

MONITOR

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CANADIAN CENTRE
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JULY/AUGUST 2023

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Cover image and centrespread images: Gary Alphonso is a freelance illustrator based in Toronto. In 1982 he graduated from the Sheridan College illustration program and then continued his studies at the Ontario College of Art and Design. Inspired by early 20th century art, Gary's illustration is often nostalgic. He uses a unique digital style that's rich in detail with a focus on colour and tone. His award winning artwork is part of special editions and private collections and can also be found in books, editorials and advertising campaigns around the world.

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MONITOR

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

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JON MILTON

Neoliberalism is like a zombie that won't die

Neoliberalism is about power, but it's also about the stories we tell

BEFORE IT WAS an entrenched globalized system, it was an idea.

Neoliberalism is a term that we use to describe the system dreamt up by right-wing economists like Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. Those thinkers, operating in an era of class-compromise social democracy and competition with communism, were proponents of an economy structured entirely around profit—one where the invisible hand of market incentives guided every social interaction.

In this dream, the government needed to “get out of the way” of private industry—mostly by getting rid of pesky regulations, government programs, public institutions, and taxes. There was, in the eyes of neoliberals, no task that private capital couldn't accomplish more efficiently than the state—not education, not health care, not the post office, not anything.

For a long time, that's all that it was—a dream. Thinkers like Friedman were certainly swimming upstream. From the 1930s to the 1980s, Keynesian economics dominated the field, with the view that governments have an important role to play in stabilizing the economy through spending programs, especially during economic downturns. Policy-makers, for the most part, believed this as well. That period represents the most significant—although still limited in very important ways, especially around race and gender—expansion of the welfare state in history. For the neoliberals, it must have felt like they were out in the wilderness.

Neoliberals believe that the state should only exist to maximize corporate profits. In practice, this meant a fundamental restructuring of the role of government in the economy. Policy-makers shifted the tax burden from corporations onto individuals, sold off public companies (think Petro-Canada, CN Rail, Air Canada, and more), and introduced market reforms into the institutions that remained public.

Neoliberal reformers came up with myths and tropes to bring the public onside, to justify their decisions to give an ever-increasing share of the pie to the ruling class.

They said government debt was out of control, that creditors were going to pull out and collapse the Canadian economy. Organizations like the Canadian Taxpayers's Federation—helmed by future Alberta Premier Jason Kenney—set up “debt clocks” that broke down government debt by the Canadian population, as if government debt had to be paid back by every individual. The numbers certainly looked scary!

They said that environmental regulations were unnecessary hindrances to the market and should be abolished—that any real environmental problems would be better solved by increased (voluntary, of course) coordination in the private sector to address them.

They said that labour unions had outlived their usefulness and that workers would be better off negotiating directly with their employers as individuals instead of having the power of collective bargaining.

They said that if we increased the minimum wage, then the cost of everything would skyrocket—so the only way to keep prices low was to have a perpetually impoverished underclass of workers performing minimum wage jobs. They also told us those workers were mostly teenagers.

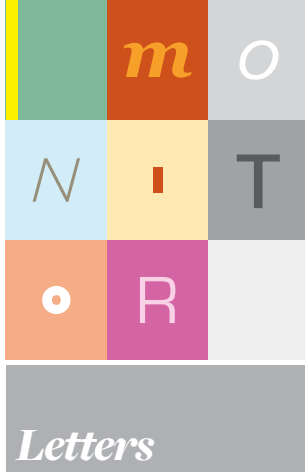
They said that if we cut taxes on corporations and the rich, then those wealthy individuals and institutions would use the money to invest in job creation. They said the wealth would trickle down to the rest of us.

They told us a lot of things and none of them turned out to be true, really. The tropes that they created were just retroactive justifications for their decision to abandon the class compromise of the Keynesian era.

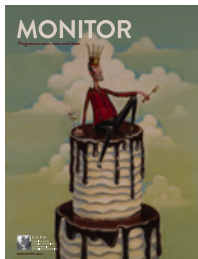
Today, those lies are increasingly untenable. We know, clearly, that wealth does not trickle down, that breaking unions is bad for the working class, that corporations will not self-regulate, and that minimum wage increases are good for the economy. We know that government debt doesn't behave like household debt.

We're in something of an in-between stage, with an emerging consensus that neoliberalism failed, but without a system to replace it. We hope that the arguments you find in this edition of the *Monitor* will be a small contribution to nailing neoliberalism's coffin shut—and making space for what comes next. **M**

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



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



March/April 2023
Income inequality

The CCPA *Monitor* 'inequality' issue came just as I was finishing reading Amartya Sen's memoir (*Home in the World*). He is such a champion of equality and inclusiveness! If our society were willing to apply some of his teachings we would not be anywhere near the disastrous situation humanity is facing today in so many areas.

Bruce Campbell's highlights of the rich contribution of CCPA to

equality is a reminder of how important your work is and so relevant. I had recently read a piece in a local paper (*The West End Phoenix*) by a construction worker, Megan Kinch, in which she says: "We are deep in the belly of the beast: building towers in the financial district, building restaurants we can't afford to eat in, condos we can't afford to live in."

The essence of that sentence applies to all the workers who sustain our everyday life. It brought immediacy to the unacceptable structural inequality of our society. Witness the display of violence in France against the workers refusing to accept new legislation delaying their retirement while the systemic societal inequality is unquestioned and unchanged.

It is the same inaction that has met the CCPA's CEO pay project. It receives a lot of coverage when it comes out. But has there been any real change since you first published in 2007.

How can we change that?????

Thanks for being there and doing this valuable work!!!

Bruna Nota
 Toronto ON

I just wanted to congratulate you on the excellent March/April 2023 edition of *Monitor*. It was excellent, and its focus on all types of inequality should be compulsory reading for politicians at all levels of government. Thanks for the great job you're doing

to highlight such important issues and keep up the good work.

Diana Hooper
 North York, ON

So NYC's purchase of 900 EVs is touted on the Good News Page. I'd be more thrilled if the city were increasing small neighbourhood-specific public transit options helping people get off their addiction to private transport. EVs rely on mining rare minerals. Due to their high costs, they serve primarily the wealthy. Those with less stand on corners in lousy weather waiting for their buses, which are often late, especially in NYC gridlock.

I'm equally appalled watching the huge number of large trucks with crew cabs, popular because they are "agricultural" and thus taxed at lower rates. We seem to have grown into a nation where meeting our personal desires is all that counts. It truly discourages me.

Dorothy Field
 Victoria B.C.



November/December 2022
The Trade Issue

I chose not to comment on the November/December (2022) article by Clare Mian even though I found it

one sided. I have, however, felt it necessary to respond to Gord Doctorow's letter in the March April edition complimenting Ms. Mian's article. White there are strong reasons to criticize policies of the current and previous governments of Israel, not limited to the occupation and the treatment of its non-Jewish residents, Mr. Doctorow makes a claim that was not part of Ms. Mian's article, namely that Israel's actions are an outgrowth of colonialism. Let us be clear. Zionism is not a colonialist enterprise. Jews are an indigenous people in that part of the Middle East, something that is documented in Holy Scriptures, not just Jewish but Christian and Muslim, as well as by overwhelming archeological evidence. Hopefully the current democratic protests in Israel and elsewhere against the current Israeli government's efforts to exempt itself from the rule of law and respect for human rights will become broader and lead to a successful effort to end the occupation and the establishment of two states living in peace, security, justice and respect and equality for minorities.

Shalom Schachter
 Toronto ON



New from the CCPA

CCPA Manitoba

Research and organizing for social housing in Canada

In response to the desperate need for low-rent housing across Canada, 100 activists and academics from across the country gathered in Winnipeg on April 20 and 21 to prepare to press the federal government to act at the “Social Housing and Human Rights: Organizing for Change” conference. The event was supported by the Manitoba office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Despite the federal government recognizing housing as a human right, only three per cent of housing units under the National Housing Strategy’s rental capital program are affordable to low-income people.

“We can no longer deny a severe shortage of low-rent housing in Canada,” said Shauna MacKinnon Chair of Urban and Inner City Studies at the University of Winnipeg and Principal Investigator with the Manitoba Research Alliance. “For far too long, governments have relied on the private market to fill the gap—it’s not working. There is growing consensus

that expanding non-market (social) housing with rents set no higher than 30 per cent of income must be a central part of a national housing strategy, to ensure we achieve Canada’s commitment to the human right to housing.” The event kicks off a year-old Social Housing and Human Rights project funded by a SSHRC Connections grant. For more info: mra-mb.ca/calling-all-housing-policy-advocacy-groups-or-organizations/.

New report on pay equity in Manitoba

A new report released on April 27 finds Manitoba has a high pay gap: women earn 71 cents for every dollar men earn. Racialized women and Indigenous women earn 59 cents and 58 cents, respectively, compared to white men.

Tired of Waiting: Rectifying Manitoba’s Pay Gap, is by Anna Evans-Boudreau, Oyindamola Alaka, Lorna Turnbull, Jesse Hajer, Natalie Dandenault and Kristine Barr.

The report includes a legislative review of federal and provincial legislation. Manitoba was a leader in Canada as the first province to enact a pay equity law in 1986. But Manitoba’s pay equity legislation has not been updated in over 35 years and it now lags other provinces’ more progressive approaches. This report recommends Manitoba’s pay equity legislation be updated to explicitly aim to achieve substantive equality and address intersectional gender discrimination for “traditional” women’s work, as well to include pay

transparency in legislation, requiring all employers to report wages.

The research was supported by the Manitoba Federation of Labour. CCPA Manitoba will work with project partners to follow up on the report’s recommendations.

—Molly McCracken,
director, CCPA Manitoba

CCPA National Office

We need to treat climate change like the emergency that it is. And while we move away from fossil fuels to a greener economy, we have to consider the impact that transitions will have on workers and communities.

Our new report, *Don’t Wait for the State: A blueprint for grassroots climate transitions in Canada*, was co-authored by CCPA National Senior Researcher Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood, Max Cohen, Isabella Pojuner and Avi Lewis. They’ve created a framework for communities to organize an inclusive and productive

transition to a cleaner local economy.

At the CCPA, we’ll continue to keep pressuring governments to provide all the tools necessary to develop a greener economy. But communities can do their part too: this guide helps communities to start moving the dial on climate change now.

Don’t Wait for the State offers a 5D framework for communities to start a fair and equitable transition to a greener economy.

It’s research like *Don’t Wait for the State* that shows how you and I can make a difference in our own communities. We’re giving you the tools to make change—before extreme weather jolts us into a dystopian future that no one wants for their children and grandchildren.

Sign up for Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood’s newsletter, Shift Storm, which brings you the latest research on climate change: policyalternatives.ca/shiftstorm.

Meanwhile, CCPA National Senior Researcher Katherine Scott made a submission to the Standing



Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology regarding the federal Bill C-22, *An Act to Reduce Poverty and to Support the Financial Security of Persons with Disabilities*. It seeks to establish a Canada disability benefit. “What’s needed now is a heightened sense of urgency to move promises into transformative action, quickly passing Bill C-22 and getting on with building a disability just future,” says Scott.

CCPA National Senior Economist David Macdonald participated in a House of Commons Agriculture and Agri-Food Committee panel. He called on the federal government to implement adequate income supports so that

low-income Canadians can afford the rising cost of food.

—*Erika Shaker, director, CCPA National Office*

CCPA Nova Scotia

During the spring, CCPA-NS presented to the Law Amendments Committee of the Nova Scotia legislature on the *Interim Residential Rental Increase Cap Act*, where we urged the government to institute permanent vacancy control.

We recently co-hosted a series of Nova Scotia events with Campaign 2000, a national non-partisan coalition monitoring child and family poverty in Canada.

Community Conversations and Anti-Poverty Roundtables were held in Halifax and Sydney Mines, Cape Breton. Residents discussed their experience of living in poverty and shared visions for a poverty-free Nova Scotia.

In May, we also co-sponsored a book launch and panel discussion with Fernwood Publishing for *About Canada: Dental Care* by Brandon Doucet.

We also hosted multiple strategic visioning sessions to guide our office’s work, and our AGM in June revealed our next three-year strategic plan and featured the work of some of our research associates. We are looking forward to the release of the 2023 Nova Scotia living wage report update in September.

—*Christine Saulnier, director, CCPA Nova Scotia*

university students—now pay about half of all tuition fees.

It’s a shaky way to run a system. Possibly recognizing this, the government has set up a blue-ribbon panel to recommend improvements. The aim is “financial sustainability” for the sector.

As the panel begins its work, the Ministry of Colleges and Universities appears to favour certain fixes over others, e.g., closer ties between universities and employers, more courses offering “micro-credentials” in specific job skills, and greater investment in online learning.

The ministry talks about using provincial funding as a “lever” to “drive institutional excellence,” but, at present, that lever is too weak to do much heavy lifting. The best solution to the current crisis is a return to funding levels that recognize the true value of universities—not just as economic engines, but as cultural anchors, global problem solvers, and a creative adventure for the entire province.

Watch for a major report on university funding from CCPA Ontario this fall. **M**
—*Randy Robinson, director, CCPA Ontario*

CCPA Ontario

Can Ontario’s universities survive? And what will they look like if they do?

Those are open questions these days. Because when it comes to funding higher education, Ontario is failing.

In 2021, Queen’s Park provided just 21 per cent of the total revenues required to run our public universities, the lowest level in Canada and far below the 39 per cent average of the other provinces. Government funding cuts and a recent reduction and freeze to domestic tuition have left universities scrambling for cash. As a result, international students—who make up roughly one-fifth of

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Is my community a child care desert?

New map shows availability across Canada

By David Macdonald

Iglika Ivanova and Kendra Strauss
BC Office

B.C.'s precarious workforce

The rise of the “gig economy” and on-demand work through online platforms like Uber and Skip the Dishes has ignited public debate about precarious work and what makes a “good job.”

We all know that precarious work existed long before Uber and is not limited to the gig economy. But government efforts to develop an effective precarious work strategy for B.C.—as promised in the 2020 election—are hampered by the lack of data on the scale and impacts of precarious work. Statistics Canada simply does not collect the regular, timely data on many important dimensions of precarious employment that are needed to understand the security and quality of jobs in today’s labour market or track any changes over time.

So we embarked on our own data collection project to gather new evidence on the scale and unequal impacts of precarious work in our province. Our pilot B.C. Precarity Survey was completed by over 3,000 workers aged 25 to 65 from across B.C. in the late fall of 2019. It provides a unique snapshot of the provincial labour market at a time of historically low unemployment and relative labour market strength just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

You can read more about the findings from the pilot B.C. Precarity Survey in our new report, *But is it a good job?*. The upshot? We found that precarious work is a widespread problem in B.C., contributing to socio-economic and racial inequalities and putting strain on families and communities across the province.

What is precarious work?

Precarious work can mean not having dependable hours, no job

security, few (if any) benefits, or a lack of meaningful access to workplace rights and protections—the kind of work arrangements that create insecurity and hardship for people and their families. Exactly what makes a job precarious is shaped by the ever-changing realities of local job markets and, therefore, looks different in different places and time periods. This makes defining precarious work a challenge, and yet defining it is vital for understanding and addressing it.

In this study, we measured precarious employment in two different ways:

First, we looked at whether survey respondents had “standard” jobs (i.e., a full-time, permanent job with a single employer that includes at least some benefits). However, we found that some workers with standard jobs still experienced aspects of precarity, such as unpredictable scheduling, working multiple jobs at the same time or lacking access to

important workplace benefits like extended health coverage.

Second, we used the *Employment Precarity Index* developed by an earlier research initiative called the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) project. The index allows us to combine a broader range of dimensions of precarity into a single measure and categorize workers’ employment experiences into one of four employment security categories: secure, stable, vulnerable and precarious.

