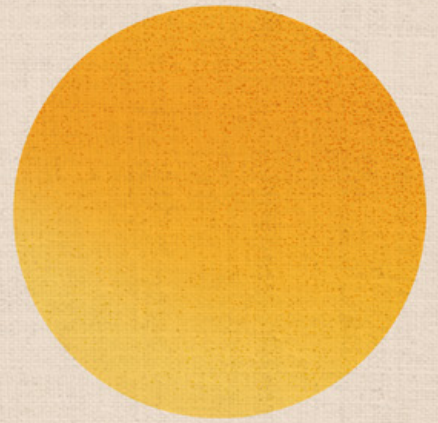


# MONITOR

Progressive news, views and ideas



## *The Changing Landscape of Public Health*



CCPA  
CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
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de POLITIQUES ALTERNATIVES

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2021

+  
**OUR  
SCHOOLS/  
OUR SELVES**  
WINTER/SPRING  
2021 ISSUE  
INSIDE



**CCPA**  
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## MONITOR

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

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# A **BROADER** VISION OF **PUBLIC** HEALTH

**What's missing, what's currently overlooked,  
and where major TLC is needed  
in how we care for one another in Canada.**

*Stories by Trish Hennessy & Lindsay McLaren,  
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**OUR SCHOOLS/  
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WINTER/SPRING 2021

# Trading places

**THIS ARTICLE IS** a little bit about Joe Biden, a little about me, and a last little bit about my successor as Senior Editor of the *Monitor*. A lot is changing, but then a lot will stay the same too. “It’s going to be beautiful,” as some one-term U.S. president used to say.

First up, Biden. The centrist Democrat was clear in last year’s presidential campaign that he intends to pick up where his former boss left off four years ago. This is evident in a number of ways. On policy, for example, a big majority of Americans, including large numbers of Republicans, strongly support a public “Medicare for All” option, as they did when the incrementalist Affordable Care Act passed (barely) in 2010. Biden is so far ignoring the polling data and heeding establishment preferences for Obamacare-plus reforms.

The machinery of government may also work much like it did in Obama’s first term. Even minor policy changes could be a slog for Biden if Republicans hold onto the Senate in two runoff votes involving GOP incumbents in Georgia this month.

But then you have to *want* to take on Wall Street and fossil capitalism, or else be pushed into it by popular mobilization. Like presidents before him, Obama brought Goldman Sachs into his inner governing circle, signalling allegiances. Biden has chosen veterans from BlackRock (the global wealth management firm Trudeau initially invited to help run the new Canada Infrastructure Bank) for top economic posts in the Treasury and his National Economic Council.

On climate and energy policy, Biden’s green economy stimulus plan is more ambitious than Obama’s, perhaps in recognition of the severity of the climate emergency (see Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood on page

5), or else the serious possibility of another jobless recovery. It’s likely both crises will loom large in Biden’s first term, colouring regulatory, foreign and trade policy as well. This is an area I will be paying close attention to as I shift roles at the CCPA.

The CCPA has a reputation for critical research about neoliberal globalization. For the past 20 years, that work has been co-ordinated by Scott Sinclair, whose expertise on ever-more-complicated trade and investment agreements is frequently sought out by Canadian and international unions, non-governmental organizations, and scholars. Scott has a knack for making trade law—and its impacts on governance—fascinating. I’ve watched him captivate a roomful of European social justice activists with a clause-by-clause lesson on CETA’s Cross-border Trade in Services chapter. Yes, that is as hard as it sounds. But as they say, somebody’s got to do it.

Starting February 1, Scott is retiring as Director of the CCPA’s Trade and Investment Research Project (see our interview with him and CCPA researcher Lynne Fernandez, who is also retiring, on page 14) and I am honoured to have been asked to pick up the slack. It has been a lot of fun working with Scott, Hadrian and TIRP over the past 10-plus years, first while I was a trade researcher and campaigner at the Council of Canadians and co-ordinator of the Trade Justice Network, and then through the many trade projects I have been involved with off the side of my *Monitor* desk. Some of that work found its way into these pages, such as op-eds and primers on the government’s inclusive trade agenda, collaborative reports with Scott and Hadrian on the Canada–EU, CPTPP and CUSMA deals, and Canada’s various trade-related regulatory

co-operation efforts. I’m excited to be taking on this research full time.

For *Monitor* readers who aren’t familiar with TIRP, the project brings together labour and feminist researchers, environmental organizations, Indigenous voices and progressive academics and activists to exchange ideas and research about what Stephen Gill of York University calls “disciplinary neoliberalism,” or the ways that market-governance is codified in trade and investment treaties to the exclusion of progressive alternatives. Most other Canadian think-tanks limit similar research to econometric assessments of Canadian trade and investment flows. While this work can uncover interesting features of Canada’s political economy, it generally has little to say about the important social and political implications of the neoliberal trade architecture and the alternatives to it.

Now, to our new *Monitor* editor. Around this time of year, the CCPA National Office is used to seeing Katie Raso in a gaudy sweater that reads: “All I want for Xmas is the means of production.” I am very excited the CCPA is handing her the gears at the *Monitor*. Many of you will have met Katie already, through her articles in the *Monitor*, blogs for *Behind the Numbers* or e-newsletters to CCPA supporters, her disability rights and health advocacy, or her intuitive videos and multimedia work on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. You’ll get to know her better in the issues and years to come.

Finally, it has been a great honour and duty to serve you as editor of the *Monitor*—an institution like no other in this country—for the past seven years. I will miss it and our correspondence, but hope we will talk again soon: [stuart@policyalternatives.ca](mailto:stuart@policyalternatives.ca). **M**



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## Empty tanks

In his book *Oil and World Politics*, and in his article in the July/Aug CCPA *Monitor* (“Canada, black swans and oil”), John Foster outlines the shenanigans that cause large variations in oil prices. Those who run Canadian oil companies surely know all this and recognize that they could be bankrupted at a moment’s notice. In short, they are gamblers with high stakes. We should not cry for them if they lose, nor should we subsidize them in any way.

Right now, there appears to be no market for the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion to fill. In 2011, the National Energy Board gave Trans Mountain priority for using the existing pipeline to ship 79,000 barrels per day to the Westridge Marine Terminal in Burnaby, so that new overseas markets could be developed. In these nine years the oil companies have not succeeded in developing any new markets and have not even used the 79,000 barrels per day since that priority was granted.

If anything, the market situation has gotten worse. The amount of oil sent to the tanker terminal can

be found on the Canada Energy Regulator website and shows a trend downwards since a peak in 2010. In the short term there was a gap of nearly six months from April 7 to September 23, with no tanker shipments to the U.S., the traditional market. Shipments to Asia have been sporadic, averaging less than two tankers per year, except for the two periods of extraordinary low prices in late 2018 and spring 2020, when a total of 18 tankers went to China.

In what appears to be an act of desperation in June, a small tanker went via the Panama Canal to Saint John, New Brunswick, in an effort to develop a market there. From the news reports it would appear that the Irving Oil company got the oil at a really good price. In short, if the pipeline is completed it may see little use. We are in great need of a business case for completing it. There may not be one.

**David Huntley,**  
Burnaby, BC

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## Bank of Canada could end homelessness

It was great to see a fine, knowledgeable article on MMT and Bank of Canada loan funding in the *Monitor* (“The fiscal deficit, modern monetary theory and progressive economic policy,” Nov/Dec 2020). A figure not mentioned, though, was the \$60 billion combined provincial and federal “odious” debt interest, which produces a guaranteed income for the private banks but nothing for the nation. But if this

sum was instead created by the Bank of Canada for a national building program, at \$200,000 each, we could build 300,000 houses a year (if my math is correct!) without additional taxation. The downside is the huge wailing from property owners seeing the existing value of their houses plummet, while the upside would be housing for those with no money and no hope, sleeping under tarps all across the country—a living disgrace for a modern nation.

**Russ Vinden,**  
Errington, BC

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## Give Joe a chance

In his article, “An anti-populist election for a populist moment” (Nov/Dec 2020), Luke Savage concludes that Joe Biden is “poorly equipped” to cure America’s ills. Perhaps he is, but unlikely politicians often rise to the occasion.

Consider, for example, the first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln. Honest Abe was a lawyer whose practice relied on defending the railroads, the arch-capitalist villains of the day. When he became president, he ended slavery.

Teddy Roosevelt was a scion of wealth, an imperialist with a fondness for war. As president, he broke up corporate monopolies, enabled labour unions, and created the United States Forest Service. His cousin FDR was also a member of the privileged class, a cautious man who preferred balanced budgets. During his long tenure as president, he spent

massively, keeping millions out of poverty and leaving an extraordinary legacy in agriculture and renewable energy.

And then there was the master political manipulator, Lyndon Baines Johnson, buddy of Texas oil barons and beneficiary of their largesse. In his term at the top, he busted Jim Crow, signed Medicare into law, and reduced his nation’s poverty by half.

What Joe Biden lacks in ideology relative to Bernie Sanders, he more than makes up with connections, a much more useful commodity in D.C.

Let’s give Joe a chance. He may surprise us all.

**Bill Longstaff,**  
Calgary, AB

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## Correction

On page 29 of the Nov/Dec issue, we mistitled Alfred McCoy’s book, which should have read *In the Shadows of the American Century*.

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*Send your letters to monitor@policyalternatives.ca.*



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## New from the CCPA

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### Long-term care standards needed

The COVID-19 pandemic has both highlighted the importance of federal leadership in health care and exposed a fragmented and underresourced long-term care system heavily reliant on for-profit delivery. In their new report for the CCPA, **A Higher Standard**, published in November, **Pat Armstrong** and **Marcy Cohen** set out founding principles for pan-Canadian continuing care services that recognize the need for a shared, equitable approach allowing for diversity in practices across jurisdictions. Their report also proposes national standards for long-term care homes and examines the need for a federal labour force strategy.

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### TMX: cash cow or money pit?

In a new report for the **CCPA BC, Corporate Mapping Project** and **Parkland Institute**, **J. David Hughes** thoroughly debunks the economic case for the Edmonton–Burnaby Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion project (TMX). Contrary to claims that getting Alberta heavy

oil to tidewater (for export to Asia) is essential for fetching higher prices on Canadian crude, Hughes demonstrates that oil shipped this way would take a \$4–\$6 per-barrel discount compared to oil destined for the U.S. market.

Arguments for TMX look even worse in the context of Canada’s commitment to net-zero emissions by 2050, says Hughes. That’s because the pipeline expansion will incent additional oil production when Canada already has no viable plan to meet its Paris Agreement greenhouse gas reduction targets.

“While the federal government claims that TMX will provide \$500 million per year to reduce emissions, the fact that sufficient alternative export capacity is being developed, that climate commitments are unreach-able without reducing production, and that TMX will not provide a windfall for Canadian producers, means that the \$12.6 billion the government plans to spend on the project would be far better spent directly on emissions reduction,” wrote Hughes in a November 21 *Vancouver Sun* column.

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### Big skies, bigger farms

Small and medium-sized family farms are often portrayed as the primary food production site on the Prairies. The reality is quite different. In **Concentration Matters**, a new report from **CCPA Saskatchewan**, researchers **Darrin Qualman**,

**Annette Aurélie Desmarais**, **André Magnan** and **Mengistu Wendimu** demonstrate that the ownership and control of food-producing land in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba is becoming more and more concentrated, with profound impacts for young farmers, food system security, climate change and democracy.

The authors find that 38% of Saskatchewan’s farmland is operated and controlled by just 8% of farms in the province. In Alberta, 6% of farms operate 40% of farmland, while in Manitoba 4% of farms operate and control 24% of the land. One result of this concentration is that “the number of young farmers in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba has declined by more than 70%,” says co-author Desmarais. “That is an astonishing amount within just one generation.” Rural economies, communities, businesses and services are also affected as there are fewer farm families to patronize local shops and services, while farmers lose their capacity to democratically influence governments and legislation as their voting numbers fall.

*Concentration Matters* proposes a series of measures to counter these inequality-producing market forces.

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### Coal for caribou

A **Corporate Mapping Project** report by researchers **Robyn Allan**, **Peter Bode**, **Rosemary Collard** and **Jessica**

**Dempsey**, published by **CCPA BC** in early December, finds that the promised economic benefits of coal mining in northeastern British Columbia (with respect to jobs, tax revenues and production, for example) have been wildly overstated, while pledges to protect vulnerable wildlife species have not been met. The report’s findings have implications for natural resource management across Canada.

The endangered Central Mountain caribou, a distinct population of woodland caribou, inhabit the same region that includes the three coal mines examined in the report, titled **Who Benefits from Caribou Decline?** While numerous provincial and federal legislative and regulatory instruments are supposed to protect the animals and their habitat, resource extraction, including coal mining, continues to threaten the caribou’s existence. The lives of these animals have been traded off against economic promises that are not being met.

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Visit [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca) for more reports, commentaries, blogs and educational resources from the CCPA’s national and provincial offices.

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood / Climate Emergency

# The Biden presidency and Canadian climate policy

U.S. PRESIDENT-ELECT Joe Biden is an unabashedly moderate politician. During the Democratic Party primaries last year, he often found himself on the defensive as more progressive candidates challenged his record and his priorities, including on climate change.

Yet after securing his party's nomination this spring, on the way to winning the presidential election, Biden brought many of those progressive critics on board—including Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez—to work on his climate platform. The result is Biden's "Clean Energy Revolution," a plan that shares many core tenets of a Green New Deal, including trillions of dollars in new public investment and a host of ambitious legislative and regulatory measures intended to reduce the production and consumption of climate-disrupting fossil fuels.

What does U.S. environmental policy mean for Canada? From clean energy to carbon pricing to environmental regulations, the shape—and chances of success—of current and future Canadian climate policies will depend, to a considerable degree, on what Biden does next. The reality is that where the U.S. leads, it is much easier for Canada to follow.

Biden's agenda faces a variety of political and economic obstacles, so there is no guarantee his climate plan will become reality. But if he is even partially successful, here are five ways that the "most ambitious climate platform of any presidential candidate in history" could change Canadian climate policy for the better.

**1. Biden's plan could energize Canada's international climate agenda.** Biden's plans to rejoin the Paris Agreement, convene a world climate summit, pursue a worldwide ban on fossil fuel subsidies, and seek an agreement to reduce international aviation and marine shipping emissions send an important message to the rest of the world: climate change is a serious problem, it can only be solved collectively, and we are prepared to do our part.

With the U.S. on side, Canada has the diplomatic space (should the government choose to fill it) to push for more ambitious global climate action at the United Nations, World Trade Organization, G7 and elsewhere.

**2. Biden's plan could accelerate the growth of Canada's clean economy.** Biden has pledged to achieve a net-zero-carbon U.S. economy by 2050. Doing so will require an unprecedented public investment—his initial commitment is \$1.7 trillion over 10 years—into the development and deployment of new clean technologies, including renewable energy generation and the electrification of transportation, industry and buildings.

In September's throne speech, the federal government also pledged to achieve a net-zero-carbon economy by 2050. The task is daunting but essential and will be made significantly easier while the U.S. pursues the same goal. We stand to benefit from cheaper and better low-carbon products, such as zero-emission vehicles, not to mention the massive potential market for Canadian designers and manufacturers of clean technologies.

**3. Biden's plan could curb Canadian fossil fuel infrastructure.** Achieving carbon neutrality requires more than the ramping up of new clean energy. It also requires the winding down of dirty fossil fuels. Although Biden has waffled on the specifics—his refusal to address natural gas fracking is a particular sore spot—the president-elect has proposed that the oil industry will be phased out in the coming decades.

Among other specific policies, such as banning offshore arctic drilling, Biden does not support the Keystone XL pipeline, which is intended to ship Canadian oil sands crude to U.S. refineries. Despite Canada's "unwavering" support for the project, there is little that can be done if construction is cancelled on the other side of the border.

A shift in U.S. energy policy could prove the final nail in the coffin for Canada's reeling, highly polluting oil industry. We needed to phase out oil and gas production anyway. U.S. climate action will make it easier.

**4. Biden's plan could strengthen Canada's carbon pricing system.** One of the biggest challenges in implementing a carbon pricing system is avoiding "carbon leakage" as heavy emitters relocate to jurisdictions with weaker environmental rules. Biden's pledge to "make domestic polluters bear the full cost of their carbon pollution" is good news for Canada's own pollution pricing system and for Canada's emissions-intensive and trade-exposed industries, such as steel production, that compete directly with U.S. firms.

The Democrats' platform also includes a border carbon adjustment that would effectively apply a carbon price to imported goods, further benefiting Canadian exporters that meet the U.S. standard. The political hurdles to a U.S. carbon pricing system are greater than for any other policy on this list. But even if Biden can't get this platform plank



## *Monitor* founding editor Ed Finn accepted into the Order of Canada

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**O**N NOVEMBER 27, we were ecstatic to hear that Ed Finn, our friend and long-time comrade at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, had been awarded the Order of Canada. It is a well-deserved honour, as we know *Monitor* readers will agree.

Ed's long and varied career was above all as a journalist and editor. He entered political life in Newfoundland during the 1950s as leader of the Newfoundland Democratic Party, the precursor to the NDP, whose political opponent was Liberal leader Joey Smallwood. During the landmark Newfoundland loggers strike in the late 1950s, as editor of the *Western Star* in Corner Brook, Ed Finn defied the owners' directive to stop including the union's perspective in its coverage and resigned along with his editorial team. Ed was later a journalist with the *Montreal Gazette*, and subsequently a columnist with the *Toronto Star*.

