

MONITOR

Progressive news, views and ideas



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**OUR
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INSIDE



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How to fix Canada's long-term care crisis

12–25

Four out of five deaths in Canada from COVID-19 happened in places that care for older people.

This should never have happened, and a few criminal investigations of neglectful facilities won't ensure it doesn't happen again.

We know what we need to do.

The international evidence is overwhelming.

It's time to end the privatization of care, strengthen salaries and regulations, and finally bring retirement homes and other care facilities under the public health care system.

UP FRONT / 5

TO AVOID FUTURE PANDEMICS,
TREAD LIGHTLY WHERE
THE WILD THINGS ARE
Laura Handal

FINANCIAL ABUSE
DURING THE SHUTDOWN
Natasha Bulowski

COLUMNS / 8

WORK-LIFE
Essential versus exploitable workers
Lynne Fernandez

BELOW THE FOLD
Holding online platforms
accountable for abuse in the
wake of USMCA
Cynthia Khoo

COLOUR-CODED JUSTICE
If Black lives matter, why do Black
incomes fall so far below average?
Anthony N. Morgan

FEATURES

OIL AND GEOPOLITICS,
FROM THE CRASH TO THE GLUT
John Foster / 28

JULIAN ASSANGE
AND THE GLOBAL ASSAULT
ON FREE SPEECH
Asad Ismi / 30

THE SMALL PRESS
AND THE PANDEMIC
Fiona Jeffries / 32



Who cares?

“COVID-19 has exposed the deep, deep cracks in the long-term care system. And it’s up to us now to fix these problems.”

—Ontario Premier Doug Ford on May 26, responding to a report from the army’s Joint Task Force on the staffing shortages, health and safety infractions, and poor-quality care it observed while providing emergency pandemic relief to five Ontario nursing homes.

“To young Black Canadians, I hear you when you say you are anxious and angry.... I want you to know I’m listening, and that your government will always stand with you. Together, we will keep taking meaningful action to fight racism and discrimination in every form.”

— Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on June 1, responding to the global uprising against anti-Black racism and police brutality sparked by the death of George Floyd under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer on May 25.

BY DRAWING ATTENTION to these two statements, I do not wish to conflate the violence our society has done and continues to do to so many older people, and the violence it perpetuates against Black bodies and lives—in the streets, in their homes, in the school system and in the workforce. Apart from the systemic nature of this violence, the timing of the army report on long-term care and Floyd’s death are about all these events share in common.

To me, the statements highlight how politicians inevitably respond when forced, by circumstances out of their control, to finally care (or at least appear to care) about a long-standing failure of government leadership. Why are more than 83% of Canada’s COVID-19 related deaths (about 8,000

when the Monitor went to print) happening in long-term care facilities? The army task force’s observations were brutal in their matter-of-factness:

...Staff moving from COVID+ unit to other units without changing contaminated PPE (personal protective equipment).... Wearing same pair of gloves for several tasks from one patient to another.... Reusing hypodermoclysis supplies even after sterility has been obviously compromised (e.g., catheter pulled out and on the floor for an undetermined amount of time).... General culture of fear to use supplies because they cost money (fluid bags, dressings, gowns, gloves, etc.).... Lack of training for new/ agency staff.... No accessible incident reporting policy in place.... Morale and well-being of staff at risk. Many are overworked, seem burned out and have no time off (some have not seen their family for weeks).... Patients observed crying for help with staff not responding (for 30 minutes to over 2 hours).... Expired medication. Much of the ward stock was months out of date (inference: residents have likely been getting expired medication for quite some time).... Patients being left in beds soiled in diapers, rather than being ambulated to toilets...

“Until yesterday morning, we didn’t know the full extent of what these homes, what these residents, were dealing with,” said Premier Ford. Of course, this wasn’t true. “These are the kinds of complaints we hear all the time,” Jane Meadus, a lawyer with the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, told the *Ottawa Citizen*. “It took somebody from the outside to show what was going on.”

The same can unfortunately be said for anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism and violence in Canada. In April, Black activist and author Desmond

Cole pointed out that at least 26 Black, Indigenous or otherwise racialized people had been killed by Canadian police or died in police custody since the high-profile 2013 killing by Toronto police of Syrian-born immigrant Sammy Yatim. To that list we must add Afro-Indigenous Toronto woman Regis Korchinski-Paquet, who fell to her death from her mother’s Toronto apartment in an interaction with police at the end of May. Six Indigenous people have been killed by police in Canada since April, including Rodney Levi and Chantel Moore in separate police shootings in New Brunswick in June. Yet it took a popular uprising in the United States to put calls to defund and reform the police on government agendas in this country.

We planned this issue of the *Monitor* before those uprisings began. While the CCPA makes every effort to uncover and highlight anti-Black, anti-Indigenous and other race-related discrimination in the workplace, our schools, income levels and access to public services, more needs to be done to keep the pressure on government and business to make the big, lasting changes that would make Canada the multicultural, equal society it falsely claims to be now.

Likewise, it’s important that we don’t let the provinces or federal government get away with band-aid fixes and the odd criminal investigation of a few care facilities before continuing along the same old path of privatization, weak regulations, lackluster inspections and declining standards. We need to listen to what the research already tells us (see pages 12–25) about how to create a high-standard, high-quality and dignified public care system for all who need it. (Stuart Trew, Senior Editor) **M**



What about the natural deficit?

I think Ryan Campbell has the right slant on public spending during the pandemic. But like too many economists he writes as if nature doesn't exist ("How should we react to a \$185 billion deficit," May/June 2020). In two centuries of zooming populations and per capita consumption, we've never spent a fraction of what was needed to help nature's economy recover from the damage we do to it. Right now, corporations are lobbying to cut environmental protections so they can keep doing what they do.

Does beating up on nature matter? Next time you see heartrending images of desperate sub-Saharan villages, look at the ravaged country in the background. Ask Newfoundlanders whose fishing livelihood collapsed whether they like going to Alberta to help screw up another chunk of nature. Or ask yourself, next time you drive to Tofino or Ucluelet, how many decades it will be before the clearcut slopes around Kennedy Lake recover from the logging atrocities of the mid-20th century.

OK, forget deficits. But instead of trying to refill fast-food and meat butchering jobs, let's try creating a whole new sphere of jobs revitalizing beat-up countryside (and cities!). That's work that will challenge a planet full of people for several lifetimes.

Bob Weeden,
Salt Spring Island, BC

Toronto's missing anti-poverty plan

Regarding "A modest proposal for reducing poverty," in the May/June 2020 *Monitor*, can we see an expansion of this discussion to include: 1) Toronto as a charter city, which would give the city more autonomy and the means to raise money besides property taxes, as proposed by councillor Josh Matlow; 2) Universal basic Income (UBI), which the Green Party among others is supporting for everyone's basic survival, and to streamline the many costly bureaucratic safety nets now in place; and 3) Universal daycare, which the former Liberal government was about to bring in with its obvious benefits. All these would impact Torontonians and all Canadians in terms of their income and living standards.

Barbara Sternberg,
Toronto, ON

Poverty should be a BIG deal

Two articles in the May-June issue address income assistance inadequacy and poverty reduction policies.

Oddly, neither mentions a policy uniquely suited to poverty reduction: a basic income guarantee (BIG). The federal government's poverty reduction strategy commits itself to reducing the number of Canadians with incomes below the poverty level by 50% before 2030. The only possible way to achieve this is to get more money to those below the poverty line, and a BIG is uniquely able to do that.

Existing studies show that a BIG delivered through the income tax system is financially and administratively feasible. The Canada Revenue Agency has shown itself to be fully capable of managing such a system, as evidenced by its ongoing provision of income-tested transfers like the Canada Child Benefit, Working Income Tax Benefit and the HST credit, and by its rollout of the temporary CERB to millions of Canadians at short notice.

A recent report of the Basic Income Canada Network illustrated how a BIG could be implemented though a progressive income tax reform that redistributes income tax revenues and transfers already within the system. Such a system would be analogous to an enhanced HST income-tested tax credit, universally available and adequate to move all Canadians above the poverty level. Like our harmonized income tax system, it would allow for federal and provincial discretion. Since it would be largely self-financing, it would preserve governments' ability to pursue complementary progressive

policies, such as housing, social services, employment insurance and health care.

Your editorial makes passing reference to recent basic income proposals. Why the reluctance to endorse it?

Robin Boadway,
Kingston, ON

Editor's response

As a collective of progressive researchers, the CCPA's work is driven by research associates and on-staff economists and researchers who bring different expertise and sometimes different points of view to the issues we cover. While the CCPA has put out papers and collections about the idea of a basic income guarantee, we have not endorsed any one model as our catchall anti-poverty solution. However, there are many similarities between the Alternative Federal Budget proposal for a "dignity dividend," which I mentioned in my May/June editorial, and the tax-based supplement you describe here. The "dignity dividend" is meant to work with other enhancements in the AFB, including cheaper and better public transit and public services, and much cheaper housing (i.e., universal basic services), to eliminate poverty by 2025 and vastly increase well-paid employment opportunities. (Stuart Trew)

Send your letters to monitor@policyalternatives.ca.

No recovery without representation

Governments, employers and unions must work urgently to fix weaknesses in Canada's employment laws and policies before the economy can be reopened safely and sustainably in the wake of COVID-19, according to a new report by **Jim Stanford**, which was co-published by the Centre for Future Work and CCPA this May in partnership with the Atkinson Foundation.

Ten Ways the COVID-19 Pandemic Must Change Work... For Good elaborates proposals for making jobs safer, healthier and fairer. These include: infection control and safety; more physical space in work sites; sick pay for workers who must stay away from work; protections for people working from home; limits on holding multiple jobs and changes to other precarious work practices; an expansion of public sector jobs; reduced reliance on just-in-time supply chains; more comprehensive income support; better wages for essential workers; and stronger worker representation.

"When workplaces, and society at large, ensure that workers have a recognized and valued role in shaping

the parameters of work life (from safety to space to compensation), then work will indeed get better," says Stanford, former economist and director of policy for Unifor. Stanford recently returned to Canada from Australia where he established the Centre for Future Work, which has just opened a Canadian office in Vancouver.

Bank of Canada has more work to do

On April 1, the Bank of Canada began a major bond-buying program following in the tracks of the U.S. Federal Reserve and other central banks. A new CCPA report from Ontario Tech University professor **Scott Aquanno**, titled **The Bank of Canada and Crisis Management: COVID-19 and Beyond**, puts this evolution of responsibilities in its historic context and calls for a reinvigorated debate about the bank's potential.

Notably, Aquanno is calling on the federal government and the Bank of Canada to provide comprehensive and long-term support for provincial and local governments that are already facing unheard-of budget shortfalls and that lack the revenue-raising tools available to the national government. His paper proposes creating a new national bank to fund public priorities that would be backed by the Bank of Canada but democratically controlled.

"The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated the important role that governments play in the economy," Aquanno says. "As Canadians face an uncertain future

together, an ambitious extension of the bank's responsibilities is the most practical option."

COVID-19 emergency measures harder for First Nations

To prevent the transmission of COVID-19, people around the world have been asked to wash hands often, maintain physical distance, and quarantine in shelter. While effective, these virus containment measures are difficult to enact in communities with overcrowded homes and a lack of piped water or hospitals.

A briefing note from the CCPA-Manitoba, **COVID-19, First Nations and Poor Housing**, by **Shirley Thompson, Marleny M. Bonnycastle** and **Stewart Hill**, looks at the health of people on First Nation reserves to determine their vulnerability to COVID-19 in light of existing infrastructure (housing and water in particular) before making several policy recommendations.

"[I]n the short term, special funding has to be put in place through Indigenous-led organizations for dealing with the lack of infrastructure," the authors conclude. "Food security needs urgent attention as roughly half (50.8%) of households in First Nation reserves experienced food insecurity, and 75% in remote and northern communities, prior to COVID-19."

Course correction needed in Nova Scotia

A new report from the CCPA-Nova Scotia, **Are You With Us?**, shows how

the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of the province's social systems and calls for a fundamental shift in political and economic direction.

"Our governments have not done enough to provide a social safety net that supports our collective well-being in the best of times, but especially in the worst of times. This is the worst of times and the requirements for social isolation means that we likely don't even know the full impact. What we do know is that those who were struggling before are struggling now, and are joined by others," says Alec Stratford, executive director/registrant of the College of Social Workers, a co-author of the report with Tammy Findlay and CCPA-NS Director Christine Saulnier.

As with Stanford's new report on a fair post-pandemic recovery (see above), the authors emphasize democratization. "In our economy, unions, worker control and ownership are essential for addressing inequality and should be supported as part of these plans," concludes the report. "Much more transparency in decision-making is necessary including allowing all of our elected representatives opportunities to ask questions and be directly involved in supporting the development of plans to address the impact of this pandemic."

For more reports, commentary, videos and podcasts from the CCPA's national and provincial offices, visit www.policyalternatives.ca.

Laura Handal / International

COVID-19 is an environmental crisis

ACCORDING TO THE UN's Environment Program, 75% of all emerging infectious diseases in humans are zoonotic, meaning they have been transferred from animals to humans. As we make new incursions into wilder parts of the world—with the expansion of settlements, farming or other economic activity—we create new opportunities for the zoonotic transmission of pathogens. Such diseases include Ebola, avian influenza (or bird flu), H1N1 (swine flu), Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), SARS, HIV, the Zika virus, and now COVID-19.