The “standard job” was not all that common

The B.C. Precarity Survey found that the standard job was not all that common: only 49 per cent of B.C. workers we surveyed had standard jobs. This is concerning because our system of workplace rights and protections—including access to workers’ compensation, employment insurance and parental leave, pensions, extended health coverage,



paid sick time, etc.—is still largely designed around this model of the standard job.

We found that women (especially racialized and Indigenous women), younger workers aged 25 to 34, Indigenous workers and recent immigrants were less likely to have a standard job. Standard jobs were more common in Metro Vancouver than elsewhere in the province and least common in the B.C. Interior.

Some workers in standard jobs experienced precarity

A significant minority of people in standard jobs reported frequent, unexpected scheduling changes (21 per cent) and/or working multiple jobs at the same time (18 per cent). Many workers in standard jobs did not have access to important workplace benefits, such as extended health coverage (15 per cent) or retirement benefits (30 per cent). Less than half (43 per cent) received employer-provided training within the last year.

In other words, having a standard job was not a guarantee of job quality and security. This is why we turned to the *Employment Precarity Index* to capture a broader range of dimensions of precarious work. Here's what we found.

A polarized B.C. pre-pandemic job market

We found that 37 per cent of survey respondents had precarious jobs and only 18 per cent were in secure jobs.

Such high levels of precarity amid the strong pre-pandemic labour market suggest that the problems are likely worse today. Since 2019, rising inflation has eaten into wages, a problem that is made worse when workers and their families face unpredictable, insecure employment and/or do not have access to employer-provided benefits.

Secure jobs were unequally available to different groups

Racialized and Indigenous workers were significantly less likely than white workers to have secure jobs. Secure jobs were slightly less common in Northern B.C. and the Interior than in Metro Vancouver and Vancouver Island.

More than half of recent immigrants (less than 10 years in Canada) were in precarious jobs (55 per cent), the highest proportion of any group in our survey. Younger workers (aged 25 to 34) were more likely to be in precarious jobs.

Precarious work was strongly associated with low income

Nearly two-thirds of workers earning less than \$40,000 per year had precarious jobs—64 per cent, compared with only 23 per cent of those earning above \$80,000. However, not all precarious jobs were associated with low employment income—about a third (34 per cent) had middle income and 18 per cent had higher income.

Employment precarity had negative effects

Workers in precarious jobs—especially those with low income—were more likely to report poorer physical and mental health.

Among caregivers of children, those in precarious employment were far less likely to be able to afford school supplies and trips. They were also much less likely to have time to attend or volunteer at school and community-related events and activities. This reveals that employment precarity impacts children's experiences and opportunities.

We found that caregivers of children in precarious jobs were four times more likely to report that lack of access to child care impacted their ability to work compared with those in secure jobs. Recent immigrant parents were particularly impacted by caregiving responsibilities—60 per cent reported that lack of access to child care negatively affected their own and/or their spouse's ability to work (compared to 37 per cent of non-immigrants). They were also much more likely to report that caring for an adult (e.g., an elder) negatively affected their or their spouse's ability to work.

Many survey respondents said work demands and job strain interfered with their family responsibilities on a weekly or daily basis, affecting not only them but also their families.

Better data collection and immediate government action

This first-of-its-kind study on multiple dimensions of employment precarity in B.C. highlights the need for more data collection in B.C. but also nationally. The pandemic—which started just after the B.C. Precarity Survey was conducted—has exposed just how little we know about job quality and job security in Canada. It also pushed Statistics Canada to start capturing data on racialized identity and access to benefits in the monthly Labour Force Survey (though the benefits

Worth repeating

“I’m sick and tired of talking about trickle-down economics. I ran for president to build the economy from the bottom up and middle out.”

—*U.S. President Joe Biden, Twitter, March 6, 2023*

data have not been publicly released at the time of writing). Statistics Canada also ran a one-off Survey on Quality of Employment in early 2020 but the results weren't released until May 2022. These are welcome initiatives, but we need regular, timely data at the regional and local levels on multiple dimensions of precarity to fully understand its unequal impacts in B.C. and beyond.

At the same time, our findings suggest that we must act now to tackle the significant and uneven burden of precarious work. Our analysis confirms that the burden of precarity falls more heavily on racialized and immigrant communities, Indigenous Peoples, women and lower-income groups. In other words, precarious employment compounds systemic, intersecting inequalities in our province.

The good news is that the B.C. government has the power to improve the lives of workers and families by strengthening workplace rights and protections, enforcing them proactively and regularly reviewing legislation to keep up with rapidly changing labour markets. Strengthening worker voices, such as by making it easier to unionize and using sectoral bargaining models, can improve working conditions and reduce gender/racial pay inequities. Expanding access and portability of benefits, addressing unpaid care work and access to child care and bringing in strong pay equity legislation are additional ways to reduce precarity in B.C. while supporting family and community wellbeing. The recent introduction of five days of paid sick leave in B.C. and federal efforts to extend dental coverage and reduce child care fees will help many precarious workers, but more action is needed. **M**

Iglika Ivanova is a senior economist and the public interest researcher at the CCPA's BC Office. Kendra Strauss is director of the Labour Studies Program and professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Simon Fraser University.

Ricardo Tranjan
Ontario Office

More bad news for education funding in Ontario

The *Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act*, which the government of Ontario recently tabled, is the clearest display to date of the Ford government's ideological agenda against public education. The writing was on the wall from the start.

In 2019, the government announced a plan to eliminate 10,054 teaching positions by 2023-24 through increased class sizes and mandatory online learning. Teachers and parents fought back and mitigated the damage. Yet during the ongoing pandemic, the government has demonstrated a clear disinclination to make schools more resilient.

Most of the COVID-19 funding for education came from Ottawa or school boards' own reserves. The government began sending money

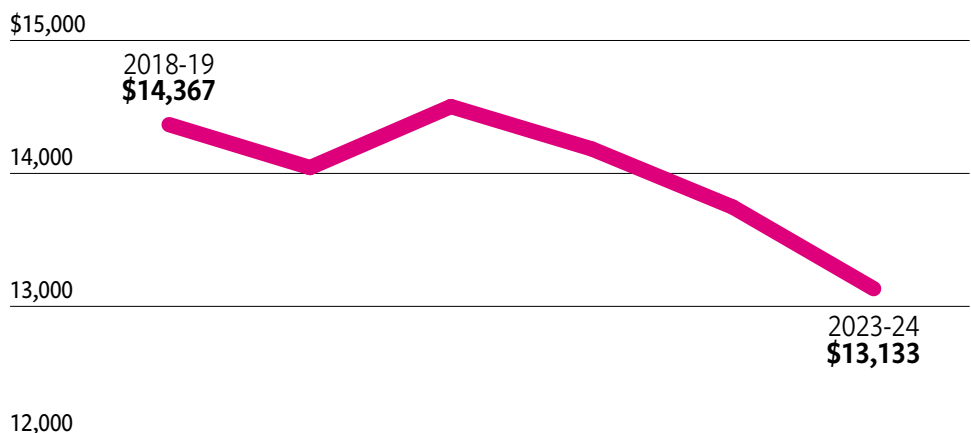
directly to parents instead of into classrooms. It also expanded the scope of online education, justifying cuts to brick-and-mortar schools. Last year, when funding became available for tutoring, it had to be partially spent on third-party providers.

Nowhere is this government's reluctance to invest in schools clearer than in Grant for Students Needs (GSN) funding—the allocations that go directly to school boards.

Taking inflation into account, school boards will receive, on average, \$1,200 less per student in the 2023-24 school year than what they received in 2018-19. The chart below shows that funding dropped in the first year of the Ford government, then increased between 2019-20 and 2020-21 due to one-time pandemic funding. But now that money is almost gone, and funding is dropping steeply.

Let's look at what this means at the board level. The Toronto District School Board (TDBS), for example, received \$12,390 per student for the 2018-19 school year. Between March 2018 and March 2023, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased by 16.9 per cent—meanwhile, the board's per-student allocation went up by less than half of that, 7.9 per cent. The upshot: the board will receive \$1,110 less per student in

Grants for Students Needs (GSN), per-student allocation adjusted for inflation, 2018-19 to 2023-24



Source: Ministry of Education, GSN Projections 2022-23, 2023-24; Statistics Canada, Table: 18-10-0004-01; author's calculations

2023-24, in inflation-adjusted terms, compared to what it counted on in 2018-19. For a large board like the TDSB, this funding cut adds up to nearly \$260 million a year in real dollars.

It may be even worse than it looks.

In the past couple of years, a line called “unallocated amounts” appeared in the GSN for the first time, with amounts between \$30 and \$40 million. In this year’s document, that line was replaced with “Planning Provision,” which has \$317 million sitting inside it. (Ten times as much!). A footnote explains that the money is “for possible in-year funding changes” and more unallocated funding has been included within the totals of specific grants. The amount is similar to the cost of direct payments to parents (\$365 million), and it could be that the difference has been included in the special education envelope since children with special needs have access to an additional amount of support.

Stashing cash away and using it to pay for populist measures—like cash transfers and tax cuts—has become a common practice of this government, which the CCPA has been closely monitoring.

The TDSB has \$53 million in its planning provisions line. If that money is not intended for schools, the board will be more than \$300 million behind where it was in the 2018-19 school year, in inflation-adjusted dollars. That will be felt in classrooms across the city.

The ideological agenda against public education is in high gear—with funding cuts coupled with structural governance changes. But as we learned last November when education workers defeated Bill 28—workers, parents, and students together can stand up to any bully at the playground. **M**

Ricardo Tranjan is a political economist and senior researcher with the CCPA Ontario office.

Kenya Thompson
Nova Scotia

Nova Scotians need expanded child care

In partnership with the federal government, the Government of Nova Scotia recently hit a key target worthy of applause—increased investments in child care successfully cut fees by 50 per cent across the province. This is a critical move to support families in Nova Scotia who, according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Nova Scotia’s 2022 Living Wage Report, pay as much for child care as they do for food.

However, as the recently released Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report, *Not Done Yet: \$10-a-day child care requires addressing Canada’s child care deserts*, emphasizes, affordability is only one of several interrelated factors involved in creating a high-quality system of early learning and child care. Parents and families must be able to access licensed child care centres in their community. And, as the “ECEs Can’t Wait” group in Nova Scotia highlighted in their well-attended Day of Action last fall, those centres need to be staffed by well-compensated early childhood educators (ECEs).

Accessing a child care space is a challenge faced by the thousands of families in child care deserts nationwide—regions where the number of child care spaces offered is highly disproportionate to the number of children who live there.

As the new report outlines, 47 per cent of younger children (not yet attending pre-primary) in Nova Scotia live in a child care desert—which, on par with the national average of 48 per cent, means nearly half of the children and families in the province are not able to access licensed child care spaces. About a third of children in the Halifax Regional Municipality, and most small towns, live in child care deserts.

Finding a child care space is twice as hard in rural areas across the province, where 61 per cent of children live in child care deserts.

Though Nova Scotia has a plan for child care expansion—9,500 new early learning and child care spaces will be created by April 2026 to reach a coverage rate of 59 per cent—this target is not nearly high enough, and it is unclear how many spaces have been eliminated already and may be lost in the meantime.

The province’s failures to meet expansion targets thus far are not encouraging. The province added only 400 child care spaces in 2022 instead of the 1,500 promised—an aim now pushed to the end of 2023. Will the government meet these new targets, and are those targets even enough to offer care to children in child care deserts across Nova Scotia?

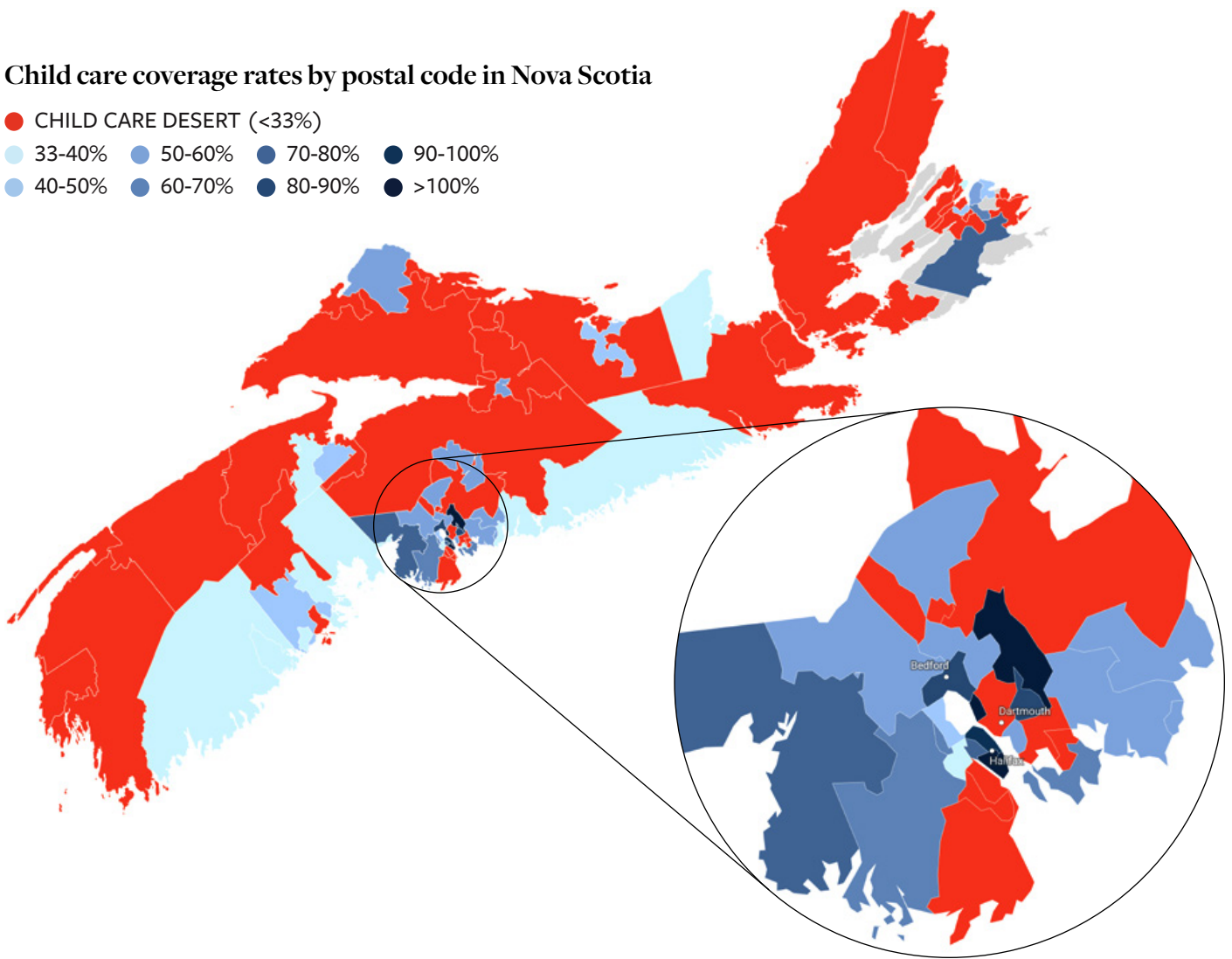
Public and not-for-profit child care expansion can only be realized by prioritizing the recruitment and retention of ECEs. Though the compensation of ECEs is the most expensive cost associated with child care and the most significant portion of any child care centre’s budget, the expansion of high-quality care child care cannot happen without them.

Ensuring a fair wage and benefits for ECEs—who, like many in the gendered caring and service sector, are poorly paid—ensures higher quality care for children. Greater retention of ECEs means better access to child care spots for children and families.

