Just to reiterate—on average, the top one per cent made an average of \$223,400 in capital gains alone in 2021. The top 0.1 per cent hoovered up over almost \$700,000 in capital gains. None of that money is from work—it’s simply the money that the rich collect because they already own things. It’s payment for being rich.

There were differences in income among the wealthy across the country. The average total income of the top one per cent varied from a high in Ontario and Alberta to a low in P.E.I. British Columbia takes top spot once capital gains are factored in and the Territories together sit at the bottom of this list.

Almost half of the tax filers in the top one per cent in 2021 were also in that bracket in 2017. This is a slightly lower share than the peak before the 2008-09 recession, which suggests slightly greater economic mobility today. A third of the top one per cent group in P.E.I. were also at the top in 2017 compared to half of Manitoba’s one percenters.

Statistics Canada’s high income report also provides insight into women’s glacial march to the top of the income ladder. In 2021, women accounted for a slightly larger share of the top one per cent (at 26.1 per cent) than in 2020, their share of total income overall edging up from 2.1 per cent to 2.3 per cent.

Yet wage disparities persist, even at the top. Over \$100,000 still separates men and women in the

top one per cent (\$500,800 versus \$606,800). The gap is even larger if we just look at average wages and salaries (\$256,900 vs \$403,700).

Fun fact: There are 76,400 women in the top one per cent, and they are less likely to be living in couple families or to rely on the labour market for their income compared to men. That is to say, they are more likely to be single, older women with sizable (inherited) financial assets.

So what does it all mean?

In 2021, Canada’s financial elites rode a wave of high stock markets and real estate values to sizable profits. They scooped up rentier checks, and they watched the value of their assets boom. There’s no question as to who “won” the pandemic—the rich made out like bandits. The question is what to do now, as the rich pull away from the rest of us.

The Daily Bread Food Bank recently released its annual profile of food insecurity and poverty in Toronto. There were over 2.5 million food bank visits between April 1, 2022 and March 31, 2023. That is a 51 per cent increase year-over-year, the highest annual increase ever reported.

Food banks are the tip of the iceberg, as more and more low- and modest-income households—who don’t have investment portfolios and real estate to fall back on—increasingly struggle with an out-of-control cost of living crisis. Whether it’s food, transportation, or housing, people—especially those from marginalized communities—are struggling to make the rent and put food on the table.

We can’t turn away from desperate need in our communities. Will governments turn away from their responsibility to make a more just and fair society? This moment is a bellwether for what’s to come. Let’s hope the feds are paying attention. **M**

Katherine Scott is a Senior Researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Follow her on Twitter @ScottKatherineJ.

## Gender gap continues, even at the top

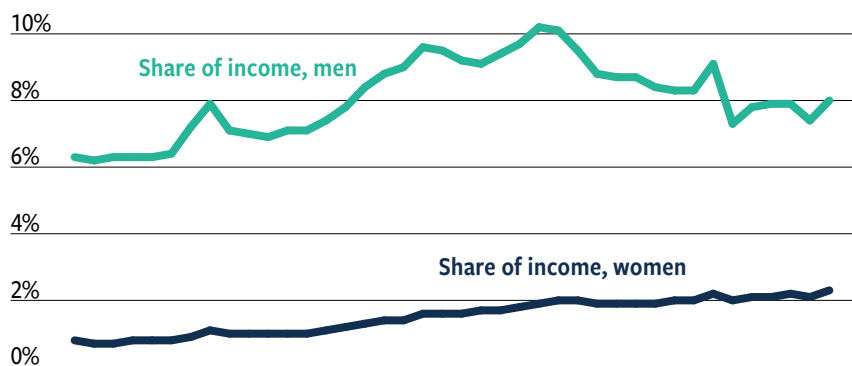
Male and female tax filers, 2021

	Males	Females	Gap
<b>Top 1%</b>			
Number of individuals	216,202	76,358	35.30%
Average total income	\$606,800	\$500,800	82.50%
Share of total income	8.00%	2.30%	28.80%
<b>Bottom 50%</b>			
Number of individuals	6,158,331	8,469,534	137.50%
Average total income	\$21,400	\$20,900	97.70%
Share of total income	8.10%	10.80%	133.30%

Source: Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0056-01, High income tax filers in Canada

## Women’s glacial march into the top income group

Share of total income of top 1 percenters, by gender, 1982-2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0056-01, High income tax filers in Canada



PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

## *Our Schools/Our Selves*

ERIKA SHAKER AND JON MILTON

# Anti-trans school panic is about controlling kids

ON SEPTEMBER 20, crowds in cities and towns across the country gathered to protest against schools' teaching children about the existence of 2SLGBTQ+ people.

If you ask the organizers—many of whom are deeply connected to far right and hate networks—they would say they have nothing against people with differing sexual orientations or gender identities,

they're just opposed to teaching it to children.

But then, what happens when a child develops their first crush—and it's on someone of the same gender? What happens when a kid starts to realize that they don't feel at home in the gender that they're in?

Every gay man, every trans woman, every non-binary person, every lesbian—every adult was a child once. Growing up means discovering

ourselves—coming to terms with our desires, with our identity, and making our own way. Kids need to be given the space to explore who they are, and what they want to become, without having adults—even loving ones—try to put them into a box they don't fit in. Kids want to be able to support their friends who are going through this same journey. Teaching kids about gender gives them the tools to do that.



The great Lebanese poet and artist Khalil Gibran, in his poem *On Children*, wrote

Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you  
cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

We fought for decades—and are still fighting—for quality public education for all kids, regardless of identity or family income. Schools need to be a place for children to build themselves what Gibran called the “house of tomorrow.” In addition to being an attack on queer youth, this is also an attack on public schools, and an attempt to take those tools and opportunities away from kids.

It isn't the first time that conspiracy theorists, religious extremists, and far right activists whipped up a public frenzy over made-up stories about public school teachers. In 1980s America, it was about teachers performing satanic rituals on kids—over the decade, they fabricated over 12,000 stories about “satanic ritual abuse” in schools and daycares. Not one was an actual case of “satanic ritual abuse.”