He worked alongside Tommy Douglas in the fight for medicare. Throughout his life he embraced Douglas's clarion call: "Courage, my friends, it is not too late to build a better world." Ed was a long-time union activist

who fought for labour rights and autonomy for Canadian unions. He was a staff member of several unions including the Canadian Labour Congress, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, and the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Transport and General Workers. He was the labour-designated board member of the Bank of Canada

And finally, during most of the time we have known Ed Finn, from 1994 to 2014, he was the founding editor of the *CCPA Monitor*, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' flagship monthly publication, and editor of CCPA publications generally. Just before he retired from the CCPA in 2014, he published his memoirs in *A Journalist's Life on the Left*. If you need any further convincing that Ed is eminently deserving of the Order of Canada award, it's in that book.

And so, on our behalf and that of all of the CCPA, we congratulate you, Ed. You deserve this—and we are all lucky to have been touched by your writing, your activism, and your lifelong commitment to social justice.

*Bruce Campbell, former Executive Director of the CCPA,  
and Erika Shaker, current Director of the National Office*



through the Senate in the near term, he will likely support efforts to implement and enhance pricing systems at the state level.

**5. Biden’s plan could enhance Canadian environmental regulations.** In contrast to carbon pricing and clean energy investment, which require the collaboration of other branches of government, Biden can quickly and unilaterally pursue more stringent environmental regulations through executive orders. He has planned to aggressively reverse hundreds of environmental rollbacks by the previous administration and introduce new fuel efficiency and energy efficiency standards.

The Canadian government and business lobbies embraced deregulation by the previous administration as an opportunity to speed up the harmonization of Canadian and U.S. regulations and standards in a number of areas, including food safety. Where Biden proposes higher standards and better protections, Canada would be wise to voluntarily meet them—in the interests of the environment, consumer and worker safety and fair trade.

### No more excuses

For the past four years, a recalcitrant U.S. administration provided cover for Canadian politicians to water down and delay climate policies. With Biden in the White House, the situation may be reversed. Even if the new president only achieves a portion of his ambitious climate agenda, Canada risks falling behind in the transition to a net-zero carbon economy. **M**

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood is a senior researcher on international trade and climate policy for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Follow Hadrian on Twitter @hadrianmk



PHOTO FROM INDUSTRIALL GLOBAL UNION

Stuart Trew / International

## CCPA joins global campaign to #MakeAmazonPay

AMAZON’S RISE FROM online bookseller to trillion-dollar global logistics, internet, merchandising and entertainment behemoth was fast and ferocious. Behind the same-day deliveries and trend-setting television series is a company committed to ruthlessly destroying productive economic activity and debasing workers. It is helped along in this pursuit by aggressive (but legal) tax avoidance practices and deferential tax preferences offered to Amazon by investment-courting governments. While everything the company does depends on publicly built infrastructure and publicly funded technology, in 2019, Amazon paid only US\$162 million in taxes in the U.S. on US\$13.3 billion in pre-tax income—up from zero taxes a couple of years earlier.

Amazon’s neglect of the needs of its pandemic-enlarged workforce was almost weekly news in 2020 and drew frequent outrage before that. “An ever-growing body of

evidence details the appalling abuse Amazon workers have long suffered, veering from the degrading (workers being forced to urinate in bottles in order to meet the targets imposed on them) to the lethal (emergency services are called to Amazon warehouses almost on a daily basis to attend to sometimes fatally exhausted workers),” reports Progressive International. “Understandably, workers have compared their position in [CEO Jeff] Bezos’s transnational empire to that of robots at best, and modern slaves at worst.”

On Black Friday (November 27), thousands of Amazon warehouse workers went on strike in Germany, while Amazon workers and their allies protested in Italy, the United States, Poland, Australia, Bangladesh, India, the United Kingdom, Brazil and elsewhere to demand corporate and legislative reforms to Make Amazon Pay its fair share—to workers and to society. That same day, international civil society organizations and labour

unions, including the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, launched a global campaign in support of these worker demands.

In joining the #MakeAmazonPay campaign (visit [makeamazonpay.com](http://makeamazonpay.com) for more information and to sign up), the CCPA has endorsed the following common demands for Amazon and its operations in Canada and around the world.

### 1. Improve the workplace by:

- raising workers' pay in all Amazon warehouses in line with the increasing wealth of the corporation, including hazard pay and premium pay for peak times;
- negotiating adequate break time to ensure safe work;
- suspending the harsh productivity and surveillance regime Amazon has used to squeeze workers, which violates their rights and jeopardizes their safety;
- extending paid sick leave to all Amazon workers, so that no worker has to choose between their health or their job;
- allowing workers in sites without workplace representation to independently elect health and safety commissions that can negotiate with Amazon to ensure a safe pace of work to avoid repeated injury; and
- disclosing the corporation's protocol for tracking and reporting COVID-19 cases, as well updated lists of cases of infection and death among all workers in Amazon warehouses, by facility.

### 2. Provide job security to all by:

- ending all forms of casual employment and bogus self-employment or contractor status;
- establishing decent, transparent procedures through which workers can voice concerns and criticisms without fear of punishment; and
- immediately reinstating all workers fired for speaking up about issues

concerning the health and safety of Amazon workers and customers, engaging in efforts to organize fellow workers, or due to selective enforcement of internal policies.

### 3. Respect workers' universal rights by:

- ending union busting, respecting workers' right to organize and unions' rights to promote workers' interests, and immediately stopping all forms of spying on workers and organizers;
- giving unions access to Amazon worksites to inform workers on the benefits of unionization, so that all workers can freely choose whether to join a union without any fear of retaliation;
- bargaining with unions wherever they are present in order to reach collective agreements on the conditions and terms of workers' employment at Amazon;
- ensuring workers' rights throughout Amazon's supply chains globally; and
- sharing power with workers, e.g., by welcoming worker representatives elected by their colleagues in different management levels, and by increasing options for workers to receive not only shares in the corporation but also voting rights, so that the company moves toward a model of democratic governance.

### 4. Operate sustainably by:

- committing to zero emissions by 2030;
- ending all custom Amazon Web Services contracts for fossil fuel companies to accelerate oil and gas extraction;
- ending Amazon's complicity in environmental racism, including by transitioning to electric vehicles first in communities most impacted by the corporation's pollution;
- stopping all sponsoring of climate change denial; and

- engaging workers, who have a right to know how their employer will operate sustainably, through a Just Transition process.

### 5. Pay back to society by:

- paying taxes in full in the countries where the real economic activity takes place; ending tax abuse through profit-shifting, loopholes and the use of tax havens; and providing full tax transparency;
- ending partnerships with police forces and immigration authorities that are institutionally racist;
- ceasing anti-competitive business practices that lead to monopolization;
- guaranteeing transparency over the privacy and use of consumers' data, including Alexa/Echo devices, streaming and cloud services;
- guaranteeing privacy and confidentiality of all Internet of Things applications and software produced by or sold via Amazon, including Alexa/Echo devices, streaming and cloud services; and
- stopping the development, deployment and sale of devices and software that expand mass surveillance practices, such as Amazon Ring and facial recognition/biometrics software such as Rekognition.

By Black Friday, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos's personal wealth had grown to US\$200 billion, while he deprives his workforce of proper sick pay and grinds them down, including now in Canada, with "time off task" personal monitoring systems. Bezos's unconscionable levels of wealth were socially produced and should be socially recaptured for the betterment of all. It's time to make Amazon pay. **M**

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Stuart Trew is Senior Editor of the *Monitor*. Individuals and civil society organizations are encouraged to learn more about the campaign and how to take action by visiting [makeamazonpay.com](http://makeamazonpay.com).

# Federal nuclear power plan is a pipe dream

IN ITS FALL economic statement, the federal government announced that it “intends to launch an SMR Action Plan by the end of 2020 to lay out the next steps to develop and deploy this technology.” SMR stands for small modular nuclear reactor, the nuclear industry’s latest pipe dream.

At least a dozen corporations around the world are hoping for Canadian taxpayer funding to further develop their SMR designs, all of them still on the drawing board. In October, the federal government handed out \$20 million to Terrestrial Energy. Other expectant entities include SNC-Lavalin (which bought Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd.’s CANDU division and is developing a CANDU SMR), United Kingdom-based Moltex Energy, and Seattle-based Ultra Safe Nuclear Corporation.

The federal government says it supports small modular reactors to help Canada mitigate climate change. The government is simply barking up the wrong tree, for several reasons: 1) cost, cost and cost; 2) renewables; 3) safety; and 4) radioactive waste.

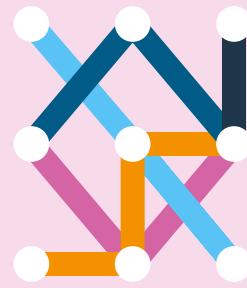
Nuclear power is very expensive compared to other low-carbon options, and the difference keeps growing because, as the Wall Street firm Lazard documents, the cost of renewables and energy storage is going down rapidly. Peter Bradford, a former U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission official, likened the use of nuclear power for mitigating climate change to fighting world hunger “with caviar.”

The high price tag for nuclear power plants has led to a near freeze on new ones around the world. Canada’s last nuclear plant came online in 1994, and Ontarians will remember when plans for two reactors at Darlington were shelved in 2009 after a \$26 billion bid—three times the expected budget. Yet the Ford government has now jumped on board the SMR train and is supporting Ontario Power Generation’s plans to build an SMR at Darlington by 2028.

Nuclear projects have a long history of cost and time overruns. The cost estimate of NuScale, the most advanced SMR project in the USA, has gone up from US\$3 billion to US\$6.1 billion. That corresponds to nearly CAD \$12,000 per kilowatt of generation capacity. In comparison, the construction cost of wind power in Alberta is around \$1,500 per kilowatt. There is no way SMRs can be cost-competitive with wind or solar energy.

Natural Resources Minister Seamus O’Regan has said he doesn’t know any way to get to net zero-carbon emissions by 2050 without nuclear power, but that is refuted by many studies, including one from 2016 by a group of academics in Finland and a more recent international collaboration published in *Joule* magazine.

The Bloc Québécois, the NDP’s natural resources critic Richard Cannings, and the Green Party federal caucus have all



## Index CCPA: As seen on TV

COMPILED  
BY ALYSSA O’DELL

### 16,810

Number of times CCPA experts and research appeared in the traditional news media in 2020. The team has been answering questions on many issues from journalists all year but shifted into high gear when the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic hit Canada in March.

### 5,000

Approximate number of print, radio and television mentions of the CCPA in COVID-19 news coverage between March and the end of May alone. Researchers across the CCPA’s national and provincial offices used these opportunities to stress the need for better income supports, draw attention to the acute crisis situation for renters, demand higher standards and more public delivery of long-term care services, and explain how COVID-19’s impact has been particularly hard for low-income and marginalized communities.

### 42%

Amount the CCPA’s media impact has increased compared to 2019. The CCPA has reached more people through traditional media every year since 2016.

### 382,472,804

Number of potential eyes and ears reached by the CCPA through broadcast television news alone in 2020, enough to blanket the entire country 10 times over.

### 3,400

Approximate number of news articles about the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or employment insurance this year that included commentary or research from the CCPA.

### 459

Number of articles quoting CCPA Senior Researcher Katherine Scott, who has been providing ongoing gender-based analysis and commentary on the COVID-19 impacts on essential workers throughout the pandemic.

### 1/3

CCPA’s share of voice (SOV) in the media compared to its major competitors. SOV measures the share of the media market dominated by the CCPA, which outpaced both the Fraser Institute and C.D. Howe Institute this year.

said nuclear power does not belong in a climate change plan. It will steal public resources away from energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. The Assembly of First Nations also passed a resolution in 2018 opposing small modular reactors.

A January 2020 article in *The Conversation*, by M.V. Ramana and Xiao Wei, explains how Ontario can meet its electricity demand using only renewables and hydro power backed up by storage technologies. A recent study published in *Nature Energy* using data from 123 countries shows that renewable energy outperforms nuclear power in reducing emissions. It concludes that nuclear investments just get in the way of building up renewable energy.

Advocates claim we need nuclear energy to back up solar and wind power when the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow. However, nuclear reactors cannot be powered up and down rapidly and safely. If they are, their cost of generating electricity increases further. Nor do nuclear plants run reliably all the time. In France, which generates 70% of its electricity from nuclear power, each reactor was shut down for an average of 96.2 days in 2019, according to the World Nuclear Industry Status Report.

The federal government sees small reactors playing a role in remote off-grid communities and mines that now rely on diesel. But together these sites require less than 0.5% of Canada's electricity generation capacity, according to a September 2020 study published in the journal *Energy Policy*. Power from SMRs could be 10 times more expensive for those communities than adding wind and solar energy. There is also strong opposition to SMRs from First Nations communities, who say these represent an unacceptable risk.

The risk from nuclear power comes in multiple forms. There is the potential for accidents leading to widespread radioactive contamination. Because reactors involve parts that interact rapidly in complex ways, no nuclear reactor is immune to accidents. And they all produce radioactive nuclear waste streams that remain hazardous for up to a million years. Dealing with these issues is a major challenge and there is no demonstrated solution to date.

Canada has a big challenge ahead: to decarbonize by 2050. Let's get on with it, in the quickest and most cost-effective way, by improving the efficiency of our energy use and building out solar, wind and storage technologies. Let's forget the dirty, dangerous distraction of small nuclear reactors. **M**

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M.V. Ramana is the Simons Chair in Disarmament, Global and Human Security and Director of the Liu Institute for Global Issues at the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, University of British Columbia. Eva Schacherl is an advocate for protecting the Ottawa River and for environmental and social justice. A version of this article appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen* on November 16.



## Colour-coded Justice

ANTHONY N. MORGAN

# Black life and the myth of Sisyphus

WHEN IT COMES to addressing anti-Black racism in Canada, I can't help but think of the mythic plight of Sisyphus. As the story goes, the Greek gods sentenced Sisyphus to an eternity of repeatedly rolling a large boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down again once he reached the summit. The struggle for Black lives and well-being in Canada is Sisyphean through and through.

In my interpretation, Sisyphus represents Black communities in Canada. The boulder is anti-Black racism. The hill, in its progressive incline, represents increasing degrees of equitable access to education, employment, housing, health care and/or the policing, immigration and incarceration systems. And the gods? No, they're not white people....

The gods—the ones who have condemned us to this fate—are any offices of authority, institutions and ideas which perpetuate, promote and/or protect white supremacist power at the expense of Black people in Canadian society. The changing weather in which Sisyphus rolls the boulder up the hill represents Canada's collective public consciousness and prevailing social attitudes, beliefs, values, and feelings toward Black people at any given time.

It's hard to definitively determine whether 2020 represented a triumphant arrival at the top or the tragic return to the bottom of the Black community's Sisyphean quest for equity and freedom in Canada.

On one hand, COVID-19 wreaked a disproportionately high degree of havoc on the lives of Black people in Canada (and continues to do so). As I've noted in previous columns, and as was recognized in the federal government's fall economic update, Black communities consistently have the highest rates and concentrations of COVID-19 infections in Canadian cities that have collected and reported race-disaggregated data. This is a consequence of the prevalence of Black workers in frontline retail and social and health service work, as well as the family care-giving roles that Black people, especially Black women, hold in our society for low wages, low respect and low support.

The labour market stratification that concentrates Black people in exceptionally vulnerable positions

within the workforce has also meant that Black people have felt some of the worst impacts of the economic shocks wrought by the pandemic, including temporary and permanent closures and layoffs at companies and organizations across Canada. High insurance rates and poorly planned city infrastructure have made individuals from Black communities more likely to be left using crowded public transit, increasing further risk of infection. Because of a lack of affordable housing, Black individuals and families are also more likely to live in crowded homes in high-density apartment complexes.

These are among the primary socio-contextual factors that have contributed to higher rates of COVID-19 infections among Black populations, making 2020 an especially tough time for Canada's Black communities.

On the other hand, 2020 positively ushered in a racial justice awakening that the world arguably hasn't seen since the rise of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement.

The Black Lives Matter Movement seized global attention and gripped it for much of last year following the murder of a Black man, George Floyd, by white Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. The year 2020's international racial reckoning centering Black lives and calls for social, economic and cultural justice led to waves of initiatives, programs, activities, policies and other previously unseen opportunities for Black community members, professionals and businesses to be seen, heard, supported, valued, employed, contracted and consulted on levels not known for more than a generation or two.

Many of Canada's private and for-public-benefit sector leaders made several statements and new commitments to address anti-Black racism. While there hasn't been an official tally, it's likely that across Canada tens of millions

of dollars were raised and distributed through new philanthropy efforts, corporate donations and crowd-funded support for Black community organizations and initiatives. For these reasons, 2020 might also be read as a return to the top of Mount Justice.

Based on these parallel histories of the year gone by, it's reasonable to conclude that 2020 was both a peak and pit in the Sisyphean cycle of Black community life in Canada, as the year left much to sorrow and celebrate. But what will really determine whether 2020 was ultimately good or bad for Canada's Black populations rides much more on what's to come in 2021 and beyond.

Justice for Black lives in Canada requires that we collectively break out of this Sisyphean condemnation. True progress means making sizable shifts in the improvement of the material conditions of Black communities, where equitable access to good jobs, housing, food, health care, education, and policing and carceral systems becomes the norm for Black people in Canada.

Making the most of the good and bad of 2021 requires a collective commitment to disrupting dynamics of racial power so that Black communities can be more self-determined and take control of the social well-being systems and structures that shape Black lives. Said another way, for all the Black Lives Matter statements, commitments and conversations of 2020 to be made real, 2021 must be a year focused on a process of redistributing economic, social, political and cultural power to Black communities, so that we can support, serve and protect our own interests and institutions.

I declare 2021 the year of reparatory justice for Black Canadians. We can and must break this boulder and march up Mount Justice once and for all, together. **M**

Anthony N. Morgan is a Toronto-based human rights lawyer, policy consultant and community educator.



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

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

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

# Your CCPA

## From social critique, societal transformation

The *Monitor* talks to retiring CCPA researchers Lynne Fernandez and Scott Sinclair about politics, the role of critical research, the importance of grassroots collaboration, and what they plan on doing next.