Nova Scotia should do better—and can, by implementing a robust wage grid for ECEs. The province’s current wage grid is insufficient and falls short of providing a sustainable, liveable income or a competitive wage to attract workers to the sector. As Child Care Now Nova

Child care coverage rates by postal code in Nova Scotia

- CHILD CARE DESERT (<33%)
- 33-40%
- 40-50%
- 50-60%
- 60-70%
- 70-80%
- 80-90%
- 90-100%
- >100%



Scotia has advocated, the bottom should be no less than \$25 for ECEs who hold a diploma—like the comparably generous wage grid Newfoundland and Labrador committed to for its ECEs in March 2023.

Due to the lack of licensed child care across Nova Scotia, many families pay more for care or rely on informal or unlicensed child care arrangements that are often precarious and costly.

For-profit child care centres are more expensive for families; for example, we know from the new report that, in the HRM, for-profit child care centres charge at least 15 per cent more than non-profit centres. These centres also create insecurity for families and educators alike, hinging operating costs and the wages of ECEs on parents' ability to pay. For these and many other reasons, the province must not expand for-profit child care but shift away from it, and instead build a high-quality system of non-profit child care.

Child care deserts are not inevitable—they result from poor, haphazard planning that leaves the distribution of child care to private actors within the market who are ill-equipped to design and execute equitable expansion. Insufficient and unreliable government support, tinkering with market-based solutions, or relying on the

initiative of cash-strapped parents in civil society will not address the patchwork that has long characterized child care provision in Nova Scotia.

As is their responsibility under Canadian constitutional arrangements, provincial and territorial governments must take responsibility for the formulation and implementation of child care expansion, and integrate child care into public planning. A central public agency, as proposed in the Nova Scotia bilateral agreement, is necessary to oversee the creation of a publicly funded, non-profit child care system that provides accessible, affordable, flexible child care to families across Canada, offered by ECEs who are well supported by decent working conditions, living wages, and benefits.

Advocacy groups such as Child Care Now Nova Scotia, alongside parents and ECEs, know what is needed to provide a robust child care system to children and families across the province. It is up to the Government of Nova Scotia to heed their advice. **M**

Kenya Thompson (she/her) is a research associate with CCPA Nova Scotia and a PhD student at York University's Department of Politics. She is also a research assistant on the Reimagining Care/Work Policies project, which aims to advance equitable and inclusive care/work policies in Canada.

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood
National office

Canada's fossil fuel problem: larger than ever

The latest national emissions numbers are in and they tell a complicated story of climate progress and pitfalls.

Canada's emissions were up in 2021 after a pandemic-related drop in 2020, but they were still notably lower than in 2019. That's a positive sign overall and points to the success of certain climate policies. The phase-out of coal power, in particular, has single-handedly kept Canada's climate credibility on life support.

On the other hand, emissions from the fossil fuel industry and transportation sector remain stubbornly high. Oil and gas production now accounts for 28 per cent of all emissions in the country—and that's just getting the stuff out of the ground! Andrew Leach captures the problem well in his annual chart series.

The new Sustainable Jobs Plan and the latest federal budget both put a big emphasis on building out the green economy. That's necessary for ensuring good jobs and economic prosperity in the long-term, but it's insufficient for addressing the climate crisis. Without serious policies to tackle fossil fuel production, our emissions targets remain well out of reach.

Canada's failure to reduce carbon emissions is especially damning in light of the government's updated estimates of the social cost of carbon, which were also released this month. Every tonne of greenhouse gas emissions costs the Canadian economy around \$250 when the consequences for health, agriculture,

natural disasters and other factors are considered. That's five times higher than the previous estimate, which also illustrates the compounding nature of the climate crisis. The longer we wait to cut emissions, the more costly they become.

For the workers and communities trying to come to grips with climate policy, however, those economy-wide justifications for tackling fossil fuels may come as little consolation if their livelihoods are at stake. That's why we need a just transition, after all, and in this month's newsletter we learn how just transitions are taking shape in jurisdictions around the world.

Storm surge: this month's key publications

BC coalition proposes ambitious just transition strategy

A coalition of BC-based groups—the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Poverty Reduction Coalition, Worker's Solidarity Network, Climate Emergency Unit and the Wilderness Committee—released a *A Just Transition in BC*, which calls for a wide-ranging provincial just transition strategy. It includes two dozen high-level asks in four main areas: overarching policy framework, support for resource workers and remote communities, Indigenous rights, and adaptation for vulnerable communities.

Though light on details, the plan effectively captures the scope of BC's transition challenge and prioritizes the right kinds of interventions. Getting workers and vulnerable communities to the table is a vital first step, and investing aggressively in regional economic diversification can both sustain those communities and win political support for necessary climate policies.

The accompanying backgrounder makes reference to the CCPA's *Roadmap to a Canadian Just Transition Act* report, which argued for a national-level just transition strategy back in 2021. The BC groups have taken many of those ideas and tailored them thoughtfully to

the provincial context. It would be fantastic to see coalitions in other provinces do the same.

Canadian communities don't have to wait for the state to lead on climate action

And while we're out west, the CCPA and University of British Columbia co-published *Don't Wait for the State*, which makes the case for grassroots climate organizing in communities that feel left behind by government inaction on climate change.

The report draws on a series of international and domestic case studies to lay out twelve principles for effective climate organizing—including starting early, promoting local knowledge, envisioning a better future, and moving from dialogue to action—before concluding with an organizing framework for Canadian communities. The proposed “5D” approach involves defining the community that is undergoing transition, designing inclusive and iterative processes for organizing the community, dreaming up a better future together, determining the constraints holding back effective action, and finally delivering real alternatives for members of the community.

I had the privilege of working on this paper with UBC's Max Cohen, Isabella Pojuner and Avi Lewis, and we hope it proves useful for communities who are frustrated by the lack of climate action they're seeing. Grassroots organizing is no silver bullet, and ultimately there is no substitute for the collective power of governments, but, as I argue in an accompanying op-ed, citizen movements can play an important role in building community solidarity, kickstarting local action and shaping broader policy responses. **M**

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood is a senior researcher with the CCPA National Office. Sign up for his newsletter, Shift Storm: mailchi.mp/policyalternatives/subscribe-to-shift-storm

Shift storm

The latest developments in work and climate

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood

Appalachian communities making just transition a reality

The Reclaiming Appalachia Coalition released its annual report, *National to Neighborhoods*, which includes a set of concrete and hopeful examples of what a just transition can look like at the local level. These aren't grand infrastructure projects or sweeping training programs; instead, we learn about how coal communities in the U.S. states of Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia are scaling up smaller-scale clean industries, such as outdoor recreation, while investing in workers through new local training centres. Grassroots projects like these are the building blocks of successful regional and national transitions.

Decarbonization reproduces underlying inequalities in the absence of progressive interventions

New research published in *Nature Communications* finds that the process of cleaning up Europe's electricity grid is likely to make affluent regions better off while punishing the regions with the least capacity to adapt. That's one of the fundamental arguments for a just transition, so the findings may come as little surprise to readers of this newsletter. But the quantitative case offered in this paper is still helpful to have in the back pocket. While the authors do not make specific policy recommendations, they note that targeting clean electricity investment in former fossil fuel regions can help mitigate the downsides.

Indian coal region considers comprehensive just transition approach

A report copublished by the consultancies Climate Trends and EY, *Livelihood opportunities for a Just Transition in Jharkhand*, offers a deep dive into India's most coal-dependent region, Jharkhand, which is home to 300,000 coal workers. While the

livelihoods of these workers are threatened by some climate policies, they also stand to benefit from greener jobs that offer greater economic security and fewer health risks. Achieving those positive outcomes for workers will require coordination between every level of government, the private sector and workers themselves, the report notes, and the first step is establishing a clearer timeline for India's coal phase-out.

UK's latest climate plan clings desperately to fossil fuels

The UK released *Powering Up Britain*, its second climate plan in as many years after the UK's High Court found the previous version insufficient for meeting the country's legislated emissions targets. While this new plan is marginally better, it relies extensively on carbon capture technologies at great public expense. While the plan talks a lot about jobs, it emphasises the protection of existing oil and gas jobs and touts the creation of tens of thousands of new jobs in the CCUS industry. Critics, such as the London-based Environmental Justice Foundation, called the plan a "love letter to the fossil fuel industry."

South Africa's just transition plan missing the mark for many workers

A fascinating story from the Oxpeckers Center for Investigative Environmental Journalism captures the anxiety around just transition in South Africa. While the country has approved a US\$8.5 billion transition plan, many of the workers and communities who are supposed to benefit from it feel left out. It's a lesson in poor government communications, certainly, but also of the limits of policy-making without sufficient social dialogue.



Canada

“It seems like the federal government decided that it had to choose between dental care or pharmacare, but not both—and dental care came out the winner.”

—CCPA National Senior Economist David Macdonald



British Columbia

“Budget 2023 rightly prioritizes badly needed investments over a return to austerity.”

—CCPA BC

CCPA staff

Spending priorities for Canada’s federal and provincial governments

The experts at CCPA offices across the country keep a close eye on government spending priorities. Budgets reveal what a government thinks matters most. Here’s a brief round up of CCPA analysis of spring 2023 budgets.

Federal budget a hit-and-miss budget

The federal budget includes \$56 billion in new corporate tax breaks for investments in the clean economy. It also substantially expands the federal dental care program while incorporating new health care spending announced in February.

“It seems like the federal government decided that it had to choose between dental care or pharmacare, but not both—and dental care came out the winner,” says CCPA Senior Economist David Macdonald.

The 2023 budget is the first since the United States passed the *Inflation Reduction Act* in summer 2022, which injected nearly US\$400 billion into the transition to a green economy. For her part, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland put forward \$56 billion in new tax breaks—part of an \$80 billion incentive package—for private investment in the clean economy.

“The *Inflation Reduction Act* was a wake up call for Canadian policy-makers who have dragged their feet on green industrial policy for too long. We need a state-led industrial plan to cut our emissions, to create good, green jobs across the country, and to remain competitive in a changing global economy,” says Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood, a senior researcher at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

One major omission in the budget, Mertins-Kirkwood says, is transit funding. Public transit systems in cities and towns across the country are in a funding crisis—and municipalities have been begging the federal government for help.

This budget provides zero dollars to top up public transit systems.

Katherine Scott, a senior researcher at the CCPA, was disappointed that budget 2023 was almost wholly silent on gender-based violence. “The crisis in violence has only intensified since 2020. A fully resourced *National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence* that facilitates the actions of all governments is crucial.”

Canada’s health care system is on the brink; the federal budget is a powerful tool to right the ship. Unfortunately, Macdonald says, this year’s federal budget did not make any additional investments beyond the commitments the federal government made in February, when it increased health transfer funding to the provinces. Those agreements will likely cap new health care investments this year and for several years to come.

“Canadians are justifiably concerned about holes in their health care system. The nursing shortage is illustrating how frayed this safety net has become,” Macdonald says.

Another missing piece of the federal budget: long-term care.

The new budget also fails to address acute and growing housing insecurity, says Ricardo Tranjan, political economist at the CCPA Ontario—in this realm, he says, the government fails to deliver anything significant.

For Stuart Trew, director of the Trade and Investment Research Project (TIRP), this year’s budget showed Canada borrowing from the Biden administration’s “worker-focused” trade agenda in the area of public procurement—but not fully embracing it.—*Jon Milton*

B.C. budget prioritizes investment over austerity

B.C.’s first budget under Premier David Eby includes substantial funding increases in housing, health care, income supports

and cost of living tax credits, as well as allocating a record level of investment towards capital infrastructure. This not only represents much-needed progress towards meeting some of the big challenges facing our province but also prudently continues to invest in the public good rather than cave to fear-mongering about deficits in light of the economic slowdown.

The budget projects modest deficits over the next three years: \$4.2 billion in 2023-24 and \$3.8 billion and \$3 billion in the subsequent two years. While these numbers may sound big, they represent about one per cent of the provincial economy (or GDP) in 2023-24 and slightly less thereafter.

Even with the expenditures in budget 2023, provincial operating spending as a share of GDP (the size of the provincial economy) has declined substantially from where it stood 25 years ago. With budget 2023, it will inch back up compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Our province is facing big social and environmental challenges—sky high rents, health care under enormous strain, deep poverty, a toxic drugs crisis, and climate disruption (to name a few). Budget 2023 rightly prioritizes badly needed investments over a return to austerity, with significant further action needed in these key areas.—*Alex Hemingway, Iglia Ivanova and Shannon Daub*

Manitoba tax cuts a gift to the rich

The 2023 Manitoba budget announced almost \$1 billion in revenue cuts. Despite claims about affordability for low- and middle-income households, most Manitoba families will not receive anything near the tax savings promoted by the province. Make no mistake, these tax cuts are a giveaway to the rich that will reduce our capacity to fund public services for years.

The centrepiece of the 2023 tax plans is a change to the Basic Personal Amount, income that is exempt from provincial tax. The estimated cost of raising the Basic Personal Amount from \$10,855 to \$15,000 in 2023/24 is \$326 million. The other part of the new tax measures released in budget 2023 is a substantial change to provincial income tax brackets, shifting the first bracket to end at \$47,000 and the third to begin at \$100,000 rather than \$79,625. Tax bracket changes are

estimated to cost an additional \$160 million in 2023/24.

When CCPA economists ran the numbers on taxable incomes in Manitoba, considering all other tax credits and benefits, Manitoba's top 10 per cent of tax filers will receive a whopping 26 per cent of all benefits, totalling \$132 million. The top 20 per cent receive 42 per cent of savings. The bottom half of Manitobans (making under \$43,000) receive only 24 per cent of savings.

In reality, low-income households get little benefit from raising the Basic Personal Amount. The average savings for the bottom 20 per cent of tax filers in Manitoba will be just \$37 per person. It is only around the median income that the Basic Personal Amount savings espoused by the Manitoba government begin to take full effect, but it's the richest Manitobans who receive the biggest break.

The average benefit for individuals making over \$101,300 per year will be \$1,322 in 2024. This is over double the average benefit for individuals earning between \$43,000 and \$79,200, approximately \$574. For anyone earning less than the median income, the average benefit will be \$237.

The true cost of these tax cuts will increase over time in the form of compounding annual lost revenue.—*Niall Harney*

Nova Scotia budget could have been so much more

The provincial government's budget leaves many Nova Scotians behind.

The path we have been on for decades has left many feeling depleted and fearful of the future. This budget does little to allay those fears, especially for those trapped under the weight of student debt or other debt used to fill in gaps even for essential goods, with the household debt to income ratio at 180.47—that means households owed \$1.80 in credit market debt for every dollar of household disposable income. That ratio was 86.11 in 1990.

If it chooses, Nova Scotia is in a strong economic and fiscal position and could have addressed the most pressing problems facing our province—while maintaining a fiscally responsible approach.



Manitoba

“Considering all other tax credits and benefits, Manitoba’s top 10 per cent of tax filers will receive a whopping 26 per cent of all benefits, totalling \$132 million.”

—CCPA Manitoba



Nova Scotia

“Nova Scotia is in a strong economic and fiscal position and could have addressed the most pressing problems facing our province.”

—CCPA Nova Scotia Director
Christine Saulnier



Ontario

“Overall program spending isn’t keeping up with inflation.”

—CCPA Ontario



Saskatchewan

“One would think that repairing our public services would have been the number one priority of the government in this year’s budget.”

—CCPA Saskatchewan Director Simon Enoch

Revenue is up \$1.7 billion, including over \$260 million in HST revenue alone. Yet, it chose not to expand and provide additional income using the Nova Scotia Affordable Living Tax Credit, designed to offset the sales tax.

Instead, it increased the tax cuts offered to another \$35 million; these small tax cuts for individuals under 30 working at specific jobs will not make a difference in whether they stay or go. Investing those millions in universal public services, making education more affordable, and cancelling student loan interest would go further.—*Christine Saulnier*

Ontario budget leaves Ontarians behind

The 2023-24 budget spends \$190.6 billion on public programs. Last year, the government spent \$189.1 billion. In other words, overall program spending is set to go up by less than one per cent.