We can minimize the impact and frequency of these pathogens, but only if we rapidly and drastically change our relationship to the living world. Three sectors of activity in particular, all products of capitalist economic systems, require our immediate attention for their destructive socio-environmental effects: the agro-industrial model, the commercialization of wild animals, and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources.

If we want to prevent future pandemics, it is essential that we transform our food production systems. Intensive industrial farming in many countries, which depends on forcing large numbers of animals into confined spaces, has been the source of the outbreaks of many strains of zoonotic flus, including A-H1N1, which caused the flu pandemic of 2009. A 2018 animal epidemiology study concluded that since 1959, more virulent strains of avian flu have been generated by intensified poultry farming systems in the United States, Australia and Europe than in all of China.

With regard to the novel coronavirus COVID-19, small Chinese

producers displaced economically by the agro-industrial sector found a niche in raising wild animals sold as luxury foods. Agribusiness drove these farmers into more remote geographic zones closer to forests and natural environments where species, such as bats, can carry viruses that infect humans through the intermediary of farm animals. Consequently, deindustrialization and de-intensification in the agrifood sector must be seriously considered to ensure its ecological, social and epidemiological sustainability.

Moreover, it is necessary to rethink our food practices on a global scale. We must re-evaluate our consumption of meat, especially in better-off countries, or at least create incentives to purchase more sustainable farm products, not only for ethical reasons but also as a matter of public health. Less meat means a decrease in intensive farming operations and a lower risk of pathogens.

Quebec Premier François Legault says he is looking for greater autonomy for Quebec with regard to food production. The Trudeau government is also talking about “Buy Canadian” food policies. Let

The erosion of natural spaces results in a much higher number of interactions between humans and wild species that carry illnesses.

us hope these efforts do not simply promote more variety and volume in regional production and buy-local practices, but that we consider how to de-intensify farming systems and encourage smaller-scale agriculture as well. A larger role for small producers is vital to ensuring food sovereignty in the broad sense, in Canada as in other countries.

Illegal hunting, and the handling and sale of wild, often threatened species, are also sources of transmission of pathogens to humans. In the case of COVID-19, the virus may have been transmitted from a bat to a pangolin and then to a human being.

Of course, it is not these species as such that constitute the problem. It is rather the alteration of their habitat and the living and sanitary conditions in which these animals are sold that are the source of contamination. They are tied up, confined and crowded together, alive, in “wet markets” like the one COVID-19 is suspected to have come from in Wuhan. These types of markets, and poaching in general, are common practices not only in China and the rest of Asia, but also in many other places around the globe. Trafficking in wild species is a worldwide industry worth billions of dollars.

The degradation and destruction of wild habitats resulting from deforestation can also pose major risks, since they make the human-wilderness interface more permeable. Ecosystem destruction by deforestation results from the expansion of agricultural land for cattle raising, from mining and petroleum development, and from large real estate projects, which are major vectors of this closer contact between animal and human populations.

The erosion of natural spaces brought about by these industries results in a much higher number of interactions between humans and wild species that carry illnesses. Phenomena linked to climate change, which are also triggered by such industrial activities, produce the

same effect. Forest fires and higher temperatures prompt animals to migrate toward inhabited areas in search of food, for example.

Programs to protect biodiversity and natural habitats must be on the agenda once the health crisis from COVID-19 has eased. Countries that allow the raising and sale of exotic species will have to reconsider the appropriateness of such activities, not only given their harmful impact on animal well-being, but also on worldwide public health. More resources will have to be invested in taking down transnational networks that traffic in wild animals and in finding alternative subsistence activities for the people involved.

In addition to policies for the conservation of nature, our methods of production and consumption must be completely redesigned if we wish to reduce our dependence on extractivist economies and minimize our impact on wild environments. This will have the additional benefit of helping us meet our climate obligations, not only because our economy is so reliant on fossil fuels, but also given that livestock agriculture—the cause of much deforestation—is estimated to be the source of 16% to 37% of global greenhouse gas emissions, depending on the study.

Confronted with COVID-19, governments everywhere have freed up colossal resources to support workers and businesses. The same scale and speed of action are required to make a radical course change in our agricultural and environmental policies so as to attack the root of the problem. If a climate crisis has not been enough to convince us to wholly transform our relationship with the environment, might we be more inclined to do it to save ourselves?

Laura Handal is a graduate in environmental studies from the University of Quebec in Montreal. Her work focuses on the social, economic and environmental impacts of extractive industries, and on the economic alternatives to such sectors. A version of this article first ran on the blog of IRIS (Institut de recherche et d'informations socio-économiques), a sister organization of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives based in Montréal.

Natasha Bulowski / National

Economic abuse: hard to spot, harder to recover from

DURING THE PANDEMIC, women in abusive relationships face long periods of isolation with their abusers alongside decreased job security and limited access to support systems. This isolation exacerbates all forms of domestic abuse, from verbal to physical to sexual. But there is another type of abuse that is less visible and can also worsen under these conditions.

Economic abuse includes controlling, exploiting and sabotaging not only a survivor's income and finances, but also their access to transportation, education and employment, food, shelter or other non-financial assets. Though the terms *economic abuse* and *financial abuse* are sometimes used interchangeably, the latter can fail to capture the extent of the harm.

Women experiencing economic abuse during the pandemic face heightened levels of social isolation, which makes it even harder to get help from family, friends, women's organizations and legal aid.

"It's about money, but it's also about controlling access to resources, financial knowledge, and manipulation of anything that could make your life more secure, or safer," explains Chitra Raghavan, a professor of psychology who researches intimate partner abuse.

In a U.S. study from 2008, which involved interviews with 120 survivors of intimate partner violence, virtually all of the survivors (94%) said they had experienced economic abuse. According to a 2019 report by the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT), such abuse is often obscured by gender norms and intertwined with other forms of abuse including psychological, sexual and physical.

Raghavan explains that because gender norms typecast men as the breadwinners and financial head of house, it can be hard to determine what is economic abuse and what is sometimes an agreed upon, if highly gendered, norm in a household.

"When it becomes abusive, to me, is when you can no longer negotiate," she says. "When you can no longer say, 'I'd like to know how much [money] I have. I'd like to know this regularly without asking, and I'd like to be consulted on these decisions.'"

Feminist lawyer Pamela Cross adds, "A really big factor is that people of all genders and ages think that it is impolite to talk about money." She says the taboo around discussing finances means friends and family are less likely to become aware of economic abuse.

"It can also be very easy for people to have a narrow understanding of intimate partner violence and family violence and only think about the physical aspect of that, when really

there's many other kinds of abuse including economic that can be as harmful—or in some cases even more harmful—than physical abuse.”

The 2019 WomanACT study found that, unlike physical abuse, financial abuse often continues long after a woman has left the abusive relationship, because their abuser can maintain contact and control through spousal or child support. Coerced debt and bad credit scores often prevent survivors from securing housing in the short and long terms or make it more difficult to get a credit card, student loan, line of credit, car loan, and potentially a job due to screening by some employers.

As if those challenges are not enough, Cross says women experiencing economic abuse during the pandemic face heightened levels of social isolation, which makes it even harder to get help from family, friends, women's organizations and legal aid. “For women who are still

living with the abuser, it's all but impossible for them to have the privacy that they need to have frank conversations with a lawyer,” Cross explains.

Job loss related to COVID-19 can also force survivors to remain in an abusive situation. “When women do not have an independent income, it is much more difficult for them to leave, especially if there are children,” Cross says.

The CCFWE and organizations like WomanACT are calling for more research on economic abuse in Canada, education initiatives to increase public awareness, and training for both social workers and financial institutions to spot the signs of economic abuse. These groups stress the importance of creating financial literacy programs, credit repair services, and other financial opportunities like special loans and scholarships for survivors of economic abuse.

For this to be done most effectively, the CCFWE says Canada needs to develop a clear definition of economic abuse, to lay the groundwork for these policies and programs. The recently amended Divorce Act now identifies financial abuse as a form of family violence. Though the inclusion of financial abuse in family law is a positive first step, Cross notes that the Divorce Act only applies to people who are married and seeking a divorce, leaving out a significant subset of people.

The CCFWE's long-term goal is for there to be a criminal definition of economic abuse, which could both act as a deterrent for potential abusers and provide survivors with a legal recourse.

Natasha Bulowski is a journalist based in Ottawa. She has been volunteering at the Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment (CCFWE) since June.

Statement from the CCPA on systemic state violence and anti-Black racism

THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES is angered and outraged by ongoing police violence and brutality against Black citizens and protestors across the continent. And while much of the current media attention is focused on the United States, these same problems are painfully alive and present across Canada, including in every province where CCPA offices are located on Indigenous territories.

We recognize that this state violence is endemic, long-standing and a function of structural white supremacy.

As a research institute committed to social justice, we believe that public policy is an essential vehicle for dismantling systemic injustices—including in relation to the coercive power of the state and state violence, economic and gender inequalities, migration and citizenship, poverty, race-blind data collection, housing and food insecurity, and inequities in health and education. We know our work is far from done. We have a responsibility

to document, challenge and propose solutions to racism and white supremacy, a responsibility we have yet to adequately meet.

Through our research and analysis, we will continue to document the systemic inequality, racism and injustice that dominates our society, limits access to public services and infects our democratic institutions. As we move forward, we will listen to and work in partnership with Black researchers, leaders and organizations to press for root-cause, systemic change while holding the powerful to account.

It is our individual and collective responsibility to ensure that systemic state violence and anti-Black racism are eradicated.

— This statement is endorsed by the CCPA's B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia and national offices.



Colour-coded Justice

ANTHONY N. MORGAN

To make Black lives matter, make Black jobs matter too

THE KILLINGS OF Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, all by current or former police officers, triggered a second tidal wave of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the U.S. this spring. Like the first wave in 2012, this one quickly burst the banks of international borders, spilling into the streets of many Canadian cities and as far afield as Brazil, Europe, Nigeria and Australia.

In Canada, this second wave of Black Lives Matter reverberated painfully. This was due, at first, to the police-involved death on May 27 of a 29-year-old Black and Indigenous woman in Toronto named Regis Korchinski-Paquet. Only a month earlier, police had shot and killed a 26-year-old Black man named D'Andre Campbell in a neighbouring suburb of Toronto.

Anti-Black murder and police violence are not new on either side of the 49th parallel. However, these incidents occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant that an unprecedented number of Canadians in extended shutdown were captive to the social and broadcast media on their televisions, computers and phones. In effect, it has never been so difficult to tune out the raw proof of anti-Black racism in Western society.

The confluence of these factors, global and local, has ultimately led Canada to undergo what I call the Great

Racial Awakening. I refer to it as such because Black people in Canada have for centuries recognized and resisted anti-Black racism on these lands. However, up until the present moment, anti-Black racism in Canada has never been confronted by mainstream institutions as a deeply embedded national phenomenon.

But now, this great awakening has led to bold and confident assertions, including by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Business Council of Canada, that anti-Black racism is a widespread systemic cancer affecting Canada's whole body politic. The obvious question is, what are we going to do about it?

In my years of legal, policy and public advocacy, I've offered many ideas about how Canada can do better by Black Canadians. I've recommended everything from an African Canadian Justice Strategy to address the overpolicing and overincarceration of Black Canadians to the implementation of a national policy for Black arts, culture and heritage, to tap into and enhance the immense potential of Canada's Black creative communities. I stand by these and other ideas and maintain that they should be adopted.

But in the midst of the current anti-Black racism reckoning that has spurred Canada's Great Racial Awakening, it is economic justice for Black communities that I think is most needed. That means modernized employment equity legislation at the federal level, and the introduction of robust provincial and territorial employment legislation across the country.

By modernized, I mean legislation that explicitly states that part of its objective is to better the conditions of employment for Black Canadians so that they can realize their fullest economic potential.

Canada exists as what Ryerson professor and CCPA research associate Grace-Edward Galabuzi calls an "economic apartheid." The concept is used to describe the way the Canadian labour market and economy are structured as racially stratified systems in which Black people are confined to the lowest rungs of financial well-being. Data from Statistics Canada bear this out:

1. In the 2016 census, Black unemployment rates were consistently higher than in the overall population at 12.5% versus 7.7% for other racialized groups and 7.3% for white Canadians. This was the case even at higher levels of education. For instance, among those with a postsecondary education in 2016, the unemployment rate for Black Canadians was 9.2% compared to 5.3% for the rest of the population.

2. Black Canadians are nearly twice as likely as non-racialized Canadians to be of low-income status. Some 23% of Black Canadians in the last census were considered low income while the rate for other racialized Canadians was 20% and that for white Canadians was 12%.

3. There's a multigenerational wage gap for Black Canadians as well. On average, first-generation Black

WORTH REPEATING

We [had] a statue up to someone who made their money by throwing sometimes the bodies of his commodities, our people, into water. There's a piece of almost historical poetry here—now he's on the bottom of the water.

—Bristol Mayor Marvin Rees on the removal of the 17th century slaver Edward Colsten's statue by Black Lives Matter activists on June 8. The bronze statue was dumped into the harbour by the group.

The root of almost every mass movement, and the source of so much social unrest, is economic exclusion—a feeling of being devalued, of not belonging.