*Lynne Fernandez is the retiring Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues at CCPA Manitoba and lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.*



*Scott Sinclair is the retiring Director of the CCPA's Trade and Investment Research Project and lives in rural Prince Edward Island.*

### **The Monitor (M): How does it feel to be retiring?**

**Lynne Fernandez (LF):** I had been toying with the idea of retiring but had lingering doubts about what I would do with myself, and also dreaded distancing myself from my colleagues, both in and out of the CCPA. Then COVID hit, and the days working at home somehow taught me that I was more flexible than I had given myself credit for.

COVID has changed my perspective on many things, and I am looking forward to changing my focus to intellectual pursuits I haven't had time to enjoy: some history, political philosophy, literature. I am also looking forward to

long walks in the forest with my two dogs. And some day, spending time in Spain with my partner, who is from there. Enrique is from a fishing town on the north coast of Spain (in Asturias) and it is my second home. I yearn to go back, and curse COVID for keeping us away.

The Manitoba Research Alliance (MRA) was awarded its 4th Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant with John Loxley as the lead. John's death also hit me hard. It's still hard to believe that he's gone. We have a great new principal director in Shauna MacKinnon, and I will remain as part of the alliance and take on the odd project so I can keep doing the work I love with friends and colleagues.

The grant is administered by CCPA Manitoba. So I will still be connected.

**Scott Sinclair (SS):** I've been planning my retirement for a while, and I'm ready. I'm looking forward to having more free time, especially for birdwatching and gardening. For me, birding is a form of meditation. I never tire of it. My partner Rosalind and I live in a 150-year-old farmhouse on 44 acres of land, which besides good birding also provides an endless source of projects and challenges. We're currently rewilding a 10-acre field. Nature is doing most of the work, but we'll be making trails and planting some native trees and shrubs.

International air travel seems like another world to me now and I don't really miss it. Our next trip, when it comes, will be for an extended stay, likely somewhere in Latin America. I will continue to do some research and writing, but on my own terms. I figure it's good to get more heretical thinking seeded in the academic literature, to support the next generation. I'm constantly amazed and heartened by how many students and young scholars, against so many societal pressures, renew and enrich radical, critical thinking.

**M: What brought you to the CCPA to begin with?**

**LF:** I spent the first part of my working life in Calgary (where I grew up) as a cashier, banker, and later a legal assistant. I never felt satisfied in my work. There was always a voice in the back of my mind telling me to go to university. After living in Spain for a while (where I learnt not everyone in the world subscribed to libertarian, free-market principles) I finally went back to school and earned a master's in economics at age 50. Better late than never.

The heterodox economists at the University of Manitoba (John Loxley, Fletcher Baragar, Robert Chernomas) taught me why I had been so dissatisfied with my past work. They gave me the critical thinking skills and theoretical background I needed to understand capitalism, neoliberalism and class conflict. John introduced me to Shauna MacKinnon, who was then the director of CCPA Manitoba, and she hired me on a couple of contracts. When the Manitoba Research Alliance got its second SSHRC grant, she hired me full time. That was 13 years ago.

**SS:** Twenty years ago, I was recruited to be the first co-ordinator of the CCPA's Trade and Investment Research Project (TIRP). At the time, I was working as a trade policy advisor for the B.C. government, which was very progressive on trade issues. I started at CCPA one month before the WTO Seattle ministerial conference and was in the meetings and the streets along with many colleagues during the Battle of Seattle. It was an exciting time to be working on trade and alter-globalization issues.

TIRP was a jointly funded project of the Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA), the CCPA, the Council of Canadians, and the union movement. I was lucky it was housed at the CCPA. I ended up with two sets of terrific colleagues, the researchers at the TIRP table and my CCPA co-workers across the country. These were days when telecommuting was uncommon, so I will also forever be grateful to former CCPA director Bruce Campbell, and Michelle Swenarchuk and Ken Traynor of CELA, for convincing everyone I could do the work from my home in P.E.I. Bruce was the most supportive boss any progressive researcher could ever hope for.

**M: What changed in the way you research, the kinds of issues you cover and how you write about policy over your time at the CCPA?**

**LF:** In the beginning I was mainly looking at macroeconomic policy and labour issues. But the work we were doing under the auspices of the MRA (CCPA Manitoba is the lead institution for the alliance) was heavily tilted toward poverty issues in the Inner City of Winnipeg, and later, in First Nation communities throughout Manitoba. When you apply a community-based participatory research approach, such as we do with the MRA, you have to completely change the way you approach a project. Suddenly you are not the expert, the community is.

Because CCPA Manitoba is such a small office, I had to be willing to take on new topics that seemed overwhelming at first, such as Manitoba Hydro. The Crown corporation is a political football in Manitoba. In order to engage in the public discourse around it I had to immerse myself in an area I knew nothing about. It is now one of my favourite areas to write about because it encompasses so many issues I feel strongly about: the value of public assets, the ability of Crown corporations to advance regional development and reconciliation with First Nations (after having done so much damage in the past), and the way the utility has us sitting pretty in an increasingly carbon-constrained world.

Working on hydro issues also led to a new appreciation of the community economic development theory I learned from John Loxley. It is a beautiful thing when you see the theory in action. The spectre of privatization never seems to go away, and we have to remain vigilant.

**SS:** In the beginning we worked primarily on WTO issues, especially privatization, deregulation, industrial policy, and threats to public services. We published a series of books on the General Agreement on Trade in Services, or GATS, and these got a fair amount of international attention. Development groups, in particular, latched on to the GATS as a campaign issue. We felt we were part of building a global civil society movement.

The WTO and some governments, of course, took exception to our analysis. I should say though, that with a few inevitable exceptions, we had a respectful, civil dialogue with WTO services officials and Canadian negotiators. Despite the fact we differed on many issues, I respected their knowledge and came to regard some of them as friends.

Public interest research should be critical, oppositional, and provocative.

Over time our focus has shifted away from simply critiquing neoliberal free trade deals (such as CETA, where we worked closely with trusted European allies including the Seattle to Brussels Network and PowerShift) to formulating and proposing alternatives. It is difficult but important work. I hope we have helped advance thinking about what is possible and how a new framework for trade can support expanded public services, sustainable government purchasing policies, a Green New Deal, and public interest regulation grounded in the precautionary principle. Seeing investor–state dispute settlement, or ISDS, eliminated from the new NAFTA was gratifying.

**M: In your opinion, what should public interest research strive to achieve?**

**LF:** I think we need to start with a fundamental understanding of what is wrong, say precarious work, and how it happened. Young people may not realize that precarious work is a new phenomenon (compared to the world I grew up in) and that it follows from adherence to a particular economic theory that has had a disastrous effect on the world. We will not be able to deal with the big issues of our day—income inequality and climate change—until we replace that pernicious theory with one that makes sense for the majority of people and the planet.

So we have to grasp the theory and see how it plays out in the real world. We need to see the connections between a strong labour movement and a strong middle class, between fair taxes and strong public services. We need the public to understand those basic things, so they can see through the nonsense we are spoon fed every day.

The challenge is tougher depending on who is in power. In Manitoba, we bounce between Conservatives and the NDP. When the NDP is in power, we are constantly pushing them to move more to the left, but

they never go as far as we want them to. It is frustrating because the Conservatives do not seem to hesitate to play to their base, while the NDP has been more timid. I guess they know how entrenched neoliberal theory is in the general public.

**SS:** Working on trade and globalization issues has reinforced my conviction that public interest research should strive for fundamental structural change. Current levels of inequality are grotesque and intersecting environmental crises imminently threaten the survival of humanity and many other living things. It's also important to recognize that a relatively small group of privileged and powerful people are mainly responsible.

Elites and their intellectual fellow travelers are constantly devising new strategies to protect their extreme privilege. A key role of public interest research is to investigate the strategies elites use to reproduce their power, explain those strategies to the broader public, and provide tools to contest them. In other words, public interest research should be critical, oppositional, and provocative.

At the same time, I believe public interest research should be firmly rooted in democratic values, which

Working on hydro issues led to a new appreciation of the community economic development theory I learned from John Loxley. It is a beautiful thing when you see the theory in action.

means persuading people that change is necessary and possible, and that it can improve their lives. Naturally, it matters greatly which government is in power, and mobilizing timely support for meaningful, achievable reforms is obligatory. But we shouldn't lose sight of the need for transformative change.

**M: How important has it been to collaborate with activist organizations, labour and other community groups in the work you've done for the CCPA?**

**LF:** It has been super important. As the Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues, I need to be ready to deal with issues important to the labour community, whether it is getting articles in the local newspaper or presenting for or against legislation at provincial hearings. I just today registered to speak against a new bill the Pallister government will table that will allow employers to easily fire workers for strike-related misconduct (whatever that means), and that lowers the threshold for union decertification and increases the threshold to certify.

Collaborating with community groups has been crucial for the work I have done on alternative municipal budgets (four of them over the years) and the alternative provincial budget we did earlier this year. These projects are community driven and we need the expertise of people working on the ground who know their areas so we can analyze the existing budgets and offer alternatives. I just could not do that on my own.

**SS:** As Lynne says, collaborating with outside groups is critical. Meaningful change will only come from below. Our project pools the resources of trade policy researchers from unions, environmental groups and other grassroots organizations, along with progressive lawyers and academics. Our regular discussions



and joint planning sessions at the TIRP table are the crucible of CCPA's trade work.

I remember in 2000, in the early days of our project, CCPA-BC economist Marc Lee gave a draft of my first book on the GATS to activists in the World Development Moment in London. I learned later from Claire Joy, one of their brilliant campaigners, that it was then that they decided to take up the issue. The global public sector unions, Third World Network, and many others were also deeply involved in GATS issues. We felt part of something big and vital.

During my early trips to Brussels in 2008 and 2009 almost no one outside of the transatlantic business lobbies was paying any attention to CETA, the Canada-EU treaty. Martin Koehler, a veteran trade advisor in the European Parliament, took me under his wing and helped set up many fruitful meetings. At first, European friends and colleagues were skeptical we could make much headway. But when EU trade negotiations started with the U.S., the mood quickly changed.

By 2015, hundreds of thousands of people were in the streets of Berlin and other European cities protesting both the proposed U.S. deal (it was called TTIP) and CETA. I am so impressed by the energy and seriousness of the European social movements. Again, I have made many dear friends.

**M: Are there any local causes you'd like to get more involved with when you retire?**

**LF:** Animal rescue, especially helping homeless dogs in northern communities. There is one group in particular that works respectfully and closely with some of the First Nations that struggle to look after their pets. With no access to veterinary services and the other socioeconomic barriers so many deal with as a result of colonization, these remote communities do not have the resources they need to deal with dog and cat overpopulation, but they want to improve things. I have seen the power of community-driven solutions through my work with the MRA. I would love to extend that experience to this issue.

**SS:** Ecological limits are being crossed everywhere, and Prince Edward Island is no exception. I look forward to getting more involved in local issues such as protecting our water from industrial agriculture and helping P.E.I. become Canada's first carbon-neutral province. I also hope to find time to get involved in other less high-profile issues too, such as supporting local unions and workers in Canada's poorest province.

**M: Big question, but what are some of the major challenges and opportunities, in your view, affecting the fight for social justice in Canada today?**

**LF:** It gets back to that economic theory again, and the overwhelming success it has had in convincing people that narrow self-interest, low taxes and free markets are the only way.

I see hope in failure—in the increasingly evident failure of this model to deliver—and that people are slowly waking up to that fact. I am thinking of the tragic loss of life in our personal care homes that was directly linked to precarious work, lack of government regulation and the pursuit of profit. Canadians have connected those dots.

And look at the increasingly clever worker organizing in the U.S. and even in Canada. I just read a piece by Sam Gindin about auto-sector unions and the relatively new organization Green Jobs Oshawa. When workers get pushed into a corner, they can still come up with brilliant ways to fight back. But mainstream unions have to change with the times.

As terrible as COVID is, it too has brought new understanding about how neoliberalism impoverishes us all and how government intervention can be such a positive force. Eyes are being opened, and cause and effect are becoming clearer.

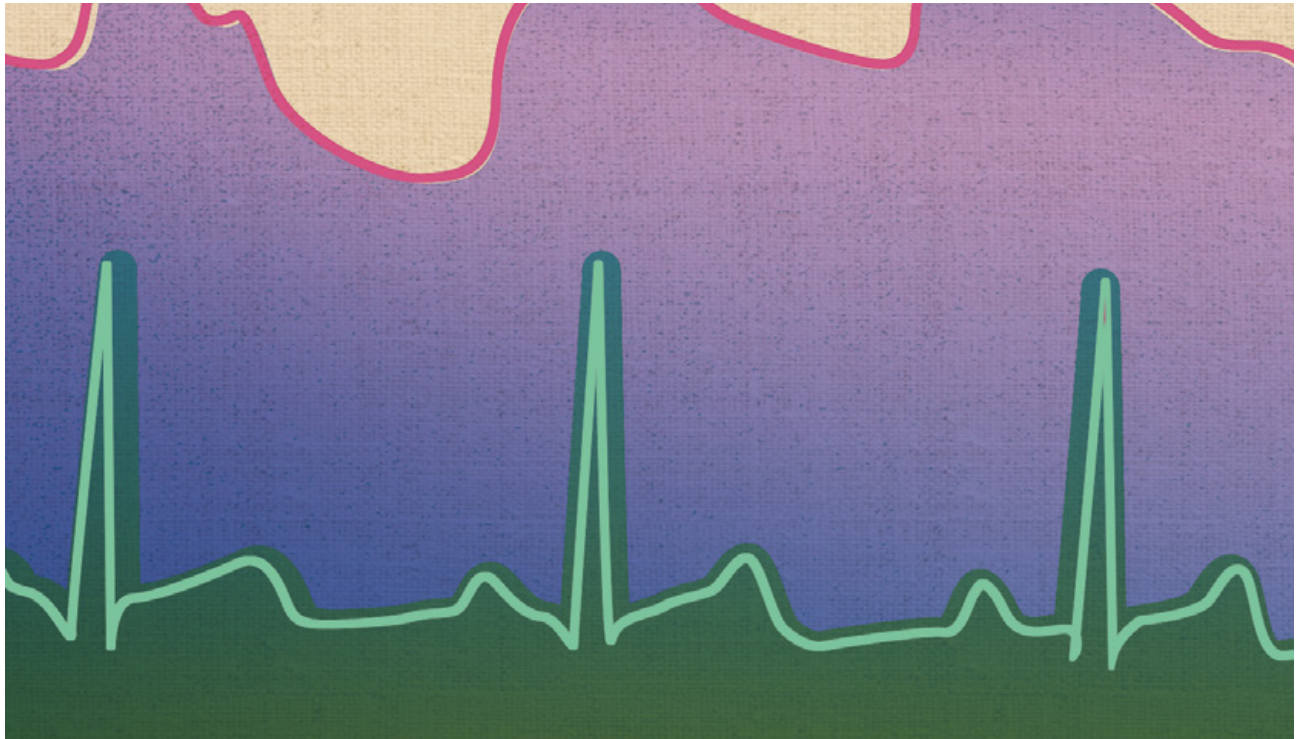
**SS:** Well, if we don't make rapid progress on environmental protection issues, especially climate change, all our other problems are only going to get worse. So, I'd put that at the top of the list.

Lynne raises a critical point about the failures of the current economic model. Neoliberalism is under strain because it relies on extreme levels of economic injustice, along with disdain for the well-being of the global 99%. Yet neoliberalism is surprisingly resilient, as evidenced by the enormous fortunes made during the pandemic.

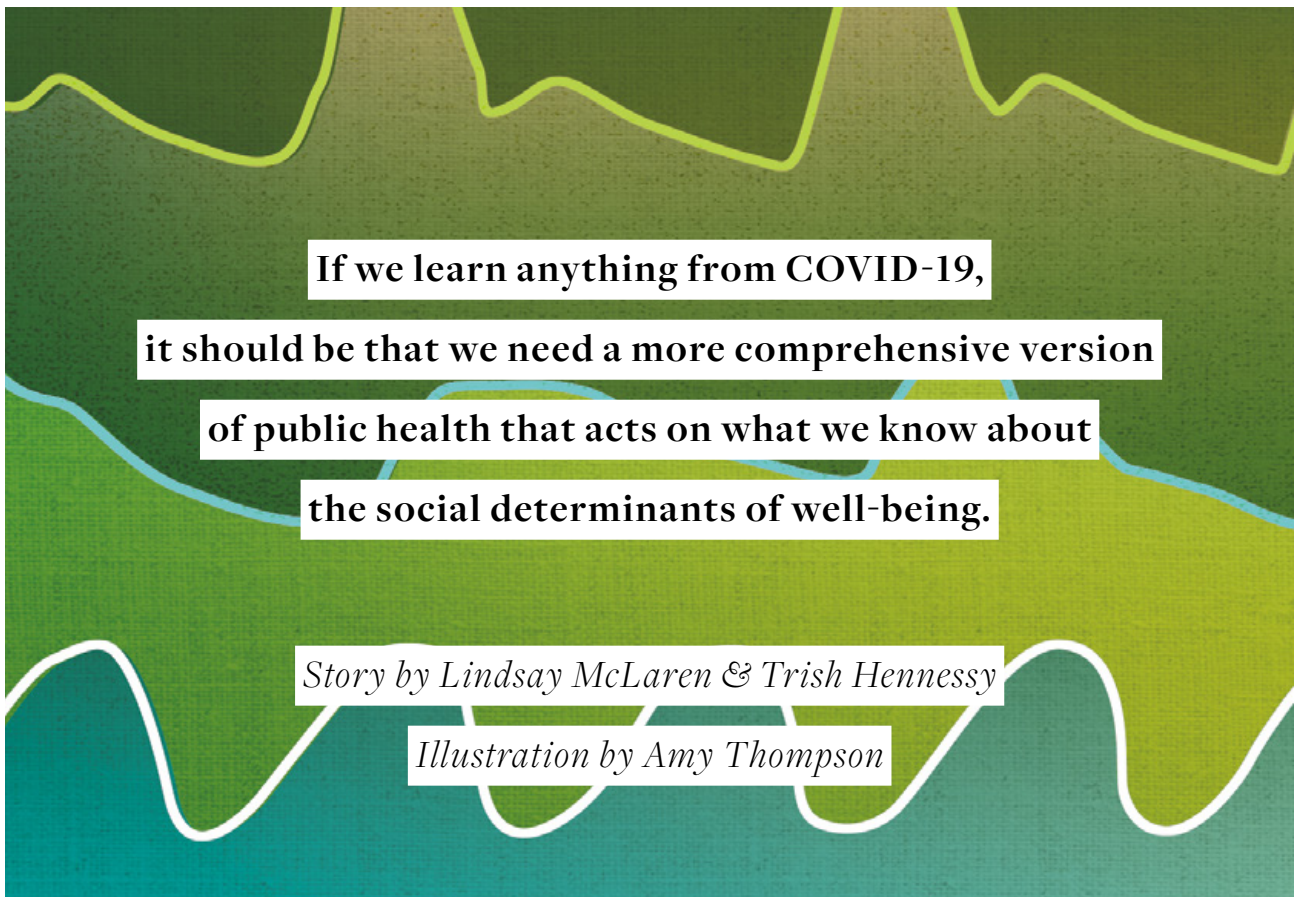
Where this could lead is worrisome. When corporate and political elites have had to choose between their economic interests and liberal democracy, let alone the future of the planet and the well-being of the global 99%, the results have not been reassuring.