That’s not enough to keep up with inflation. Or population growth. Or the fact that the pandemic clearly showed us that Ontarians need more and stronger public services, not fewer and weaker ones.

Take these factors into account, and what seems like a small increase in funding is really a cut on a per person, inflation-adjusted basis.

The provincial health budget last year, including COVID-19 funding, was \$79.8 billion. This year it will be \$81 billion. That’s a 1.5 per cent increase—not early enough after years of underfunding. It won’t bring staffing numbers or wages up to where they should be.—*Sheila Block, Ricardo Tranjan, Randy Robinson*

Saskatchewan budget underfunds public services

Given the extent of the crisis of public services in Saskatchewan—with city hospital emergency rooms on bypass, rural health centres struggling with service cuts and bed closures and public schools facing overcrowding and chronic understaffing—one would think that repairing our public services would have been the number one priority of the government in this year’s budget. It wasn’t—the government’s priority yesterday was to use *the entirety* of its billion-dollar surplus yesterday to pay down debt.

The health system will be receiving a 6.7 per cent bump in funding—but an increase that barely keeps up with inflation is hardly the kind of historic and transformative investment that our public health system urgently needs in the continuing wake of the pandemic. It’s not like they don’t have the money—the province just received a massive cash injection from the federal government for health care, around a third of which came with no strings attached.

Similarly, public education was also hard hit by the pandemic, and is struggling with rising costs and record-high enrolments. It received a 6.2 per cent increase—but with only a 2.5 per cent increase in operational funding, school boards are warning of further cuts to staff and services this year.

The government’s recent about-face on increasing funding for public schools in the face of growing public anger demonstrates that it fundamentally miscalculated the public mood in prioritizing debt repayment over investments in our public services. The decision to prioritize Bay Street over the public looks like it will haunt Scott Moe and the Saskatchewan Party for some time to come.—*Simon Enoch* **M**



HOW TO KILL A ZOMBIE

...or the strange persistence
of neoliberalism

ALEX HIMELFARB

NEOLIBERALISM IS DEAD...AGAIN. It died the first time in the aftermath of the Great Depression and Second World War, in the heady days of the Marsh Papers, Beveridge Report and New Deal, when it seemed that profit and high wages could coexist, that endless growth would benefit just about everybody. It stayed dead for several decades, during which democracy flourished, inequality declined, but came back in full vigour after the economic upheavals of the 1980s.

Neoliberalism was again pronounced dead after the Dotcom bubble burst around 2002 and even deader after the financial meltdown of 2008. Books announcing its demise can be purchased cheap in bookstore bargain bins.

And now, post-pandemic, in the midst of “build back better” commitments here, in the U.S. and Europe, neoliberalism is yet again being pronounced dead. Just how many lives does it have or, as some have begun to wonder, is it more like a zombie wreaking havoc long after its demise because we haven’t figured out how to take it out of its misery, our misery.

What is this thing?

There is now a vast, confusing, often contradictory literature about just what neoliberalism is: ideology, philosophical doctrine, political project, all or none of the above? Coined in the 1930s by Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, it was, at its root, a reaction to what they perceived as the threat of “collectivism”—Nazism and communism, of course, but also the softer collectivism across much of Western Europe. Warning about the hubris of government planning and the danger it posed to individual freedom, they made the case for market competition. While characterizing democracy as a great good, to protect freedoms and constrain abuse of power, they spent far more words explaining why democracy must be limited to ensure that neither governments nor unions become so powerful that they might interfere with the market, whether through collective bargaining or “excessive” government regulation or programs of redistribution.

Much has been written about the limits and dangers of this view—its comfort with, indeed embrace of, inequality; its blindness to the environment; its overconfidence in the efficiency of markets; its limited view of democracy; and its narrow view of freedom. But what’s more important, for our purposes, is to

understand how these ideas have been used and abused as part of a political agenda to shore up the wealth and power of the wealthy and powerful.

Neoliberal politics and freedom

It’s quite likely that Hayek and Von Mises would object to much of the rhetoric that pretends to draw on their work, but it’s clear that a number of very rich people saw opportunity in their ideas.

In the 1970s, in particular, democracy was expanding and power was shifting. Unions had secured a strong foothold. Civil society groups were making demands on behalf of the many who had been excluded from the benefits of the welfare state. What sociologist Herbert Gans called the “equality revolution” was in full swing.

If democracy is always a battle about who will shape the future, the powerful few or the many, the powerful seemed to be losing ground. And some were getting worried. Something had to be done. Hobbesian warnings started to appear about “an excess of democracy” and an “upward spiral” of demands for social and environmental justice. Think tanks proliferated, spreading the message of the virtues of the market and the dangers of democracy let loose.

If neoliberalism would show the way, the economic turmoil at the end of that decade provided the opportunity. Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher got elected. Political discourse began to change.

No more talk about social justice. Regulations to protect labour rights, health and the environment became red tape. Taxes became a burden or, worse, a punishment.

Government no longer was our means to level the playing field, protect rights, and pursue the common good; it was part of the problem and had to be shrunk and refocused. Public debt was toxic. Private trumped public. Efficiency trumped equity. Price stability trumped full employment. Market competition at home and reducing barriers to global trade and investment were the route to a better world.

And underlying all this, the promise of freedom—freedom from government, freedom to consume, freedom to get rich.

The language had an undeniable appeal: freedom, a global view, low taxes. And for about four decades, this is the language that has shaped our politics. Over those decades, we have seen environmental degradation,

rising inequality, hollowing out of public institutions, and yet, with minor variations here and there, we kept getting more of the same: tax cuts, deregulation, privatization, financialization, offshoring of manufacturing, austerity.

Neoliberalism's most recent death

So what is it that has some yet again declaring neoliberalism's demise? Here in Canada, we have seen economists pleading for a new fiscal anchor after the federal government eschewed the convention of balanced budgets, embraced deficit spending and promised no return to austerity.

Here, as elsewhere, we are hearing talk of more active government, taxing the rich, increased public investment to drive the transition to a carbon neutral and more equal future.

The federal government promised a renewed commitment to gender equality and respect for human rights, Indigenous reconciliation and anti-racism.

For the first time in decades, we saw a major new social program—\$10 a day child care—and an expansion of public health, most recently with public dental care.

We are also hearing more talk about reducing dependency on fragile global supply chains, building domestic capacity to make what we need and, if not onshoring, at least friend-shoring more of our manufacturing.

What's going on? Is it really dead this time?

What does seem evident is that neoliberalism has lost its glow. Does anybody still buy that a rising tide lifts all boats or that wealth will trickle down or that the so-called free market always rewards the worthy and punishes inefficiency?

Zombie neoliberalism?

Yet it seems equally evident that, zombie-like, neoliberalism continues to influence our politics.

We see it in the reluctance to use government's regulatory clout to

advance our climate goals in favour of market mechanisms.

We see it in continued dependence on the private sector for achieving public goals.

We see it in the caution about raising taxes and a view of taxes as simply how we pay for public goods rather than a way to deconcentrate power and reduce inequality.

We see it in the preference for means-tested programs over universality.

We see it in the same old responses to inflation and in the pushback against change in the politics of several provinces.

We see it in the policy lurches as our governments shuffle between incremental steps forward and incremental steps in reverse.

But perhaps most importantly, we see it in a political culture of inevitability, fatalism and division. Research has documented decades of decline in social and political trust and, with that, a decline in commitment to democracy and trust in the idea of progress. In this low-trust post-truth era we cannot even agree on what is. How are we to find common ground on what could be?

Zigmunt Bauman, perhaps the most influential sociologist of our times, lamented that in an age of massive collective challenges, our collective toolkit has rarely been weaker. Neoliberalism has infiltrated our common sense and stunted our political imagination.

For about four decades, we have lived in a world in which we are urged to focus on our own interests, our family and maybe our friends next door—a world in which there is no society, no obligations to the stranger or to some notion of the public good.

Ours is the age of austerity, where government was backing away, less present in our lives and, in any case, seen increasingly as foreign, even dangerous, rather than a means to express our collective will. Most of our political leaders have known nothing else.

Little wonder, then, that we have—most of us—turned our eyes to private troubles rather than public issues, that we have come to see social problems like poverty and inequality not as a failure of policy but as just the way the world works.

Many simply now accept as inevitable that our kids will have a



Central to this is renewal of democracy. We need a shift in power.

tougher time than we did, that however much we may dislike what's going on, there's just not much we can do about it and we are pretty much on our own to manage whatever comes.

Thatcher's "there is no alternative" could be the slogan for zombie neoliberalism.

But is it really dead?

But perhaps neoliberalism isn't dead at all. Wolfgang Streeck describes what is said to be an Italian way of seeing politics, "dietrismo."

"Dietro" means behind and this perspective asks what's really going on behind the rhetoric, behind the curtain. It's a useful frame for thinking about neoliberalism as a political project.

How do we reconcile the language of leaner, less intrusive government with the growth of the security state, packed prisons and cameras surveilling just about everything?

How do we reconcile the language of free markets with the readiness to bail out banks and other big corporations when they run into strong headwinds?

How do we reconcile the language of competition with the unprecedented degree of corporate concentration and the failure to deal with monopolies or near monopolies in critical sectors?

Few have been as explicit as libertarian tech billionaire, Peter Thiel, when he wrote "competition is for losers" and monopolies are how best to create and preserve value. But he captures well neoliberalism in practice.

Perhaps neoliberalism is not so much a zombie as a shape-shifter, defined only by its purpose: to preserve the power structure, to subordinate the state to that purpose, to keep democracy in check, with whatever means are at hand. So, for example, growing concern about global supply chains and free trade may not signal the death of neoliberalism but, rather, an adjustment necessary to protect growth and profits.

What about the various virulent forms of authoritarianism seemingly on the rise around the world? We are well to remember that neoliberal's fiercest proponents made clear in both writings and actions that they'd prefer capitalism even under a dictator over any version of social democracy

In any case, we do not seem anywhere near a new consensus that will finally and truly kill off neoliberalism.

What will it take?

Progressives of my generation have too often either spent our energy fighting to preserve the programs of the past from the cutters and dismantlers or settled for a menu of incrementalism as the best we could hope for.

We have, I fear, become something of a conservative force, often defending government as it is from the neoliberal assault rather than imagining the government we need for a more just and sustainable future.

There are, however, plenty of powerful ideas out there—largely from a new generation of leaders—that could form the basis of a new consensus; one that understands that all that we value depends on our ability to build a carbon-neutral economy and reverse nature loss, and that we will achieve neither if we do not simultaneously reduce inequality, build a care economy and put in place the measures necessary to help those most affected by the transition at home and globally.

And central to all of this is the renewal of democracy in our politics and in our workplaces. Democracy is no side issue. Without a shift in power, no change will hold.

So how do we move forward? How do we overcome the prevailing fatalism, division and distrust?

Perhaps there are lessons to be drawn from the equality revolution of the 1960s and in the work of the Combabee River Collective on how, in collective action, we can overcome our loneliness and cynicism to find courage and strength.

The collective was a group of Black women of various sexual orientations in the U.S. fed up that their issues and voices were always sidelined or subordinated. They developed a manifesto based on class and identity, taking on both privilege and power, and joined up with other equity-seeking groups, recognizing that while inequality and oppression are experienced differently by each, there is much that is shared and they were stronger together—each for all, all for each.

They fought for the common good and universal rights, but with an understanding of diverse needs and a belief that only through collective action could they hope to establish the conditions for individual freedom.

Perhaps in the Combabee River Collective and their remaking of solidarity, their commitment to fighting inequality in all its forms and their understanding of the emancipatory power of collective action are clues for how we might kill neoliberalism...again.

The fight these women waged might serve as a reminder of the joy that can be found and the possibilities that are opened up when we reject neoliberalism's insistence that human purpose must be subordinated to the logic of the market and unite instead in the pursuit of common purpose and the possibilities of a richer freedom, for all. **M**

Alex Himelfarb is chair of the CCPA National Office steering committee and a member of the CCPA's board.

DAVID MACDONALD AND JON MILTON

Vampire consulting firms

End stage neoliberalism?

HERE'S A HIDDEN GEM in the spring federal budget: the federal government is finally placing some limits on high-priced consulting firms. The feds are aiming to cut \$7.1 billion from outsourcing and travel expenses, with a focus on “management consultants” like McKinsey.

It's about time the feds drew a line against the McKinseys of the world—the hidden hand behind the destruction of public services.

It could have gone a different way. In the 2021 budget, the feds promised a “strategic policy review” that would cut \$6 billion in spending. In the past, such reviews have encouraged and implemented significant staffing and service cuts. This time, they're going after consulting firms.

The cost of consulting firms has mushroomed over the past years—from \$8.4 billion when the Liberals were first elected in 2015 to an estimated \$21.4 billion this year. Those consulting firms represent a shadow public service—vampire consulting, one might say.

The feds' reliance on consulting firms is rotting away government capacity. The more governments rely on consulting firms to implement big-picture strategic direction, the less capacity the public sector has to do so itself.

That downward spiral of capacity loss and reliance on consulting firms doesn't just impact the budget—it also impacts the aspirations for public services. For consulting firms, that aspiration focuses on increased use of other private consulting firms to solve problems instead of relying on the workers the federal government already employs to do just that.

Since the 1980s, the use of consulting firms expanded as the

federal and provincial governments implemented a program of austerity and restructuring. They hired consulting firms to advise on program reviews, cost-cutting measures, and privatization initiatives. This trend continues, as the federal government and many provincial governments have embarked on significant austerity measures and privatization.

During those heady days of selloffs, tax cuts, and austerity measures, consulting firms acted as the central planners for this economic restructuring. They were often hired to advise on which Crown corporations and government-owned assets should be sold off, how to structure the deals, and how to market the assets to potential buyers. The firms would also provide advice on how to restructure the remaining government-owned assets to cut costs by reducing service quality.

They call these cuts “efficient” and “competitive.”

Since then, consulting firms have become even more embedded in Canadian policy-making. Consulting firms now advise on a wide range of policy issues, including health care, energy, environment, and national security. They have their hands in procurement of goods and services, as well as in project management and implementation.

Today, these consulting firms continue to produce fiascos—the most recent of which was McKinsey contracts with the federal government being reviewed by the auditor general. In the U.S., the firm has paid out over half a billion in lawsuits for “turbocharging” the opioid epidemic. The Phoenix pay scandal—in which tens of thousands of federal workers are struggling to get their own paycheques that they work for—was the result of disastrous IT outsourcing.

Like a vampire, consulting firms are suave and sophisticated actors that aim to gain the trust of their targets. They convince government managers that public services are inefficient, that only consulting firms have the cure—for a sizable fee. They convince governments to give up their assets and resources to private actors, draining the lifeblood of public services, and turning those that remain into versions of themselves.

It's more important than ever that we understand just how deeply consulting firms have captured policy-makers at every level. Vampires, as we know, hate the daylight. **M**

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BILL LONGSTAFF

Dismissing the low taxes myth with a word

IF THERE'S a common refrain in Conservative election platforms it's lower taxes. No matter the current tax level, Conservatives believe it must be lower.

If this is simply a belief that more money should be spent individually and less collectively, so be it. A reasonable sentiment. But we also constantly hear that taxes must be lower in order to fully enjoy the benefits of a prosperous economy. This is promoted by a range of conservatives, from business people to media types to economists and, particularly from the latter, we hear clever theories about why this must be so.