Canadians make an income of about \$37,000, compared to an average income of \$50,000 for new immigrants who are white. The average income of third-generation Black Canadians as recorded in the 2016 census was \$32,000, compared with \$48,000 for white Canadians.

Not only are these disparities dramatic, they're also chronic and date back decades. Modernized employment equity legislation can help fix this. We could model it on Ontario's short-lived employment equity legislation, adopted by the NDP government in 1993 and scrapped by the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris that swept to power in 1995.

In the spirit of the Ontario model, this legislation could create benchmarks for recruitment, hiring and promotion for employers. It could also feature the establishment of an Employment Equity Commission tasked with supporting companies to foster more inclusive and welcoming work environments for Black employees.

I believe now is the time to revisit, reform and/or re-introduce stronger employment equity legislation. The root of almost every mass movement, and the source of so much social unrest, is economic exclusion—a feeling of being devalued, of not belonging.

Black and other racialized people in Canada were already discriminated against in the workforce before the pandemic. They are now overrepresented in the lower-paid and precarious frontline jobs that pose the highest risk of contracting COVID-19. The feeling of social exclusion is acute among far too many Black populations in Canada.

It's in conditions like these that pernicious police-community relations thrive. So, if we really want to make Black Lives Matter, we have to make Black Jobs Matter too. **M**

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



**Work
Life**

LYNNE FERNANDEZ

Essential or exploitable?

N HIGH RIVER, Alberta, Cargill's 2,000 mostly immigrant employees slaughter and process 4,500 cows a day. At one point almost half these workers tested positive for COVID-19 and the plant closed. Two workers died of the virus. Cargill's other Canadian plant, outside Montreal, had 64 active cases by the end of May, and workers at a JBS slaughterhouse in Brooks, Alberta were contracting the virus at a rate far higher than the rest of the population.

Meatpacking plants are not designed for workers' comfort or safety. Employees stand cheek by jowl in cold temperatures, wielding cutting instruments at a fast and relentless pace. The work is dangerous and difficult at the best of times. Employers did little to help workers avoid catching the virus.

When Cargill reopened, workers were understandably nervous about going back. Their union, UFCW Local 401, began pushing occupational health and safety and labour relations officials in Alberta to ensure that conditions improved. Many workers questioned whether or not they could choose to go back to work, despite legislation stating that workers have the right to refuse unsafe work.

The \$2,000/month Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) makes the unsafe work issue more complicated. The CERB can pay as much, even more, than low-wage workers earn, which explains why employers don't like it. Why work, asked one Winnipeg

How many Canadians would be willing to do back-breaking work, 16 hours a day, six days a week, for minimum wage?

restaurateur in the news, if you can sit at home and get paid \$500 a week by the federal government?

Even though the CERB is keeping Manitobans safe and preventing a total collapse in consumer demand, Premier Brian Pallister doesn't like it either. "We are fighting against a federal program that is actually paying people to stay out of the workforce right now," he said, riding a popular conservative backlash to any and all government shutdown measures. "I don't like the fact that that is real, but that is real. People are being paid to stay home and not work."

There are a variety of reasons workers may not want to return. Many have lost access to child care. Some may have health concerns that put them at higher risk, or live with someone who is vulnerable. Community transmission has not been eliminated and won't be until herd immunity is established and/or a vaccine is found. Fear of contracting COVID-19 is not unreasonable.

Although employees have the right to refuse unsafe work, who gets to decide if the risk of transmission is low enough? Public health officers are still warning people to practice social distancing. This cannot be reassuring to those who work directly with the public or in close quarters with other workers. Such mixed messaging is at the crux of the tensions in Alberta. Cargill's unionized workers at least have a voice. Many low-wage workers do not.

The only control many workers currently have is the CERB. But this flash of autonomy will be over once they are called back to work. If workers refuse to go back they will have effectively quit and will find themselves in a challenging job market. Layoffs stabilized in May, but the unemployment rate increased slightly to a record high of 13.7%, driven by the re-entry of 201,000 workers into the labour market to look for work. One-third of the potential labour force remains underutilized, and returning student unemployment surged to over 40%.

These data do not bode well for anyone hoping to see improvements in employment standards, health and safety regulations or minimum wages post-pandemic. Higher unemployment means less worker power. Some wonder if higher unemployment could force Canadians into the agricultural sector.

The 60,000 foreign workers who come to Canada each year under federal temporary entry programs have to be quarantined for 14 days before they can start working. Worker advocates had a hard time determining if these workers' living conditions are being adequately monitored, or if they are being forced to work when they shouldn't, or forced to pay back the two weeks' pay in quarantine.

These concerns are legitimate considering the well documented abuses these workers face. It is their high degree of exploitability that makes these workers such an integral part of Canada's food production. But the quarantine and social distancing requirements mean far fewer foreign workers will be brought in this year.

So what about getting Canadians to do this work? Farmers are not keen on the idea. Evan Fraser of Guelph University's Arrell Food Institute told the *Financial Post* that farm work is "not unskilled work," since it takes a lot of training and experience to do properly and quickly. Bringing in unskilled locals to do this farming work would slow down harvests and eat into the market value of crops, he said. How many Canadians would be willing to do back-breaking work, 16 hours a day, six days a week, for minimum wage?

As long as we classify temporary foreign workers as low-skilled and refuse to open a pathway for them to permanent residency, and as long as we expect Canadians working in the service and food processing sectors to risk their health for low pay and precarious working conditions, we have to admit that some workers are essential because they're so exploitable, despite all the lip service to the contrary. **M**

Lynne Fernandez is the Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues at the CCPA-Manitoba.



Below the Fold

CYNTHIA KHOO

CUSMA: No one-size solution to platform liability

WHEN CANADA RATIFIED the "New NAFTA" (CUSMA) in March 2020, the agreement's digital trade chapter attracted renewed attention for how it seemed to import Section 230 of the United States' Communications Decency Act into Canadian law. Section 230 grants broad legal immunity to digital platform companies for the actions and speech of their users, including abusive or illegal behaviours and posts. Examples of shielded harms include radicalizing white supremacist videos on YouTube, hate speech campaigns on Facebook and Twitter, and social media-based targeted harassment or stalking.

For reference, the relevant text in Article 19.17 of CUSMA reads: "no Party shall adopt or maintain measures that treat a supplier or user of an interactive computer service [e.g., a digital platform] as an information content provider [e.g., the user who posted the content] in determining liability for harms

related to information stored, processed, transmitted, distributed, or made available by the service, except to the extent the supplier or user has, in whole or in part, created, or developed the information.”

Given this wording, it is possible that applying direct liability to platforms for legal harms committed by users would violate CUSMA, while applying standalone regulatory obligations with the aim of preventing, mitigating or remedying such harms would not. If that is the case, Canada should implement and interpret Article 19.17 in a way that makes full use of that flexibility. Two key reasons support this strategy.

First, digital platforms ought to be held to different levels of accountability for user activity depending on the specific harms, rights or interests involved. For instance, platform liability measures considered necessary, proportionate and equitable where the aim is protecting the equality rights of marginalized groups would likely not be necessary, proportionate or equitable at all where the aim is to preserve copyright owners’ financial interests. The merits of a platform liability proposal must be assessed in direct relation to the rights or interests at stake.

Similarly, legal mechanisms meant to hold platforms accountable for political disinformation, discriminatory advertising or non-consensual distribution of intimate images, for example, cannot be conflated and reduced to one single platform liability regime. This would completely undermine our ability to pass and enforce sensible laws and policies that suit the dramatically different ways in which digital platforms can facilitate harm on both individual and systemic levels.

Second, Canadian law has already developed a measure of context specificity when it comes to addressing platform liability. This has occurred not through all-encompassing intermediary liability provisions such as in the U.S. or European Union, but through developments in specific areas of law. The courts have established, for example, that defamation law will consider an internet intermediary liable where it does not take down allegedly defamatory content upon gaining knowledge that it is hosting that specific content.

Legislatively, the federal Copyright Act has, since 2012, imposed a legal regime on intermediaries for users engaging in copyright infringement including direct liability where a platform meets the Section 27 test for “enabling” infringement. This contrasts with the laissez-faire approach that the federal government has taken with digital platforms for other, arguably more individually and democratically devastating user behaviours, including sexualized online abuse, intimate partner violence, or co-ordinated campaigns to harass and silence Black, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, and female journalists, politicians and human rights activists.

To be clear, the argument is not that because direct liability currently can apply to online platforms for

Platform liability for copyright infringement has routinely been shown to chill free expression online, including the free expression of historically marginalized communities.

defamation and copyright, at least as much liability should apply for sexual harassment or discriminatory abuse. The point is that defamation, copyright, technology facilitated violence and other user-generated issues tied to digital platforms each require their own separate and contextualized legal and policy analysis of the most suitable approach to liability. Each analysis can make reference to, but should be ultimately independent of, the analysis in other areas of law. This mitigates the risk that incorrect, misguided or objectionable approaches to platform liability in one area will cascade into others, resulting in further poor law and policy.

To illustrate, a human rights-based analysis of platform liability would suggest that the current Canadian responses to copyright infringement and platform facilitated abuse against marginalized individuals should be reversed. The latter should warrant stronger measures—to uphold the rights to equality, privacy and freedom of expression—and the former weaker or no measures, as platform liability for copyright infringement has routinely been shown to chill free expression online, including the free expression of historically marginalized communities. The current state of affairs, with seemingly misplaced priorities, does not reflect well on the Canadian justice system.

Discussions regarding platform liability often treat potential regulation as a one-size-fits-all proposition. It should not be and does not have to be. Without recognizing the importance of context and the specific rights, interests and equities involved, platform liability law and policy threatens to be overrun with false equivalencies of harm and distorted calibrations of proportionality and necessity. Lawmakers must proceed astutely and carefully to prevent CUSMA Article 19.17 from making this more likely—or the “New NAFTA” will have cost something that should not ever be up for trade. **M**

Cynthia Khoo is a technology and human rights lawyer and researcher.



REIMAGINING LONG-TERM RESIDENTIAL CARE IN THE COVID-19 CRISIS

INTRODUCTION AND REPORT BY PAT ARMSTRONG,
HUGH ARMSTRONG, JACQUELINE CHOINIÈRE, RUTH LOWNDES
AND JAMES STRUTHERS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALISHA DAVIDSON

OUR OUT OF FIVE deaths in Canada from COVID-19 happened in places that care for older people, and media reports tell us that many of the survivors went without sufficient food, drink, washing and exercise. Canada stands out among major OECD countries in this concentration of deaths in nursing homes. Partly as a result, and unlike elsewhere, a majority of those who have died from COVID-19 were women. Nursing home workers, an overwhelming majority of whom are women, have also died in this pandemic. Many of these workers are racialized and/or new to the country.

These tragic numbers are not a total surprise given the chronic underfunding and understaffing of nursing homes, a fact that has become increasingly obvious to the public as the pandemic progresses. The conditions that produced those numbers are certainly not news to care home staff, or the families and friends of residents, who have long done their best to fill the gaps in care by helping residents dress, brush their teeth, go to the toilet, eat, and escape social isolation. Now, of course, these unpaid and unrecognized carers are barred from most homes, further reducing needed care.

Government strategies to address this crisis change daily, as do the availability of personal protective equipment and other essential equipment, treatments, and statistics. Building on our 10-year research project, we hope that this report, which was published by the CCPA in April, helps us all honour those who work in, live in, and visit nursing homes—and that it may contribute to our collective struggle to transform nursing home care.

OR MORE THAN a decade, our international, interdisciplinary team has been studying nursing homes in Canada, the U.S., the U.K., Germany, Norway and Sweden.¹ In this report, we draw on the lessons for the pandemic from the research done by us and others, to suggest what we can do and should not do now, and what we should plan for in the future.

There is no question that the COVID-19 crisis calls for extraordinary and immediate measures. There is also no question that some of the most vulnerable live in what are commonly called nursing homes where people require 24-hour care. Those providing paid and unpaid care are particularly vulnerable as well.

There is a real tension in balancing between the urgent need for compromise and alternative strategies and the need to ensure protection and care, now and in the future. Safety is clearly the priority

now but we must make sure that we build on the existing research, while drawing lessons for the future that allow us to do more than provide a safe environment for all those who live, work and visit in long-term residential care. We do so on the basis of our extensive research, which you can find at <https://reltc.apps01.yorku.ca/>.

The right to care

The importance of universal, publicly funded, accessible health services has never been clearer. Study after study, commission after commission, have demonstrated that a universal health care system is not only more equitable but also more efficient and less costly for society as a whole. What has also become so evident in this crisis is that ensuring everyone has the care they need helps protect us all.