The enormous challenge for progressive forces is to present credible alternatives, though I'm not sure we have them yet. But creative thinking and good research are tools for movement-building, which is the basic challenge. It's not too late to change course, and positive social change often comes from unexpected directions.

The CCPA and our allies have our work cut out for us. I am happy to be leaving our trade and globalization work in the capable hands of my colleagues Stuart Trew and Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood. **M**



# A *BROADER* VISION



**If we learn anything from COVID-19,**

**it should be that we need a more comprehensive version**

**of public health that acts on what we know about**

**the social determinants of well-being.**

*Story by Lindsay McLaren & Trish Hennessy*

*Illustration by Amy Thompson*

**It was  
never expected  
to be easy,**

grappling with a global pandemic as grave as COVID-19. In its early days in Canada, during our spring of silent shock, we powered down our economy, stayed home as much as we could, and hoped that our collective sacrifice would buy our governments and health

# *N OF PUBLIC HEALTH*

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care systems the time needed to prepare, strategize and not get overwhelmed by another wave.

The shutdown period challenged us in many ways. The social deprivation and break from “normal” made us anxious, depressed, lonely. More broadly, the inability to have everyone shelter down exposed inequities built into our economic, social and health care systems. The unequal and unfair impact of COVID-19 exposed the failure of years of neoliberal austerity that purposefully diminished the role of the public service in areas critical to health and well-being. Our governments’ false belief that the private sector would pick up the slack left us unprepared for a pandemic.

The springtime television images of an army coming to rescue ailing elders and staff in long-term care facilities was a tragic symbol of this systemic failure. There were similar damning moments as COVID-19 ripped through migrant worker camps, meat-packing plants and low-income, often racialized communities. These communities were exposed to the greatest risks of a deadly virus without the protections afforded the privileged, those of us with private means.

If we could not protect the most susceptible people from COVID-19, what did that say about us, our

governments, our institutions? Why were we not able to plan for a pandemic that was always a question of when, not if?

In Ontario, the failure of the provincial government to work coherently and transparently with public health and education officials to reopen schools in the fall led to confusion, contradictory advice, nonsensical rules and questions of political competence. The Alberta government made oddly timed decisions to wage war with doctors, cut health care positions and downplay the seriousness of the virus, with Premier Jason Kenney assuring us in May that, “The average age of death from COVID in Alberta is 83. And I remind the house that the average life expectancy is 82.” In provinces that were initially sheltered from COVID-19, such as Saskatchewan and Manitoba, rates of viral spread began to soar.

Across Canada, cracks in the federation have been showing. Creating a coherent, national response to COVID-19 was very much like herding cats while walking on eggshells. No jurisdictional response was alike. Some provinces, such as B.C., were more proactive,

The unequal and unfair impact of COVID-19 exposed the failure of years of neoliberal austerity.

accepting the scientific evidence and expert advice that their public health officials were offering. Others, such as Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, not so much. While the federal government showed policy and fiscal leadership by introducing massive income support programs for individuals and business, it became increasingly clear that getting everyone on the same page was a growing concern.

By mid-November the scenario that some had predicted was quickly becoming reality: COVID-19 was on a rapid growth path in many Canadian jurisdictions. Outbreaks in long-term care facilities returned with a vengeance. “It’s like a nightmare that we’re reliving now which we really shouldn’t have had to, given that we had months to prepare over the summer for a second wave,” Dr. Amit Arya, a palliative care physician, told the *Toronto Star* in November.

Some health care systems were already nearing capacity, even before flu season kicked in. At the same time that provinces were allowing indoor dining, gym openings, and gatherings too large to contain spread, some were also losing their ability to keep up with contact tracing. Toronto Public Health Officer Dr. Eileen de Villa warned the public to assume COVID-19 is everywhere. Political leadership had been faltering, and public health experts were resorting to pleas for people to take cover. There were warnings of political mishandling of the pandemic.

Reopening the economy without a co-ordinated plan to minimize viral spread was magical thinking. Political delay in following public health advice contributed to a strong second wave, which came with exponential costs to people’s well-being, the health care system and an economy that has no chance of thriving without a healthy public. Some of our governments have failed to recognize, or have forgotten, that health and the economy are inextricably linked.

This is a critically important point. Underlying everything the COVID-19 moment has taught us is the revelation of how shallow our understanding of public health actually is. Until we truly appreciate how public health is different from concepts like individual health, and not the same thing as our universal health care system, we are doomed to repeat our failures.

### What comes to mind when you think of public health?

If you’re like most people, the idea of public health probably brings to mind hospitals and physicians, or what you, personally, can do to promote a healthy lifestyle, such as eating nutritious food or not smoking. At the moment, your attention is likely drawn to ventilators, vaccines and other high-profile medical tools of the response to the pandemic.

While all of these things are important elements of health, they exist within a broader context of the social determinants of health—the social, economic, ecological and colonial factors that determine why some people are healthy and others are not. It’s not just about your individual behaviour or the ability of your health care system to treat your ailments, it’s about the root causes of good or bad health. Those root causes are hardwired into our social and economic systems, which are the product of political decisions.

While we have known about the social determinants of health for a long time, political action to address them has been, to say the least, disappointing. This reflects a strong tendency among most people and politicians to think of “health,” “public health,” and “health care” as interchangeable things, such that the solutions to health problems are seen to lie within the health care system.

But that health care system reflects our neglect of the social determinants of health, because it’s there to treat the problems after

they occur, not to prevent them in the first place. It is, more accurately, a sick care system.

Nowhere is that reality more evident than in the age of COVID-19. The virus has shown us, in no uncertain terms, that health and its social determinants cannot be separated. The pandemic has magnified inequities along axes such as income, employment circumstances, gender, race and ethnicity.

As famously stated by the World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health in its 2008 final report, those health inequities are in no sense natural—they are “the result of a toxic combination of poor social policies and programmes, unfair economic arrangements, and bad politics.”

In Canada, we have failed to implement, and to adequately fund, public universal systems of child care and elder care; to protect public institutions, such as schools, from corporatization and privatization; to update our outdated income support programs so that they better align with current workforce and economic realities; and to commit to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Indeed, the inequitable impact of the pandemic reflects these political failures; fixing them must be part of the recovery. It is time for a coherent, integrated approach to public health.

An important challenge, which has become glaringly obvious during this pandemic, is our poor understanding and appreciation of public health, which is routinely conflated with publicly funded health care.

On the one hand, public health is a tiny but mighty component of the health care system. It focuses not only on communicable disease control, but also disease and injury prevention, health promotion, keeping track of the health status of the population and population groups, and emergency preparedness. Outside of a crisis situation, much of the work of public health practitioners (public health physicians, public health nurses, public health inspectors, health promoters, epidemiologists, etc.) remains hidden from public view.

In times of crisis, as during a pandemic, politicians are expected to seek expert guidance from public health practitioners to inform policy decisions. That was the standard proposed in the wake of the SARS outbreak of 2002 and 2003: politics should take a back seat to scientific evidence and expertise. Variation in the extent to which this has played out across the country sheds light on some important challenges to our pandemic response.

Perhaps the most significant example of this variation has been in the ability of chief medical officers of health to issue clear directives unencumbered by provincial politics. Political interference manifests itself in wishy-washy, rudderless plans that try to “balance” health and the economy, as though they were separate.

# Underlying everything the COVID-19 moment has taught us is the revelation of how shallow our understanding of public health actually is.

What happened in the first and second waves of COVID-19 in 2020 was in part the result of the weakening of the public health arm of the health care system. Political decisions have limited the scope of public health practice by combining it with primary and community care as well as through inadequate government funding. The Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) has estimated that public health activities receive about 5% of all health care spending on average, and considerably less in many provinces.

However, that is not the whole story. While the pandemic has placed public health in the spotlight, it has reinforced a very narrow version of public health. More broadly, and usefully, public health can be thought of as the art and science of preventing disease and promoting health through organized societal efforts. Public health embraces values and priorities such as:

- collectivity, with its focus on populations, which are not reducible to an aggregate of individuals;
- social justice, with its concern about social inequities that cause health inequities; and
- upstream thinking, which focuses on the root causes of health problems.

Lying beneath the weakening of public health practice, which one can think of as the tip of the iceberg, is an erosion of these deeper values and priorities. The implications for “the public” in public health are profound. The erosion manifests as cuts to the public sector, solutions packaged in individualized terms, and a deepening political polarization that erodes societal assets such as trust.

Significantly, nothing about this broader version of public health requires that we limit ourselves to the health care system. Indeed, the only way to ensure a just recovery from this pandemic, and to be ready

for the next one, is to find ways to operationalize this broader version of public health.

### **The way forward**

COVID-19 has made structural change to public health policy a critical priority, as we've heard from Chief Public Health Officer Dr. Theresa Tam. The lack of understanding about the interconnectedness of health, the economy, public well-being and public policy must be redressed. Federal leadership is essential, but so is provincial and municipal co-operation. Incoherent or siloed strategies have proven inadequate to the task.

Here's our three-step plan.

#### **1. Identify the contours of an integrated, coherent vision of public health.**

This is the easy part, since several visions have already been articulated. Three in particular come to mind.

One is the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion of 1986, which was ahead of its time in characterizing health as a resource for everyday life, and for identifying “prerequisites for health,” including peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable ecosystem, sustainable resources, social justice and equity. Strengthening health and health equity, according to the charter, requires efforts to build healthy public policy, create supportive

environments for health, strengthen community action (including activism), develop personal skills, and reorient health services so they are more attuned to prevention and health promotion.

More than 20 years later, the World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health identified three overarching recommendations to improve population health and health equity, a goal it described as “closing the gap in a generation.” Those overarching recommendations were to improve daily living conditions; to tackle the inequitable distribution of money, power and resources; and to measure the problem and assess the impact of action.

More recently, in 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released its final report and recommendations following a multi-year process of information gathering and public discussions concerning Canadian government policies of cultural genocide, which have caused unacceptable social and economic conditions for Indigenous peoples in Canada. The social and ensuing health inequities that continue, which provide a dramatic example of the social determinants of health, may only be addressed through a foundation of reconciliation, defined as commitment by all Canadians to an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships.

It goes without saying that these goals go well beyond the scope and mandate of the health sector. They demand a broader approach to leverage the legal, constitutional and collective mechanisms that we have at our disposal.

A health-in-all-policies approach offers one avenue, since it provides a way to operationalize the fundamental understanding that the primary determinants of health, well-being and health equity reflect public policy decisions outside of the health sector.

For example, under a health-in-all-policies approach income tax policy would be guided by the extensive knowledge of the negative consequences for health of poverty and income inequality. Education policy would recognize universal public education for what it is—a backbone of a healthy and equitable society. The inadequacies of federal and provincial jurisdictional mechanisms would be embraced by a commitment to Indigenous self-governance. And so on.

#### **2. Co-ordinate the wider public health vision across political jurisdictions.**

Having identified the contours of an integrated vision for public health, governments must co-ordinate their leadership in advancing the vision in all parts of Canada.

The federal government's economic support mobilization during the pandemic has been significant. The structural change—and challenge—now is to transition those activities from an integrated emergency protection response to an integrated, longer-term investment in the social determinants of health.

There are hints that we are moving in this direction. The federal government's structural supports have shifted into medium-term solutions, such as a more flexible (and thus respectful) system of employment insurance. In the last federal throne speech, the Trudeau government hinted at potentially significant advances to strengthen

Under a health-in-all-policies approach income tax policy would be guided by the extensive knowledge of the negative consequences for health of poverty and income inequality.

child care and long-term care. This would be in line with the government's 2019 mandate letters, which referenced well-being budgeting, that is, making sure that program spending and taxation decisions support people's well-being.

In our federated country, co-ordinated leadership demands provincial co-operation, the absence of which has been made clear in the pandemic. Once again, we have a working guide in the form of the Declaration on Promotion and Prevention, signed by Canada's federal, provincial and territorial health ministers in 2010.

Health portfolios across the country are overwhelmingly focused on treatment-oriented health care, yet ministers from different political parties committed in the declaration to principles of prevention, health promotion and social determinants of health. Imagine how different the pandemic experience might have been had that declaration been translated into governance structures that prioritize well-being.

Provincial co-ordination, with federal leadership, could institutionalize and protect public health elements of the health care system, such as independence for chief medical officers of health, and adequate and sustained funding for core public health activities (e.g., health surveillance, protection and prevention). Importantly, however, the "system" it supports would not stop there. It would transcend our public policy environment, as demanded by the social determinants of health.

### 3. Work from the ground up to uncouple "health" from "health care."

Underpinning the success of the first two steps, a third step is to work from the ground up to break down the pernicious conflation of health, health care and public health—and to help people make a connection between health and its social determinants. In addition to popular discourse about health, which is dominated by a focus on health care and individual lifestyle behaviours, this challenge exists—disconcertingly—within public health itself.

For example, while the SARS epidemic of the early 2000s helped spur an explosion of post-secondary education programs in public health, in an effort to build workforce capacity, concern has more recently been expressed that these programs tend to privilege certain kinds of research methods and theories. So-called quantitative methods are prioritized over qualitative and participatory approaches, for example. Likewise, behavioural theories, where the unit of focus is the individual, crowd out learning and application of critical social theories that foreground issues of power. In some cases, educational programs omit pressing issues entirely, such as ecological determinants of health.

COVID-19 reminds us that we have not devoted enough attention to broad-based science literacy and

Behavioural theories, where the unit of focus is the individual, crowd out learning and application of critical social theories that foreground issues of power. In some cases, educational programs omit pressing issues entirely, such as ecological determinants of health.

critical thinking. These are essential to rebounding from the current pandemic and ensuring preparedness, not only for the next pandemic but for other, equally pressing emergencies—with equal if not greater consequences for health—such as climate change.

These steps—articulating the contours of an integrated version of public health, putting in place co-ordinated leadership to advance the vision, and creating the necessary foundation where health is uncoupled from health care—are required for meaningful improvements to health and well-being for all.

The integrated, coherent version of public health we have advocated here is very different from what most people think of when they think of "public health." That is the structural change required. Anything less dooms us to repeat the failures of 2020. **M**

KATHERINE SCOTT

# “Do our lives count for less?”

**People with disabilities were an afterthought in Canada’s COVID-19 response. Their lives and well-being should be integral to public health renewal.**

**O**N OCTOBER 30, people with disabilities finally started to receive a one-time federal government payment of \$600 to help cover a significant jump in living expenses from the COVID-19 pandemic. This was 14 weeks after authorizing legislation for the payout was passed, five months after the financial package was initially announced by the Prime Minister, and more than seven months after governments began issuing state-of-emergency and stay-at-home orders across Canada.

Once again, people with disabilities were last in line for COVID support—and that support does not come close to meeting their needs. About 1.7 million people will receive the new benefit, but that’s a fraction of the 6.2 million adults and more than 200,000 children living in Canada who report having one or more disabilities that limit their day-to-day lives.

And it doesn’t begin to compensate for the extraordinary expenses people with disabilities have incurred throughout the pandemic, or the extraordinary labour involved in trying to locate scarce PPE (personal protective equipment like masks) or acquire the services of even harder-to-find support workers, or access medical care, safe transportation and workplace accommodation.

As low-paid workers themselves, people with disabilities, and women in particular, have been significantly affected by employment loss and the collapse in household earnings. One-third of participants in a recent Statistics Canada survey reported a decline in household incomes since the start of the shutdown, with over

half experiencing a loss of more than \$1,000 per month.

Many more are having difficulty meeting their financial obligations and paying for essential needs—especially those from racialized and other marginalized communities. Rates of poverty were already very high among people with disabilities, many of whom are compelled to subsist on welfare benefits that even in the most generous province of Quebec fall far below the poverty line.

Disability advocates question why disability benefit levels remain so low compared to the \$500 per week that has been extended to people who have lost their jobs or much of their income due to the pandemic. “Do our lives count for less?”, wondered Vancouver activist

romham gallacher in a *Globe and Mail* feature in August.