We can dismiss those theories with one word—Norway. Why Norway? Well, Norway has one of the world's highest tax rates, 42 per cent of its GDP. That compares to 33 per cent for us. So, according to conservative economic theory, Norway should be a mess. In fact, it has a GDP per capita higher than ours (\$80,000 to \$53,000 US)—even higher than the Americans'

(\$70,000 US) and the U.S. tax rate is only 27 per cent of its GDP.

I could, of course, have chosen a different word. Denmark, for instance, or Sweden. Again, they have much higher taxes than ours but also higher GDP per capita. And these two countries accomplish this with hardly a trace of oil or gas. In North America, if you don't have oodles of oil and gas, you just aren't in the game. Well, these countries are very much in the game. In fact, they're winning.

I emphasize that these are not economic theories or computer models, they are real societies of flesh-and-blood humans buying and selling real goods and services.

This shouldn't be surprising. In a modern nation, to optimize your economy you need a well-educated, healthy population in which everyone is enabled to do their best. And quality education, health care and welfare don't come cheap.

Furthermore, by maintaining a relatively equal society with a fair distribution of wealth, you achieve a

healthier society. Unequal societies tend to have worse social outcomes: more crime, drug use, obesity, mental problems, and so on. The U.S. is a testament to this—low taxes and the worst social outcomes among advanced countries.

The latter reminds us that the GDP is not, in fact, a good measure of the quality of a society. It is, after all, a measure of stuff, not of human well-being.

Indeed, economic growth can have negative effects on society, such as contributing to climate change, ecological spolioation or inequality. We need more comprehensive yardsticks.

Some countries are working on this. In India, for instance, the government is developing an Ease of Living Index to combine quality of life, economic ability and sustainability.

Bhutan attempts to measure Gross National Happiness, considering factors such as equitable socio-economic development and good governance.

The UN has its Human Development Index, which considers health and knowledge as well as economic prosperity. Lower taxes will do nothing to improve these metrics.

If, for whatever reason, we want more spending individually than collectively, then the Conservative low-tax approach is the way to go. But if our goal is both a prosperous and a healthy society, the answer is higher taxes, not lower. **M**

Bill Longstaff is a Calgary writer whose books include *Democracy Undone: The Practice and the Promise of Self-governance in Canada* and *No Free Lunch and Other Myths*. He blogs at bill-longstaff.ca.

Statistics are from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development websites: Tax rates: www.oecd.org/tax/revenue-statistics-2522770x.htm; GDP: data.oecd.org/gdp/gross-domestic-product-gdp.htm



DAVID MACDONALD

Dawn of the Debt

Governments aren't households—and their budgets don't act like them

YOU'VE HEARD THIS old chestnut before: Governments should be run like a household. As if the biggest single organization in the country has no effect on anything else.

The idea that government budgets and household budgets are comparable in any way goes back at least to the 1930s, when it was used as a rhetorical cudgel against the UK's progressive government of the era. It was used to try to limit the scope of government in the economy, more broadly, in an era when governments were setting up national health care plans, infrastructure projects, and so on.

Turns out economic thinking has progressed since then, but political thought really hasn't.

The little economy on the prairie

The federal government is one of the very big sectors in the economy. The three other big sectors are provincial governments, corporations, and households. A much better analogy for our economy is that all four of these sectors are part of the same household; a little economy on the prairie with no one else around.

All of these sectors are sitting around their kitchen table day in and day out.

Those four members are constantly trading with one another—the corporations are giving money to the households (as wages), and the households to the corporations (when they buy things), and the feds are collecting money from households (in taxes) and giving it to the provinces (as transfers). Money is constantly circulating between them.

When one side pays another, the paying side ends up with a deficit,

but the receiving side ends up with a surplus. The total amount of money is the same, but who has it changes and we label that “deficit” or “surplus.” For example, when the feds transfer money to households—think of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)—the feds are in deficit for that amount, but households are in surplus for the same amount. It's the same money, “deficit” or “surplus” just tells us who sent it and who received it.

At the end of the year, some of those four members are in surplus and some are in deficit. When the feds are in deficit, it's often because they've been transferring money to other family members, creating surpluses for them. Think, here, of the feds increasing health care transfers to the provinces. It's no coincidence that the provinces are all declaring big surpluses right now!

When so-called “free market” economists try to describe the federal budget as if it were a household budget, they are ignoring the other three members at the table. They want to treat the federal budget as if it's something that can be isolated from the broader Canadian economy. It simply doesn't make sense to do so.

If the federal government aimed for massive surpluses—as some economists and think tanks argue it should—then that money has to come from somewhere: it would have to take it from the others at the table. In practice, that can mean cutting services (to households), raising taxes (on households or corporations), or cutting transfers (to provinces).

Right now, the federal government is in deficit, as it has been for quite some time. Those deficits

have grown during the pandemic, as federal services have expanded. That's a good thing! It means that households, businesses, and provinces are on the other side of the trade declaring surpluses and they'll have had an easier time keeping their head above water.

Whose deficit is it, anyway?

The idea that the federal government should plan its budget as if it were a household really took off in Canada in the 1980s and 1990s, during those heady days of restructuring the Canadian economy to transfer a larger and larger piece of the pie to corporations.

Unless we realize that deficits go somewhere, we can't evaluate if we like where they're going. We might be just fine with federal deficits creating provincial surpluses, but less so if they created massive corporate surpluses (through, say, corporate tax cuts).

If you think about the feds as a member of a household, this becomes obvious. But if you turn off the lights at the kitchen table and shine a flashlight only on the federal government, pretending it is the only occupant of the house, which is generally what economists do, then these trade-offs aren't obvious.

Economic language readily takes on moral overtones when “deficit” and “surplus” are two sides of the same transaction—you can't have one without the other. If you want a surplus, say for a government, you better know where the corresponding deficit will be created.

So, in our thinking, let's make the feds a member of a household and not pretend it's a household on its own. **M**

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CATHERINE BRYAN

Canada's immigration system isn't inclusive

SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT of Canada's Comprehensive Ranking System in 1967, Canadian immigration has been framed as an embrace of multiculturalism.

Immigrants are no longer selected for their proximity to a "white British ideal," but, rather, for their ability to mobilize their skills, training, and capacity in service of the Canadian economy, regardless of who they are or where they come from.

Canada, in turn, has positioned itself as an inclusive society, welcoming of all people. This article challenges immigration rhetoric that overstates the capacity of contemporary Canadian society to welcome migrant-newcomers in socially just ways.

Under neoliberalism, meaningful inclusion is rendered less possible as newcomers find themselves consistently relegated to low-wage, precarious employment—despite status and time spent in Canada.

Confronted with a patchwork of programs, immigration applicants to Canada are granted entry according to skill level, educational attainment, employment experience, language proficiency, and age.

Broadly, we can point to two "types" of migrant newcomers. Those afforded permanent residency prior to arrival and those who arrive with temporary residency. The latter includes "high-" and "low-" skilled workers, international students, and "high skilled" refugee claimants and Canadian-educated migrants more eligible for eventual permanent residency relative to those regarded as "low skilled."

Consistent with this logic, migrant self-sufficiency and an ability to contribute to the Canadian economy are prioritized in determining who can stay and under

what conditions. Economic self-sufficiency, however, in the manner celebrated by Canada's immigration apparatus, is largely dependent on meaningful inclusion.

Yet this is not what most immigrants encounter in Canada. Instead, they arrive to a context determined by the legacies of settler colonialism, the stratifying logics of racialized capitalism, and exclusionary labour markets.

Evidenced in the experiences of "high-skilled" permanent residents is the elusiveness of meaningful welcome and inclusion, the persistence of a strategic use of immigration by the state in service of capitalist political economy, and the limits of immigration policy predicated on multicultural ideals.

Indeed, many newcomers arrive through programs that prioritize "skill" only to find themselves stuck in workplaces where those skills are underutilized, if used at all. Others actively "deskill" or downplay training and education acquired in the country of origin to secure employment in sectors increasingly eschewed by Canadian workers.

Employer-supported transition to permanent residency for temporary migrants also offers important illustration. In Nova Scotia, like elsewhere in Canada, temporary migrants aim to position themselves favourably with their employers. This is because where full-time, permanent employment is possible, employers can facilitate permanent residency through the province's nominee program or the federally managed Atlantic Immigration Program.

While remedying some of the more exploitative tendencies of temporary foreign worker programs, these pathways allow employers to recruit and retain workers who are likely to remain confined to

precarious, low-wage work, despite the mobility rights afforded to them once they secure permanent residency.

Capital—embodied here by employers—produces and reproduces a population conducive to their own objectives of accumulation in the short- and long-term.

These dynamics are not new, nor are the ideas that animate them.

Following the 1881 *Colonization Company Act*, which aimed to stimulate westward expansion, small, often inexperienced companies became key players in Canadian expansion and immigration.

At the onset of formalized, state-managed immigration in Canada, private interests were central to determining eligibility criteria and selecting new arrivals.

The tropes in need of investigation are not "simply" those of neoliberalism. They are reflected across the totality of the Canadian state's nation-building project via immigration since confederation.

What is novel, however, is neoliberalism's self-purported acceptance of multiculturalism. While earlier examples of exploitative, extractive, and dispossessing immigration regimes pursued explicitly racist objectives, the contemporary regime is reliant on state-driven narratives of multiculturalism that celebrate cultural plurality. At the same time, it flattens socially constituted difference, obscures the reality of racism, and denies (wholesale) the ways in which racialized market stratification is a cornerstone of Canadian political economy. **M**

Catherine Bryan is an associate professor in the School of Social Work at Dalhousie University and the chair of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Nova Scotia Office's Research Advisory Committee.

AHMED MEZIL, WITH CRAIG PICKTHORNE

Ancient minimum wage trope just won't die

WE OFTEN HEAR an outdated description of who typically earns a minimum wage: those just entering the workforce with no skills or experience. It's an outdated holdover from the time of minimum wage legislation's birth in the first decades of the last century.

Whatever 20th century motivations were behind the minimum wage, they are no longer relevant. Seventy per cent of minimum wage workers are over the age of 20, per a 2022 report from the CCPA: *One Step Forward* by Sheila Block and Grace-Edward Galabuzi.

Yet this conception of who deserves to be held in working poverty keeps clawing its way up from the distant past. Some variation of "... but those people are just working for extra money" is often heard when an increase to those at the lowest end of the wage spectrum is in the news.

These are not just teenagers without bills to pay—the majority are working adults with households to support. Racialized men and women are over-represented in the ranks of minimum wage workers, as are recent immigrants.

Just how inadequate is the minimum wage? In Ontario, there is no region where a minimum wage is even close to a living wage. A full-time, minimum-wage cleaner in Toronto is \$231 short each week of being able to pay their bills.

The Ontario Living Wage Network (OLWN) releases the results of its calculation every November. In 2022, living wage rates ranged from \$18.05 to \$23.15 per hour. They collect the real expenses that a worker would have to cover, such as rent, food, transportation, and child care for 10 regions in the province. They also account for any government taxes,

transfers, and benefits. The result is an hourly wage that a worker must earn in order to make ends meet and live with some dignity in their community.

Honest question: what else is work for if not to be able to pay the bills?

From credit unions with locations all over the province to small non-profits and everything in between, there are employers who do not view workers as just another cost to suppress, but as living assets that are key to their success. They are certified living wage employers, and there's almost 600 of them in Ontario, with many more in Alberta and B.C. via similar programs.

As the owner of a growing cleaning service in Ontario, I can attest to the benefits of paying a living wage and being certified as a living wage employer. It has allowed us to attract and retain highly motivated and skilled employees who are committed to the success of the business.

Paying a living wage also helped reduce turnover and absenteeism, which ultimately leads to increased productivity and profitability.

But beyond these practical benefits, what drew us to the living wage

movement was a sense of moral obligation. We have a responsibility to ensure that our employees are able to live with dignity and security, and that they are not forced to choose between paying the bills and covering rent on time. By paying a living wage, we are not only doing the right thing—we are also helping to build a more just and equitable society. By financially investing in our cleaners and ensuring they're getting paid enough to live, their increased morale has impacted our clients and our own sales in a positive way.

What if the politically set minimum wage more closely resembled our living wage calculation? There could be no simpler and profound acknowledgement that most at the lowest end of the wage scale have families and households to support. If you work full time, you should be able to make ends meet.

The idea that there is a whole class of workers who deserve nothing more than a poverty wage is an undead brute that keeps lurching along the landscape of work. **M**

Ahmed Mezil is owner of Hellamaid. Craig Pickthorne is communications coordinator with the Ontario Living Wage Network.



SIMON ENOCH

Zombie climate change denial

IF WE WERE to view the history of the oil industry and climate change as moving through the stages of grief, we might say the industry is currently in the “bargaining” stage.

After years of funding denial of climate change and lashing out at its critics, the industry now wants to make a deal. The deal is that if we adopt their version of energy transition, they promise to finally make real progress towards reducing emissions.

Certainly, any claim that we should now trust the very same industry that has actively obstructed ambitious climate action for the past three decades should warrant suspicion.

And such suspicion is certainly warranted, because if we look at the supposed “solutions” the oil industry is pitching to combat climate change, we will find that they are of dubious efficacy in reducing carbon emissions and they have the curious feature of prolonging our reliance on fossil fuels.

The oil industry’s most favoured solution to its emissions problem is Carbon Capture Usage and Storage (CCUS). Every oil company that has made a net-zero promise is relying on CCUS to meet that promise to some extent.

Of course, what the industry forgets to mention in these pledges is that they are confined only to upstream emissions from the exploration and production of oil and gas. The actual burning of oil and gas in cars and homes—what is known as Scope 3 emissions and constitute up to 80 per cent of the total emissions of using oil and gas—is someone else’s problem.

The other pertinent fact that industry advocates for CCUS often neglect is that much of the carbon captured in these projects is used

to flood older oilfields in order to extract even more oil.

Yet even though the oil industry is betting on CCUS to prolong its existence in a low-carbon world, it is loath to pay for it itself. Indeed, despite recording billions in profits, Canada’s oil industry is asking the public to pay 75 per cent of the costs to build CCUS facilities for the oil industry. That’s billions of dollars in public subsidies for a wildly profitable private industry that could be directed to proven and effective emission reduction strategies.

To a large extent, oil industry net-zero pledges also rely on the idea of carbon offsets. Offsets are supposed to provide the “net” in their “net-zero emissions.” Not through emission reductions in their own operations, but by paying for someone else to reduce or sequester carbon—most popularly through the planting of trees.

For example, Shell Oil’s pathway to net zero includes the ample use of carbon offsets, so much so that they will need to plant a forest the size of the nation of Brazil to offset their own emissions.

However, the practicality of Shell’s plan (and other oil companies) has been rendered all the more suspect due to the increasing recognition that many of these offset schemes are not actually reducing emissions.

An investigation of Verra, the world’s leading carbon standard for the rapidly growing (\$2 billion) voluntary offsets market, has found that more than 90 per cent of their rainforest offset credits—among the most commonly used by companies—are likely to be phantom credits and do not represent genuine carbon reductions.

Last in the industry’s arsenal of dubious climate actions is the promise of hydrogen. Industry and

governments have been heavily promoting hydrogen as a next-generation, carbon-free fuel that can power cars, homes and power plants.

Except the only truly zero-emission hydrogen is “green hydrogen,” which is made by electrolyzing water. But the energy used for this process must be via renewable energy. If it simply uses electrical power generated by fossil fuels, it cannot be, in any sense, considered zero-emission.

Rather, what the industry is hoping you don’t know is that their proposals are often for “grey” hydrogen, which is produced using natural gas and can generate as much carbon as burning a gallon of gasoline.

Some industry advocates counter that they will capture and sequester the carbon used to produce hydrogen, making it carbon neutral.

And so, we come full circle. The industry is effectively asking us to rely on one dubious technology that relies on this other dubious technology so we can continue to produce more fossil fuels.