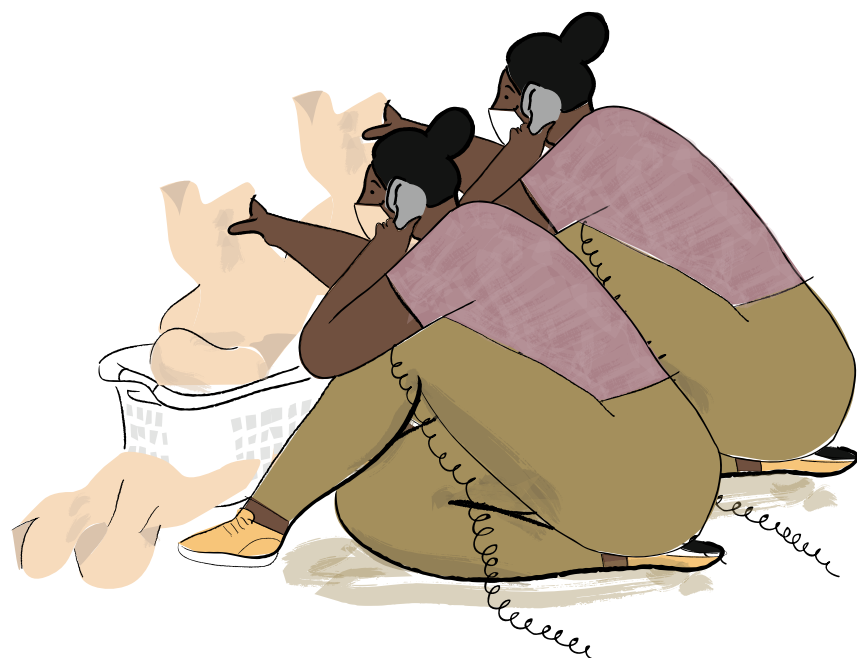
But one major gap in our Canadian universal system is long-term residential care or what are more

commonly called nursing homes, although they do receive varying forms of public funding and regulation. Yet nursing homes provide extensive health services, and this has become increasingly the case as our governments have made it harder and harder to get into a home by failing to provide enough beds to meet the need. That the largest proportion of deaths in Canada are in nursing homes attests not only to the vulnerability of residents but also to residents' high health care needs and our failure to implement the evidence. As the World Health Organization pointed out many years ago, "strategies for providing long-term care have been low on government agendas everywhere."² Since then, government policies have made long-term residential care less accessible, without appropriately adjusting to the rising need for care within these nursing homes. There have, however, been increasing discussions of the need for reform in these times and lots of evidence on how to do it.

Our purpose with this project was to identify promising practices for treating both residents and care providers with dignity and respect and for allowing them not only to stay safe but also to flourish. We sought to find ideas worth sharing, ideas that could help make nursing homes a positive option rather than the last and least attractive one. And we talked about *promising* rather than *best* practices because context matters, and what works well in one jurisdiction or even within it may not be effective in another area or for another group. Along with others, we have been successful at identifying many promising practices and some definite principles for all jurisdictions, although the ways to implement them may vary.

We have been less successful in convincing government to put these ideas into practice. Indeed, some government policies have gone against the evidence.

One of the most obvious policies that ignores the evidence is the



move to further privatize care services. In spite of the evidence that market strategies do not work well in health services, the Ontario competitive bidding process for establishing nursing homes with public funding has favoured large corporations and has resulted in a significant expansion in for-profit ownership. Private, for-profit services are necessarily more fragmented, more prone to closure and focused on making a profit. The research demonstrates that homes run on a for-profit basis tend to have lower staffing levels, more verified complaints, and more transfers to hospitals, as well as higher rates for both ulcers and morbidity. Moreover, managerial practices taken from the business sector are designed for *just* enough labour and for making a profit, rather than for providing good care. These include paying the lowest wages possible, and hiring part-time, casual and those defined as self employed in order to avoid paying benefits or providing other protections. As the experience with SARS and COVID-19 shows, these workers cannot afford to stay home when they are ill and can carry infections from place to place. In addition to these for-profit employment practices, homes are contracting out whole services such as cleaning, laundry, dietary and security. This contracting out brings even more people into the home on a daily basis, people who can present a risk and be at risk. And they can fragment teamwork. Moreover, the workers are not necessarily people trained in health services or screened for infections on entry.

As the 2002 Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada made clear, the extent and nature of our health care system is a matter of values.³ Currently, the state of nursing homes and the number of beds available suggest we do not highly value older people or the growing number of younger people who are now in nursing homes or those who provide their care. At least, we do not value them enough to ensure they have the conditions and care they need. Public health services must include nursing homes and be more effectively integrated in the health care system. To be accessible, these homes must not only be publicly funded but also be available in sufficient numbers for those who need care. And they must have enough resources and methods of supporting the work to provide appropriate care.

It is not easy to change ownership patterns during this crisis, although countries such as Spain have moved in that direction and British Columbia took the lead in restricting workers to one home, supporting full-time employment and topping up wages. Planning for the future has to ensure infection control but it also has to be about much more than that. We have to move to include long-term residential care in our public services, not only in terms of funding but also in terms of delivery, to ensure the focus is on care rather than on profit. We also have to deal now with the problems facing the nursing home labour force.

Care is a relationship that needs fostering and support.

The long-term residential care labour force

Our project was based from the start on several explicit assumptions that grew out of our previous work, assumptions that have been reinforced by our research and by the current crisis. Five of those assumptions are particularly relevant to the research on this labour force and relate to an additional overall assumption: care is a relationship that needs fostering and support.

First, the conditions of work are the conditions of care. Although there has been a great deal of recent discussion about resident-focused care, staff cannot easily focus on residents if the conditions do not now allow them the resources, the structures, the support, the time, and the capacity to do so. **Second**, as the determinants of health teach us and as is becoming increasingly obvious once again with the pandemic, housekeeping, dietary, laundry, clerical and recreation services are critical components in care. **Third**, the labour in nursing homes includes a host of paid and unpaid work carried out not only by staff, families and volunteers but also by paid staff who take on unpaid work. **Fourth**, care work is skilled work, and those doing the work require ongoing education and training for the nursing home environment. **Fifth**, the bulk of the labour is carried out by women, many of whom are racialized and/or new to this country. As well, women account for the majority of residents, although the number of men is increasing. Moreover, the resident population has become increasingly diverse. In keeping with our search for promising practices, these are principles that establish the basis for research, policies and practices which themselves may vary with context.

Undoubtedly the most obvious condition of work, and another example of where evidence has been ignored, is the staffing levels. More than a decade ago, when resident care needs were not as high as they are now, research determined that homes should ensure a minimum of four hours of direct nursing care per resident per day. These figures are for staff actually providing care, and thus would not include those on training programs or on sick leave or maternity leave or on vacation. Nor does this minimum include the vital non-nursing staff, such as dietary, laundry and housekeeping workers. Few Canadian jurisdictions

require minimum staffing levels and none match the minimum standard set out in the research more than a decade ago. The overall pattern in Canada is of staffing levels below the four hour minimum. In ordinary times, we need higher staffing levels not only to ensure residents have the care they need but also to reduce the incidence of staff injury, burnout and exhaustion. As our research indicates, under pre-pandemic conditions, staff in Canada were almost seven times as likely as their Nordic counterparts to report that they face violence on a daily or almost daily basis. Although resident needs are very similar to those in Canada, staffing levels in Nordic countries are much higher. Especially in times of crises such as that created by COVID-19, we need even higher staffing levels to meet both the growing demand for care and for safety precautions but also to cover for staff who become ill.

Low staffing levels have contributed to the high demands on family and volunteers to provide not only social support but also some direct care such as helping residents eat, walk or dress. It is often assumed this is work any woman can do, and it is primarily done by women. However, this is skilled labour and if these unpaid workers are not properly prepared for the work, they risk injury to themselves and to the residents. And they can complicate and even increase the workload of staff. If we are to rely even more on these unpaid workers during this crisis, we need to ensure they have appropriate training and are coordinated with paid staff, recognizing the full range of work involved in health care. The same applies when governments are tempted to call on the unemployed to fill the care gaps. We must remember not only the skills involved in the labour but also the extra work required to integrate as well as supervise those unfamiliar with the work or workplace.

It is important to remember that residents get admitted to homes only when a crisis demonstrates

More publications on promising practices in long-term care

These resources are freely available at www.policyalternatives.ca. Or write to us at monitor@policyalternatives.ca and we will send you the links.

Promising practices in long-term care: Ideas worth sharing, by Donna Baines and Pat Armstrong, Dec. 2015.

Physical environments for long-term care: Ideas worth sharing, by Pat Armstrong and Susan Braedley, Nov. 2016.

Exercising choice in long-term residential care, by Pat Armstrong and Tamara Daly, Oct. 2017.

Negotiating tensions in long-term residential care: Ideas worth sharing, by Pat Armstrong and Ruth Lowndes, May 2018.

the family can no longer provide care at home. This has become clear to us in our current project which focuses on the move into long-term care. We have been repeatedly told that the move into a nursing home happens only when there is a breaking point and the person or persons at home can no longer provide the care required. Although families often feel guilty about “putting my mother in a nursing home,” they know they do not have the skills, the physical and emotional capacity or the environment and equipment to provide the required care. Family members, for example, point to their lack of skill in ensuring the right medications are taken at the right time and actually swallowed, to the physical strength of those who need care putting the whole family at risk, to the stress of providing constant care, to the

complicated machinery involved and to the difficulty in ensuring appropriate nutrition. The 24-hour demands are overwhelming even for those who have quit their paid work in order to provide this unpaid care. To suggest that families take the resident back home underestimates the complex, skilled care needs as well as the resources required while ignoring the crisis that got them there in the first place and may put both the resident and the family at risk for even more than infections. Furthermore, given the long waiting lists for the move into nursing homes and the processes for admission, there is no guarantee that a resident can return to the care home they left although some jurisdictions have moved to make readmission easier.

An important indicator of the low staffing levels is the number of privately paid personal companions hired by families to compensate for the gaps in care. Few of the homes we studied provide formal agreements on what these companions can and cannot do. While they may relieve some of the paid staff's workload, they may also create difficulties for the regular staff in terms of co-ordinating work, especially if the work hours of a companion are irregular and if they report only to their private employer. Moreover, the companions constitute another group of people coming into a home that may bring in disease, as is the case with families and volunteers. They may also be employed in more than one place, and are most often in a precarious position as a result of their employment and frequently their immigrant status. Some of those we encountered have formal healthcare training, and so could perhaps with caution be integrated into the staff. But they too require continual testing for the virus.

Higher staffing levels are a necessary but not sufficient condition to keep those who live, work and visit in care homes safe. New managerial strategies taken from the for-profit sector have contributed to an

increasing reliance on part-time and casual labour as a strategy to reduce the costs of benefits and to keep staffing levels as low as possible. Yet, especially given the low wages and benefits, most of these part-time and casual workers want and need full-time work. As a result, they take another part-time job at another care home, travelling there by public transit because few can afford a car. The risk of sharing any virus is obvious. Moreover, so many part-time and casual workers undermine continuity in care for residents, a continuity that is particularly important for those with dementia. And they may interfere with the teamwork that is important in care.

British Columbia has recognized this issue by effectively making all workers in seniors' homes public employees, raising their wages to the union rates and ensuring that they are offered full-time work in a single home. All jurisdictions should do the same, not just for now but also into the future. It is not good enough to prohibit workers from working in two places. We must make sure that they get the same hours of paid work. Moreover, for the same reasons, governments should move to eliminate the outsourcing of services such as dietary and housekeeping; services that also bring outsiders into the home on a regular basis, outsiders who may or may not have education for health care. And during the pandemic, they should offer to house staff in hotels so they will not have to commute or put their household members at risk.

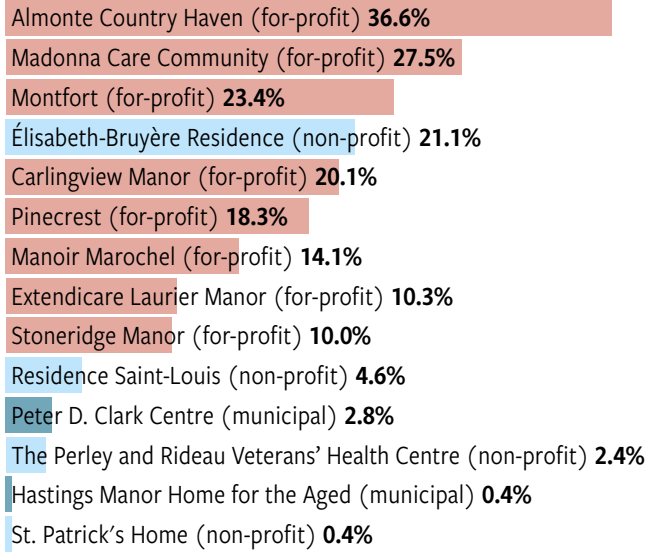
Union contracts provide workers with employment protections such as benefits, sick leave, paid vacations and the right to say no to unsafe or unfair conditions. Many of those who are part-time, casual, on contract or work for an outsourced firm do not have these protections. Unions and professional associations have also helped define who can do what as a way to protect both the worker and the resident, in part by ensuring skills and supports. The proposal to suspend contracts in order to create more flexibility for employers risks that protection. While we have certainly seen much more flexible divisions of labour in other countries, this flexibility has to be understood in the context of their training and education systems, their regulations for safety, their supports for workers and their staffing levels. Moreover, there tends to be a strong emphasis on, and time for, collaborative teamwork as a way of ensuring quality care in those workplaces with a more flexible division of labour.