## Heightened risk of poverty and illness

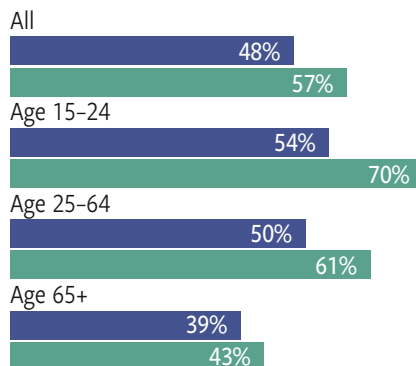
Heightened economic insecurity is just one of the wholly predictable threats to the well-being of people with disabilities during this crisis and beyond. The risk of contracting COVID-19 and experiencing severe illness and death continues to be as large as ever, especially among those living in congregate settings like long-term care facilities and group homes.

People with disabilities remain isolated and exposed, having endured months of cancellations and delays in access to care and treatment, many unable to rely on the support of family, friends and community services. Across the country, people with disabilities are still subject to medical triage protocols that threaten their very right to health care and life itself—this despite concerted advocacy from the disability community decrying the process and the discriminatory impacts of these protocols.

All of this is taking place as the federal government has introduced legislation to update its medical assistance in dying (MAID) regime in response to a Quebec Superior Court decision in 2019 that concluded the process should be easier to access. Offering medically assisted death, in the absence of adequate community supports and health services such as pain management and addiction treatment, places vulnerable people at great risk, according to witnesses in front of the parliamentary committee studying MAID regime reforms.

## Changes in self-rated overall health and mental health compared to before COVID-19, by gender and age group, for persons with long-term conditions or disabilities

- Change in overall health, somewhat or much worse
- Change in mental health, somewhat or much worse



SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON CANADIANS LIVING WITH LONG-TERM CONDITIONS AND DISABILITIES



“Bill C-7 declares an entire class of people, those with physical disabilities, as potentially appropriate for suicide,” said Dr. Ewan Goligher, assistant professor at the University of Toronto, as reported by Postmedia. “I cannot imagine a more degrading and discriminatory message for our society to communicate to our fellow citizens living with disabilities.”

Research from Statistics Canada confirms the heightened stress and ill health that people with disabilities are currently experiencing. Almost half (48%) of respondents in a survey this summer reported that their health was “much worse” or “somewhat worse” since before the pandemic, while more than half (57%) said their mental health had deteriorated as well (see graph).

A few weeks into the pandemic, the Australian government rolled out an emergency response plan “to minimize the spread of COVID-19” and related illness and/or death among people with disabilities, and to “ensure fair access to health care during the viral outbreak.”

In Canada, the response has been, in the words of federal minister Carla Qualtrough, “embarrassingly hard” and has “taken way too long.”

### **Current systems fail people with disabilities**

Too many of the millions of people with disabilities in Canada fall through the holes in our social safety net. Co-operation among all levels of government is desperately needed to plug these gaps.

In the September throne speech, the federal government signalled a more comprehensive response is on the way. A Disability Inclusion Plan will be introduced that includes a new Canadian Disability Benefit (CDB) modelled on the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for seniors. The government also announced a “robust employment strategy” for people with disabilities, and a better process for determining eligibility for benefits and programs.

A new disability benefit and employment strategy could reduce the numbers of people living in deep poverty and improve the health and well-being of millions. But this all hinges on what comes next: the program details, eligibility criteria, related funding commitments, proposed timeline, and how seriously the government consults on all of it with people with disabilities.

Provincial and territorial governments have offered little by way of support. Only three have provided COVID-related income support to people on social assistance. Indeed, with the exception of B.C., the Northwest Territories and Yukon, provincial governments have partially or fully clawed back CERB benefits from eligible recipients, essentially earning a huge windfall at the expense of the most vulnerable.

The Ontario government has utterly failed to step in with meaningful investments and policy reforms in the long-term care sector, where vulnerable seniors

and people with disabilities died in such large numbers this spring (see feature in the July/Aug issue of the *Monitor*). A pledge to introduce a new standard that mandates an average of four hours of direct care every day is four years away. Too little, much too late.

### **Disability justice and health renewal**

The voices of people with disabilities are almost completely invisible in policy and research. This includes women and girls, First Nations, Indigenous and Métis (FNIM) peoples, deaf\* and hearing impaired, those with invisible and less-understood disabilities, episodic and chronic disabilities and intellectual and neurological disabilities. We need to bring a disability lens to all planning and action for the recovery and support the leadership of people with disabilities in all of our renewal efforts.

Reform of the income security system is fundamental to any hope of success. The patchwork that now exists traps people in lives of abject poverty. At 0.8% of GDP, Canada is one of the lowest spenders in the OECD on income support for people with disabilities or those experiencing illness or injury (the OECD average is 1.9%), below even the United States, which spends 1.3% of GDP.

Governments the world over acknowledge the need to spend their way through the current economic crisis resulting from the pandemic. What better moment to build out physical and social infrastructure that prioritizes the needs of people with disabilities, in collaboration with Indigenous communities, provinces and territories, and municipalities? Projects could include bringing buildings up to accessibility standards, investing in the care economy, expanding health care, education and social service levels, and increasing the stock of supported and affordable housing.

Targets should be set for employing people with disabilities in this work and providing opportunities for education and training as well as community leadership. Employment equity has been an important policy objective for years. Our governments should lead in setting standards for disability-inclusive workplaces and making sure their own workplaces are representative and accessible to all.

There also needs to be “clear, concise, and universal health care policy that ensures those with disabilities have access to care that is accessible, values their lives, and allows for access to support persons and caregivers in situations where this is needed,” as DisAbleD Women’s Network of Canada (DAWN) called for in November.

As difficult as this period has been, the pandemic hands us an opportunity to dismantle the systemic legacies of exclusion and ableism in our institutions, social services and workplaces—so that all can thrive and no one is left behind. **M**

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\*We recognize that not all deaf people identify as disabled.

# Corporate lobbyists and right-wing think-tanks are waging a war against the plan for national pharmacare

**I**N THE SPEECH from the Throne this September, the Trudeau government said it “remains committed to a national, universal pharmacare program and will accelerate steps to achieve this system.” That is an improvement over the Liberals’ pledge, during the 2019 federal election, to provide \$6 billion over four years as a “down payment” on pharmacare. How much of an improvement remains to be seen.

Behind the pharmacare plan is a simple idea: no one in Canada should be denied access to necessary prescription drugs because of cost. Currently, despite spending over \$1,000 per person per year on prescriptions, millions of Canadians have trouble getting the drugs they need. The average cost of prescriptions across the 29 countries of the OECD, which mostly have pharmacare plans, is \$700 per person per year.

A report prepared in 2018 for the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions estimated that 70,000 Canadians aged 55 and older suffer avoidable deterioration in their health status every year, and as many as 12,000 Canadians over 40 with cardiovascular disease require overnight hospitalization. Hundreds of thousands of Canadian go without food, heat and other health care expenses so they can afford the drugs they need.

Pharmacare is overwhelmingly supported by Canadians. An Angus Reid poll published at the end of October found that 86% of Canadians moderately or strongly support establishing such a plan. A large

majority of people in every province and in every income group, along with 55% of people who identified as Conservative voters, were in favour of pharmacare.

In every country that has a universal program for accessing doctors and hospitals, access to prescription drugs is part of the health care mix. Every country except Canada. Here government covers about 42% of the cost of medicines, private insurance another 36%, and the rest comes out of people’s pocketbooks. It wasn’t supposed to be this way.

When Justice Emmett Hall released his iconic 1964 report paving the way for medicare, he envisaged that after universal coverage for doctors the next step would be prescription drugs, but that next step has still not come.

Over the years, a variety of reports have repeated calls for national pharmacare: the 1997 National Forum on Health, the Kirby Senate report, the Romanow Commission, and in April 2018, a parliamentary standing committee on health. In June 2019, the Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare led by Eric Hoskins, former Ontario health minister, laid out the broad outlines of how to achieve this goal.

Not surprisingly, some groups have mobilized against universal pharmacare. Notably they include Innovative Medicines Canada, the lobby group for the multinational drug companies, and right-wing think-tanks such as the Fraser Institute. These groups argue that the system we have works well for

most Canadians and that we should just fill in the gaps in coverage.

A universal pharmacare plan, by lowering drug prices, will make companies reluctant to introduce new “life-saving” drugs or otherwise invest in Canada, claim corporate opponents. They also suggest that pharmacare won’t cover all of the drugs currently covered by private insurance plans and therefore patients will suffer.

None of these arguments hold up to scrutiny. Even people in the medium-to-high income groups who have drug insurance still report not adhering to medications because of cost.

The Quebec model is frequently touted as the solution for people who don’t have drug coverage. In that province all employers who offer health benefits must also offer drug coverage. For everyone else the government steps in. Yanick Labrie, a senior fellow at the Fraser Institute, authored a report advocating the Quebec system for the rest of Canada.

On some measures, such as cost-related nonadherence, Quebec does relatively better than the Canadian average. But given the poor drug coverage in other provinces that is not the right comparison. For example, Quebec lags behind Australia, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom—which all offer universal drug coverage—on nonadherence. Similarly, a greater percentage of people in Quebec report spending more than \$1,000 out-of-pocket on drugs, and total per capita spending on drugs in Quebec (\$1,087) is substantially

higher than the average in the rest of Canada (\$912) and in countries with universal coverage (\$826).

With respect to investment, drug companies have been threatening to withdraw it from Canada for almost 50 years. When the NDP government in Manitoba passed a law in 1972 making it mandatory for pharmacists to substitute cheaper generic drugs for those named on prescriptions, the forerunner of Innovative Medicines Canada said, “It will remain to be seen how much value would be put on the Manitoba market by research-oriented companies.... If they can’t meet the prices they could be forced out of business.”

The threat not to introduce new “life-saving” drugs into Canada is also hollow. Most new drugs are not life-saving or even moderate advances over what is already available. According to the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board (PMPRB), a federal agency charged with setting a maximum price for new patented drugs, only 2.2% of all new drugs introduced into Canada between 2010 and 2017 were breakthroughs; another 4.3% were substantial improvements, but a whopping 72.5% were of slight or no improvement.

In a positive step, the federal government has finalized new guidelines for how the PMPRB operates (see article by Bruce Campbell in this issue), including how it sets drug prices. Under current guidelines, the board compares Canadian prices to those in seven other high-income countries including the United States and Switzerland—the 1st and 3rd most expensive places in the world for prescription drugs. As a result of this calculation, Canada ranks fourth in prices.

The new guidelines will remove these two high-cost countries from the list and expand it to include countries, such as Australia, with more reasonable prices. Along with a number of other measures, the PMPRB is projecting these changes will lead to savings to Canada of \$8.8 billion over a 10-year period. But given that Canada now spends \$33.7 billion a year on prescription drugs, these savings will not dramatically lower our drug bill.

The same groups that have been active in opposing pharmacare are also crying wolf over the PMPRB changes. Innovative Medicines Canada warns that “the threats of negative impact of the PMPRB changes are real and significant, not only for the life sciences sector in Canada, but more importantly for millions of Canadian patients that depend on new medicines and vaccines.” Life Sciences Ontario, whose membership includes drug giants Amgen, AstraZeneca, Lilly and GlaxoSmithKline, repeats the claim that drug companies will stop launching new drugs in Canada.

In the middle of October, Nigel Rawson and John Adams published an opinion piece bemoaning the future of drug access in Canada if the PMPRB reforms go ahead. Rawson is affiliated with the Fraser Institute and Adams is the president of the Canadian PKU and Allied Disorders Inc., a patient group that grants

## The same groups that have been active in opposing pharmacare are also crying wolf over changes to drug pricing rules.

gold donors, like the drug company Biomarin, one direct-marketing email per year to its membership.

According to Rawson and Adams, drug prices will be so low that they will be unsustainable, and new breakthrough therapies that can treat disorders that cause premature death and/or life-limiting disabilities will not be marketed in Canada. The authors single out the drug Trikafta, a breakthrough treatment for cystic fibrosis that allegedly has not been submitted for approval to Health Canada by the company because it may not get the price that it wants.

In the United States, Vertex is charging US\$311,000 per year (\$411,000) for a Trifakta treatment. But the independent Institute for Clinical and Economic Review, which assesses value for money, estimates the drug is only worth US\$67,900 to US\$85,500 per year (a 73% to 78% discount) based on the real health improvements it offers patients.

Vertex has cut a deal with the National Health Service in the United Kingdom to market Trikafta at a lower (but undisclosed) price and did the same thing in Switzerland for two of its other cystic fibrosis drugs. The ability of other countries to get reduced prices suggests that Vertex might have been using Trikafta to “blackmail” the PMPRB into backing down on some of its planned changes.

On November 9, Vertex unexpectedly announced it will be submitting Trikafta for approval in Canada. However, in a statement that indicates that the company has not given up its fight against the new regulations, it said, “We remain genuinely concerned that the PMPRB Guidelines may impact access for Canadians to new innovative medicines in the future.” As far as Trikafta is concerned, the fight will soon switch to how much Canadian patients will have to pay.

“The arguments for pharmacare have never been stronger and these moments to act don’t come up all that often,” said Hoskins in the leadup to the last Speech from the Throne. “It is achievable; we have a road map; we know the benefits; we know the government can get it across the finish line.”

The *can* of the matter is not in question. Whether the government *will* take action is still to be determined. **M**



BRUCE CAMPBELL

# Is there a vaccine against regulatory capture?

## Government must confront Big Pharma to keep health costs down—during the pandemic and for posterity.

THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC has exposed Canada’s vulnerability to shortages of essential medicines and cracks in its public health infrastructure.

In an open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, leading doctors and pharmacists including the Canadian Medical Association urged the government to develop the capacity to manufacture these medicines domestically, and to bolster stockpiles.

Confronted by journalists in October about these and other holes in Canada’s pandemic response capacity, Trudeau blamed funding cuts and an anti-science attitude under the previous Harper government. However, doctors and epidemiologists inside the Public Health Agency of Canada say the current government never fixed the problems or the funding shortfall.

An investigation by the *Globe and Mail* revealed that the country’s pandemic surveillance system, the Global Public Health Intelligence Network, was effectively silenced in 2019.

Unfortunately, the problems bedeviling Canada’s emergency response to COVID-19 go much deeper and begin much earlier than Trudeau or Harper. The regulatory mistakes and paths not taken at Health Canada share much in common with those I exposed at Transport Canada in my research into rail safety changes in the decades leading up to the 2013 Lac-Mégantic explosion.

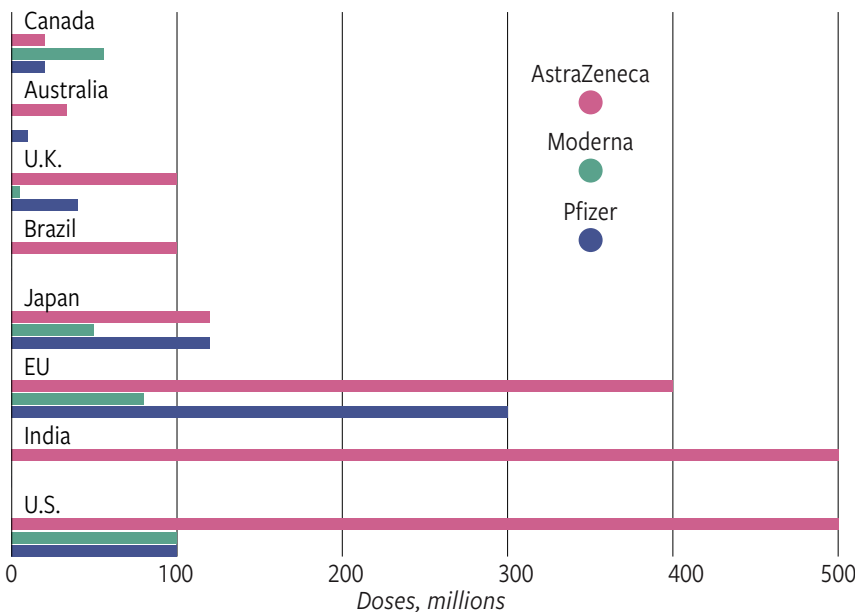
In this case, Canada’s disjointed and contradictory vaccine plan is shaped by such events as the surrender of federal compulsory drug licensing powers and the sell-off of

the government-owned Connaught Laboratories (the discoverer of insulin) to a French multinational in 1989; the replacement of compulsory patent licensing by a drug pricing system that has resulted in Canadians paying the fourth highest drug prices in the world; and the entrenching of these policies in the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, and the WTO Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

Partly as a consequence of this Big Pharma-friendly trajectory, drug expenditures are today one of the biggest medical outlays, growing from \$2.6 billion in 1985 to \$33.7 billion in 2018, according to the federal government. For example, the cost of intravenous chemotherapy to treat cancer in hospitals is covered under medicare; the same medications prescribed to patients outside of those facilities are not. Sales of these medications to treat cancer have nearly tripled in Canada over the past decade, reaching \$3.9 billion last year.

Big Pharma’s dominance is reinforced by a deferential “partnership” with the regulator, Health Canada. The relationship is characterized by an underresourced regulatory agency, diminished scientific expertise in evaluating industry demands, and the corrosive influence of dependence on industry funding of the drug-approval process. Fees charged to drug companies cover 50% of the cost to administer Health Canada’s drug program, with the department planning to raise that ratio to 75%—further compromising its independence at a moment where public health and international

### Advance purchases of leading vaccine options to November



SOURCE: RECREATED FROM A BLOOMBERG NEWS CHART BASED ON DATA FROM THE DUKE GLOBAL HEALTH INNOVATION CENTER AND BLOOMBERG.

solidarity should tower over pharma profits as a policy priority.

The international scientific community continues to work co-operatively on a vaccine for COVID-19, the novel coronavirus that had killed over 1.4 million people by the end of November. At least 17 vaccine candidates are currently being tested on humans, three of which have been shown to be effective in preventing the disease. With the exception of vague assurances by the odd CEO that vaccines will be affordable, major pharmaceutical corporations—focused on protecting their monopoly patents—are not co-operating in the global endeavor.