But these are not solutions to climate change, they are solutions to the existential threat that the industry recognizes from real climate action. They are another delay tactic that will prolong our reliance on fossil fuels at a time when we should be making every effort to wean ourselves off of fossil energy.

The Canadian oil industry is bargaining that you won’t notice the difference. **M**

Simon Enoch is director of the CCPA Saskatchewan office.



Zombie neoliberalism

BRUCE CAMPBELL

10 years later: Lessons from the Lac-Mégantic rail disaster have not been heeded

ON JULY 6, 2013, a runaway train carrying 72 tank cars loaded with volatile Bakken shale oil derailed and exploded in the centre of Lac-Mégantic, a small town in southeastern Quebec. It killed 47 people, orphaned 26 children, spilled a record six million litres of oil, and incinerated the town centre.

It was the worst rail disaster in more than a century—a catastrophe described by the editor of the local weekly newspaper as “a chain of explosions and the sound of whistling gas escaping from

everywhere: the vomiting bowels of hell.”

Ten years later, the factors that led to the Lac-Mégantic tragedy have not been addressed. It has its roots in neoliberal tenets of deregulation.

I began my research into what led to the disaster shortly after it happened. My first CCPA report was published in the fall of 2013, with two more in 2014. I was deeply motivated to seek the truth about what really happened—and why—after learning my colleague Diane lost three members of her extended

family in the inferno. The Bégnoches family lost their daughter Talitha Coumi and two granddaughters, Alyssa and Bianca.

I spent 2016 as a visiting fellow at the University of Ottawa Law Faculty, teaching and lecturing on issues related to the disaster. My book, *The Lac-Mégantic Rail Disaster: Public Betrayal Justice Denied*, was released in 2018, after which I travelled across Canada and the U.S. sharing the story. I was warmly received at the 2019 launch of the French edition of my book, *Enquête sur la catastrophe de Lac-Mégantic*:

Quand les pouvoirs publics déraillent, at the rebuilt Musi-Café club, where most of the victims died.

Lac-Mégantic was the violent consequence of a four decades-long trajectory of mutually reinforcing policies: deregulation, privatization, tax cuts, austerity—which systematically eroded transportation safety protections. It entrenched the power relationship between railway corporations, with their formidable lobbying eco-system, in concert with government enablers. What is referred to as regulatory capture has also infected a wide swath of other industries.

Austerity reinforced a vicious cycle, where gutted regulatory resources increased pressure to offload responsibility to companies: self-regulation. It reinforced companies' power to block, delay, dilute, reverse, or remove regulations that adversely affected short-term profit and shareholder value.

In the years leading up to the disaster, the railway/petroleum lobby blocked regulations proposed to address the ballooning danger as unnecessary. The volume of oil transported by rail in Canada soared from 500 tank cars in 2009 to 160,000 in 2013. Huge volumes were being hauled through Lac-Mégantic by a company with a poor safety record, on a poorly maintained track, with a single operator, in tank cars designed for carrying corn oil, with negligible oversight and enforcement: an accident waiting to happen.

Disaster aftershocks

The Lac-Mégantic community has been plagued by a legacy of economic, health, and environmental after-shocks.

Shortly after the disaster, victims' families were exploited by ambulance chasers promising them major compensation in U.S. courts.

Disaster capitalists, including private contractors, financiers, and allied local politicians, oversaw the destruction of large portions of the town that had not been contaminated, despite opposition from most residents.

York University Professor Liette Gilbert, who grew up in the adjacent town of Nantes, where the train ran away, has written about the creative destruction that

No senior official,
politician, corporate
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has admitted their role
and responsibility for
the tragedy.

shaped the reconstruction effort in Lac-Mégantic, describing how those in control manipulated the language of urgency, risk and resilience to impose their agenda on a traumatized community, including residents who were summarily evicted from their homes.

Trains carrying dangerous goods continue to rumble through the town, whistles screaming day and night. These much longer and heavier trains still descend the steep slope and go around the sharp curve where the fateful train derailed. They still carry dangerous goods in standard or slightly upgraded DOT-111 tank cars—the kind that derailed and spilled on that tragic night. Unit oil trains are no longer running through the town, at least for now.

The fear of another derailment keeps residents on edge. On April 15, 2023, a CP freight train (its new name is Canadian Pacific Kansas Southern) carrying toxic chemicals derailed and caught fire in Northern Maine. This same train had earlier passed through Lac-Mégantic, only 56 km from the crash.

As far as I can determine, neither the provincial or federal government have conducted (or at least made public) studies on the health effects of people's exposure to the toxic chemicals that spilled into the air, water, and soil that night—whether there has been a disproportionate level of cancer, asthma, birth defects, or more.

Construction of the long-promised bypass around the town still has not begun. The bypass was supposed to be a step toward healing the community. Transport Canada has bungled the issue from the outset. The chosen route has sharply divided the community. Opposition to this route—the one preferred by Canadian Pacific, which will own the government-financed bypass upon completion—means still further delay. Those whose lands will be appropriated are seen as the latest victims of the disaster. Completion of the bypass is years away.

The ongoing setbacks have contributed to a state of despair and resignation among large segments of the population; a belief that nothing can be done. It is also a story of citizens who continue to fight for safety and justice; who fight to uncover the whole truth surrounding the disaster; who fight to keep its memory alive; who refuse to give up.

Who has been held accountable?

Three front-line workers were criminally charged and acquitted. No corporate executives, owners, or directors have been held legally liable.

No senior official, politician, corporate executive, or director has admitted their role and responsibility for the tragedy. Successive governments have refused demands by the community to establish an independent commission of inquiry.

Civil suits, including a class action lawsuit filed on behalf of town residents, resulted in a 2015 plea deal

with 24 defendants, including the federal government, contributing to a \$460 million settlement fund protecting them from further charges.

A lone defendant, Canadian Pacific Railway—the company contracted to transport the cargo from North Dakota to the Irving refinery in Saint John—refused to settle. CP also managed, on a technicality, to evade accountability in a wrongful death suit filed in U.S. court.

After repeated CP-instigated trial delays, the Québec Superior Court ruled in December 2022 that CP could not be held liable for damages suffered by the Lac-Mégantic victims. It was a blatant example of a flawed legal system wherein major Canadian railways effectively determine the laws, rules, and regulations, and escape liability in the event of a disaster. Another setback in the fight for justice. The plaintiffs have appealed the court ruling.

Compare CP's refusal to compensate victims with the fact that it purchased a major U.S. railway, Kansas City Southern, for US\$31 billion in 2020. Compare it with the record compensation paid to CP's senior executives. CEO Keith Creel's compensation in 2021 was the 6th highest in Canada, at \$26.7 million. Almost \$15 million came from stock options that are tied to CP's soaring profits and shareholder value.

The window for a recurrence of a Lac-Mégantic-type disaster still open

Regulatory agency resources are still woefully inadequate to undertake effective safety oversight and enforcement.

The flawed safety oversight regime—safety management systems [SMS]—has continuously been on the Transportation Safety Board's (TSB) *Watchlist* since the list was created in 2010 to highlight “those issues posing the greatest risk to Canada's transportation system.” In its most recent 2022 *Watchlist*, the TSB noted that

Safety Management Systems are “still not effectively identifying hazards and mitigating risks in rail transportation.”

The auditor general's 2021 report on safety management systems oversight expressed serious concerns, stating it focused on checking off the regulatory boxes: not whether they were effective in reducing the risk of accidents. Once again, Transport Canada's response continues to be that they are reviewing the system—namely, inaction.

The federal government still has not lifted the veil on corporate activities protected by commercial confidentiality and lobbying pressure. When compared internationally, Canada's access to information and whistleblower protections laws rank poorly.

The number of uncontrolled rail movements—including that which resulted in the Lac-Mégantic disaster—has risen significantly between 2010 and 2022, a trend interrupted only briefly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite a few targeted safety measures taken by Transport Canada, the Transportation Safety Board 2022 *Watchlist* concluded that unplanned/uncontrolled movement of rail equipment continues to “create high-risk situations that may have catastrophic consequences.”

Transport Canada has still not mandated advanced braking systems on trains, which could have prevented the Lac-Mégantic disaster and other runaway trains.

Companies still refuse to implement work-rest requirements for workers, in accordance with sound science. Fatigue remains on the TSB *Watchlist* as posing a safety risk to operations. Governments have not made these practices mandatory.

Working conditions have become more dangerous over the last decade due to major staff cuts in line with the precision scheduled railroading model that has been embraced by almost all major railways.

A 2020 report by the environmental commissioner in the auditor

general's office on the transportation of dangerous goods warned, “the window for a recurrence of a Lac-Mégantic-type disaster is still open.”

The lessons from Lac-Mégantic still haven't been learned

When a disaster occurs, governments commit to finding its causes, holding those responsible to account, and taking the necessary safety measures to prevent their recurrence. However, with the passage of time, public consciousness of what happened fades and government commitment wanes, replaced by incrementalism.

Time and again, the corporate game plan in the wake of major disasters is to deny and delay. Considerations of justice for victims are invariably subordinated to those of profit and shareholder value. Corporations calculate that the probability of another such event is low, the cost of implementing rigorous safety measures is high, and the cost of lawsuits under existing legislation is manageable. In other words, business as usual.

Lac-Mégantic still hangs like a sword of Damocles over rail transportation in North America. We should not have to wait for another catastrophe to rediscover that its lessons have not been learned.

If we are to prevent future disasters, countervailing measures to escape regulatory capture must be implemented. It is an existential threat that corrodes our democracy. Though the status quo is deeply entrenched, giving up the fight is not an option.

We will not forget Lac-Mégantic.

M

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

RICARDO TRANJAN

COVID-19 didn't kill neoliberalism; we must do it ourselves

NEOLIBERALISM IS a broad term used to describe a ruthless variant of economic thinking that weakens a country's immune system, making its population vulnerable to poverty and other social malaise. Margaret Thatcher's U.K. (1979-90) is widely known as patient zero, while Ronald Reagan (1981-89) was responsible for bringing the variant across the Atlantic to the United States, from where it spread across the globe. Most cases detected in Latin America and Africa have been traced back to travellers originating from Washington, D.C., especially the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund compounds.

In Canada, the Macdonald Commission meetings (1982-84) were the first superspreader events. By the mid-1990s, cuts to public services, anti-labour policies, tax breaks for the rich, privatization and other common symptoms of the malaise were seen everywhere.

Unemployment insurance became inaccessible to a workforce. In 1989, 83 per cent of workers were eligible for benefits, compared to 42 per cent in 2018. Provincial social assistance programs were gutted across the country. Ontario's Mike Harris government cut social assistance rates by 22 per cent in 1995, pushing many of the province's residents into deep poverty.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Canadian government led the way in the financing of social housing. By the late 1990s, Ottawa had decided housing was no longer its problem and downloaded it onto the provinces, some of whom further downloaded responsibility onto municipalities.

Governments doled out public infrastructure to the private sector: a national railroad (CNR), a highway (407), a hydro company (Ontario Hydro), a ferry service (B.C. Ferries), just to name a few. They were awful deals, as Linda McQuaig has pointedly explained.

A neoliberal outbreak has also been documented in post-secondary education. Between 1988 and 2018, government funding dropped from 71 per cent to 47 per cent of university revenue, leaving them to rely on increasingly unaffordable tuition fees and international students.

These are just some examples of a longer list of casualties.

It has been a brutal ride for political activists and social justice advocates who came of age as neoliberalism gained momentum. The struggle often consisted of narrating a never-ending tragedy, orchestrating defence tactics and trying to salvage pieces of our welfare system. In the wicked context of a neoliberal consensus, where the ground

constantly shifted to the right, any social policy or program that wasn't ravaged stood out as a symbol of successful resistance.

By the 2010s, a new variant of neoliberalism had become prevalent. Political philosopher Nancy Fraser named it progressive neoliberalism since it couples economic policies that ultimately spur financialization with a recognition agenda focused on "empowering" marginalized groups and promoting "diversity" without actually addressing structural racism and discrimination. While this highly contagious variant acknowledges some socio-economic challenges, the proposed solutions are invariably more free market, more financialization.

When COVID-19 struck, governments acted with a level of resolve not seen in decades. The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) rolled out in less than a month, addressing shortcomings of the unemployment insurance system that had been documented for 20 years. Excitement over CERB threw kindling on the fire of a basic income debate that had been building in Western countries since the Great Recession. The horrendous state of long-term care homes shocked the country, triggering additional funding and the criticism of profit-making in a vital social service. Low-wage workers were praised as essential workers and received temporary raises. Many provinces enacted temporary eviction bans, some froze rents. Several public health measures were put in place to ensure people's safety and wellbeing, reminding us that governments are capable of regulating but have simply chosen not to do so for decades.

No more pretending the Centre is a lesser evil than the Right: the Centre is the new Right

There were reasons to believe that neoliberalism could be eradicated. Trading one deadly disease for another is no cause to celebrate, but at least we wouldn't have to deal with both.

As the dust of the 2021 federal election settled, it became clear that this 40-year nightmare is not over. With the exception of the \$10-a-day child care—a feat that can be credited to a generation of devoted advocates—little has changed.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau rolled back CERB instead of making the long-due changes to unemployment insurance permanent.

On the housing file, the Liberals continue to focus on making mortgages more accessible and providing loans to private developers.

To address the climate crisis, the Canadian government is giving ever more incentives to the private sector instead of regulating industries or building the infrastructure we need.

The earlier promise to implement a national pharmacare plan appears to have fallen off the map, perhaps because it requires upsetting the pharmaceutical industrial complex. In fact, to ensure vaccine supply in the future, Canada is throwing money at big pharma rather than going back to its successful experience with publicly owned laboratories. Shamefully, Canada is also resisting international calls to waive patents on COVID-19 vaccines.

COVID-19 didn't kill neoliberalism. The policy agenda for the future remains fundamentally the same. So how do we rid ourselves of this thing?

Political organizing is the most effective inoculation against conservatism. Nothing compares to the gains unions and social movements have made for the working class and other marginalized groups. Throughout the pandemic, organizers have continued to plough

through, unionizing new workplaces, supporting migrant workers and fighting evictions.

Research and policy types should follow the example of organizers and refuse to go back to the defence tactics that marked the 2000s and 2010s. No more pretending the Centre is a lesser evil than the Right: the Centre is the new Right. A less wealthy Canada created a universal health care system, expanded public education to all children and implemented a de facto basic income for seniors. Now we can't even talk about free child care.

No more arguing investments in poverty reduction, equity, health and well-being are good for the economy. Monetizing life is exactly what neoliberalism does. We should assess how well the economy is serving people, not whether lives are worth saving.

No more legitimizing endless consultations on a plan to plan. Government-designed participation doesn't always serve progressive agendas. They are often a decoy. Our time and resources are better spent supporting organizers directly.

No more assuming there is a win-win solution for every issue and that we can build consensus around it. The world has changed, but neoliberalism is still here. It won't go away if we just ask nicely. We have to push it over the cliff. And we have better chances if we all push at the same time. **M**

Ricardo Tranjan is a political economist and senior researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' Ontario office. This piece was originally published in the November 2021 *Monitor*.



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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.

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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.



Inside Trade

STUART TREW

Trade barriers or good public policy?

This spring, the House of Commons trade committee held hearings on the topic of non-tariff trade barriers (NTBs). What are those? It's a good question, one with important implications. I was happy to be invited to present to the committee on the issue.

About 20 per cent of any modern trade agreement deals with tariffs—the rest lays out limits on how governments regulate commerce in the name of reducing NTBs.

Any policy, standard or other rule affecting Canadian exporters, service companies (think: banks, online shopping apps, engineering firms, etc.), or investors in other countries is a potential NTB. The same is true for Canadian policies, besides tariffs, affecting foreign companies and investors here.