Working conditions also include access to equipment that keeps both staff and residents safe and comfortable. Injury rates have long been very high in nursing homes, especially for injuries related to dealing with bodies that have to be assisted. While many homes we visited have installed shower and bath systems as well as lifts that help keep residents and workers safe, they too often do not have enough staff or enough time to operate this equipment safely. Long before this crisis,

supplies such as adult briefs were often rationed in ways that made it difficult to follow safety practices. As has become increasingly obvious in this crisis, much less attention has been paid to equipment to protect against vicious infections, even though there were clear recommendations following SARS to provide equipment for now and stockpiles for the future. In part this reflects the notion that these are homes, rather than places of congregate living where people have complex care needs. Yet when people need to be bathed and taken to the toilet, dressed and changed in bed, helped to eat and drink, given the correct medications and assisted to walk, there is no possibility for the staff, family or volunteers to physically distance. There is now a recognized need for protective equipment but it is still a lower priority than other health care settings. This should not be a competition for safe equipment but rather a recognition of the very high risks in nursing homes for both staff and residents. We not only need such safety equipment now, and in the future, we



Death rates in eastern Ontario long-term care homes



SOURCE: CBC NEWS

need to ensure that those providing care have the time and the training to use the equipment.

We also need to develop surge capacity to ensure a prepared labour force in times of crisis. A recent report from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development and the International Labour Organization provided further support for what we have found in our research.⁴ The report, prepared before the pandemic, warned that preparation for the future means:

improving the status and working conditions of care workers, promoting LTC workers' representation, social dialogue and collective agreements, as well as providing stable and formal jobs with adequate labour and social protections, including adequate wages with suitable hours, as well as a reduction of mental and physical risks. This is key to reducing the current high turnover rates.

If we follow these guidelines to do what we can now, then those with experience who have left the field may be willing to return.

Regulations

For the most part, regulations are designed to promote good care, prevent problems before they may occur and protect residents and, less often, staff. They are frequently a response to identified problems. As our article "It is a Scandal!" demonstrated, regulations are often the consequence of scandals exposed in the media.⁵ The scandals and the regulations are most detailed and numerous in the countries with the most for-profit firms. However, the regulations most often focus on workers and on physical structures rather than on ownership or on working conditions and on employer practices such as hiring part time.

During this pandemic, there have been calls from employers to suspend regulations. While there may indeed be some regulations that prevent necessary flexibility in these times, such as the requirement to get everyone who is able to breakfast in the dining room, we should be very careful about which regulations we suspend rather than allowing any wholesale suspension. We must ensure that there are evidence informed assessments for suspending any regulations, the

reasons for the suspension and clear rules about how long any suspension will last. We must also ensure that the important regulations are enforced quickly and effectively. This is especially the case when it comes to health and safety regulations. We need to look carefully at the homes where outbreaks have occurred and resulted in deaths, examining not only their current but also their past practices. This includes the requirements for training and the form the training takes as well as its frequency.

And we need to think about new regulations. One obvious area is the requirement to stockpile for emergencies and to keep these stockpiles current. We also need to look at the pressure to fill any bed as soon as possible, and at the consequences for that policy on the health and safety of all those involved in long-term residential care. In other words, we need better *and* better enforced regulations.

Physical environments

A great deal of attention has been paid during this crisis to the fact that many homes in Canada have rooms for four residents, with only curtains separating them. In some cases, all four residents must use the toilets down the hall, further complicating efforts to control infections. It should be noted that in Ontario private and semi-private rooms, when they are available, cost more and thus are limited to those who can pay more. These, like many other aspects of the physical environments in nursing homes, are not easy to change during the crisis, although we could certainly lift the surcharge on private rooms. During the crisis, we could also severely limit further admissions, especially those based on the suggestion that more patients be sent to nursing homes from hospitals, in order to create more hospital space. And we could temporarily refit some of the public spaces to accommodate physical distancing.

There is no shortage of evidence on the need for new physical

structures. Indeed, the designs for new homes take important aspects of this research into account. It is important though that these new designs not only allow for private rooms and outdoor spaces, non-slip floors and smaller units, good sight lines and communication systems as many do, but also that they have appropriate space for in-house food, laundry and cleaning services that ensure the safety of staff. They need staff rooms that not only allow a private space for respite but also for changing out of travel clothes that bring in viruses. And they need to continue to provide spaces that allow the community to be active in the home, doing so in ways that provide the resources to ensure the community can do so without undermining their safety or that of staff and residents. Finally, they need surge capacity, extra space and convertible space for times of crisis.

Where to from here?

The research is clear. In the **short term**, we must

1. Follow the B.C. example and make all staff either full-time or permanently part-time and limit their work to one nursing home.
2. Raise the wages and ensure the staff has benefits, especially for sick leave.
3. Offer alternative housing for staff.
4. Provide testing for all those living in, working in, or visiting nursing homes.
5. Provide hands-on training for all those entering nursing homes.
6. Keep essential regulations and contract protections.
7. Ensure protective equipment now.
8. Assess the skills of anyone paid to provide care and limit what those who are not trained staff are allowed to do.
9. Severely limit transfers from hospitals.

In the **long term**,

1. Continue all these strategies in the future, while ensuring regulations are effective and enforced and contracts supported.
2. Use the model of the Canada Health Act to develop a universal public long-term residential care plan that is adequately accessible and funded.
3. Develop a long-term labour force strategy following the guidelines from the OECD-ILO report.
4. Stop privatization and ensure non-profit ownership.
5. Stop contracting out food, housekeeping and most laundry services.
6. Ensure that any vaccines and/or drugs that result from the public funding for research are made widely available and publicly funded.

7. Ensure protective equipment, and stockpile for the future. In doing so, recognize that protection goes well beyond protection against a virus.

8. Move to integrate and co-ordinate health care services through public mechanisms.

9. Build surge capacity into the physical structure of the homes, and into labour force planning.

10. Establish and enforce minimum staffing levels and regulations.

11. Attend to context and diversity.

12. Ensure new homes are designed to protect residents and staff while also allowing the community to enter safely and all those in the home to flourish.

13. Listen carefully to staff, residents, families and volunteers, taking their ideas into account.

This crisis offers us the opportunity to learn about how to create a new normal, to think through how we design, structure, access and organize long-term residential care. Indeed, it allows us to reimagine nursing homes as rewarding places to work, where life is worth living for residents and where visitors feel comforted about the care. There is no going back but there are ways forward that allow us to continue caring and sharing, collectively providing for care. We hope our many ways of sharing what we have learned assist in this reimagining process.

Notes

1. For details on our research methods, see Armstrong, Pat and Ruth Lowndes, eds. (2018) *Creative Teamwork: Developing Rapid, Site-switching Ethnography* New York: Oxford University Press.

2. World Health Organization (2002). *Ethical Choices in Long-Term Care: What Does Justice Require?* Geneva: WHO.

3. Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada. The Romanow Commission (2002) Ottawa: Royal Commission in the Future of Health Care.

4. Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development and the International Labour Organization (2019) *New Job Opportunities for an Ageing Society*. <https://www.oecd.org/g20/summits/osaka/ILO-OECD-G20-Paper-1-3-New-job-opportunities-in-an-ageing-society.pdf>.

5. Lloyd, L., A. Banerjee, C. Harrington, F.F. Jacobsen, & M. Szebehely. (2014). "It is a scandal! Comparing the causes and consequences of nursing home media scandals in five countries." *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 34(1/2):2-8.



ANDREW LONGHURST AND KENDRA STRAUSS

End for-profit seniors' care now

The COVID-19 pandemic may be unprecedented in recent times, but its impacts are being felt in long-term care facilities because of the way seniors' care has been undervalued, underfunded, and privatized.

IN APRIL, the B.C. government announced a set of measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in the province's long-term care homes and assisted living facilities, by then the epicentre of the pandemic in Canada. Most of the province's long-term care staff can now only work at one facility where previously they would have needed to hold down multiple low-wage, part-time care jobs to make ends meet. This "single-site order," which will be enforced by public health officials as a way to stop the virus from spreading from one facility to another, comes with new guarantees of full-time hours and union-level pay, at least until the immediate crisis is under control.

Important as these changes are, concerns remain about how B.C.'s home and community care sector is meeting the needs of seniors during the pandemic. The B.C. Seniors Advocate is worried about the assisted living sector, for example. A less intensive level of care than nursing homes, assisted living—where seniors live independently in apartment-style units but receive meals and a variety of

Paramedics leave the Lynn Valley Care Centre, a seniors care home in North Vancouver that housed a man who was the first in Canada to die after contracting COVID-19.

REUTERS/JENNIFER GAUTHIER

support services—is not covered by the Residential Tenancy Act, leaving residents unprotected from the province's temporary rent freeze and ban on evictions. And there are no limits on fee increases for personal care services in private-pay assisted living, which comprised 42% (3,196 units) of the sector in 2016.

How did these vulnerabilities in eldercare come about? Beginning in the early 2000s, policy-makers have made choices that reduced access and eligibility to publicly funded care, produced vulnerabilities and gaps that harm seniors and those who care for them, and encouraged profit-making through risky business practices, such as

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subcontracting, which undermine working conditions and created staffing shortages. The B.C. government's partial reversal on some of these fronts is a positive sign that we have the expertise to build on, here and in provinces across Canada.

A system under stress

Long-term care facilities (LTCFs) are at the centre of COVID-19 outbreaks across Canada as in some other countries. The first major COVID-19 outbreak in the United States, for example, was at the Life Care Center in Kirkland, northeast of Seattle. On March 25, the *Washington Post* reported that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the federal agency that regulates nursing homes, had counted 147 nursing homes that had a resident with coronavirus, "and that figure included only nursing homes, not elder care facilities."

In B.C. about two-thirds of long-term care is delivered by non-profit organizations and for-profit companies, with the remainder provided directly by health authorities. The most severe and widely reported outbreak has been at the Lynn Valley Care Centre in North Vancouver, but by the end of May about 14 seniors' assisted living, rental residences, and care homes had been infected, including 12 LTCFs.

A CBC report on conditions at Lynn Valley described a scene of "mayhem." The virus, wrote Jason Proctor, "has moved through the facility in much the same way it has through the world, preying on vulnerabilities that seem obvious in hindsight: Reliance on a subcontracted labour force whose members...work multiple jobs to make ends meet. Gaps in communication. A societal reluctance to talk about the basics of hygiene."

Subcontracting was also identified by the *Globe & Mail* in its investigation of how COVID-19 spread at the care home. Service providers (e.g., home support agencies, LTCFs, assisted living facilities) contracted by regional health authorities to provide care frequently subcontract with other companies for services such as direct care, cleaning, cooking or maintenance.

Contracts are often awarded on the basis of lowest cost, which translates into lower wages, poorer benefits and fewer full-time positions.

The prevalence of subcontracting in the eldercare sector is no accident. In 2002 and 2003, the B.C. government introduced legislation (Bill 29 and Bill 94) that stripped no-contracting-out and job security clauses from the collective agreements of health care workers, resulting in more than 8,000 job losses by the end of 2004. These laws (both repealed in 2018) provided health sector employers, including private LTCFs, with unprecedented rights to lay off unionized staff and hire them back as non-union workers through subcontracted companies. In 2004, the province followed up with further legislation that imposed wage rollbacks on more than 43,000 health care workers.

A lack of successor rights for unionized workers meant that subcontracting (often called "contract-flipping") was used to make union organizing more difficult. For example, the number of unionized community health workers (three-quarters of whom work for home support agencies) declined almost 10% between 2008 and 2011, before increasing by about 2.5% from 2008 levels by 2013, according to the Health Employers Association of B.C. The number of unionized care aides declined by over 5% between 2008 and 2011, before increasing slightly by 2013, for an overall decline of 3.8% between 2008 and 2013.

Lower funding and reduced access to publicly funded seniors' care from the early 2000s resulted in the rationing of care. Rationing means that access to publicly funded care is limited to those with more acute needs, leaving seniors with less complex needs without access to supports that might prevent deterioration and keep them from needing institutional care.

For example, the Canadian Institute for Health Information found that among people aged 65 and up who were assessed by Vancouver Coastal Health for long-term care intake between 2011-12 and 2015-16, the proportion of seniors requiring extensive or more

Publicly funded long-term residential care facilities covered by industry-wide master collective agreement, British Columbia, 2016

	# of facilities in BC	% of total facilities	# of facilities opened since 2003	% of total facilities
Covered by master collective agreement	168	58%	20	25%
Health authority (government)	109	37%	14	18%
For-profit	4	1%	1	1%
Non-profit	55	19%	5	6%
Not covered by master collective agreement	124	42%	59	75%
Health authority (government)	0	0%	0	0%
For-profit	95	33%	47	59%
Non-profit	29	10%	12	15%
Total facilities	292	100%	79	100%

SOURCE: AUTHORS' CALCULATIONS FROM HEALTH SERVICES AND SUPPORT FACILITIES SUBSECTOR COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT (2014) AND OFFICE OF THE SENIORS ADVOCATE (2016).



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physical assistance rose from 49.6% to 54.6%, and moderate to severe cognitive impairment increased from 52.1% to 57.1%. So as staffing levels have declined, the care needs of many residents have increased.

At the same time, more of those publicly funded services are being delivered by for-profit companies, often in LTCFs that combine publicly funded and private-pay beds. As a recent report by the B.C. Seniors Advocate highlights, prior to 1999, 23% of beds were run by for-profit companies; by 2019 it was 34%.

Health authorities pay for the services provided by LTCFs through block funding that accounts for the direct care hours that each resident is to receive (the currently provincial guideline is 3.36 hours per resident per day) and the cost of other services and supplies such as meals. There are no restrictions on how operators spend these dollars, and health authorities do not perform payroll or expense audits to ensure public funds are actually spent on direct care.