The panic continued to spread. Like a witch hunt, the mob of parents trying to “protect their children from satanic rituals” decided that teachers were out to get their children, and they were out for blood. They got teachers fired, took over school boards, and weakened public education.

Today, it isn't satan—it's trans kids. The same coalition of right-wing culture warriors is using a different scapegoat to target public education.

Many of the organizers and participants in the anti-trans rallies absolutely do want gender ideology taught to children—they just want it to be a very specific type of gender ideology. One in which only men and women can be attracted to each other, and each one stays within their traditional gender roles. One where “hands off our kids” means a health curriculum without concepts like consent or bodily autonomy.

Men decide, women nurture, and queers get back in the closet. That's the gender ideology these people want children to learn.

But here's the thing—we're not going back. Women fought long and hard on the unsteady and unfinished path to equality, and 2SLGBTQ+ people fought decades-long struggles to get to the point where we can be queer in public without fear or shame. We will not let the forces of hate snatch the progress we've made from under us. And we will defend ourselves from attack. **M**

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Erika Shaker is director of the CCPA National Office and editor of *Our Schools/Our Selves*. Jon Milton is a senior communications specialist at the CCPA National Office. This article was originally published by Troy Media.

RICARDO TRANJAN

## Beware of rent control bullying

**R**ENTS CONTINUE TO skyrocket across Canada. From September 2022 to August 2023, average rents for vacant units went up by 11 per cent, while average wages increased by 3.3 per cent.

A 2023 CCPA report showed that in 93 per cent of the country's neighbourhoods, a full-time minimum wage worker cannot afford a one-bedroom unit without spending more than the recommended 30 per cent of their total income on housing. And since rent eats first, food bank usage reached record highs in 2023.

In this context, it is bewildering that we don't have a serious debate about rent controls in this country.

Currently, only five provinces have some form of rent control. In all of them, rent regulation is incomplete, under attack, or both. Stronger tenant protections would have a more immediate and direct impact on affordability than the housing measures politicians are touting. It would also help to tame inflation.

Yet, in most housing policy spaces, mentions of rent controls inevitably activate bullies who try to shut everyone up with categorical claims about the negative impacts of these policies.

It's all hot air. Ideological arguments. And out-of-date evidence.

The #1 charge against rent controls is that they kill supply. In rent-controlled markets, investors have fewer incentives to build and rent, the argument goes, and fewer units in the market will ultimately hurt tenants, the very people rent control aims to protect.

The main problem with this argument is that it is not true.

In 2020, the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)—the government body with the best housing data—carefully analyzed the impact of rental controls on construction, which researchers call “rent starts.” The study compared cities with and without rent controls. Since the CMHC has a wealth of data, it used a time series going all the way back to 1971—that's almost 50 years of data.

The main finding of this study: “There was no significant evidence that rental starts were lower in rent control markets than in no rent control markets.”

The next time someone screams at you, “Rent controls will kill supply, you dummy,” you should ask them for 50 years’ worth of evidence.

The CMHC study also found that “new unit exemption regimes lead to an increase in rental price.” In other words, if rent controls apply only to units built until a particular year, but not to more recently built units, average rents are higher.

Ontario is a case in point.

The provincial government abolished rent controls in units built after 2018. On top of not having controls on vacant units—which drives average rents up and creates a financial incentive for evictions—the province now doesn’t have controls on new builds. Tenants in these units are at the mercy of landlords come the lease renewal date.

The CMCH study also found that rents are more responsive to supply and demand changes in markets without rent controls. In practice, this means landlords can more quickly increase rents if there is a lot of demand.

But data alone will not silence cheap shots against rent controls.

For Columbia University professor Tom Slater, the widespread view that rent controls anywhere are always harmful “offers a fascinating yet disturbing example of the triumph of ideology and propaganda over evidence.”

Many of today’s economists were trained to believe price controls of any kind are always bad. The reason is that they distort markets. And, to them, markets are always good—a magical force that balances the good

and the bad. Even without ever studying housing, these economists will strongly oppose rent controls.

Blind faith in “the market” is an ideology disguised as a science.

In turn, the real estate industry hates rent controls out of self-interest. Landlords want to be able to hike prices when opportunities present themselves, like grocers are doing these days.

The more serious arguments against rent controls draw from old studies.

During and after World War II, governments in Canada and elsewhere imposed rent freezes for long periods. In many instances, these rent freezes negatively impacted the quality and quantity of rental units.

Today’s rent controls are different, especially in allowing rents to keep up with inflation. Recent studies present mixed results and, in some cases, don’t find any adverse effects.

There is surely more than one way to design rent controls to balance benefits and risks, and a thoughtful debate is long due.

But people who categorically oppose all rent control policies are ideologically blinded, deeply invested, and full of hot air. **M**

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Ricardo Tranjan is a senior researcher with the CCPA Ontario office and author of *The Tenant Class*.



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PHOTO: ISTOCK

ZSOFIA MENDLY-ZAMBO

## Understanding the farmer mental health crisis

**C**ANADIAN FARMERS ARE experiencing a mental health crisis. Survey data of Canadian farmers revealed that 57 per cent met the criteria for anxiety, 34 per cent for depression and 45 per cent experienced high levels of stress—rates far in excess of those experienced by the general public.

Efforts aimed at improving mental health among farmers are predominantly focused on increasing access to mental health care, providing education and resources, as well as campaigns to reducing stigma.

But what if the problem is more than stigma, or bigger than a lack of access to care?

What if farming is becoming a losing proposition because of structural issues and bad policy?

Key to understanding farmers' mental health is to understand

that in the agricultural sector, as in the larger economy, inequality is increasing. While some larger farms thrive, small- and medium-sized farms are facing unprecedented challenges, including economic uncertainty, exorbitant land prices and record-high levels of debt.