I thought the trade committee might focus on agriculture in its study, given recent complaints by Canadian exporters about the European Union's new Farm to Fork agenda, a proposed Mexican ban on GM corn imports, and slightly more humane animal welfare standards in the U.K.

But based on the mixed backgrounds of the witnesses, the committee may consider a bigger picture. I did the same in my comments, which made the following three points.

1. Non-tariff barrier or good public policy?

Here are four examples of popular public policies that exporters (and trade economists) have criticized as non-tariff barriers.

- Front-of-package health labels on cigarettes, alcohol or foods that apply to domestic as well as international companies.
- Animal welfare laws expanding minimum cage and pen sizes for captive farm animals and banning the sale of food products that don't meet those standards.
- Policies aimed at reducing the use of pesticides or favouring organics based on environmental considerations and local preferences.
- Public stockholding programs for agricultural goods that aim to stabilize prices and compensate farmers in hard times.

All these policies serve clear public health, public ethics, social and environmental purposes. Yet all may be challenged as NTBs in trade deals with overly strict rules on how governments regulate.

2. Trade deals go too far to limit policy space in ways that impoverish democracy.

Canada is among a relatively small group of countries trying to narrow the policy flexibility of governments (including our own) in new bilateral and regional free trade deals. The CUSMA, or "New NAFTA," is the most striking example of this.

CUSMA goes further than any other trade deal to give corporations a front row seat (with remote) to the rule-making process. It even locks in a single, allegedly best way to regulate in all instances through a "good regulatory practice" chapter that is enforceable under CUSMA's dispute settlement process.

The amount of work Canadian regulators already do to ensure that public protections are the "least burdensome" (for corporations) and "least trade-restrictive" options imaginable has been compared to red tape for regulators, in that it gets in the way of governments doing their jobs.

When we insist on the strongest possible language in trade deals for restricting government's regulatory options, we weaken democracy here and in our trade partner countries.

3. We already have ways to complain about foreign regulations.

My final point to the trade committee was that there are plenty of options for contesting foreign policies and regulations as overly trade-restricting or incompatible with trade rules.

The World Trade Organization's committee for technical barriers to trade has a decent record of clearing up regulatory spats before they head to dispute settlement. Regional deals like CUSMA and the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) established dozens of technical committees to help governments understand each other's public protections.

There are legitimate concerns about corporate capture of the WTO, CUSMA and CETA regulatory cooperation committees. Thankfully, domestic politics can moderate, and occasionally overcome, this bias.

Governments must also consider the diplomatic fallout from attacking their trade partners' reasonable public health, environmental and social policies just because a domestic producer group, service sector, or investor complains. **M**

Stuart Trew is the director of the Trade and Investment Research Project. Write him at stuart@policyalternatives.ca.

YOUR CCPA

Get to know Molly McCracken

OFFICE: **MANITOBA**

POSITION: **DIRECTOR**

YEARS WITH THE CCPA: **10**

You've been a leader in your community for 20 years. Which experiences stand out for you?

I was part of a committee that hosted Angela Davis in Winnipeg to speak on "Freedom is a Constant Struggle" to over 1,100 people in 2018. Davis is an icon of marxist thinking, for Black freedom and for feminists. Her talk on prison abolition was so powerful and challenged my thinking on how society criminalizes Black and Indigenous Peoples. What's more, it was incredible to see how the Black and queer community responded to Davis. I will always value that evening.

How did your family's history inform your choice to work on progressive policies? I was raised by my grandmother and mother. My grandmother, Edith McCracken, imbued me with the Golden Rule "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." My mother, Melinda McCracken, wrote a book about influential Canadian women with several other authors in the seventies and one chapter featured my grandmother. In one passage, Melinda explains she would bring home the "hairiest of hippies" and my grandmother would welcome them with a big hug and make them feel welcome. I'm doing what I can to carry forward this spirit of welcome and inclusivity in my life and family.

What makes you proud of working at the CCPA? Recently I was hearing from many people how angry they are at the rebate cheques they're receiving from



the provincial government. People are saying they don't need or want these cheques; that the government should keep the money and spend it on the underfunded education and health care systems. I was able to draw attention to their concerns in our work at the Manitoba office. I worked with Jesse Hajer, an economist and research associate in our office, and Niall Harney, the Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues, to draft a Probe research question regarding public opinion on the education property tax rebate cheques: 58 per cent agreed the cheques should be halted and that money spent on public services. We used this finding to gain media attention and did an op ed in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, with background information from labour partners, on the unsustainability of these cheques and the lack of a plan to fund education if the province cuts \$1 billion of revenue from property taxes to education. We were told by multiple people in the legislature that after that was published, the government stopped bragging about the education property tax cheques. I am proud to be part of an organization that has

the relationships, expertise and goal to interject into public discourse in order to educate and inform people that other more progressive policy options are possible.

When you're not at work, what are some ways that you decompress? I'm the mom of a five-year-old girl and a six-year-old boy, so I don't get a lot of chances to decompress. When Friday rolls around, I'm grateful to have some time to play with the kids and go for walks to playgrounds around our house. When Monday rolls around, I'm grateful to be able to sit at my desk and work without constant interruptions from my kids for juice or something!

What are you reading these days? Right now I'm reading *Demon Copperhead* by Barbara Kingsolver, loosely based on Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, and *The Explosive Child* by Ross Reene. My nightstand usually includes fiction, political economy and parenting books!

What gives you hope right now? Manitoba has an incredible history of social justice organizing and movements. A new group, Community Solidarity Manitoba, is one powerful example. It is particularly important to create a left-leaning populist movement to counter right-wing extremism and, as members of that group explain, talk about the important issues facing people today: low income, lack of sick days, precarious work, rising rents and systemic racism. I am inspired by the Martin Luther quote "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant an apple tree."

Meet Rain Loftus, London, Ontario, CCPA donor

Tell us about someone you find particularly inspiring right now.

I'm inspired to see the rise in unionization. Workers need to unite.

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

I had a professor in my undergrad who was very influential on me. My undergrad and graduate studies were in philosophy. I was originally planning on going to law school and this professor ignited my interest in philosophy and critical thinking.

I became interested in CCPA when I was assigned to a work conference and someone from CCPA spoke at the conference. I asked questions and took a copy of their literature.

My studies in philosophy made me critical of just accepting the status quo. My interests in social justice and the work that I do align perfectly with the mission of the CCPA. I also worked with Randy Robinson and always enjoyed his presentations at work gatherings.



What have you read or watched to keep your mind busy and your soul fed lately?

Lately, I've read *The Shock Doctrine* and *The Socrates Express* for personal interest. I tend to watch a lot of news and read two papers daily to stay up on current events. I also subscribe to several podcasts from progressive sources.

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

I am most proud of CCPA's stance on labour issues. They are always at the forefront of current issues affecting labour. I always enjoy reading their progressive articles and research on labour issues. I find it helpful in the work that I do.

Could you tell us why you set up this legacy gift at such a young age?

It's important to have non-partisan sources of information and research on social justice issues.

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

My hope for the future is to continue to work toward a more inclusive and socially just society. The one policy that I wish the government would adopt to make people's lives better is a national pharmacare programme. **M**



CCPA

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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.

Summer reading

Ricardo Tranjan

CCPA Ontario senior researcher

I got my hands on a review copy of Andrew Crosby's new book, *Resisting Eviction: Domicide and the Financialization of Rental Housing*. There is a dearth of accounts of tenant struggles in Canada, so I'm very excited about this. Stay tuned for a review in the next issue!

Katherine Scott

CCPA National senior researcher

Published last year, Debra Thompson's, *The Long Road Home: On Blackness and Belonging*, is a personal story that blends family history and memoir to examine the experiences of racism as well as Black cultural identity and activism in both Canada and the United States. Dr. Thompson is one of Canada's leading scholars on the comparative politics of race. I have also been meaning to read *Refracted Economics: Diamond Mining and Social Reproduction in the North*, by Rebecca Jane Hall. Hall employs a decolonizing and feminist approach to political economy, analysing the diffuse and intersectional impacts of diamond mining in Yellowknife, centring the experiences of Indigenous women and their labours. This type of work is pushing political economy in new directions.

Christine Saulnier

director, CCPA Nova Scotia

Frequently Asked White Questions, by Ajay Parasram and Alex Khasnabish (Fernwood, 2022). This book is described as an important resource and guide for white individuals learning about racial

privilege, and understanding how race structures the day-to-day. As a white settler, I am looking forward to learning more about building solidarity.

Jon Milton

CCPA National Office senior communications officer

This summer, I'm really looking forward to reading *The End of This World: Climate Justice in so-called Canada* (Between the Lines, 2023) by a collection of authors drawn from social movements across the country. I am always excited to see movements attempt to build bridges with one another, and this book contributes to building that framework. I'm also looking forward to reading *We Go Where They Go: The Story of Anti-Racist Action* (University of Regina Press), which tracks the understudied history of combative anti-racist and anti-fascist movements in North America. Lastly, I'm looking forward to reading *Il fallait se défendre: l'Histoire du premier gang de rue Haïtien à Montréal*, a history of the Bélanger gang, the first "Haitian street gang" in Montreal, which emerged as a way for Haitian youth to defend themselves against racist violence only to face criminalization by the Montreal police.

Katherine Scott

CCPA National Office senior researcher

Quinn Slobodian's new book *Crack-Up Capitalism: Market Radicals and the Dream of a World Without Democracy* (2023) is on my summer reading list. Slobodian examines the ongoing fragmentation of the world into zones that protect the rich and powerful

from the rest of us, where private agreements replace public law. A new feudalism is the goal; Duty-free districts, city-states, gated communities, tax havens, cryptocurrencies, and special economic zones are the tools. Slobodian writes, "The world of nations is riddled with zones—and they define the politics of the present in ways we are only starting to understand."

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood

CCPA National Office senior researcher

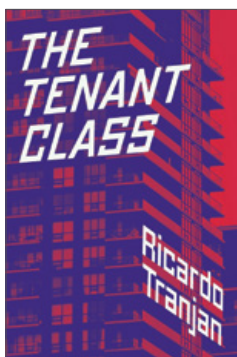
I love dystopian climate fiction as much as the next brooding environmentalist, but those stories, as gripping as they may be, rarely show us how to stop the apocalypse before it happens. That's why I'm so excited to read *The Ministry for the Future* (Orbit, 2020), the latest novel from sci-fi luminary Kim Stanley Robinson. Set in the near future, it tells the story of a world that comes together to actually do something about the climate crisis. It may or may not have a happy ending, but I'd like to see more fiction writers take this approach to tackling big issues.

Trish Hennessy

CCPA National Office senior strategist, Monitor editor

My summer reading pile is one of the best things about summer! This year, I'll be reading *The Big Con: How the consulting industry weakens our businesses, infantilizes our governments, and warps our economies* by Mariana Mazzucato and Rosie Collington (Penguin Press, 2023). Mazzucato is leading the international conversation about how governments need

to embrace public leadership. This latest book documents how governments have become dependent on consultancy firms, why that's the wrong way to go, and how to move forward for the public good. I'll also tuck into CCPA Ontario Political Economist and Senior Researcher Ricardo Tranjan's *The Tenant Class* (Between the Lines, 2023). Ricardo is a brilliant thought leader who is challenging conventional narratives around housing. As Sahar Raza wrote in the May/June 2023 *Monitor* review of *The Tenant Class*, "Tranjan places our contemporary 'housing crisis' within a century-long history of class-based struggles—struggles that are ongoing."

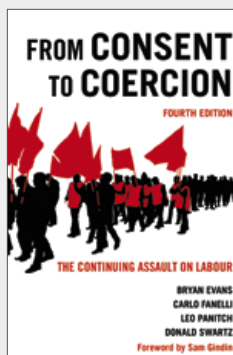


Sheila Block

Senior Economist CCPA Ontario

My summer reading list includes two Canadian novels set in the 1920s. *The Sleeping Car Porter* by Suzette Mayr (Coach House 2022) won the Giller Prize and tells the story of a Black, gay sleeping car porter. I am looking forward to reading a novel that explores this aspect of Canadian labour history. The second is Christine Higdon's *Gin, Turpentine, Pennyroyal, Rue* (ECW Press, 2023), immersed in the complex political and social realities of the 1920s and, not so ironically, of the 2020s: love, sex, desire, police corruption, abortion, addiction, queer lives, class inequality, and women wanting more. Much more.

Also recommended...



**FROM CONSENT TO COERCION
THE CONTINUING ASSAULT
ON LABOUR, FOURTH EDITION**
BY BRYAN EVANS, CARLO FANELLI,
LEO PANITCH AND DONALD SWARTZ

March 2023

From Consent to Coercion examines the increasing assault against trade union rights and freedoms in Canada by federal and provincial governments. Centring the struggles of Canadian unionized workers, this book explores the diminution of the welfare state and the impacts that this erosion has had on broader working-class rights and standards of living.

The fourth edition witnesses the passing of an era of free collective bargaining in Canada—an era in which the state and capital relied on obtaining the consent of workers and unions to act as subordinates in Canada's capitalist democracy. It looks at how the last 20 years have marked a return to a more open reliance of the state and capital on coercion—on force and on fear—to secure that subordination.

This important edition calls attention to the urgent task of rebuilding and renewing socialist politics—of thinking ambitiously and meeting new challenges with unique solutions to the left of social democracy.

**DISPLACEMENT CITY:
FIGHTING FOR HEALTH
AND HOMES IN A PANDEMIC**
GREG COOK AND CATHY CROWE

University of Toronto Press, November 2022

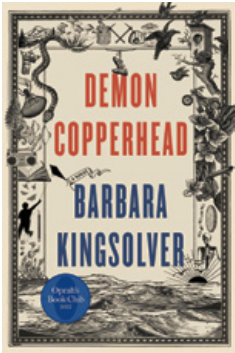
In *Displacement City*, outreach worker Greg Cook and street nurse Cathy Crowe present the stories of frontline workers, advocates, and people living without homes during the pandemic. The book uses prose, poetry, and photography to document lived experiences of homelessness, responses to the housing crisis, efforts to fight back for homes, and possible solutions to move Toronto forward. Contributors provide particular insight into policies affecting Indigenous Peoples and how the legacy of colonialism and displacement reached a critical point during the pandemic. Offering rich stories of care, mutual aid, and solidarity, *Displacement City* provides a vivid account of a humanitarian disaster.

**ANGER AND ANGST—
JASON KENNEY'S LEGACY
AND ALBERTA'S RIGHT**
TREVOR W. HARRISON
AND RICARDO ACUNA, EDS.

Black Rose Books, May 2023

Anger and Angst: Jason Kenney's Legacy and Alberta's Right examines the chaos of the UCP Alberta government and asks why it happened. Answering these questions, this book leaves the reader with a better understanding of politics, ideology, and the New Right. **M**

A modern twist on Dickens' *David Copperfield*



DEMON COPPERHEAD

BARBARA KINGSOLVER

HarperCollins, October 2022

POVERTY BRUTALIZES people and destroys lives. It did at the time that Charles Dickens wrote *David Copperfield*, in mid-19th century Britain when school-age children toiled long hours in appalling conditions in coal pits and cotton mills. It does in 21st century America, with devastating effects on children and youth, as depicted so vividly in Barbara Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead*.

Demon Copperhead is Kingsolver's 21st century re-imagining of Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, set in America's Appalachia. At the core of the novel is the devastation visited upon the region, especially the children and youth of the region, by the opioid epidemic.

Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead* is grittier, more painful and more working class than Dickens's *David Copperfield*. Copperfield undergoes hardship and abandonment as a child and youth. But he comes from a middle class family and, in adulthood, he and his close friend Traddles work as middle-class lawyers.