Shockingly, the same report finds that most direct care (67%) is delivered by care aides, the lowest paid care workers. Health authorities calculate the costs of care on the basis of the master collective agreement, which covers unionized direct care workers. Yet LTCFs and their subcontracted companies are not required to pay the rates set out in that agreement. In 2017-18, the industry standard for care aide wages was \$23.48/hour. But according to the Seniors Advocate, "Some care aides were paid as much as 28% less based on the lowest confirmed wage rate of \$16.85/hour, which was found in a for-profit care home."

In other words, care companies make profits by underpaying the workers who provide the majority of direct care, despite those companies receiving funding based on the assumption they pay union rates contained in the master collective agreement. What's more, operators are not monitored to ensure that they are providing the number of

care hours they are being paid for. Without adequate oversight and reporting, companies thus also make profits by understaffing, which impacts the amount and quality of care that residents receive.

Many LTCFs house a combination of publicly subsidized and private-pay beds. But the co-located private-pay beds are not consistently included in these facilities' calculation of delivered care hours, according to the Seniors Advocate. As a result, publicly funded care hours may be used to cross-subsidize the care of private-pay residents who pay out-of-pocket, allowing greater profit-taking from private-pay beds and exacerbating staffing shortages as companies use the same staff to cover both publicly funded and private-pay beds (when private-pay beds should have their own staff complement).

Privatization advocates often claim that business is less wasteful and more efficient than the public sector. But according to the Seniors Advocate's most recent findings, contracted non-profit LTCF operators spend \$10,000 (or 24%) more per year on care for each resident than for-profit providers even though the public funding levels are equal. In 2017-18, for-profit LTCFs failed to deliver 207,000 funded direct care hours, whereas non-profit LTCFs exceeded direct care hour targets by delivering an additional 80,000 hours of direct care beyond what they were publicly funded to deliver.

These are significant issues in their own right. Care workers are being underpaid relative to the funding that operators receive. But even if we are unconcerned about fairness, low staffing levels are not conducive to quality care.

Although for-profit companies outnumbered public and non-profit providers in the 2013 Statistics Canada Long-Term Care Facilities Survey, they reported spending less on care aides, licensed practical nurses and other health care staff,

and less on dietary, housekeeping and maintenance workers. Low staffing places both workers and residents under increased stress and reduces the time carers have with residents.

And as the B.C. Seniors Advocate report points out, low pay and understaffing are a vicious circle. They make it difficult to recruit and retain staff, while operators that employ staff directly (no subcontracting) and pay higher wages do not experience the same kinds of shortages.

We can see all of the dynamics mentioned here at work in the four LTCFs that are part of the Retirement Concepts chain owned by China-based Dajia Insurance (successor company of Anbang Insurance Group), where persistent staff shortages were compromising resident care and safety. Prior to COVID-19, regional health authorities took over management of these Retirement Concepts homes and brought in their own nursing staff. And in early May, Alberta Health Services similarly intervened in a Retirement Concepts facility in Calgary.

A key reason for staffing challenges is that many LTCF staff, namely care aides, must work more than one job in order to make ends meet. While the provincial government committed to review contracting and subcontracting in the sector after the crisis, the newly announced single-site order, increasing wages to the industry standard, and guaranteed full-time hours at one site are as yet only guaranteed for six months.

The risks of for-profit ownership and financialization

A large body of academic research shows that staffing levels and staffing mix are key predictors of resident health outcomes and care quality, and that care provided in for-profit long-term care facilities is generally inferior to that provided by public and non-profit facilities. High staff turnover, which is linked to lower wages and the heavy workloads demanded by inadequate staffing levels, is associated with lower quality care in for-profit facilities.

The B.C. government's long-standing reliance on attracting private capital into the seniors' care sector has benefited corporate chains with the ability to finance and build new facilities. Between 2009-10 and 2017-18, B.C. only invested \$37.4 million in LTCF infrastructure, and \$3.3 million in assisted living infrastructure, representing on average 0.5% and 0.04%, respectively, of total health sector capital spending over this period. In other words, not much at all. By 2016, corporate chains controlled 34% of all publicly subsidized and private-pay long-term care and assisted living spaces in B.C. while 66% of units were owned by either non-profit agencies or health authorities.

Another way to look at the significance of corporate chains is by looking at the top 10 largest corporate chains by market share or share of the total publicly

subsidized and private-pay units in B.C. controlled by the top 10 chains. As of 2016, over one-quarter (27%) of all assisted living and long-term care units in the province were controlled by the top 10 corporate chains collectively. Among contracted operators, Retirement Concepts (owned by Anbang/Dajia Insurance) controls the greatest share of assisted living and long-term care units in B.C. It has 2,158 units, or 7.8% market share of publicly subsidized and private-pay units, more than double the number of units held by the second largest chain.

Corporate chains pose risks to quality of care. While the growth of chains has received less attention in health services research in Canada, a prominent U.S. study found that “the top 10 for-profit chains received 36 per cent higher deficiencies and 41 per cent higher serious deficiencies than government facilities,” and that other for-profit facilities had “lower staffing and higher deficiencies than government facilities.” A 2008 study in the journal *Health Affairs* showed that staffing levels—a key predictor of care quality—were already falling before the takeover by private equity investors. Another U.S. study looking at one large chain, published in the journal *Inquiry* in 2017, found that there were no significant changes in staffing levels following private equity purchase, “in part because staffing levels in large chains were already lower than staffing in other ownership groups.”

Corporate chain consolidation in seniors' care is a reflection of financialization in the health care and housing sectors. Financialization occurs when traditionally non-financial firms become dominated by, or increasingly engage in, practices that have been common to the financial sector. Globally there is growing interest among investors in seniors' care



Signs of support for workers at Eatonville Care Centre, a long-term care home in Toronto, after several residents died of the coronavirus disease in April.

REUTERS/CARLOS OSORIO

because the business has a footing in real estate markets. Seniors' care facilities are increasingly being treated as financial commodities that are attractive to global capital markets.

International experience, and the unfolding Retirement Concepts story in B.C. and Alberta, tell us that financialized care chains tend to employ risky business practices. Chains are frequently bought and sold using debt-leveraged buyouts, inflating asset sales prices and leaving the chains loaded with ever more debt. Eventually, cash flow, which is dependent on government funding, cannot meet a care chain's debt-servicing costs.

This situation can result in financial crisis, bankruptcy and chain failure, as documented in a 2016 report of the Manchester-based Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change. The United Kingdom's largest care chain, Southern Cross, collapsed in 2011 as a result of these risky financial practices and successive flips of the real estate assets to

different investors. Southern Cross's collapse created months of uncertainty for 31,000 residents and their families, as well as for the company's 44,000 employees, until other buyers could be lined up.

The financialized business model is often structured around short-term real estate flipping where government and taxpayers assume the financial risk of failure. The disruption that can result from these business practices undermines the conditions necessary for stable "relational care," in which continuity in staff allows care workers to know their residents and the rest of the staff. The opposite of relational care is high staff turnover and workforce instability, which can have a negative effect on quality. This has been occurring at the five Retirement Concepts facilities subject to health authority intervention.

Rebuilding seniors' care in B.C. The COVID-19 crisis is exposing the long-term impacts of policies aimed at cutting costs and expanding the

role of for-profit companies in the seniors' care sector in B.C. Reduced pay and benefits and understaffing are bad for workers; they are also bad for vulnerable older people who depend on those workers to meet their daily needs. The pandemic may be unprecedented in recent times, but its impacts are being felt in LCTFs because of the way seniors' care has been undervalued, underfunded and privatized.

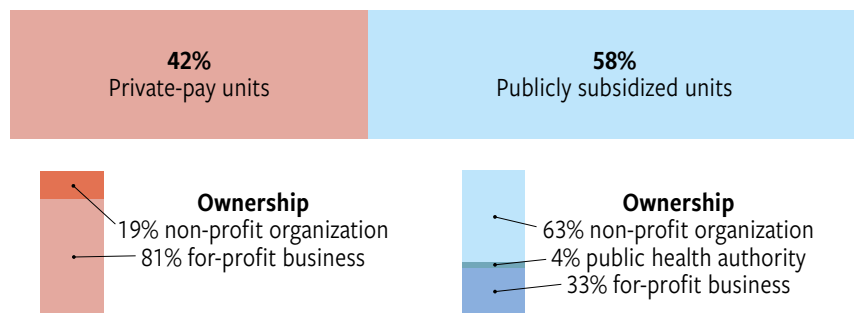
Policy can be steered in a different direction, however. Over the medium and long terms, the B.C. government should end its reliance on contracting with for-profit companies and transition exclusively to non-profit and public delivery of seniors' care. The same will be true in all other provinces, regardless of whether COVID-19 took hold of LCTFs in the same way as in B.C., Ontario and Quebec.

The evidence is in: profit-making does not belong in seniors' care. The revelation from the Seniors Advocate—that contracted for-profit LCTFs failed to deliver funded direct care hours—should be reason enough to determine that the government is getting poor value for money by contracting with corporations. Public dollars are flowing into profits, not into frontline care as intended.

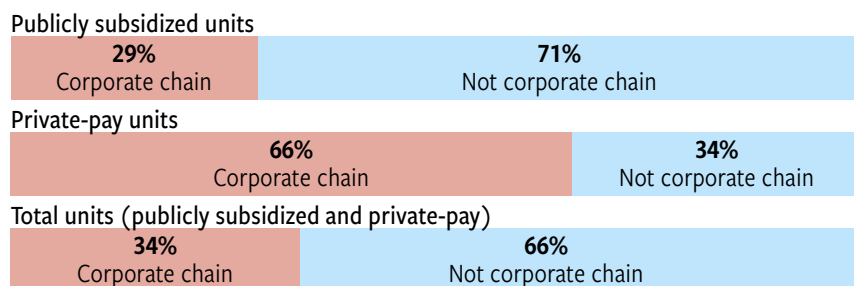
Moreover, April's single-site public health order is largely a response to the erosion of wages and working conditions in long-term care that began in the early 2000s. In mere weeks, the B.C. government was trying to rectify workforce instabilities brought about over years of labour policy deregulation and business practices intended to drive profits. These policy decisions were championed by care companies and corporate chains. Once the current crisis is over, we simply cannot return to the status quo.

The B.C. government needs to move boldly on a capital plan to start building new seniors' care infrastructure and acquiring for-profit-owned facilities. Its longstanding policy approach has

Assisted living units by funding type in British Columbia, 2016



Share of assisted living and long-term care units controlled by corporate chains in British Columbia, 2016



SOURCES: AUTHOR'S CALCULATIONS FROM DATA OBTAINED FROM THE OFFICE OF THE SENIORS ADVOCATE, 2016B, AND ASSISTED LIVING REGISTRY AS OF MARCH 31, 2016.

allowed corporations and their investors to build up large real estate portfolios on the public dime while receiving generous public funding that simply assumes, often wrongly, that the facilities are paying unionized wages.

The B.C. government said that it will cost about \$10 million per month to provide “top-up” funding to increase wages to the unionized industry standard so that no worker loses income as a result of the single-site order. It appears these public dollars will flow to employers that up to now have not been paying the unionized industry standard rate. Structuring the wage top-up in this manner raises some concerns.

The top-up will go to some employers who are already funded to pay the unionized rate. As noted above, the Seniors Advocate found that a significant number of long-term care operators have been funded using a formula that is based on the unionized industry standard rate but have failed to pay their workers commensurately. In practice, the top-up means these operators will be rewarded for over-charging the public.

Instead, these operators should be compelled to pay the unionized wage rate—without additional funding—and to become part of the public sector labour relations structure, as was required of all publicly funded operators before the early 2000s. The provincial government also recently announced that the B.C. Care Providers Association, a long-term care industry group, will receive \$10 million to administer an infection control program for LTCFs. Public dollars for a government program should be disbursed by government, not by private industry.

Topping up operators who have underpaid their workers is not a cost-effective strategy now or beyond the current pandemic. But neither is it tenable to suggest that these workers will get a pay cut after the pandemic, or that they should return to cobbling together an income through multiple part-time jobs. All of which reinforces the need to move to consistent public and non-profit ownership and delivery of care.

Immediate steps the government should take

First, the province should require much greater transparency, public reporting and accountability in the seniors’ care sector. This should include implementation of the Seniors Advocate’s recommendation that public funding for direct care in contracted LTCFs must be spent on direct care only, and to require standardized reporting in all LTCFs, including public disclosure of audited revenues and expenditures.

These recommendations align with a recent CCPA-BC report that looks at the growth of private for-profit seniors’ care, titled *Assisted Living in British Columbia: Trends in access, affordability and ownership* (February 2020), available on the CCPA’s Reports and Studies webpage: www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports. Over the longer term, moving

exclusively to non-profit and public delivery of seniors’ care addresses this problem. Public institutions and non-profits don’t have investors; any excess revenue is reinvested into frontline care.

Second, the province should ban subcontracting. The B.C. government rightly repealed Bills 29 and 94 in 2018, but subcontracting continues to undermine employment standards that are preconditions for quality care. COVID-19 has made this very clear. The industry-wide labour relations and bargaining model, established in the 1990s, provided standardized wages and working conditions. This structure needs to be put back together and, following the end of special COVID-19 measures, existing operators should be part of the public sector master collective agreements if they are receiving public funding. This was the case before the early 2000s.