Coupled with the growing severity of the climate crisis, many farmers find themselves in precarious situations, forcing many to leave the industry, while those who stay endure heightened stress, anxiety, and depression.

Farming is a unique profession, characterized by long hours, isolation, and the unpredictability of both weather and commodities prices.

Farmers face various challenges that can negatively impact their mental health, including high levels of debt, financial pressures, overwork, and a lack of essential services like mental health support.

Financial difficulties and economic uncertainty, however, stand out as primary contributors to stress and anxiety in the farming population, particularly in Canada. Although this is well acknowledged in the literature and by the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, the causes of economic precarity are often left out of the discussion of farmer mental health. These causes include unfettered corporate concentration in the food sector, consolidation and financialization of farmland, trade liberalization and the climate crisis.

### **Corporate concentration is putting the squeeze on farmers**

The agri-food system is dominated by a decreasing number of transnational firms positioned at various points in the production and supply chain, including



wholesaling, retailing, food production, farm inputs, and transportation.

Growing corporate concentration in the food system is driving what's called the "cost-price squeeze," where the price of the inputs that farmers need to buy (including fuel, fertilizer, chemicals, veterinary drugs and machinery) has risen faster than the price of the agricultural products that farmers sell, with the prices of their products often falling rather than rising.

Over the past 50 years, the price of farm inputs has increased nearly twice as fast as farm product prices, resulting in diminishing margins and farm products that are often sold below the cost of production. These falling margins are, in part, what pushes farmers to expand in order to stay viable. In turn, this can lead to increasing and sometimes unsustainable levels of debt, further increasing the financial precarity of farmers as well as their levels of anxiety.

Farmland is also subject to corporate and financial investment and speculation in a process known as financialization, driving the price of farmland above its agri-economic value and increasing both tenant farming and rental rates. Financialization reinforces energy-intensive conventional farming practices, exacerbating both climate change and farmer vulnerability in a vicious cycle of environmental degradation and economic precarity.

Increasing farm operation capacity through either renting or purchasing more land has driven significant growth in the average size of Canadian farms, which stood at 820 acres in 2016, compared to 463 acres in 1971. As farms expand, the number of small- and mid-sized farms decline, decreasing by 40.4 per cent between 1981 and 2021.

This collapse is accelerated by an aging farm population as well as changes in technology, which have reduced labour requirements, contributing to the de-population of rural and farming communities.

Rural de-population is a significant contributor to poor mental health in the farming population. Rural de-population has had negative impacts on local economies as well, precipitating a loss in rural business and services, including the closure of schools, hospitals and transportation services.

As rural populations decline, so does the political voice of this population. Declining local economies, coupled with a sense of political marginalization and feelings of loneliness, contribute to social and regional isolation, which can drive right-wing populism.

Trade agreements have opened the floodgates for agricultural exports, exposing farmers to price volatility. Canada's agricultural policy prioritizes a focus on export markets in agriculture and this is facilitated by numerous trade agreements.

These trade agreements, however, have exposed farmers worldwide to price volatility, with little to no mechanisms to guard against it, such as state trading

boards (or marketing boards), production controls or trade restrictions.

This global competition for production of commodities has also put downward pressure on farm gate prices. Farmers have little choice but to absorb financial losses that occur as a result of fluctuating markets, which can have devastating and long-lasting impacts.

What protection farmers have from marketing boards is continuously being eroded. The Canadian Wheat Board was dismantled by the Harper government in 2011, leaving grain and oilseed farmers with little leverage over prices in their sales to a handful of multinational grain corporations.

Canada's supply managed sectors, especially dairy, are under continuous attack, including during the last round of negotiations of the **United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USCMA)**, which allowed more dairy exports into Canada which were zero tariff, to the detriment of dairy farmers in Canada.

Climate warming is another source of pressure: it is not evenly distributed across the world and Prairie regions in Canada are expected to warm twice as fast as the global average, potentially reaching a 6.4 degrees Celsius rise by the end of the 21st century. This would be devastating for farmers and would significantly reduce Canada's food production capacity.

Severe climate events can irrevocably reduce farmers' economic potential. The unpredictability of weather, including extreme weather, is noted as one of the top stressors faced by Canadian producers.

The mental health crisis among Canadian farmers is not solely a product of personal challenges, nor of stigma preventing farmers from seeking help. It is the result of larger structural problems and policy failures. Too often, financial and economic uncertainty, as well as extreme weather, are treated as just the 'facts of farming' and not as something created and worsened by bad policy and governments' policy inaction.

An in-depth discussion of these structural causes of poor farmer mental health is available in a new CCPA report produced in collaboration with the **National Farmers Union (NFU)**, titled *Field Notes: Looking upstream at the farmer mental health crisis in Canada*.

This research also identified six policy recommendations to address these challenges and restore the well-being of our farmers, which include implementing policies that enhance economic stability for farmers and farm workers, rebuild rural infrastructure, as well as continue to expand access to mental health care.

Ultimately, these recommendations focus on making farming a viable industry, not just for the large farms, but for every farmer across Canada. ●

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Zsofia Mendly-Zambo is a researcher and PhD Candidate in Health Policy and Equity at the school of Health Policy and Management at York University.

# YOUR CCPA

## Get to know **Véronique Sioufi**

OFFICE: B.C.

POSITION: **RESEARCHER & POLICY ANALYST, RACIAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC EQUITY**

YEARS WITH THE CCPA: <1

### **Tell us about your research focus and how you landed on it?**

The CCPA-BC created the Racial and Socio-economic Equity desk so there could be dedicated attention to structural racism in B.C. and the multiple forms of oppression that intersect with it, including across gender and class. The centre, of course, already does a lot of work that touches on these issues, but the aim of this desk is to more directly engage in ongoing struggles against white supremacy, colonialism and racial injustice. I was drawn to this role because of my own research background in labour geography, which is a critical approach to economics that centres workers; it looks at how workers shape the world around us and what hinders or enables them to shape it in their own best interest. It's a field that lends well to understanding the racist geographies of capitalism by examining the exploitation of land and labour together. Colonialism is alive and well and much of the precarity and trauma people are experiencing is a result of that.