Demon Copperhead, by contrast, grows up in a single-wide trailer in a small Appalachian community with a single mom who dies of a drug overdose in her 20s, not long after

Demon is beaten by his mother's boyfriend, Stoner.

Demon struggles to find his way. He is left an orphan at age 10. He works as a boy in a scrap yard that is a front for a drug house. Heartless care workers dump him in foster homes where he is put to hard labour. He has his meagre belongings stolen while homeless and on the road in his early teens. Through all of this he makes his way through his young and troubled life with a cast of colourful but mostly poverty-stricken characters.

There is his friend Maggot, who lives with his grandparents because his mother is in prison for stabbing her violent boyfriend. There is the unctuous and obsequious U-Haul—"the man could leave a layer of scum on any good thing"—who is Kingsolver's Uriah Heep. There is Fast Forward, Kingsolver's version of Dickens's Steerforth, who is a magnetic former high school football star who is not what he seems and who comes to a bad end.

Demon becomes a football star with his high school team and things are looking bright after years of youthful struggles. But his sudden climb to local fame is brought back to earth when he injures his knee and is prescribed OxyContin for pain relief by the local doctor.

Demon soon moves in with his girlfriend Dori—Dori is to *Demon Copperhead* what Dora is to *David Copperfield*. They both succumb to OxyContin and related drugs and live in squalor until Dori dies.

The OxyContin that is rampant in his community is the "drug they give a guy so he can stand his life in the hopeless fucking darkness."

Although not mentioned by name in *Demon Copperhead*, the Sackler brothers, owners of Purdue Pharma, became one of America's richest families by aggressively and dishonestly

marketing OxyContin. The Sacklers deliberately targeted poverty-stricken areas like the Appalachians that had already been devastated by generations of poverty. Their salespeople were trained to insist that OxyContin was virtually harmless, while offering financially attractive inducements to medical doctors who would prescribe the drug. The result was a trail of devastation—drug overdoses killed an estimated 245 Americans every day in 2017.

Underlying Kingsolver's *Demon Copperhead* is the destruction created by capitalism—in this case, big pharma, whose pursuit of profit laid waste to an already poverty-stricken area. *Demon* eventually escapes the poverty and devastation, as did *David Copperfield*, but dead bodies—of parents, family members and friends—litter the path behind him. Some escape the monster that is poverty, but the monster keeps grinding up humans.

Kingsolver is especially concerned with the fate of children ground up by poverty. This is appropriate, given the abundance of scholarly evidence that growing up in poverty causes myriad forms of long-term damage to children. She closes with the following dedication, evoking both 19th century Britain and 21st century America: "For the kids who wake up hungry in those dark places every day, who've lost their families to poverty and pain pills, whose case workers keep losing their files, who feel invisible, or wish they were: this book is for you." Such kids, and the harsh realities they endure in the wealthiest country in the world, are brought to life in a way far more revealing than mere statistics could do in this powerful and beautifully written book. **M**

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



ZOMBIE

☠ 5 BAD IDEAS THAT

Neoliberalism promotes policies that retool the government to serve corporations rather than the public good. American economist Milton Friedman, a leading neoliberal thinker: “I am in favor of cutting taxes under any circumstances and for any excuse....our government is too large and intrusive.” His views—and neoliberal politics in the UK and America—influenced Canadian policy-makers. From former Alberta Premier Ralph Klein’s low-tax approach in the 1980s to former Prime Minister Stephen Harper: “I believe that all taxes are bad.”

☠ GIVE OUT TAX CUTS

Tax cuts disproportionately benefit the rich, worsen income inequality, and result in fewer public programs and income supports for the rest of us.

WHY IT SHOULD DIE:

Taxes are actually the gift we give each other—in the form of health care, education, affordable child care, public pension plans and more.

☠ “SMALL” GOVERNMENT

Neoliberalism is an ode to the imaginary “small” government: “I don’t want to abolish government. I simply want to reduce it to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub.” —Grover Norquist, founder and president of Americans for Tax Reform, on NPR’s Morning Edition, May 25, 2001.

WHY IT SHOULD DIE:

In reality, neoliberals don’t want a small government—they want a big government whose sole purpose is to maximize corporate profits.

NEOLIBERALISM

DESERVE TO DIE - FROM THE 70s TO NOW

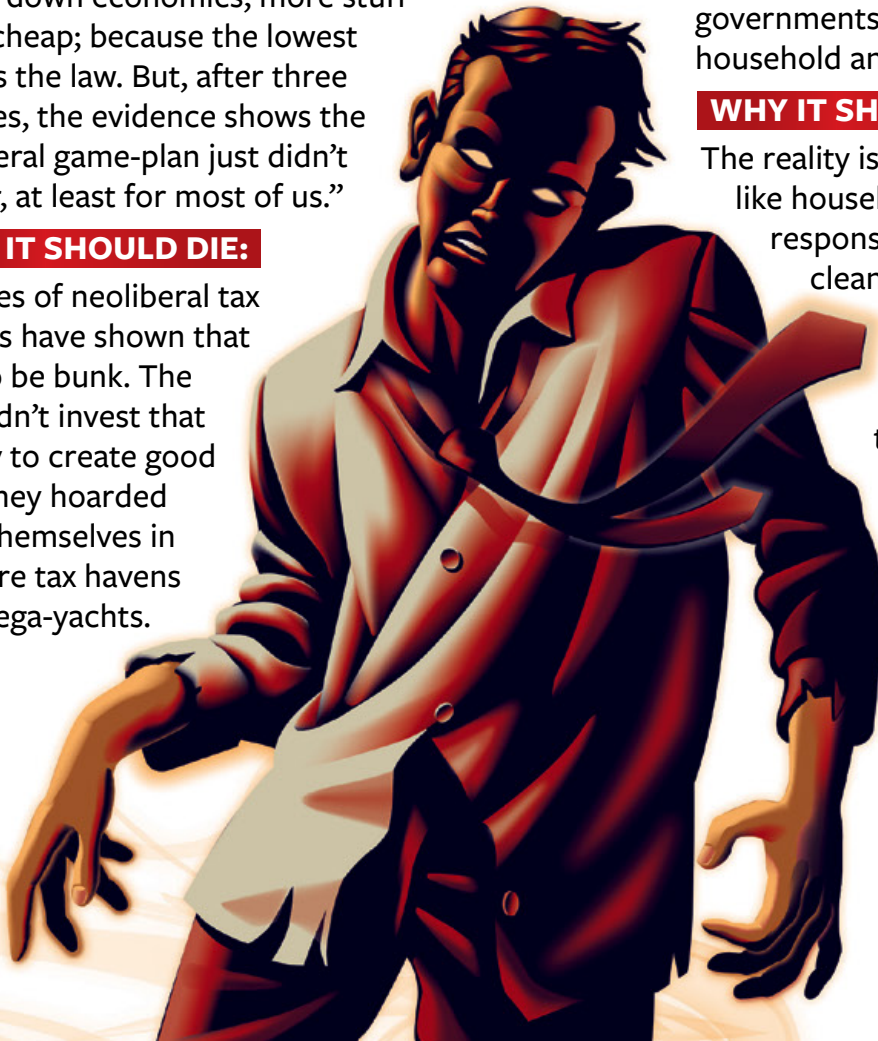
Neoliberal reforms rarely shrink the overall size of government—they shrink essential public services like health care and education while increasing the amount of government resources that subsidize corporate profits in various ways.

☠ TRICKLE-DOWN ECONOMICS

To justify tax cuts, neoliberals promised everyone would benefit, eventually. As former CCPA Senior Economist Armine Yalnizyan wrote in 2010: “We bought into all the slogans: a bigger economic pie; a rising tide lifts all boats; trickle-down economics; more stuff more cheap; because the lowest price is the law. But, after three decades, the evidence shows the neoliberal game-plan just didn’t deliver, at least for most of us.”

WHY IT SHOULD DIE:

Decades of neoliberal tax policies have shown that idea to be bunk. The rich didn’t invest that money to create good jobs, they hoarded it for themselves in offshore tax havens and mega-yachts.



☠ “CUT RED TAPE”

To “free” the market, neoliberal governments talk about “cutting red tape” but that’s really code for deregulating the market so businesses don’t have to follow stringent health and safety rules.

WHY IT SHOULD DIE:

It’s like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse.

☠ CUT GOVERNMENT DEBT

“All government deficits and debt are bad.” Neoliberal tropes include this chestnut: that governments should run their budgets like a household and not carry deficits or debt.

WHY IT SHOULD DIE:

The reality is that governments aren’t like households. Governments have a responsibility to build safe roads, ensure clean water, provide public transit, health care, and a number of things that individual households aren’t mandated to do. Also: households and businesses regularly borrow money to pay for things. What they don’t have that governments do: the ability to “print money” and “bulk buy” public services.



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The good news page

ELAINE HUGHES

India's endangered tiger population is rebounding

At the start of the 20th century, tigers once roamed across Asia, their numbers as high as 100,000. However, by 2006, the species had plummeted to the brink of extinction when their population in India—home to the majority of the world's remaining wild tigers—hit a record low of just 1,411. But decades of conservation efforts appear to have finally paid off. According to the latest tiger census, India's tigers have more than doubled, reaching 3,167 last year. / **CNN, April 25, 2023.**



Third artist from Africa to win Polar Music Prize

Putting the Benin-born singer-songwriter in rare company, five-time Grammy winner Angelique Kidjo has been announced as one of three 2023 Polar Music Prize recipients. Founded in 1989 by ABBA manager, Stig 'Stikkan' Anderson, the Sweden-based Polar Music Prize has been awarded since 1992 and is considered to be among the most prestigious honors in the music industry. / **CNN, April 9, 2023.**

BBC show in Afghanistan helps children banned from school

Aiming at children aged 11 to 16, including girls whose secondary education has been stopped by the ruling Taliban, the BBC has launched a new education program for children in Afghanistan who are banned from school. The weekly program is called Dars, which means lesson in Dari and Pashto, Afghanistan's official languages. The program is hosted by Afghan women journalists who were evacuated from Kabul during the 2021 Taliban takeover. / **BBC News, April 1, 2023.**

Astronomers solve the 60-year mystery of quasars

Scientists have unlocked one of quasars' biggest mysteries by discovering that quasars, which are the brightest, most powerful objects in the universe,

are ignited by colliding galaxies. First discovered 60 years ago, quasars can shine as brightly as a trillion stars packed into a volume the size of our solar system. Quasars are important to astrophysicists because, due to their brightness, they stand out at large distances and therefore act as beacons to the earliest epochs in the history of the universe. / **Phys.org, April 28, 2023.**

Renewable energy's share of German power use tops 50 per cent

Recent data from utility group BDEW and the Centre for Solar Energy and Hydrogen Research showed that renewable energy accounted for 50.3 per cent of Germany's power consumption in the first three months of the year. As it abandons nuclear power and aims to cut most of its coal generation by using gas plants mostly for grid back-up, Germany wants green power to account for 80 per cent of its energy mix by 2030. / **Reuters, April 28, 2023.**

Doctor, transplant team receive Logan Boulet Humanitarian Awards

On April 27, 2023, Dr. Mike Moser, a Saskatoon kidney transplant surgeon, received the 2022 Logan Boulet Humanitarian of the Year Award from the Angel's Legacy Project in Saskatoon. Dr. Gavin Beck and Dr. Abubaker Hassan, co-directors of the Saskatchewan Transplant Program, received the 2022 Team Award. The award is named in honour of Logan

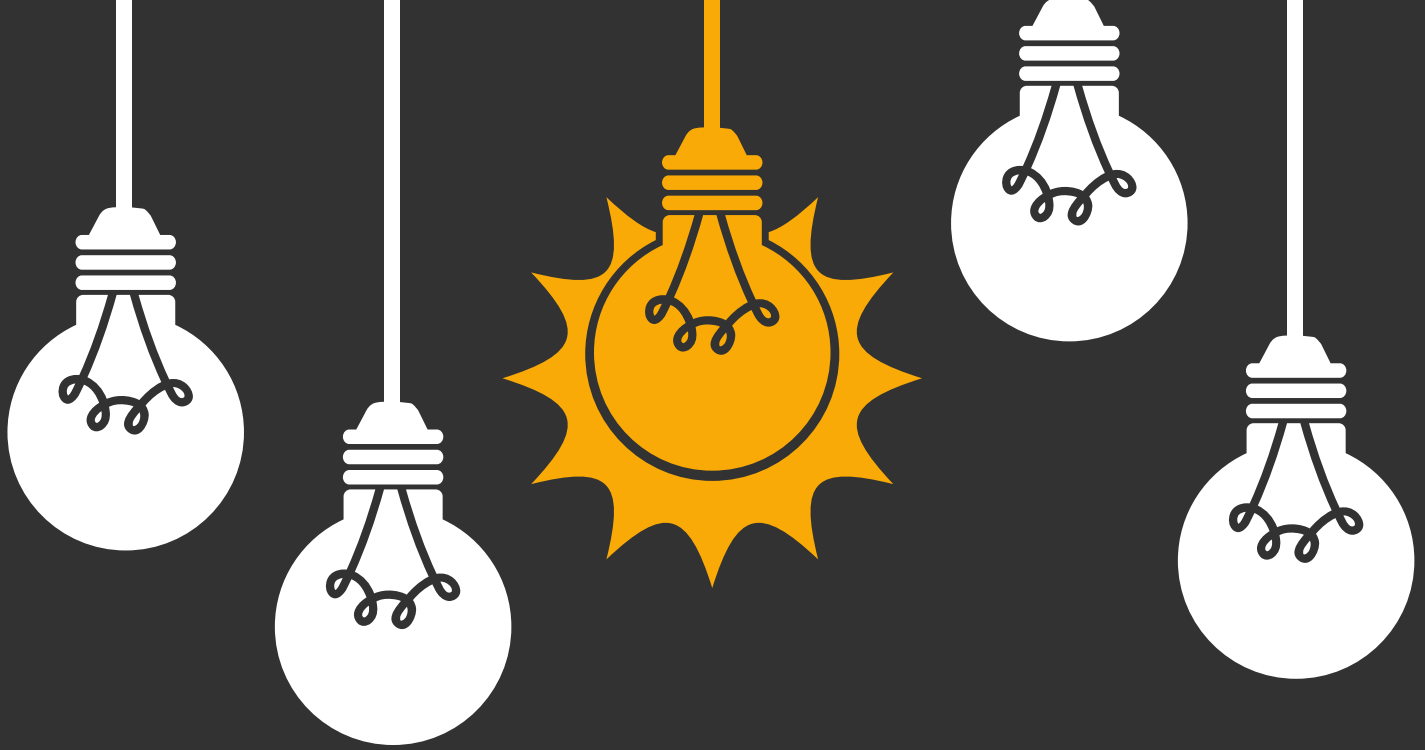
Boulet, a member of the Humboldt Bronco hockey team, who had signed his organ donor card shortly before his death in the 2018 Bronco bus accident, and, as a result, saved six people on the transplant list. The publicity surrounding those organ donations led to 95,000 Canadians signing a donor card. / **Star Phoenix, April 27, 2023.**

Scientists confirm the moon has a solid iron 'heart' just like earth

After more than 50 years, scientists have finally uncovered the moon's interior structure, showing that our closest celestial companion has a fluid outer core and a solid inner core, similar to earth's. / **Live Science, May 6, 2023.**

Genetic early warning system to identify new variants as they emerge

Researchers at Wellcome Sanger Institute in Cambridgeshire, UK, are developing groundbreaking technology to monitor genetic changes in respiratory viruses that can identify dangerous new variants as they emerge and act as an early warning system for new diseases and future pandemics. The team of researchers aims to make the technology cheap, easy to use and capable of being scaled up to provide global surveillance of a wide range of viruses. Targets would include influenza viruses, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), coronaviruses and previously unknown pathogens. / **India Today, April 2, 2023. M**



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