Canada along with 180 countries has joined COVAX to ensure the distribution of vaccines to less-developed countries. Canada has committed \$440 million. Half of this money will secure doses of the vaccine for Canada and the other half will go to poorer countries. However, the Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research and the Canadian Society for International Health have criticized Canada for buying doses for itself, hindering efforts to ensure a fair distribution of vaccines around the world. Moreover, these “fair distribution” programs are all based on Big Pharma keeping patents intact.

India and South Africa have led a proposal at the WTO to suspend international patent laws for an extended period to allow compulsory licensing of patented medicines, treatments and protective equipment. Rich countries including Canada pushed back against this proposal, a vote on which will happen at the WTO TRIPS Council early this year. Last spring, Costa Rica proposed allowing countries and researchers to share their technologies, collaborate on research and produce patent-free medicines. Big Pharma is aggressively opposed to both proposals.

The federal government has additionally spent \$1 billion in pre-orders for six foreign vaccine candidates for exclusive Canadian use. It has signed deals with multinationals Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson, Astra Zeneca, Novavax, and Sanofi. None of these companies manufacture vaccines in Canada. There are a handful of Canadian vaccine candidates registered with the World Health Organization, at least one of which has been tested on humans. The government has also committed to support a national medical research strategy including the development of vaccines and treatments, and to rebuild domestic manufacturing capacity.

The lame duck Trump administration, rife with former Big Pharma lobbyists, opposed international collaboration on COVID-19 treatment and vaccines. Instead, the U.S. government provided major research funding and economic support to pharmaceutical companies while protecting the industry’s monopoly patents against affordable public access both domestically and abroad. Incoming president Joe Biden’s ability

## COVID-19 is viewed as an unprecedented business opportunity for the pharmaceutical industry.

to develop an alternative approach, should the Democrats desire to, was hindered by Trump’s post-election obstructionism in the interests of securing Republican control of the Senate in runoff elections this January.

“Pharmaceutical companies logged more than 800 price increases this year (2020) and adjusted the cost of 42 medicines upward by an average of 3.3 per cent so far in July,” reported Politico based on data from the price-tracker GoodRx. U.S.-based Gilead Sciences Inc. announced in June that the non-negotiable price for its COVID-19 treatment remdesivir would be US\$390 per vial, which would amount to US\$2,340 per five-day treatment course. The estimate is that remdesivir could be made for under US\$1 per dose. Though Trump is on his way out, this pricing system remains in place and may continue to for some time before Biden moves, as he has promised he will, to lower consumer drug costs. But grassroots pressure will be needed. Biden represents a bipartisan policy establishment that has enabled this drug pricing regime for decades.

COVID-19 is viewed as an unprecedented business opportunity for the pharmaceutical industry. The stock prices of the top 20 global bio/pharmaceutical companies have risen sharply since last February, as the pandemic was taking hold of China, Iran and Europe. The industry has secured intellectual property (IP) controls over COVID-19 health technologies, with the possible exception of the British company Astra-Zeneca, which allegedly has an agreement with Oxford University to make their research available without patents.

Big Pharma is taking advantage of the pandemic to pressure the Canadian government to further block, delay, dilute or reverse policies, legislation and regulations designed to provide Canadians with affordable access to essential medicines. Backed by the U.S. government, the industry has aggressively lobbied against three Canadian initiatives: the plan for universal pharmacare, the partial reinstatement of compulsory licensing, and the planned overhaul of Canada’s method for calculating fair prices for prescription drugs. The U.S. Trade Representative’s latest annual report on foreign threats to U.S. copyright holders singled out Canada as a major concern.

# With national pharmacare we might finally realize the dream of medicare's founders that all Canadians have access to drug coverage as a human right, not based on ability to pay.

In 2015, the federal government committed to overhauling the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board [PMPRB] price-setting rules. The reform, which is estimated to save Canadians billions of dollars, was seen as a first step toward a national pharmacare plan that has been on the government to-do list since the mid-1990s. In 2019, pharmacare seemed to finally come into view when the final report of the federally appointed Advisory Council on the Implementation of National Pharmacare recommended a national program along the lines of medicare and set out a federal-provincial implementation timeline.

Big Pharma along with the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association launched an intense lobbying campaign opposing the plan. Their efforts are reinforced by think-tank echo chambers including the Fraser Institute, Macdonald-Laurier Institute and Montreal Economic Institute, which receive generous funding from U.S. billionaires and Big Pharma lobbies.

Big Pharma says that reform of the PMPRB pricing rules will mean less research and development in Canada, fewer clinical trials, fewer new medicines, and patients being denied the latest medications. Surprisingly, a coalition of patient advocacy groups supports the pharmaceutical industry position, warning that the PMPRB guidelines go too far in lowering prices and thereby preventing access to life-saving medical treatments.

According to Sharon Batt, a Dalhousie University researcher who studies the links between patient advocacy groups and the pharmaceutical industry, many patient groups accept major funding from pharmaceutical companies. Batt is concerned “they’ve been so compromised by their relationships that they’ve undercut their own power to serve the interests of patients.”

None of the industry claims about the drug pricing changes are true, according to PMPRB’s own research, which found:

- 90% of drug shortages occur among non-patented drugs;
- there is no clear association between lower prices in Canada and drug shortages; and
- there is no clear association between shortages and the price of medicines in Canada relative to other countries.

The draft regulations amending Canada’s drug-pricing methodology were made public in late 2017, with the final regulations published in August 2019. The changes remove the U.S. and Switzerland from the list of countries used to compare international prices, since they are the two most expensive jurisdictions and therefore skew prices upward. Draft guidelines implementing these regulations were introduced in November 2019. The industry lobby again pushed back, launching a series of court challenges for good measure.

On October 23, the PMPRB published its final guidelines, giving effect to the amended Patented Medicines Regulations that came into force on January 1. While the revised country comparisons methodology was maintained, it only applies to drugs marketed since August 2019, and thus the overall median drug prices of the new PMPRB comparators will take a decade or more to come into effect.

Furthermore, COVID-19 vaccines and treatments are exempt from the PMPRB rules. This likely neutralizes the March 2020 COVID-19 Emergency Response Act, which brought back Canada’s ability to impose compulsory drug licensing in the event of a national health emergency. It is not as blatant as Trump’s public handouts to the pharmaceutical industry, but federal deference to Big Pharma will cost us during the pandemic and afterwards, with no proof of any public health benefits.

Still, the industry is fighting the pricing rule changes in court, declaring they violate the Patent Act and would reduce corporate revenues by \$19.8 billion over 10 years. Think about that—even if the industry is exaggerating and the costs are half that amount, that’s \$10 billion in *savings* for prescription drug consumers, including Canadian governments, over the next decade.

Canada is the only country with a universal health care system that does not also cover prescription drugs. With national pharmacare we might finally realize the dream of medicare’s founders that all Canadians have access to drug coverage as a human right, not based on ability to pay. But we cannot allow our government to back down or back-peddle any more to secure exorbitant monopoly pricing for Big Pharma. And we need to double down on efforts to establish domestic non-profit or, better yet, publicly owned corporations to develop, manufacture and export affordable essential medicines. **M**

# When will publicly funded and provided midwifery come to Yukon?

**M**ARIA ROSE SIKYEA is a young Dené artist living in Yukon with her adorable three-year-old. When I spoke to her in November, she was expecting a second child, whom she hoped would be delivered with the assistance of a midwife. But like many others in her situation, Sikyea faced a considerable roadblock: Yukon is the only Canadian jurisdiction that does not offer access to government-provided and funded midwifery.

In theory, this roadblock shouldn't exist. Midwifery is a centuries-old profession relied upon internationally in traditional and hospital assisted births. But despite a five-year effort to get midwife services regulated and funded in Yukon, midwifery has been impossible to implement. Though I am relatively new to this struggle, I already feel like those grannies at protests holding up signs reading, "I Can't Believe I'm Still Protesting This Sh\*t."

For the birth of her first child, Sikyea moved from her home in Northwest Territories to British Columbia. The province and the territory both have regulated and funded midwifery, making it accessible to her without causing financial stress. She chose a home birth, as the medical model isn't her preference, and because it resembled the traditional births she was told of, coming from a generation and lineage of traditional midwives.

Now living in Yukon, Sikyea had the option of hiring the services of a practising midwife for her second child, but with a catch: she would have to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket. Also, with only one

practising midwife in the whole territory there was no guarantee this option would be available to her when she needed it.

Sikyea told me birthing in the hospital was not an option she really wanted to consider. "I want to retain my power, as an Indigenous woman," she said. A power she refers to as being taken away through colonization and the medicalization of births.

As explained in the book *Born Into My Grandmother's Hands: Honouring First Nations' Birth Knowledge and Practice in North Yukon* (The Firelight Group, 2019), until very recently, births in Yukon took place

based on traditional knowledge and practice: "At the turn of the 20th century, there was a push to medicalise and modernise childbearing practices across Canada. Childbirth in a hospital setting, and under the authority of physicians, grew steadily. By the 1940s, midwifery was 'no longer an option for the vast majority of Canadian women.'"

"I would give birth in a wall tent, surrounded by women and community on my traditional territory, if I could," said Sikyea.

## What gives, Yukon?

Geography is the easiest excuse for the lack of access to midwifery in Yukon. North of 60 is a world of mystery and wonder to many, including Canadians. Yet the Northwest Territories regulated midwifery in 2005, and Nunavut in 2011. This is clearly not a "North" thing.

At the same time, getting midwifery covered was hardly simple in the rest of Canada. Ontario only regulated the practice in 1994, Alberta in 1994 (with—major eyeroll—public funding not available until 2009), Quebec in 1999, British Columbia in 1998, Manitoba in 2000, Saskatchewan in 2008, Nova Scotia in 2009, and finally, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador in 2016.

How can midwifery services still be treated as a luxury in Yukon and not a fundamental right? How can we have better access to weed than midwifery care?

In 2015, then-Yukon NDP health critic Lois Moorcroft brought the issue to the Legislative Assembly. "Why is this government still failing to uphold women's reproductive

## The midwifery profession

Midwives must have formal educational training and be accredited through a midwifery program. The midwife supports the birthing person through the prenatal, pregnancy and postnatal stages of birth. They are able to deliver the newborn in more traditional settings, such as a person's home or at a Birth Centre. In Canada, midwifery programs are obtainable at the University of British Columbia, Ryerson University, McMaster University, Laurentian University, l'Université du Québec à Trois Rivières, University of Manitoba and Mount Royal University.

choice by not providing regulated and funded midwifery care?”, she asked.

In 2016, a newly elected Liberal government promised in its throne speech that Yukoners would have access to regulated, funded and implemented midwifery. A public consultation was performed in 2018. The results reiterated what most Yukoners and birthing people already knew: midwifery services are awaited with much anticipation in the territory.

The Community Midwifery Association of Yukon (CMAY) is one of the groups leading the charge for regulated midwifery in the territory. Its members were delighted to see their efforts finally come to fruition, when at a 2018 annual meeting the territorial ministers of health and community services reaffirmed the government’s promise and timeline for action. The room was filled with sighs of relief and excitement. Queen’s *We Are The Champions* was probably the only thing missing from the scene, as people hugged (in a pre-COVID world) and congratulated each other for the years of effort and advocacy.

It was a truly beautiful moment, one that I am still honoured to have witnessed. Briefly, my skepticism of government promises was alleviated. Briefly, the Yukon government *caught me slippin’*. In October 2019, CMAY was told, yet again, that regulated midwifery would have to wait.

### Midwifery and COVID-19

The pandemic forced an alternative approach to child birth on Yukoners. Rules implemented last March required birthing people to attend checkups and ultrasounds on their own. For birthing, only one support person was permitted in hospital. If you had intended to give birth with the presence of one person all along, be it your partner, friend or doula, you’d be fine.

But if birthing in your culture is meant to happen surrounded by community, mothers, aunties, elders, doulas, etc., the pandemic put an end to your established and comfortable birth plan. Many Yukoners saw,

How can midwifery services still be treated as a luxury in Yukon and not a fundamental right? How can we have better access to weed than midwifery care?

once again, how necessary midwifery services are. The option of birthing at home, surrounded by a support network, especially at a time of uncertainty, was requested by many.

Birthing people living outside of Whitehorse have known what this dislocation feels like for some time. Four weeks prior to their due date, they are forced to relocate to the city. Sometimes they take partners, younger children and other family members with them. Many must stay in a hotel during that time, as there are very few alternative accommodations. Whitehorse is facing a housing-crunch; it is nearly impossible to find housing on a short-term basis.

At the book launch of *Born Into My Grandmother’s Hands*, I was left stunned and reflective by how Bonnee Bingham, Vuntut Gwitchin citizen from Old Crow, described the impact of this birthing process. The last trimester of pregnancy is an important part of welcoming the new baby for its family and community, a time of celebration and joy, she said. The four-week pre-natal and one-week post-natal stay requirements in Whitehorse deprive both family and community of this important rite.

Deaths are treated differently and are much more visible, said Bingham. The person dying is either surrounded by family or community, or medivaced out to Whitehorse or Vancouver. “How do you think seeing death and missing out on the joys of childbirth affects a community?”, Bingham asked.

“I acknowledge that I live, breathe and play on the traditional territories of (Insert Yukon First Nation).” The words are now spoken by government officials at every press conference, before every public event. What do these words mean, when traditional practices, such as access to midwifery, are made impossible to so many?

Sikyea told me she wanted to give birth in the most traditional way possible. She attempted to get funding for private midwifery care through Jordan’s Principle, but this federal money is only available to her postpartum. She ended up paying out of pocket for bringing in additional support, and in exchange, teaching traditional work.

It was not enough to access the level of care she needed for birthing. Sikyea resorted to setting up a GoFundMe page to seek financial help from the community and from strangers, which she said she found very stressful. Her strength, tenacity and courage are admirable, to say the least. It shouldn’t have been needed in a country that prides itself on its publicly funded and accessible health care services.

With elections in the territory this coming November, the current government has made another promise: Yukon will have regulated, funded and implemented midwifery services by the fall. I’ll believe it when I see it. **M**





## The good news page

COMPILED  
BY ELAINE HUGHES

*Chatelaine*, the glossy magazine read by more than 3.5 million Canadians, recognized Unist’ot’en House matriarchs Freda Huson, sister Brenda Michell (Geltiy) and niece Karla Tait among its Women of the Year for 2020, alongside Canada’s chief public health officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, *Schitt’s Creek* actor Annie Murphy, and Annamie Paul, the first Black Canadian elected to a major federal party (Green). / The New York Philharmonic performed a world premiere of a piece by 12-year-old Brooklyn resident Grace Moore, who conducted the outdoor performance from the back of a truck. / Bonnie Lewis (pictured),



PHOTO FROM THE BATTLEFORD NOW WEBSITE

an Indigenous person of colour, made history when she was elected the first female mayor of the Town of Allan, just southeast of Saskatoon. / Somewhat further west, newly re-elected Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern appointed Nanaia Mahuta New Zealand’s first Indigenous foreign affairs minister. / Molly Shoichet, a Toronto professor of chemical engineering and applied chemistry, was awarded the \$1 million Gerhard Herzberg Canada Gold Medal for her cleverly designed hydrogels that mimic human tissues for the purposes of drug development and regenerative medicine. / Scotland became the first country to require that menstrual products be freely available everywhere. / *Chatelaine* / CBS News / CBC News / Prince Albert Now / NPR / Associated Press

The Chinese government expects sales of electric, plug-in hybrid and hydrogen-powered vehicles in the world’s biggest auto market to rise from the current 5% to 20% of new car sales by 2025 (plug-in electric vehicles made up 2% of total U.S. auto sales in 2019). / A class of Dutch students built a bright yellow sporty two-seater electric car entirely out of recycled materials, including flax and plastic bottles for the chassis and an interior constructed with household waste pulled out of the ocean. / Riding Sunbeams, a joint social enterprise made up of climate charity Possible and campaign

group Community Energy South, will use a 2.5 million pound (\$3.34 million) government grant to construct a 3.75 MW solar farm to help power trains between London and the southern seaside town of Eastbourne. / In an effort to fight deforestation, the Norwegian government’s International Climate and Forests Initiative will spend the equivalent of \$44 million on a high-resolution mapping satellite dataset on the tropical forests of 64 countries. / Reuters EV-Volumes.com / BBC News /

Scientists with the Schmidt Ocean Institute discovered a “massive” 500-metre “blade-like” coral reef with a base of 1.5 km in Australia’s Great Barrier Reef, the first reef to be discovered in 120 years. / The global distribution of all 20,000 bee species has been mapped as part of an effort to conserve the important pollinators. Turns out there are more bees in the Northern than Southern Hemisphere, more species in dry and temperate zones than the equator, and more in deserts than jungles and forests. / A New Zealand couple donated their 900-hectare heritage farming property near Lake Wakatipu to the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust to keep it out of the hands of developers, so that it may be kept “as it is forever.” / Organic farm acreage in Canada has increased by 121% since 2006—to meet a market worth \$6.9 billion in 2018. Quebec leads the country

in acreage, followed by Saskatchewan. / CNN / BBC News / Independent (U.K.) / Moose Jaw Today

With a time of 16 hours, 46 minutes and nine seconds, Chris Nikic, 21, became the first person with Down Syndrome to finish an Ironman triathlon in Florida late last year. / Keegan Hodgson, a 16-year-old farm boy from Olds, AB, won the Outlaw Male Surf category of the 2020 World Wake Surfing Championship in Vernon, B.C. Wake surfers use a shorter and squatter board compared to ocean surfers, and are towed by a rope behind a specially designed motorboat that creates an endless wave. / Toronto writer and poet Souvankham Thammavongsa won the coveted 2020 Giller Prize for her book, *How to Pronounce Knife*, which jurors hailed as “a stunning collection of stories that portray the immigrant experience in achingly beautiful prose.” / CBC

ASAD ISMI

# Garbage in, garbage out

**Washington hopes a free trade pact with Kenya will give it a beachhead in its hot war with Al-Shabab and cold war with China—and an African dumping ground for GMOs and plastic waste. What Kenya gets in exchange is not at all clear.**

THE UNITED STATES and Kenya have been negotiating a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) since March 2020, sparking concerns about further neocolonization of the East African state by Washington, whose economy is 224 times the size of Kenya's. Given its "America First" policy, it is not surprising the Trump administration would aim to subjugate Kenya economically through this FTA, as a template for the rest of Africa.