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

I was raised by a labour rights activist, a carpenter, and an artist—so these were households steeped in working-class politics and also



in imaginings of a post-capitalist world. Although an immigrant family might typically lean towards gratitude and assimilation, my upbringing allowed me to take a much more critical perspective on the Canadian state. In the face of Palestinian erasure, it's become important to me to keep our family history alive—and I came to a better understanding of that struggle through the solidarities that exist between Palestinians and Indigenous Peoples here. "Land back" is not just a figure of speech to me.

### **What makes you proud of working at the CCPA?**

I had this unbelievably serendipitous moment shortly after finding out I was hired in this role. I happened to walk past a Status for All event just as the man on the mic cited the CCPA-BC's research (I swear I'm not making this up). I feel proud to work somewhere that can validate people's lived experience in that way and support their calls for change.

### **When you're not at work, what do you do to decompress?**

Vancouver must be one of the most beautiful cities in the world—the parks, the ocean, and the spectacular mountains! And I thoroughly enjoy the view of those mountains from the comfort of my balcony, with some wine and cheese.

### **What are you reading these days?**

A colleague and I just went to a reading by author Saeed Teebi from his book *Her First Palestinian*. It's a collection of short stories with characters who happen to be Palestinian immigrants to Canada. I got myself a signed copy and I'm loving going through a completely different diasporic experience every night.

### **What gives you hope right now?**

The "hot labour summer" sure was exciting to see. I used to be a teaching assistant and sessional instructor for the Labour Studies program at Simon Fraser University. I remember going over a very bleak history of events in those classes. It felt really good when the course of history shifted and I could finally say worker solidarity was on the rise. I also noticed a shift in the students over that time. It used to take effort to get folks to see themselves as part of the working class but I found I suddenly had a lot less explaining to do. Now I see former students on the picket lines!

THE CCPA'S WORK IS POWERED BY PEOPLE LIKE YOU

# Meet Allan Chris Hansen

Edmonton, Alberta, monthly donor and has included a gift in his will

## What makes the CCPA special and why do you donate to it— including the future legacy gift you've arranged?

In the mid-1960s I was a teenager growing up in rural Alberta and recall the battle of Tommy Douglas to enact universal medical care for all Canadians. Since that time, I have observed too many issues that have been remarkably slow in becoming legislated to protect Canadians. Overwhelmingly, people pay little attention to the importance of the issue and just endorse what the corporate press convinces them to be the truth. I heard about the CCPA and its magazine, the *Monitor*. On reviewing the CCPA's objectives, I was convinced that if you want people to see their politics from a progressive point of view, or what is in their interests, they must first understand that the corporate media is not speaking for them. I thus began supporting the CCPA.

After growing up in third world conditions in rural Alberta, then struggling to pay a mortgage off and provide for five people while the precarious construction industry was at a low ebb in Alberta, a boom occurred. I had the fortune to have somewhat of a windfall, which endured to a time when it mattered little to me. I was impeded by my wish to spend it on travel first by requiring hip surgery, then three years of COVID-19, followed by other health issues, thanks to the environment I grew up in. My ability to travel is waning so I thought I



may as well put that windfall where it will do some good so I have included a legacy donation to the CCPA in my will.

## What are you reading and what are your inspiration and activities?

Since I have become unable to travel, thanks to health issues, I do spend efforts in keeping up with international, Canadian and local news. I am of the opinion that the progressive forces of the planet are beginning to ramp up more quickly year after year and a seismic shift appears in the offing. I find this encouraging. What I read in the *Monitor* virtually endorses my previous statement. Each January, even the corporate media report the CCPA's finding as to what portion of the first work day of the year that it took the top CEOs to earn an average workers pay in Canada, it brings a smile to my face. It confirms that I am supporting a

worthwhile press that is special. It tells why we have inequality that is on the rise or, as Marx called it, the gradual and inevitable impoverishment of the working class. I initially saw the CCPA to be a counter to the corporate press and it has gained even more of my confidence over the past 18 years that I have supported it.

## Who inspires you?

It is difficult to pick one individual that inspires me now but not so difficult to choose a group of persons that I find inspiring. The group that I choose is the Palestinian leaders who have initiated this massive battle to bring freedom and justice to the Palestinian people. This is an action to liberate Palestinians from the yoke that they have endured around their collective necks since 1915, thanks to the British and American support of Israeli colonialism—far too long!

## What one issue must government prioritize today to make people's lives better?

I find so many reasons to appreciate. In looking to the future, I would hope that Canada would develop a policy of peace and dialogue, renouncing support for the overthrow of democratic and progressive people's governments, reducing arms expenditures and using those monies to address people's needs. Government of Canada: ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. **M**

A legacy gift is a charitable donation that you arrange now that will benefit the CCPA in the future. Making a gift to the CCPA in your will is not just for the wealthy or the elderly. And a legacy gift makes a special impact—it is often the largest gift that anyone can give. To ask about how you can leave a legacy gift to the CCPA, or to let us know you have already arranged it, please call or write Katie Loftus, Development Officer (National Office), at 613-563-1341 ext. 318 (toll free: 1-844-563-1341) or [katie@policyalternatives.ca](mailto:katie@policyalternatives.ca).



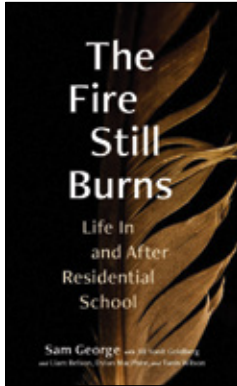
CCPA

CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
CENTRE CANADIEN  
de POLITIQUES ALTERNATIVES



E.R. ZAREVICH

# A memoir with an intention to scorch, and it does



## THE FIRE STILL BURNS: LIFE IN AND AFTER RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SAM GEORGE

Purich Books, May 31, 2023

THE NAME ON the cover of the book is Sam George, but not even five pages in, readers are made aware that it isn't quite correct. It's not his birth name. "My Ta'ah (grandmother) told me, 'Your name is Tseatsultux,' and she made me repeat it about four or five times to remember it."