Third, in the assisted living sector, seniors in both publicly subsidized and private-pay units need much greater protections regarding tenancies, rents and fees, as the incomes of seniors’ and their families may decline significantly during the pandemic. We know from CCPA research and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation data that assisted living costs continue to rise faster than the incomes of many low- and middle-income seniors.

Fourth, public funds should not be used to bail out overleveraged corporations in the seniors’ care sector. The impact of COVID-19 on international financial markets will likely have knock-on effects. The provincial government should be prepared for the possible financial collapse of for-profit LTCFs—and prepared to take over these facilities and chains.

When we emerge from this crisis, there should be a public consultation on the kind of seniors’ care system we want in our province and across Canada, drawing on lessons from the pandemic. In fact, the Ontario government isn’t waiting: on May 19, the province announced it was launching an “independent commission into Ontario’s long-term care system,” with details to be announced in the coming months. These provincial reviews should inform a comprehensive planning approach to projecting demand and identifying appropriate transitions for seniors across the continuum of home and community-based services.

This crisis is highlighting how the exclusion of seniors’ care from Canada’s universal medicare system, and the inconsistencies across and within the provinces, lead to uneven conditions for seniors, their families and workers. This unevenness creates the vulnerabilities that we are seeing now, and the disproportionate impacts on older people in care and those struggling to look after them.

We have the evidence and tools to rebuild seniors’ care. COVID-19 has revealed the urgency of doing so. **M**

Meet Fay Martin, Monthly Donor

As often as we can, the *Monitor* likes to get to know one of the CCPA's incredible supporters. In this issue we speak with Fay Martin of Minden, Ontario.

Hi Fay. These are trying times. How have you been affected by the pandemic?

In my volunteer life, which focuses on affordable housing, our fundraising strategy is being savaged. We had to shelve our March fundraiser and mid-summer event, a timed run, because people are not supposed to gather. We debated if we should fundraise at all at a time when our sister organizations, who are much more immediately affected by the pandemic, have their hands out. But we decided to organize a creative wood stacking competition via Facebook, since it would be a seasonal activity (before the black flies arrive) and nobody's working, so there's more time than usual to devote to it.

I am really fortunate because I live in a roomy house in a rural area, so my lockdown space is palatial. And I can access any of the essential services with little risk—there's always lots of room to distance, and mostly people have been diligent and careful. I am becoming (more or less) technologically competent at electronic platforms for local committee and board meetings. But the inequity of broadband access has become glaringly evident during this time. After the pandemic, I plan to turn up the heat on the issue of broadband as a right of citizenship.



Tell us about someone who has inspired you recently.

Not a particular person so much as the daily acts of community and caring that I see and hear about. That said, I have been very proud to see women performing so competently and graciously under pressure during the pandemic. Dr. Bonnie Henry is rightfully becoming a national icon. Chrystia Freeland is measured, clear and courageous. Patty Hajdu epitomizes the competent, well-briefed manager. Carla Qualtrough's comfort with getting things right, one step at a time, is wonderful to see.

Globally, countries with women leaders seem to be best at engaging their people in taking civic responsibility. You can say Jacinda Ardern had an easy time of it because she's PM of a small island, but you have

to admit she showed admirable git-'er-done leadership.

What made you decide to give monthly to the CCPA?

I trust the CCPA to be persevering and predictable and precise in what it focuses on and how it peels the onions of choice. I think I remember a pre-CCPA world, when to really get a grip on complex issues, you had to search far and wide, wade through sourdough academic writing (dense and chewy, such hard work you forget what's in the sandwich), and take leaps of faith about the veracity of the analysis.

What are your hopes for the future?

Actually, I'm hoping that COVID-19, if it keeps our noses to the grindstone long enough for us to develop new habits, and our leaders are creative and savvy enough to figure out how to keep us all engaged for that length of time, leads to a paradigmatic change that can be maintained post-crisis.

My new world would start with the truths that humanity is part of nature, not its boss; that equality is not the same as equity; and that we are only as strong as our weakest part. These are all lessons the virus is trying to teach us, if we can still ourselves to listen, and if we can find the courage to act humanely.



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The good news page

COMPILED
BY ELAINE HUGHES

In January, New Jersey passed a law aiming to have 330,000 electric cars on state roads by the end of 2025, and 85% electrification by 2040. / The company magniX, which launched the first all-electric commercial aircraft in Vancouver last December, announced this May that its even larger all-electric Cessna Grand Caravan 208B, a partnership with aerospace firm AeroTEC, had completed its first successful test flight. / Bangalore-based company Altigreen said in March it is preparing to debut a fully electric three-wheel rickshaw that will cost drivers 350,000 rupees (about \$6,300). Last year, the Indian government said all two- and three-wheel vehicles would need to be electric by 2020. / German startup Sinn Power hopes to begin testing its floating solar-wind-wave modular power grid off the Greek coast very soon. The system combines standard wave energy conversion units on a floating platform that can be combined with solar panels above and micro wind turbines on each corner of the combined unit, to produce 26 kilowatt-hours of renewable

energy. / [NPR / Good News Network / CNN / Forbes](#)

On April 24, the Hubble telescope celebrated its 30th birthday with an astonishing image of the nebulae NGC 2014 (in red, pictured) and NGC 2020 (blue), both part of a star-forming region 163,000 light years from Earth. / For the first time in England since the 1400s, wild storks have produced offspring. Three years ago, conservationists introduced 20 wild stork pairs from Poland and France at three separate locations in the U.K. in the hope of reintroducing the native birds. / A pack of beagles, trained from birth to protect wildlife, has been credited with saving the lives of 45 South African rhinos threatened by poachers since 2018. / UBC marine biologist Amanda Vincent has won the 2020 Indianapolis Prize for her trailblazing work to protect seahorses and other marine life. In 1996, Vincent successfully convinced the International Union for the Conservation of Nature to include seahorses, often sold for traditional medicines or aquarium displays, on its "red list" and has since convinced many countries to suspend trade in dried seahorses. / A lawsuit brought in the 1990s by the indigenous Ashaninka people of Brazil against illegal logging in their part of the Amazon has finally ended with a public statement of apology and a \$3 million award, which will be used mainly for reforestation projects. / Thanks to conservation funds from the European



Union, and a 2017 law against sand-dredging along the Sre Ambel River, Cambodia's royal turtle, thought to be extinct two decades ago, got a new lease on life this year with the hatching of 23 eggs in southwestern Koh Kong province. / Numbers of critically endangered wild gibbons on China's tropical Hainan Island have tripled since 2003, from only 13 to 30, thanks to the efforts of Kadoorie Conservation China, which has planted 80,000 fig and lychee trees to link existing habitat patches and encourage isolated populations to meet and interact. / [CBC / White Stork Project / National Geographic / UBC News / Mongabay / Reuters / Good News Network](#)

Spanish almond farmers in one of the country's driest areas are turning to preindustrial methods to bring new life to the land by reducing tillage and leaving grassy plants to wither in the fields, forming fertiliser that protects the soil. / Jyoti Kumari, a 15-year-old girl, biked her father Mohan Paswan, an injured

and out-of-work migrant worker, 750 miles from the outskirts of New Delhi to their home village of Sirhullu in the northeastern state of Bihar. On hearing of the trip, Onkar Singh, chairman of the Cycling Federation of India, contacted Jyoti to urge her to try out for the national team. "I'm elated, I really want to go," she told the *New York Times*. / Thomas Moore, a British Second World War veteran who walked laps of the 25-metre loop in his Bedfordshire, England garden to raise £32,794,701 (about \$55,600,000) for the National Health Service, received the honorary title of colonel on his 100th birthday, April 30, and was knighted for his efforts. / Last but not least, Alphabet subsidiary Sidewalk Labs has abandoned plans to build a privatized, sensor-laden and data-intrusive neighbourhood on the Toronto waterfront that privacy watchdogs and other opponents of the project described as a dystopian surveillance nightmare. Good riddance. / [Reuters / NYTimes / BBC / CBC](#)

JOHN FOSTER

Canada, black swans and oil

Fossil fuels can be produced much more cheaply outside North America. But war and sanctions offer no long-term solutions to oversupply—let alone climate change.

JUST 12 YEARS ago, oil exceeded US\$100 per barrel. In April this year, prices crashed below zero for the first time ever. How could that happen? The shutting down of economies during the coronavirus pandemic provides a partial answer, but the story is more complex. It involves miscalculations in both the U.S. and Canada.

President Trump and many media blamed the price collapse on an alleged spat between Saudi Arabia and Russia. Saudi Arabia and Russia are the world's second and third largest oil producers. However, the U.S. is number one, producing more oil than either country. Canada is number four.

During the past 10 years, North American oil output doubled, essentially because of fracking in the U.S. and expanding oil sands extraction in Canada. The production tsunami created a bonanza for North America but also flooded the world oil market, leading to the earlier price collapse in 2014-15.

The U.S. and Canada continued expanding production, expecting Saudi Arabia and other countries to cut back. To some extent, this happened. In late 2016, 24 oil-producing countries hammered out a historic accord to alleviate the world oil glut. They agreed to cut output by about 1.2 million barrels per day for six months.

These countries subsequently extended cuts through March 2020. Signatories included not only the 13 member countries of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), but also 11 others led by Russia (the OPEC+

group). Oil prices improved substantially. The U.S. and Canada, who were not among the signatories, freeloaded off the agreement by continuing to increase production.

This March, the OPEC+ group faced a crisis. How far was it willing to cut production again to underpin the world oil market? Demand was falling with the pandemic, yet North American production continued to expand. Russia was willing to extend existing cuts; Saudi Arabia wanted to increase them. The meeting ended without consensus. The next day, Saudi Arabia slashed its prices and opened up the spigots. World oil prices fell to record lows.

Some observers perceived a strategy—concerted or not—to derail the U.S. fracking industry. The Kremlin refuted the idea, telling reporters, “there are no price wars between Russia and Saudi Arabia.... We know the huge U.S. oil sector is now in distress because of these prices. There is a serious crisis, we also understand this.”

With alarm bells ringing, Trump phoned Putin on March 30. According to the Kremlin readout,

the two leaders agreed to hold Russo-American consultations through their ministers of energy. Trump told Fox News, “We don’t want to have a dead industry that’s wiped out... It’s bad for everybody. This is a fight between Saudi Arabia and Russia.” Alberta Premier Jason Kenney commented, “OPEC+ started this fire and they have to put it out. We’re not going to surrender our industry and we’re prepared to go the distance.”

OPEC+ countries took action on April 9, announcing huge cuts of almost 10 million barrels per day from May to June, eight million b/d from July to December, and six million b/d from January 2021 to April 2022. They called on major producers worldwide to help stabilize the market.

The next day, Saudi Arabia hosted a virtual meeting of G20 countries. The final communiqué said blandly, “We commit to take all the necessary and immediate measures to ensure energy market stability.” Neither Ottawa nor Washington promised specific cuts at the meeting.

The OPEC+ cuts were far less than the anticipated 20-million-b/d or more drop in global demand. With the oil glut, storage installations became full and the bottom fell out of the market.

On April 20, the U.S. benchmark West Texas Intermediate price for May deliveries crashed below zero for the first time ever. Suppliers were paying customers to take oil off their hands. In subsequent days, the U.S. price hovered around US\$10-15 per barrel. The oilsands

Should the U.S. and Canada shore up an industry whose future is questionable? What about the banks saddled with bad loans?

price, Western Canadian Select, floated around US\$0–5 per barrel. Subsequently, both benchmark prices improved but remained below production costs.

In early June, OPEC+ countries extended the May–June production cuts an additional month and the WTI benchmark approached US\$40 per barrel. Whether this will tempt some U.S. or Canadian producers to reopen shut-in operations is too early to know.

The price collapse was calamitous for both fracking and oilsands operations. They are both high cost operations, initiated when prices exceeded US\$100 per barrel. The prevailing wisdom then was that production had peaked and scarcity loomed. During the 2020 price collapse, companies were unable to cover operating costs, let alone capital overhead. U.S. oil and gas producers closed wells, suspended drilling and axed new projects. With a glut of both oil and gas, numerous producers faced bankruptcy.

Trump ordered his administration to formulate a financial rescue plan for the U.S. oil industry. Texas regulators debated whether to curtail production, the first time in five decades. Alberta oilsands producers cut capital expenditures and shuttered production totalling almost one million barrels per day.

Ottawa announced financial support for Canadian oil companies to help them clean up contaminated sites and reduce methane emissions. It offered pandemic bridge financing for large Canadian businesses. Most remaining oilsands operations are Canadian owned. International investors left the oilsands earlier, to pursue cheaper oil projects elsewhere.

Should the U.S. and Canada shore up an industry whose future is questionable? What about the banks saddled with bad loans?

Relatively speaking, Russia and Saudi Arabia are sitting pretty. Russia's finance ministry revised its 2020 budget to reflect a US\$20 oil price. While Russia needs a breakeven price of about US\$40 per barrel to balance its budget, it has “enough resources to cushion the blow,” according to the Kremlin. To cover the shortfall, Russia can use its National Wealth Fund accumulated from oil revenues. Besides, Russian oil is very cheap to produce. Its largest oil producer, Rosneft, enjoys operating costs of about US\$2.50 per barrel (about \$3.50/barrel in Canadian dollars).