Somewhat more puzzling is why the Kenyan government of President Uhuru Kenyatta would go along with it, and what Trump's successors in the Biden administration will do with the negotiations now. I spoke to Kenyan and U.S. trade experts about the domestic and geo-politics behind the FTA.

"The Trump administration wanted to move away from preferential trade programs towards more 'reciprocal' trade in which developing countries must make new concessions to keep the trade benefits they have now," says Karen Hansen-Kuhn, program director at the Washington-based Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP). "This agreement would be based on the model established under the new NAFTA [known as USMCA], which sets new limits on governments' abilities to set rules on things like pesticides and GMOs or other public interest rules. In general, it would serve to cement these new limits on public policy in both the U.S. and Kenya against more progressive rules in the future."

As a major participant in the U.S. Africa Command's (AFRICOM)

security operations on the continent, especially in Somalia, Kenya is already a leading U.S. client state, accepting \$824 million in military and economic aid from Washington in 2018. Since 2010, Kenya has received \$400 million in counterterrorism funding from the Pentagon and has become the U.S. military's main foreign conduit for opposing Al-Shabab, the insurgent group that is fighting the U.S. in Somalia for control of the Horn of Africa. Al Shabab also carries out attacks in Kenya, including strikes last January on a U.S. military base and two schools near the Somali border.

As in Brazil, the United States sees strong military co-ordination with Kenya in combination with a preferential free trade pact—the U.S. government's first with a sub-Saharan country—as a way to shore up Nairobi as a dependable military and economic conduit for U.S. interests on the continent.

Another major factor for Washington in seeking the FTA is countering Chinese influence in Africa, which has grown dramatically in economic terms. In fact, this may be "foremost among Washington's concerns," according to the U.S. establishment think-tank the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). China-Africa trade has "soared" since 2008 while trade between the continent and the U.S. has declined, notes CFR. China is also the top investor in Africa. Kenya's imports from China were worth \$3.79 billion in 2017, making Beijing its leading trade partner whereas imports from the U.S. in 2019 were \$401 million and exports to the U.S. were \$667 million.

A main objective for the U.S. in the Kenyan FTA negotiations is gaining tariff-free access for its dominant agricultural sector, which could potentially destroy Kenya's domestic food systems. This is one reason why Public Citizen, the U.S. consumer advocacy organization, calls the FTA "a terrible idea." Melissa Omino, research manager at the Center for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law (part of Swarthmore University in Nairobi, Kenya), agrees there would be "dire consequences" for Kenya stemming from the FTA, particularly concerning food security.

"The U.S. heavily subsidizes its own domestic producers thus allowing them to overproduce. When such goods are exported out of the U.S. at low prices together with removed tariffs, it results in the flooding of such U.S. agricultural exports leading to the destruction of the domestic market of Kenya," says Omino. The U.S. also wants Kenya to import its GMO corn and maize, but GMO products are banned in Kenya currently.

According to Omino, the effect of the FTA would become devastating when world food prices go up, since Kenyans would neither be able to afford to buy food imports nor would they have local production to rely on.

"An example of this is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, now USMCA), which affected Mexico such that [two million] corn farmers lost their income due to flooding of corn from the U.S.," she tells me. "So far Kenya has been protected by the tariffs of

the East African Community [EAC—a regional trade agreement Kenya is part of along with five other countries] and has been able to manage food security well. Once these are removed the case changes drastically.”

Melanie Foley, international campaigns director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch, pointed out to me that in the proposed FTA, the U.S. is also targeting Kenya’s “strong laws” banning certain GMO foods, protecting consumers’ privacy online, and the country’s progressive environmental policies such as its ban on plastic bags. Kenya is a leader in the area of plastic waste bans and management, according to Omino.

Foley quotes a *New York Times* exposé, according to which, she says, “the [American] petrochemical lobby is pushing the U.S. government to use these talks to challenge Kenya’s strong plastics laws and expand the plastics industry’s footprint across Kenya and the continent. If the industry has its way, Kenya’s strong plastic bag ban and proposed limits on imports of plastic garbage could be under threat.”

James Gathii, professor of law at Loyola University Chicago School of Law, tells me that the flooding of the Kenyan market with U.S. GMO corn and maize will not only devastate Kenyan agriculture but also its industry. “Heavily subsidized farm products from the U.S. flooding the Kenyan market would enhance access to Kenya for U.S. companies in a way that would undermine Kenya’s industrialization plans, especially in agro-manufacturing.”

Gathii, a leading Kenyan academic and an expert in international trade law, says he is also concerned that Washington “is aiming for enhanced intellectual property protections” in the Kenya FTA, which could inhibit access to essential medicines and likely “undermine the fledgling health care systems in Kenya’s regional governments.” It is common United States Trade Representative practice to use trade negotiations to solidify and extend monopoly patent and other intellectual property protections for Big Pharma, Hollywood and Silicon Valley.

“Counties have made a lot of progress in bringing health care closer to the people at the grassroots level for the first time since Kenya’s independence in 1963,” continues Gathii. “That progress will be upended by the U.S.–Kenya FTA that would make it difficult if not impossible to preserve and enhance the work these counties have been able to do with provision of essential drugs and health care systems that would face higher drug and medical costs as a result of the FTA.”

Sharon Treat, senior attorney at IATP, emphasizes the degradation of standards Kenya faces under an FTA with the U.S. Currently Kenya has a trading relationship with the European Union and “must align its food standards to be consistent with EU standards in order to export there,” she explains.

“EU food standards in many respects are more protective of human health or the environment than U.S.

standards, for example, allowable levels of pesticide residues on produce, approvals of genetically modified food for human consumption, and use of chemical additives and growth promoters such as ractopamine and hormones in livestock production.” Treat warns that a trade deal with the U.S. “could lead Kenya to adopt policies that reduce, rather than increase environmental and other protections.”

The Kenyan government argues that it needs the FTA to safeguard against possible U.S. cancellation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which currently provides considerable U.S. market access for Kenya and other African countries and has to be renewed by the U.S. Congress in 2025. But as Foley points out, the AGOA is unlikely to be terminated in 2025 as it “is extremely popular in Congress” with both Democrats and Republicans.

“AGOA has been renewed twice with overwhelming bipartisan support,” she says. “[T]here is simply no reason to believe that Congress would not renew this popular program again before it expires in 2025.”

Given all the disadvantages of finalizing an FTA with the U.S. as opposed to staying with the AGOA, which requires no concessions from Kenya, the Kenyatta government’s devotion to the FTA talks is difficult to understand, says Omino. “What makes it even more difficult to understand is that such negotiations take place in secrecy and the text is only released to the public after the parties have agreed and signed the same,” she adds. “This means that citizens of the affected countries...are not really in the know of motivations for and actual machinations within these negotiations.”

Gathii says it seems Kenya’s elite are “pegging their hopes on a trade and investment deal that will propel Kenya’s economy.” He adds, “There is simply no empirical evidence that merely entering into a trade and investment agreement along the lines that the U.S. and Kenya are entering into can result in the kinds of economic gains that the Kenyan government hopes to garner.”

Incoming U.S. President Joe Biden will announce his administration’s trade policy at the end of January. On the one hand, he is widely expected to put a hold on new trade initiatives while focusing attention on domestic affairs including the still worsening COVID-19 outbreak as well as economic renewal projects, some of them tied to a climate transition.

At the same time, Biden is on record calling for “a united front of friends and partners to challenge China’s abusive behavior.” Going along with Trump’s FTA negotiations with Kenya, as Biden is also expected to do with a proposed U.S.–U.K. FTA, could provide him with an easy bi-partisan win while appeasing establishment hawks, business Democrats and big business lobbyists in D.C. What is the livelihood of a million Kenyan farmers and food vendors next to that? **M**

ALAN SILVERMAN

# Can the climate justice movement succeed?

CANADA IS EXPERIENCING its worst social and economic crisis since the Second World War. We will hopefully weather the COVID-19 storm, but the crisis that more comprehensively jeopardizes our existence—the climate crisis—is still with us. What strategies do we need to successfully meet this grave threat? I have more questions than answers. My hope in sharing them here is that I may provoke some creative and innovative thinking.

As social justice activists, we have never been in this situation before. We've experienced some victories, probably more defeats, but we could always come back for another struggle. For the climate justice movement, we only have one try—and a short decade to make it work. If we fail, it's game over, folks. Therefore, the overriding social justice issue of our time is avoiding climate catastrophe.

But has this reality sunk in? Should not every activist be a climate justice activist? Should not every institution in Canada prioritize contributing to our decarbonization goals on a war-time-era scale, as Seth Klein argues in his recent book, *A Good War* (see excerpt in the September/October 2020 *Monitor*)? This is not to rank the importance of our many struggles. But we must appreciate that we could get pharmacare, secure living wages across the country and make significant progress in defunding the police, and yet still hit the brick wall of climate crisis.

It is crucial that we find links between climate change and other social justice issues. In Canada, several Indigenous communities are

playing a leading role in this respect. Their struggles on the frontlines of fossil capital projects, their constant reminders to the rest of us that we must fundamentally change the way we relate to nature, and their victories are an inspiration. However, much of the rest of the movement in Canada is essentially white and middle class. We have failed to attract unions and working class people, too.

Why is this? What do we need to do to change this situation? I have a few ideas.

## We should keep our eyes on the prize

There are some activists who claim that we cannot deal with the climate crisis unless we deal with the source of the crisis which is capitalism. I think this is a strategic mistake. There is no doubt that our market-regulated, neoliberal-dominated capitalism cannot resolve the climate crisis, but a “radical,” progressive, social-democratic capitalism might be able to. We do not have time to convince Canadians of a revolutionary alternative.

## There are no political forces up to the task

Canada, like other countries, will need to almost fully decarbonize its economy by 2030 to meet the climate challenge. The Conservative Party is totally under the sway of the fossil fuel industry; the federal Liberal Party, in power since 2015, has been unwilling to confront it, while recent B.C. and Alberta NDP governments have promoted carbon-intensive infrastructure projects. The Greens do not yet have enough support anywhere in

the country to be a deciding part of the solution to the climate crisis.

For any of these political players to take on this challenge with the urgency it demands, they will need to be pushed from outside of government. Will demonstrations, petitions and other forms of public pressure be enough? This is the implicit strategy of most environmental groups today and I am not convinced it is adequate. What is our strategy?

## There is no hope of a social media-organized mass movement

Whether I am right or wrong about the willingness of the ruling elite to accede to the pressure of the climate justice movement, in either case a massive and powerful social movement needs to be built. So where is this social movement at now?

Staff-based organizations such as the David Suzuki Foundation, Environmental Defence Canada, Greenpeace, Pembina Institute, The Leap and many others do excellent work in the area of research, advocacy, lobbying and fundraising. Then there are hundreds of volunteer-based groups like Toronto350, Seniors for Climate Action Now! (I work with this group), For Our Grandchildren, Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, and so on. These groups do great work in educating Canadians, in pressuring politicians, and in organizing all kinds of protests, from petitions to huge demonstrations to acts of civil disobedience. There are also groups like Lead Now and Change.org that, while not exclusively focussed on climate issues, see climate change as a priority.

Despite all this excellent work, the climate justice movement, while it comes together for certain activities such as the Just Recovery Principles, is not that united; these groups do not spend much time talking to people one-on-one, stewarding them into an activist role, or developing common demands with similar strategies and tactics. Even before the COVID crisis hit, much of this work happened online.

This is not an accident, as this type of direct-contact organizing is the hardest thing to do. Developing relationships, staying in touch with people, developing democracy and insisting on diversity of voices in the organization are difficult tasks. But we need to move out of our comfort zones to make progress.

A strong social movement cannot be built principally via social media and online. Let me give two examples that highlight this. In 2019, The Leap and others organized over 100 town halls across the country, where over 8,000 people participated. My experience was that these meetings were very democratic, well-run and very energizing. But what became of all this work? There was little follow-up with the attendees (beyond email contact) to try to get them to get involved in an organization. This is unfortunate.

And then there were the amazing climate change marches in September 2019, which mobilized over 700,000 people across the country. I attended the biggest march in Montreal. However, there were no, or very few, concrete demands put forward, no strategies suggested, and little follow-up. It was so apolitical that even Prime Minister Trudeau attended. If, for example, the marches had been clearly focused on ending, as quickly as possible, the fossil fuel industry, they would have had a lot more punch.

### Where do we go from here?

Seth Klein's book raises some fundamental challenges for climate justice activists. Most Canadians know there is a climate crisis, but not enough Canadians realize that we need to act like we are in a climate emergency—in the fight of our lives! None of the political parties are providing the necessary leadership to tell Canadians the truth and tell us how to get out of this mess. Too many Canadians are under the sway of what Klein calls “the new climate denialism.”

In my view, the climate justice movement needs a concrete economic plan that lays out the steps of how the fossil fuel industry and other emitters will be wound down and what this means for transportation, housing and agriculture, and new sustainable energy sources. Will we need to consume significantly less than we do now? If so, we need to prepare. We need a concrete political plan that sets up accountability mechanisms to ensure that our goals are actually being met.

And we need to mobilize across all cultural communities to inspire the Canadian imagination. Again,

If the 2019 climate marches had been clearly focused on ending the fossil fuel industry, they would have had a lot more punch.

Klein's book provides lots of interesting suggestions. We need to learn how to walk the fine line of warning Canadians of danger (and this is trickier than during the Second World War because climate change is not like the Nazis) and offering hope that this transformation will bring about a more caring and just society.

The climate justice movement is doing lots of great work, but it is not that focussed. In her book, *More Powerful Together: Conversations with Climate Activists and Indigenous Land Defenders*, Jen Gobby interviews many activists who say that one of the biggest internal barriers to progress is our difficulty in working through difference (see excerpt in the November/December 2020 *Monitor*). Diversity is good, but we have to learn to work together, accept different perspectives, and realize that we do not have all the answers.

There is no magic bullet to building a powerful social movement. Obviously the COVID pandemic makes organizing so much more difficult. Perhaps one or two groups can take the initiative to bring several groups together to discuss how to create a more unified purpose, with very clear common strategies and concrete demands that millions of Canadians can rally to.

I am not suggesting that groups dissolve and form one large one, although eventually there probably does need to be more organizational unity. These discussions have to be held in a spirit that promotes respect, listening, and honouring differences of view. This is not easy, but do we have a choice if we want to avoid climate catastrophe and build a more equitable and caring society? **M**

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Alan Silverman is an 85% retired high school teacher, administrator and university instructor living in Toronto. He has four grandchildren and dearly hopes they will have a radical Green New Deal future. Though Alan currently works with Seniors for Climate Action Now! (SCAN!), this column reflects his personal views and not those of the organization. He welcomes comments at [alan.silverman@utoronto.ca](mailto:alan.silverman@utoronto.ca).

# Meet Ann Loewen, CCPA Donor

**The *Monitor* talks to Winnipeg physician Ann Loewen about her inspirations and priorities—and why she chose to put the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in her will at the young age of 57.**

**Hi Ann, the world is in bad need of some inspiration. Who's inspiring you today?**

I am very inspired by Greta Thunberg, obviously because of her intelligent approach and commitment toward the prevention of climate change harm. But also because she is honest about herself, modest about the movement she has activated, and analytical and measured in her response to the criticism levelled at her.

**How have you been coping during the pandemic?**

I am a family physician and have several patients with significant emotional trauma. I started a group in 2019 called Community of Care and it was working very well, but it was suspended at the outset of the pandemic. When things reopened, I was concerned about meeting indoors, but equally concerned about my patients' well-being. So I decided to try meeting outdoors, which was a leap with regard to dealing with weather and confidentiality. The patients were willing to try, and it worked beautifully.

**What drew you to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives?**

Although it sounds obvious, my parents are the earliest and



possibly greatest influencers of my outlook on fairness, social justice, community and ethics. Without grandstanding or preaching, they are idealistic but not ideological. That is how I came to be aware that there was more to how the world worked than what I might see in the news. Being a compulsive reader, I pick up and at least scan all kinds of print material. I recall some of the longer CCPA reports being around the house and reading them as a young adult. This was formative as I worked to understand the way our world was, and is, shaped.

**What has the CCPA done lately that's made you feel proud to be a supporter?**

The integration of seemingly disparate threads—from the need to support child development and prevent them from poverty, to critiques of megaprojects bridging environmental harm with economic benefit—is a difficult but necessary task in a complex world that strives to leave no one behind. We have to wrestle to find solutions, and independent voices without vested interests are valuable.

**You're a young woman—why did you choose to set up a legacy gift at this age?**

I know how important it is to have an up-to-date will, and also how difficult. When I was able to imagine how I could continue to be supportive after my death, the task became easier.

**What one issue must governments prioritize today to make people's lives better?**

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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).