It's a curious state of affairs, especially in an age of supposed Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, but in May 2023, Purich Books brought out *The Fire Still Burns: Life in and After Residential School* under the First Nations' author's English name. Perhaps it's to prove a point. The author is unbuttoning his shirt and showing readers, for their inspection, exactly where and how he's been scorched. He wears his burn not proudly, but defiantly, like a badge.

A team of scribes brought this work to materialization: Jill Yonit Goldberg, Vancouver's Langara College's literature professor, and her capable students Liam Belson, Dylan MacPhee, and Tanis Wilson. But while George, now a respected Elder of the Squamish community in

North Vancouver, dictated and they transcribed and edited, there are no attempts to override George's voice or manipulate his story. When he says he can't remember something, he says so. His colleagues, respecting his agency, don't invent or substitute details to fill in the gaps.

George's voice as a storyteller in *The Fire Still Burns* is to the point, astutely honest, and without unnecessary frills. As a storyteller, a memoirist, a whistleblower, and an archivist of his own people, he is not looking for readers to romanticize any aspect of his life, especially the horrors he experienced as a "student"—the loosest possible use of the word—at St. Paul's Indian Residential School (which, terrifyingly, opened in 1899 and didn't close until 1958, a nightmare that lasted 59 years). Readers not prepared to grapple with the harsh truth and would prefer a more saturated version of Canadian history should probably turn to more censored, outdated history books instead.

George does charm the readers in the first two chapters with accounts of his peaceful childhood on the Eslhá7an (Mission) reserve, where his people lived simply off the land, content amongst themselves, and harming no one. But as anyone with even the slightest knowledge of Canadian's truly murky past knows, that peace is short-lived, like the flickering flame of a candle. The real, devastating fire is coming.

The narrative quickly takes an ominous turn when, as a young boy, George breaks his arm and the doctors at a white-only hospital refuse to treat him; a brutal introduction into systematic racism and colonialism, and only the first of many similar traumas. George is a

vulnerable seven-year-old when his reluctant, helpless father (who'd suffered the same fate and is obliged by the law to inflict it on his own children) drops him and his siblings off at school to stay. There, not even 20 minutes in, their heads are shaved and the nuns in charge spray them down with pesticide. This is the start of their "education."

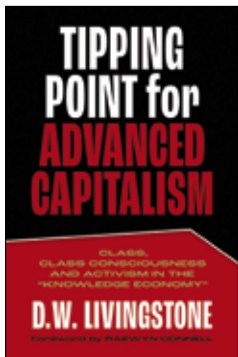
The children are forced to abandon their own language and memorize Latin prayers, but these are the words they really learn in their years spent at St. Paul's: deprivation, regimentation, injustice, and cruelty. And according to George, his own indoctrination did little except teach him the art of survival:

"Whenever people ask me what I learned at that school, my answer remains the same: I learned how to steal, I learned how to lie, I learned how to mistrust, and I learned how to hate. I stole because I was hungry. I lied because I knew that the truth didn't matter. I learned how to mistrust because none of them at the school trusted me. And I hated because it was all I could do."

This book stands overall as a staunch reminder to all of Canada that its work making amends to its Indigenous Peoples is far from over. The residential schools are closed, but the graves of the children who, unlike George, did not emerge from this ordeal as adults to share their stories, are still being excavated. The fire has burned, the fire is still burning, and no one can get away with sweeping the ashes under a rug anymore. **M**

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

# Reconnecting class and capitalism's future



**TIPPING POINT FOR ADVANCED CAPITALISM: CLASS, CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND ACTIVISM IN THE “KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY”**  
D.W. LIVINGSTONE

Fernwood Publishing, September 2023

THIS IS ABOUT a book that asks large questions—and answers them. *Tipping Point for Advanced Capitalism: Class, Class Consciousness and Activism in the “Knowledge Economy”* by D.W. Livingstone has just been published by Fernwood (see <https://fernwoodpublishing.ca/book/tipping-point-for-advanced-capitalism>).

The aim of the book and the related website is to bring class back into our thinking about capitalism, and alternatives to capitalism. Today, most commentators—and most researchers—pay little attention to class grounded in paid work relations. In grappling with real concerns about inequality and injustice, they make plenty of allusions to *differences* of income, of status, or of a hybrid ‘SES’, along with race and gender. But, since the 1980s,

there has been much less attention to class *relations* between owners, managers and workers. And there has been very little consideration of these groups’ different roles in producing a tipping point between capitalist oblivion and sustainable alternatives.

Class is no easy matter to deal with. There is a huge, confused and inconclusive debate about the subject. Class sometimes disappears from the public agenda, then is re-discovered. Some voices claim that class no longer exists, some say that it takes entirely new forms, and others declare that we already know all that needs to be known. Livingstone takes a stance against this confusion and also against dogmatism. He draws from Marx’s work some basic ideas about how capitalist economies work and how we might examine them—and then studies the evidence.

*Tipping Point* is full of the evidence. Since the 1980s, Livingstone and his colleagues have conducted a unique series of surveys of the Canadian labour force and of corporate executives. This is a remarkable information resource, a rich library of data from carefully designed survey research (see <https://borealisdata.ca/dataverse/CanadaWorkLearningSurveys1998-2016>). The information concerns occupations, education, labour forces, social consciousness, change over time and the character of social divisions. *Tipping Point for Advanced Capitalism* puts this resource to work, giving us many of the highlights—it is really worth reading the detailed tables in this book—and pinning the argument constantly to the relevant data.

The book works step by step through the big issues about class. It proposes a way of mapping class structure, particularly focused on employment class. It has much to say about the different forms of labour we now see in and around a complex capitalist economy. But it isn’t simply economic. The argument moves on to class

consciousness in its different forms and the social contours of attitudes to class-linked issues, such as poverty, profit and climate change.

Livingstone is well aware that class structures are not static. Social change has long been a theme of his research, on the steel industry, on schools and on occupations. *Tipping Point* tackles questions of class dynamics, the directions of change and the reasons for change. Here it confronts questions about the growth of middle-class identification, the growth of the knowledge economy, the decline of the industrial workforce and the paradoxical degradation of conditions among highly educated workers. On these issues Livingstone has distinctive and carefully argued views, which I find entirely convincing.

For a book so packed with data, *Tipping Point* is unusually explicit about its logic. Livingstone carefully sets out the conditions for each step in his analysis and the background assumptions for the analysis as a whole. He makes a thoughtful

The corporate rich are statistically almost invisible in conventional surveys, but they are enormously consequential in their power. Livingstone reveals the depth of their obsession with excessive profits.

critique of the relevant concepts. His account of what is meant by the “knowledge economy” is particularly helpful; so is his demolition of the attractive but misleading idea of a “professional/managerial class.”

But as well as patient argument, the book is rich in insights, unexpected conclusions and striking phrases. There’s a nice image of lingering “trace elements” in the politics of class; there’s a blunt recognition that a capitalist economy centres on “profits stolen from wages.” I’m impressed by the book’s account of the underemployed capacities of an increasingly well-educated workforce. It makes one weep to see all the potential in knowledge and creativity that is simply wasted by an advanced capitalist economy!

Livingstone doesn’t use the term “ruling class” for corporate capitalists, but I do, and I’ve learned a lot about them from this book. The corporate rich are statistically almost invisible in conventional surveys, but they are enormously consequential in their power. *Tipping Point* reveals the depth of their obsession with excessive profits—the main force driving the world’s ecosystem to destruction of tolerable life. Livingstone brings together key pieces of information about the group that holds this power, especially its ideological coherence despite its economic divisions. The book

raises exciting questions about the connections between the owners of corporate capital and key support groups, showing how those connections might be fraying.

It is easy to feel despondent when thinking about the ruthlessness of power, the deepening environmental crisis, rising inequalities of income and wealth, the persistence of violence and the degradation of living conditions for so many of our people. Yet *Tipping Point* is not a pessimistic book. The title itself calls up the idea that social change does happen and can be catalyzed by activism. So the final section addresses the possibilities that emerge from the situation that the book has revealed.

Some important news is in the data. *Tipping Point* shows that even in rich capitalist countries, capitalist hegemony is far from total. Oppositional ideas are quite widespread across major groups, including those who mostly identify as middle class. Belief in the unrestrained pursuit of profit has been falling, while concern about climate change has been rising. What Livingstone calls revolutionary class consciousness is not widespread in the population as a whole, but is certainly present among the most exploited. Compared with the corporate elite, there are actually more class-conscious workers fighting for economic democracy and livable futures.

There are, then, social bases for system change, more extensive than usually thought. Livingstone adds to this information his reflections on the direction of change that is now possible. The ingredients for economic democracy are known; many examples of the cooperative production of goods and services are already here. System change is by no means a plunge into darkness.

*Tipping Point for Advanced Capitalism* is an important book, not just for empirical social science but also for social movements. It provides a mass of new information and ideas about key issues in class analysis. It offers new perspectives on large-scale social and economic change and the forces that might produce change. It recognizes that we are living in distinctive times, which demand new thinking. It sees the self-destructive dynamic in our present social and economic order. And it is, at base, optimistic, showing real potential for fundamental change. We are not trapped in the current swamp—there are ways of digging ourselves out. If we have the courage to try. **M**

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Raewyn Connell is professor emerita at the University of Sydney, a life member of the National Tertiary Education Union in Australia, author of *The Good University and Southern Theory*. This essay is adapted from her foreword to *Tipping Point*.

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## Federal anti-scab legislation is a big win for workers

By Jon Milton





PHOTO: CANADIAN PRESS

JIMMY THUNDER

# Standing on the shoulders of those who came before us

## INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE AND DEVELOPMENT IN WINNIPEG: 1960-2000

SHAUNA MACKINNON AND KATHY MALLET, EDS.

ARP Books, 2023

THE ONE PHRASE that stands out the most to me in this book is Vern Morrisette explaining that we are ‘standing on the shoulders of those who came before us.’ I’ve read this book through the lens of a member of a generation that has grown up in a very different world than the one described in the 1950s.

When I first arrived in Winnipeg in the early 2000s, my family lived near R. B. Russel and that is where I went to high school. I attended my brother-in-law’s graduation at Children of the Earth High School. I helped pick up youth for Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre programming at Niji Makwa. I went to the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development for help with my resume to find my first job after high school. I’ve made trips to the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre of Winnipeg to use the fax machine to send my application for post-secondary support to my tribal council in Ontario.

In all of this I had never questioned why or how these institutions existed—it just made sense that they did because they were necessary.

As I reflect on the leaders who shaped Winnipeg into what it is today, I imagine younger versions of Ovide Mercredi, Tom Jackson, and others who, at the time, were pioneers in addressing the overt systemic racism that existed in the day, which perpetuated the social problems our people were coming to Winnipeg in hopes of solving.

I imagine a generation of leaders meeting at Club 376 and sharing dreams about what a better

tomorrow could be and not only seeing history made with position papers such as *Wahbung: Our Tomorrows* by the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, but to see concrete action toward changing policies and practices to make life better for the Indigenous Peoples of Winnipeg.

That generation saw Indigenous youth in Winnipeg who were closely aligned with the U.S.-based American Indian Movement. It saw leaders who took control of the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre by ensuring that the board included all Indigenous members.