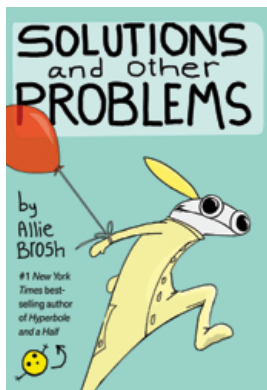


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REVIEWED BY SHOSHANA MAGNET

# Joy and solace, not necessarily in that order



## SOLUTIONS AND OTHER PROBLEMS

ALLIE BROSH

Gallery Books, September 2020, \$30

*Sometimes you have to be the change you want to see in the world, and if you can't be beautiful enough for everybody, the next best option is animal stories.*

**S**OLUTIONS AND OTHER PROBLEMS marks cartoonist-blogger Allie's Brosh's brilliant, heart wrenching return to writing about depression, animals, and the inane and weird minutiae of modern life. Brosh published her first book, *Hyperbole and a Half*, based on a blogging project of the same name, to great acclaim in 2013 and then largely disappeared from the world of writing.

During this time, Brosh suffered terrible life upheaval, including the death of her sister by suicide, a life-threatening illness and a divorce. These events form part of the intentionally disjointed narrative of her latest work, which simultaneously draws out the ways that trauma can upend one's life, and the absurdities and joys of everyday living.

More than anything I've read since the beginning of the pandemic, this book has helped me contend with the stress, personal family

upheaval and farcialities generated by COVID-19. It frequently reminded me to take pleasure in the tiniest of moments, for example. I laughed out loud so much while reading that I infuriated my youngest son, who told me in no uncertain terms—"Stop laughing mummy!"—that my giggling was interrupting his screen time.

Brosh achieves more with the light touch of a humourist than many of the heavier-handed recent self-help books (which I also often enjoy). Nowhere here will you read, "There is joy all around you; breathe it in! Right now!" Instead, there is a balloon tied to the back of a truck:

*there was an explanation for it, but I don't know... I guess you still just never expect to see a balloon going that fast. Balloons aren't designed for that. They aren't aerodynamic enough. This one was wobbling all around in spastic*

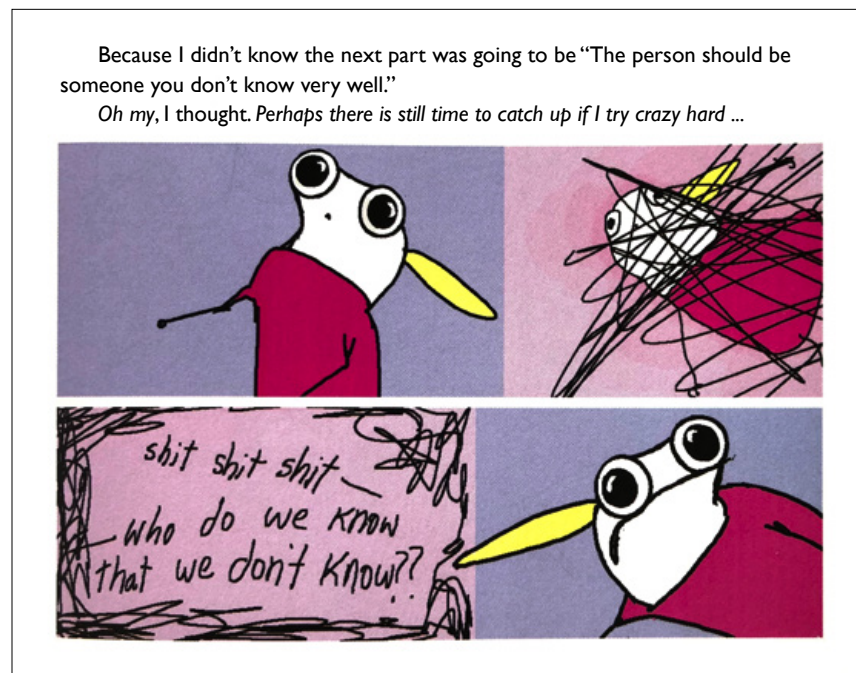
*little circles, making a sound like wp-wp-wp-wp-wp-wp-wp-wp-wp-wp-wp-wp-wp-wp-wp-wp. It seemed genuinely out of control.*

*I was laughing so hard I had to pull over.*

*I feel just like that balloon.*

Probably we can all identify a little with that balloon, in these middle days of the pandemic. With no real end in sight, it's hard not to feel tethered to this troubled, fast-moving world by little more than a string. More than any other image in Brosh's book, this one stays with me.

Brosh's meandering storyline also feels so right for this moment of general trauma; its almost antinarrative structure captures how traumatic events can upend a life in unpredictable ways. As Cornell University professor Cathy Caruth argues, trauma overwhelms



the nervous system (too much, too fast) in ways that confound linearity in our personal storyline. Or, as Brosh writes, sometimes there is no chapter 4:

*That was the first chapter. The second chapter is next... For the sake of trust building, the third chapter will follow the second. But then we will jump directly to chapter 5, do you understand? No chapter four. Why? Because sometimes things don't go like they should.*

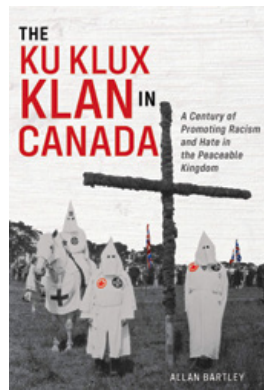
A chapter titled “Loving-Kindness Exercise” describes Brosh’s inability to “keep up” with a particular meditation. In the exercise, the meditator is instructed to think of a person they know whom they wish to send kindness, and then to quickly swap that person out for someone they don’t know very well.

It can be quite challenging, as I’ve experienced myself, and Brosh’s frantic rejection of her first “mental image person” made me laugh very hard. It still makes me laugh just remembering it.

My mother has often said that reading is her drug of choice. Following in her footsteps, in this moment punctuated by anxiety, stress and absurdity, I found *Solutions and Other Problems* a lovely stimulant for examining the tiny moments of weirdness in everyday living, of finding the joy in absurdity. **M**

REVIEWED BY JUSTIN APPLER

## Sowers of hate find fertile soil in Canada



### THE KU KLUX KLAN IN CANADA: A CENTURY OF PROMOTING RACISM AND HATE IN THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM ALLAN BARTLEY

Formac Publishing, October 2020, \$24.95

THE KU KLUX KLAN *in Canada* is Allan Bartley’s condemnation of this nation’s history of racism and bigotry. In response to the mainstream perception of Canada as a tolerant multicultural nation, the author, a former intelligence analyst, has crafted a narrative that illuminates the attacks on various minorities across the country that have been perpetuated under the banner of the KKK.

The KKK first rose to prominence in Canada after the 1915 Toronto premiere of *The Birth of a Nation*. The racist film, Hollywood’s first feature length production, was an instant hit. Advertised across Canada as “the 8th wonder of the world,” it entertained audiences with imagery of the American Civil War and inspired racist Canadians to organize through the Klan. The second half of the film, set during

the reconstruction period in the U.S. South, glorified the KKK as the arbiters of morality in a world gone mad after the end of slavery. Its popularity translated into the naissance of the “Canadian Klan” in diverse forms and locales.

The theatrics of the film glorified the violent tactics of the Klan, paving the way for Kleagles (Klan Recruiters) from the United States to visit Canada to stoke racial tensions and rally together local racists. The public interest that flared up was often short-lived. However, there exists a trove of these moments of surging support for the Klan throughout Canadian history.

The KKK, as an avenue to act on sectarian hatred, was transported north to Canada by those looking to profit from the sale of Klan memberships and robes. Such ambitions were eagerly fed by the homegrown racism that often predated the arrival of U.S. Klan organizers. The Kleagles rebranded to fit the needs of Canadian bigotry and racism at different levels of society, exploiting societal cleavages that would not have been as relevant in an American context, namely the divide between Protestant anglophones and francophone Catholics.

The book details the responses of public officials and members of civil society groups who were either willing to turn a blind eye to the Klan or who actively worked with them to further their own political agendas. Numerous Orange Order Lodges across the country were well known defenders of “Anglo-Saxon heritage” before the KKK showed up, for example, and they were happy to lend their meeting spaces for recruiting new Klansmen.

The Klan’s resurgence in the 1980s, and again in this century, was not met with the same widespread support as in the 1920s, when there were fewer antiracist groups to push back against Klan activities. However, Bartley rightly marks the election of Donald Trump in 2016 as a catalyst that renewed



# Numerous Orange Order Lodges across the country were well known defenders of “Anglo-Saxon heritage” before the KKK showed up.

Canadian-based white supremacist ideologies, identities and movements.

In the wake of Trump’s election, Canada saw a spike in anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, anti-Black and homophobic incidents and attacks across the country. Bartley makes note of the attack on the *Centre Islamique de Quebec* on January 29, 2017, in which Alexandre Bissonnette shot and killed six Muslim men and wounded nineteen others. The 28-year-old had frequently checked the social media feeds of U.S. alt-right, neo-Nazi and white supremacist leaders in the weeks before his massacre.

Bissonnette’s own social media posts make clear references to Trump’s victory and anti-Islamic rhetoric. The internet provides a fertile platform for the proliferation of racism and bigotry. White supremacist material can be anonymously published online for a community of like-minded people, negating the fear of public backlash. Racist U.S. website such as Stormfront.org, which blend white supremacist ideology with revisionist history, conspiracy theory, pro-Trump propaganda

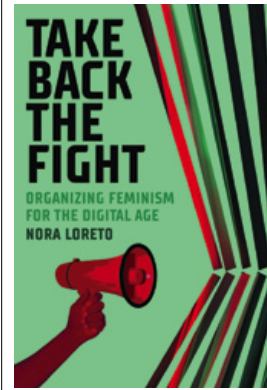
and paranoid anti-communism, also offer Canadian subsections and chatrooms dedicated to their northern neighbours.

Again, an important value in Bartley’s work is his nuanced look at the role of racist ideas and organizations within Canada, linked to but also independent of the KKK and other U.S. imports. The book draws connections between Canada’s past KKK activities and the contemporary hatred propagated online by and for Canadian audiences who are interested in the same sort of division, racism and bigotry.

At the same time, Bartley describes the cultural forces that can challenge Canadian racism today. The Anti-Racist Coalition, an online group of anonymous reporters who identify white supremacist groups in Canada, is one such example. Bartley shows the reader how, through our activism, we can chip away at the legacy of the KKK, by challenging online hate speech and making the general public aware of white supremacist groups. Bartley’s work demands that we refuse to view these groups as outliers and instead contextualize them as a part of a long history of the KKK in Canada. **M**

REVIEWED BY RAYNE FISHER-QUANN

## Turning pop-feminism into popular resistance



**TAKE BACK THE FIGHT:  
ORGANIZING FEMINISM  
FOR THE DIGITAL AGE**  
NORA LORETO

Fernwood Publishing, October 2020, \$25

IT’S A CONFUSING time to be a feminist. With labels like “feminist” and “activist” becoming more popular, but effective community organizing proving harder to find, the lines between ideology and identity become more blurry by the day.

What does it mean to be a feminist when the leader of our country—one responsible for environmental devastation and the continued oppression of Indigenous peoples—uses the same title? I’ve long been aware that my feminism is not Justin Trudeau’s feminism, nor is it the feminism of “girlboss” CEOs or conservative women’s groups. But for many young radicals the question remains: what does feminism mean?

Writer and activist Nora Loreto authored her second book, *Take Back the Fight*, to answer that question. The book is a manifesto,

a scathing criticism of the status quo and a call to action for the next generation of feminists all in one. Over 10 chapters covering everything from the rise of neoliberalism to the complexity of digital organizing, she meticulously examines Canadian feminism's past, present and future and creates a blueprint for feminist movements in the modern age.

Loreto begins by analyzing the failures of past feminist movements, focusing especially on the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. While the big-tent organization brought together organizers of all stripes and led landmark political battles, it was doomed by years of national funding cuts and a lack of intersectional analysis within the organization.

"NAC's mostly white membership could not accept and enable the success of its first racialized president," Loreto writes. "If feminists are going to learn from the successes and mistakes of our past, the collapse of NAC reminds us that only a confrontational, radical and intersectional feminism will have the strength necessary to force the powerful to heed feminist demands."

The collapse of NAC, as well as several other large-scale coalitions, led to a vacuum in the feminist sphere that was filled by a combination of single-issue organizations, progressive pundits and popular feminist bloggers. Loreto writes that our individualist culture has replaced feminist collectives with celebrities and lone voices, and everyone has paid the price.

It's essentially impossible for individuals to create significant change without a collective behind them, and those voices also often have to face the brunt of the backlash they receive for fighting for change. The latter is an issue that Loreto knows well: she's spent years facing a co-ordinated right-wing harassment campaign after tweeting about how gender, race and class affected Canadians' perception of

My feminism is not Justin Trudeau's feminism, nor is it the feminism of "girlboss" CEOs or conservative women's groups.

the deadly Humboldt bus crash in 2018.

The book also explores the commodification of feminism by political actors. Loreto dwells on the example of Michelle Rempel Garner, a conservative politician who's vocally criticized sexist incidents in the House of Commons but has actively fought against progressive legislation for her entire career. This is the crux of the problem presented earlier: what does feminism mean if anyone can be a feminist?

One of the biggest issues here is the individualization of feminism, the idea that feminism can be claimed as a personal identity without meaningful work behind it. Loreto criticizes both Rempel Garner's and Trudeau's approaches to faux-feminism. "There is tension between someone assuming the label of feminist and someone who has committed their work to making politics more feminist, and it's at the heart of the problem with individualized feminism versus collective feminism," she writes.

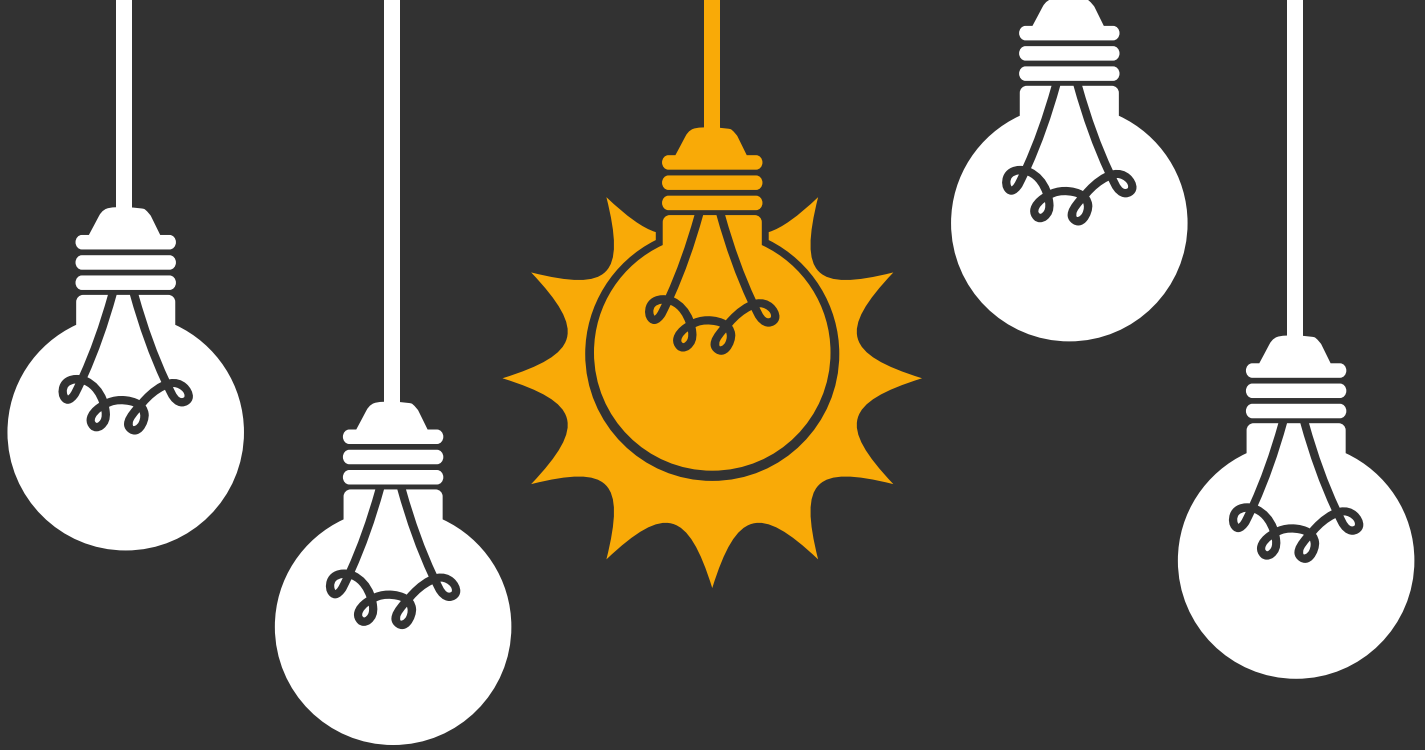
Feminism has hit the mainstream. But is that a good thing? In the last chapter of the book, Loreto raises an urgent point. "The fact that the word [feminism] has been

undemonized should concern many feminists; is it popular because society is shifting in such a way that feminism is becoming an undeniably important concept? Or is it popular because it's no longer threatening?"

Loreto's extensive experience with online feminism as well as in-person, large-scale organizing makes her analysis a refreshingly informed read. She's gained a following online for her excellent reporting and honest, unflinching takes on current events, and seems to draw on that experience in much of her writing about digital organizing. As an online activist myself, those chapters echoed what I've been feeling for years with eerie accuracy. And honestly, I'm overjoyed at the idea of other young activists being able to read those insights in a book instead of having to experience Twitter for themselves.

Perhaps Loreto's most important point is this: "Feminism can no longer be understood by some as a struggle for minor changes that benefit only a few, and a new feminist movement must change opinions so that people come to understand this. Challenging the status quo is hard work, and we need to find a way to organize a feminist network that is capable of confronting Canada's status quo, especially as the far-right rises, fuelled by misogynistic and racist rhetoric and violence."

*Take Back the Fight* takes an unflinching look at the failures of feminism's past and present, but it also offers a hopeful look at its future. I hope it becomes mandatory reading for young feminists across the country. **M**



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