By today's standards it seems strange to even question that Indigenous Peoples should have ownership and leadership of projects and initiatives aimed to support our communities. They fought to change Winnipeg's standards and the impacts are felt today.

This generation saw leaders who did not back down when faced with challenges to open a high school for Indigenous young people. They organized the Thunder Eagle Society to establish the Children of the Earth High School and Niji Makwa. When faced with every problem, they tenaciously found a solution to make their visions a reality.

These leaders were smart and competent, and they carried this with confidence, despite the racist attitudes of the non-Indigenous community they lived among.

Delia Opekokew defended the family and estate of Dudley George during the Ipperwash crisis and went on to receive the Order of Canada.

Ovide Mercredi became the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations and was involved in the Oka crisis.

Marion Meadmore became Canada's first First Nations lawyer.

Kathy Mallett received the Order of Manitoba.

The list goes on. These are trailblazers that must be taught about and celebrated by the next generation.

As the director of economic development for Norway House Cree Nation, I appreciate how *Indigenous Resistance and Development in Winnipeg: 1960-2000* defines community economic development (CED) and illustrates an Indigenous approach to building the economy.

Economic development is “the policies and practices that improve social and economic life.”

I have worked with Kathy Mallett and John Loxley on a research project called *Indigenizing the Cooperative Model*. In this report, Mark Intertas and I heavily referenced the CED principles in use by Neechi Commons.

It was interesting to see how the voices of community members shaped these principles that have become so foundational. The approaches informed by convergence theory seem self-evident today, but these principles are gifts from those who have done the work and the research ahead of us.

It is my hope that every member of this new generation would read this book and learn about these heroes and ask: “What will my generation be remembered for?” “What legacy do I want to leave behind?”

As our first First Nation premier said during his swearing-in ceremony in October 2023, “the economic horse pulls the social wagon.” The leaders before us saw community economic development as the means to improve the urban Indigenous community in Winnipeg and they have been successful.

The Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre was created to support and keep young families together. They started with an operating budget of \$1 million and today operate with \$22 million and serve over 30,000 families.

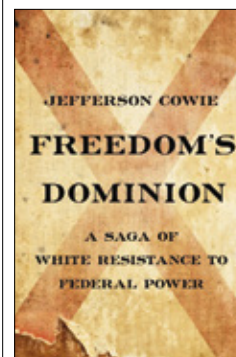
As Marion Meadmore explains, it started because they realized “somebody had to do something.”

I hope the current generation realizes it is that simple. **M**

Jimmy Thunder the director of economic development for Norway House Cree Nation.

JIM SILVER

## The freedom that isn't



**FREEDOM'S DOMINION:  
A SAGA OF WHITE RESISTANCE  
TO FEDERAL POWER**  
JEFFERSON COWIE

New York: Basic Books, 2022

**W**HO COULD BE opposed to freedom? Well, it depends upon who is being made free by the exercise of freedom, and who is not, because one person's freedom can be another's domination.

Jefferson Cowie's history of Barbour County in southern Alabama reveals a version of freedom that denies others' freedom. He begins with the painful removal of the Indigenous people, the Creeks, in the 1830s.

White settlers wanted Creek land. The Creeks sought federal government protection. To Southern whites, federal intervention denied their freedom—the freedom to remove the Creeks and seize their lands.

These were lands particularly suited to cotton. Once the Creeks were removed, African American slaves were marched in chains from the old east coast tobacco plantations to the Deep South to build the slave-based cotton economy.

Enormous profits were made. Profit-making required the brutalization of slaves.



White southerners wanted no interference with this profitable industry. Federal efforts to oppose slavery were interpreted as the oppression of white southerners because it denied their freedom. For example, an 1851 editorial in an Alabama newspaper, seemingly without a hint of irony, described white slave owners as “the most oppressed, insulted and plundered of all.”

When President Abraham Lincoln opposed the advance of slavery into the western states, it was seen by the South as “an act of tyranny.” Southerners fought for freedom from that tyranny—their freedom to oppress others.

After the Civil War, federal troops moved into the South to protect the rights of African Americans. With the beginnings of freedom in this brief reconstruction period, many were elected to office. African American children attended schools. The culture of the South began slowly to change.

But once federal troops were withdrawn, White Southerners fought back with violence—lynching, night riders, Jim Crow laws, “the white terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan”—to take back their white freedom.

Into the mid-twentieth century, any federal intervention in the South, whether to restrict lynching or segregation or to secure African Americans’ right to vote, for example, was seen as a “threat upon the sovereignty of a free

It is a ‘conqueror’s freedom,’ the freedom to dominate, the freedom to deny others’ freedom.

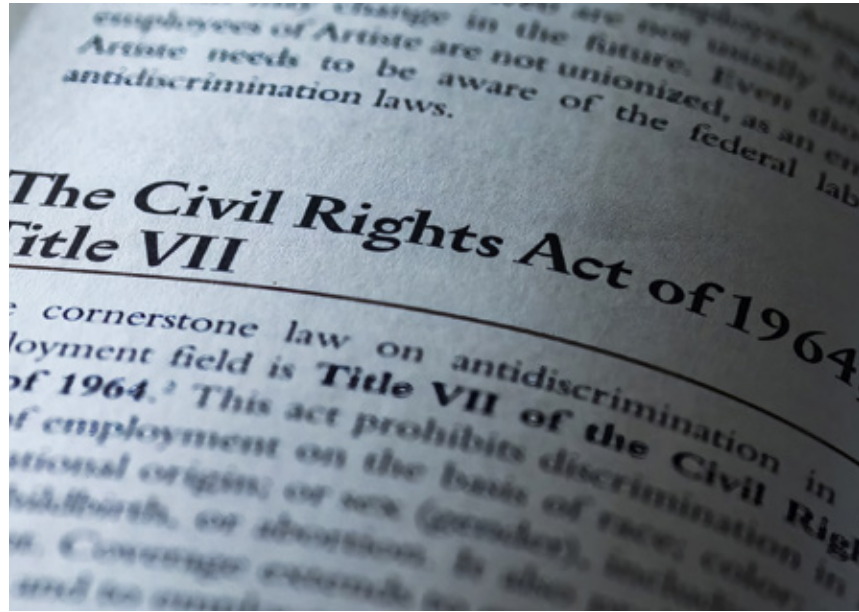


PHOTO: ISTOCK

people”—that is, a free white people, free to oppress.

George Wallace, who grew up in Alabama’s Barbour County, was a fighter for white freedom. His inaugural speech as Governor of Alabama is remembered for his line, “segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.” The bulk of the speech extolled the long struggle for white freedom from federal “tyranny.”

When the civil rights movement took off in the mid-1950s, it was met with racial violence: Bull Connor’s dogs and fire hoses in Birmingham, Alabama; the bombing of Birmingham’s 16th Street Baptist Church by Klansmen, killing four African American girls; beatings and assassinations too numerous to recount. White Southerners perpetrated these crimes in the name of freedom. George Wallace was “their champion.”

Wallace condemned the 1964 *Civil Rights Act* as “the most monstrous piece of legislation ever enacted... the assassin’s knife stuck in the back of liberty.” It forced the South, Wallace said, “back into bondage.” It was yet another attack upon white freedom.

His conservative populism, with its anti-Black and anti-government character, was wildly popular in the

South. But Wallace was politically astute enough to see that it was not confined to the South.

“The South was not an anomaly.”

On the contrary, the culture of the South “was the future of American politics,” Wallace believed. He worked to promote “the Southern way of freedom” across the U.S.

When he campaigned for the presidency in 1964, he got standing ovations in the North, even while Martin Luther King Jr., campaigning for fair housing in Chicago, was met with vicious hatred. This was evidence that “a new coalition could be built to exploit racial politics as a path to less government and more white freedom.”

This has been the path to the far right, white supremacist, anti-government movements that are so powerful in the USA today, and that are creeping across the border into Canada. Their freedom is the offspring of the white freedom of the Deep South. It is a “conqueror’s freedom,” the freedom to dominate, the freedom to deny others’ freedom.

This kind of freedom is, of course, no freedom at all. **M**

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Jim Silver is a professor emeritus at the University of Winnipeg and a research associate with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives’ Manitoba office.





## The good news page

ELAINE HUGHES

### Antigua and Barbuda's youth orchestra plays to inspire

Before the Antigua and Barbuda's Youth Symphony Orchestra was formed seven years ago, most of the young musicians had never picked up a classical instrument. Since then, various charitable bodies supplied instruments, tutors and mentors, as well as invaluable training and support. On October 15, 2023, they performed one of Dvorak's Slavonic Dances alongside the Royal Philharmonic at Duke's Hall in Marylebone. / *BBC News*, October 8, 2023

### Teachers win award for letting students do what they want

Two of St. John's Waterford Valley High teachers, Jill Rose and Margie Taylor, have won the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence for their program that provides Grade 11 and 12 students with an hour each day to work on something they find meaningful. Working with community mentors, one student created an app for new Canadians to learn Newfoundland and

Labrador sayings and find job opportunities. Another student designed an engine that runs on solar power and water. Yet another student worked on a novel and is designing its cover. Aside from the credit they receive for completing these projects and collaborating with other students, they can include them on their resumé as evidence of their skills and knowledge acquired outside of the regular school curriculum. / *CBC News*, October 17, 2023

### Large Californian corporations to disclose carbon emissions by 2026

Thanks to a recent ground-breaking law the state passed this month, large companies doing business in California will soon have to publicly disclose their annual greenhouse gas emissions. The first-of-its-kind law in the U.S. will impact over 5,000 corporations, both public and private, including Amazon, Apple, Chevron, and Walmart. / *USA TODAY*, October 27, 2023

### Falling solar costs offer hope for power-deprived Bangladesh

Falling solar power prices can help ease an energy crunch in Bangladesh, where an over-dependence on fossil fuels has drained foreign-exchange reserves and jeopardized electricity supplies. Thanks to declining technology prices, solar is set to become the cheapest source of power in the South Asian

nation by 2025. By the end of the decade, solar plus batteries will be crucial to displace fossil fuels and will be cheaper than new coal or gas power plants. / *Bloomberg*, October 1, 2023

### Bio-architects plot route to circular economy in Mexico

Giving birth to a new cutting-edge school of bioconstruction while aiming at reducing the ecological footprint of the cement-hungry construction sector, bio-architects in Mexico are reviving traditional clay adobe building techniques used since the 16th and 17th centuries in Mexico and the U.S. southwest. Bio-buildings are built from natural, easily recycled materials by locally trained workers, are long-lasting, energy-efficient, healthier, and often have better earthquake resistance. As they become part of a circular economy, they will benefit both humanity and nature. / *Mongabay*, October 31, 2023

### Can cooking and gardening at school inspire better nutrition?

Aimed at bringing fresh food to students' plates, farm-to-school events happened nationwide in the U.S. in October. Evaluations show that participation in FRESHFARM programs is associated with an increased preference for fruits and vegetables. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention points to

evidence that nutrition education may help students maintain a healthy weight and can also help students recognize the connection between food and emotional well-being. / *NPR.org*, October 22, 2023

### World shift to clean energy is unstoppable

A report by the International Energy Agency, the global energy watchdog, predicts renewables will provide half of the world's electricity by 2030. The report says the growth in clean energy and technologies is "impressive". In 2020, one in 25 cars sold was electric. Just three years later, this number has risen to one in five. / *BBC News*, October 24, 2023

### This Alberta First Nation fights climate change with trees

The Siksika First Nation in southern Alberta is bringing back an old innovation to fight climate change with their plans to plant about 40 km of multiple rows of trees on the perimeters of properties in their community. Shelterbelts serve many purposes, including being a natural wind barrier and capturing moisture in the soil. / *CBC News*, October 23, 2023



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