Saudi Arabia is a petro-state *par excellence*. It too has huge foreign exchange reserves to help weather the oil price collapse. While it needs a breakeven price of about US\$85 per barrel to balance its budget, it can meet the shortfall by borrowing, cutting non-essential projects and financing from its Public Investment Fund. However, austerity has also come into play. To further shore up government finances, the Saudi Finance Minister announced in May he would be raising the value-added tax from 5% to 15% and cancelling a cost-of-living allowance for state workers worth about

\$375 a month. Its national oil company, Saudi Aramco, has operating costs in the US\$2.50–2.80 range.

Trump warned he would get involved “at the appropriate time.” Oil producing countries shuddered, remembering previous interventions.

President George W. Bush invaded Iraq, claiming his motive was weapons of mass destruction, but insiders have revealed his oil agenda. Libyan exports remain sporadic following NATO's 2011 military intervention. U.S. sanctions batter Iran, which has the world's fourth largest oil reserves. Western oil sanctions affect Syria too, which used to produce oil mostly for local use. U.S. troops now occupy Syria's eastern oilfields, illegally.

In addition, Western sanctions hammer Venezuela, a country with the world's largest oil reserves. As a result of sanctions, Venezuelan oil exports have tanked. Canada cheerleads the clamour for regime change, alleging Venezuela's democracy deficit. Unable to import Venezuelan heavy crude, U.S. refineries switched to using more oilsands bitumen. Numerous U.S. refineries have invested in the expensive units that can upgrade bitumen. Outside the U.S. and Alberta, such refineries are rare.

While Iraq's oil exports have recovered, those of Iran, Syria and Venezuela remain disrupted. Washington continues implacable pressure for regime change despite the pandemic. By disrupting their oil exports, sanctions help both U.S. fracking companies and Canadian producers. Ottawa is complicit in support of Washington. Western sanctions are not endorsed by the United Nations.

Washington has applied its sanctions against trading with Iran worldwide. Further, U.S. sanctions against European companies have delayed completion of Nord Stream 2, a joint venture gas pipeline from Russia to Germany. The U.S. wants to reduce Russian gas supplies to Europe and substitute its own higher priced gas. What's going on is economic warfare.

Black swans—rare and unpredictable events that seem obvious only in hindsight—lurk everywhere. The future of oil globally and in Canada remains uncertain. After the pandemic, will world demand resume its previous trajectory? How far will prices recover?

Analysts question whether consumption will return to pre-pandemic levels quickly, or at all. Is a support package for the oil industry a panacea? It may provide life support, but long-term prospects remain problematic for oilsands and fracking alike.

The reality is oil can be produced much more cheaply outside North America. War and sanctions fail to offer long-term solutions to oversupply. Meanwhile, global warming is hatching new black swans every year. Miscalculations in both the oil industry and governments will be costly for all. **M**

John Foster is author of *Oil and World Politics: The real story of today's conflict zones* (Lorimer Books, 2018).

ASAD ISMI

Journalism under attack in Assange case

U.S. Espionage Act charges against WikiLeaks founder may compromise fundamental rights and freedoms at home and abroad

IN A LETTER to the *New York Times* in 1970, British historian Arnold Toynbee said the United States “has become the world’s nightmare.” It turned out they were just getting started. Through its many wars, covert operations and economic destabilizations, the U.S. government has immiserated and killed millions of people in the Global South. Washington’s aim in this carnage, under a thin cloak of liberal internationalism, has been to enrich itself and its Western client states including Canada, Britain and Australia.

Official documents that show the workings of this sordid enterprise are leaked once in a while by brave whistleblowers inside the U.S. empire. The most famous is surely Daniel Ellsberg, who in 1971, a year after Toynbee irritated the U.S. establishment with his judgment, released the Pentagon Papers containing the secret history of the Vietnam War, and became a hero for doing so.

Julian Assange continues this venerable tradition and is paying a high price for it. The WikiLeaks founder is currently being held at the high security Belmarsh prison in the U.K. while he awaits trial to determine if he will be extradited to the U.S. In a November letter to the British government, 60 doctors attested to Assange’s deteriorating physical and mental health and warned he could die in prison. The Trump administration has charged Assange with 17 counts of violating the Espionage Act, introduced in 1917 to criminalize socialist

opposition to the First World War. If found guilty, Assange could face up to 175 years in jail.

In 2010, WikiLeaks published hundreds of thousands of classified U.S. military and State Department documents leaked by U.S. army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning, herself jailed in 2013 until former president Obama commuted her 35-year sentence in January 2017. (Manning was jailed again last year for refusing to testify about WikiLeaks before a grand jury, but she has since been released.) The “document dumps that shook the world,” as the BBC described the WikiLeaks cache, showed massive U.S. war crimes in Washington’s Iraq and Afghanistan invasions, including the killing of tens of thousands of civilians by U.S. forces, and the use of death squads, torture and kidnappings in both wars.

“The video was the key document: it shook people up by showing how badly the U.S. forces had behaved in Iraq,” says Julian Burnside, a human rights lawyer based in Melbourne, Australia and a supporter of Assange, who is an Australian citizen. He is referring to the infamous, grainy video revealed by WikiLeaks that showed the crew of a U.S. Apache helicopter in Iraq gunning down 12 civilians including two Reuters reporters. “Ha ha, I hit ‘em,” exults the helicopter pilot.

Six years later, WikiLeaks released “The Yemen Files,” which exposed U.S. complicity in Saudi Arabia’s devastating war on Yemen and Washington’s spying on U.N. officials. But its vast cache of U.S. diplomatic

cables would also embarrass the Obama administration on its Libya policy and trade objectives (deregulation) for the failed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the European Union, among other files. If the government didn’t move then to prosecute Assange it was “because it risked criminalizing subsequent national security journalism,” according to *USA Today* in a recent article.

The Trump Administration, with its much lower opinion of the free press, had no such qualms. Its prosecution of Assange is “very dangerous” for journalism and human rights, emphasizes Burnside. Even the U.S. mainstream press, which had been attacking Assange for years before the 17 charges were brought against him, seems to agree.

According to Charlie Savage of the *New York Times*, the Assange case “could open the door to criminalizing activities that are crucial to American investigative journalists who write about national security matters.” Much of what Assange does at WikiLeaks “is difficult to distinguish in a legally meaningful way from what traditional news organizations like *The Times* do: seek and publish information that officials want to be secret, including classified national security matters, and take steps to protect the confidentiality of sources,” he wrote in May.

The *Washington Post*’s media columnist Margaret Sullivan called Trump’s indictment against Assange “despicable” in a May 2019 article. She said it was alarming how the

case might result in “the architects of secret, and possibly illegal or immoral, government programs [being] the same people who get to decide whether information about them is made public.”

Ben Norton, assistant editor of *The Grayzone*, a leftist independent media website in the U.S., has said “the U.S. government’s campaign against Julian Assange is one of the gravest threats to press freedoms in modern history.” Norton pointed out that, “in its relentless assault on civil liberties, the Trump administration has the dubious distinction of breaking two records at once: indicting a journalist under the Espionage Act for the first time, and indicting a non-U.S. citizen.”

This last point shows that the Trump indictment is an attack not only on the U.S. press but on journalists all over the world.

Norton blames the mainstream media, including the *New York Times*, for encouraging Trump’s indictment against Assange by denigrating the whistleblower for years. “This is the ultimate irony,” Norton explains. “The very same institutions and people that stand to lose the most from Assange being thrown in prison are those that helped put the noose around his neck

“As journalists in the U.S. and around the world now stare down the barrel of a gun, it must be said clearly: Everyone who demonized WikiLeaks and Julian Assange put the ammo in that weapon, paving the way for Trump’s historic attack on press freedoms.”

Donn Hallinan, an analyst with Foreign Policy in Focus, agrees with Norton and speaks gravely about a major crisis in the media. U.S. news outlets have “covered up the criminal nature of American foreign policy [and] downplayed the major threats to humanity, like climate change and nuclear war,” he says. “Those chickens are coming home to roost. Will it change? Not by itself. Most of the media is owned by people who want to keep the public in the dark.”

In December 2010, Assange was charged with rape in Sweden and released on bail, after which he fled to the U.K. The leftist Correa government in Ecuador granted Assange citizenship and a place to stay in the country’s London embassy so that he would avoid extradition to Sweden to face trial. But this citizenship was withdrawn in 2019 by Correa’s successor, Lenin Moreno, who forced Assange out of the embassy and into the arms of waiting U.K. police. Later in 2019, Swedish prosecutors dropped the rape charge (which Assange denied), stating that “the evidential situation has been weakened to such an extent that there is no longer any reason to continue the investigation.”

Guillaume Long, Correa’s foreign minister, tells me he “believed that Assange’s life, integrity and human rights were at risk for having exposed war crimes,” and that his role “was to uphold and defend Ecuador’s respect for the institution of asylum, at the same time as trying to find a way out of the diplomatic impasse

while abiding to Ecuador’s commitments to protect Assange and to international law.”

While Assange was there, the Ecuadorian embassy in London hired UC Global, a Spanish security firm led by David Morales, to protect Assange. Shortly afterwards, according to charges brought against Morales in Spain, the company is alleged to have started spying on Assange and on Ecuadorian embassy staff on behalf of U.S. intelligence. Ex-employees of UC Global exposed the alleged arrangement to Assange’s lawyers after his arrest, and then to Spanish authorities, who jailed Morales last August. He was released on bail in October and charged with violating both Assange’s privacy and attorney-client privileges, along with bribery and money laundering.

According to an article in *The Grayzone*, the documents submitted in court, which come from UC Global computers, “detail an elaborate and apparently illegal U.S. surveillance operation in which the security firm spied on Assange, his legal team, his American friends, U.S. journalists, and an American member of Congress who had been allegedly dispatched to the Ecuadorian embassy by President Donald Trump. Even the Ecuadorian diplomats whom UC Global was hired to protect were targeted by the spy ring.”

Morales’s actions appear to have gone beyond spying. According to witness statements seen by *The Grayzone*, Morales allegedly proposed breaking into Assange’s lawyer’s office (it was burglarized several weeks later). Witnesses have also testified to there being an alleged proposal to kidnap or poison Assange. Police found two handguns with serial numbers removed and stacks of cash at Morales’s home.

The alleged U.S. spying on the Ecuadorian embassy in London would amount to “a very serious violation of international law and the rules that regulate international diplomacy, as well as a very serious breach of Ecuadorian sovereignty,” says Long. “The fact that the Ecuadorian government has not protested this, or taken any action in response to it, speaks volumes about the new relationship that the Moreno government has established with the Trump administration: one of total surrogacy.”

Since 9/11, the U.S. national security state has been steadily eroding human and civil rights under the pretext of fighting terrorism, to the point where journalism itself is now under threat. Britain and Canada have followed suit, attempting to build all-powerful surveillance states whose policies are increasingly secret and so difficult to question.

“The case of Julian Assange is...the turning point,” warned WikiLeaks editor Kristinn Hrafnsson late last year. “It is the biggest and the most serious attack on journalism and the free press in decades, if not 100 years. If this extradition goes ahead, journalists around the world will have lost so much that it will be very hard, if not impossible, to get back the rights that we had before.” **M**

FIONA JEFFRIES

The small press and the pandemic

Independent and radical publishers have always been catalysts for social change during times of crisis

POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND social crises have historically acted as turning points in which ideas once treated as ludicrous, unimportant or dangerous suddenly become drivers of momentous social gains. Abolition, the expansion of voting rights, and the concept of minimum wages are good examples. Weekends and workplace safety, old age pensions, public education, civil rights and consumer protections are also on the long and illustrious list of things we now take for granted, but which we owe to past crises and struggles.

More often than not these ideas started out on the cultural and political periphery. More often than not they would have remained there had they not been championed in books from small, radical publishers. From the 18th century's revolutionary upheavals to the global surge of labour, socialist, feminist, abolitionist and anti-colonial struggles in the centuries that followed, small presses have played a vital role in circulating bold new visions of society and facilitating democratic institution building. In doing so, they faced outright repression and criminalization at the hands of panicky monarchs and censorious authoritarians, and the persistent ruinous shenanigans of monopoly capitalists.

It seems safe to say we would be in a much worse place today without small presses. And yet progressive publishers once again find themselves in the crosshairs of crisis. In Canada, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a new layer of challenges for small publishers on top of pre-existing conditions such as shoestring budgets, lean margins

and an economic system that favours corporate concerns. Bookstores have had to close, circulation networks are clogged up and online platforms like Amazon seem poised to gain an even stronger hold of the book market.

Small presses are bracing for a sharp drop in sales as well as a flood of returns from shuttered bookstores that scramble to make up lost revenue. This includes returns from university and independent bookstores, but potentially also from chains like Chapters Indigo, whose CEO Heather Reisman has publicly called attention to the behemoth's deep financial troubles. Bookstores are starting to reopen, but the pandemic has upended the shopping experience as patrons can't yet safely return to browsing the shelves with spontaneous abandon.

Nor can they partake in the pleasures of interacting with bookstore staff whose expertise and enthusiasm are crucial for getting the word out to the book buying public about titles that don't come with big marketing budgets. "People discover books in bookstores," says Amanda Crocker of Toronto-based publisher Between the Lines. But as Kate Edwards of the Association of Canadian Publishers tells me, in an industry that is largely organized around the production of blockbusters, it's much easier for people to select their books from the bestseller lists that large presses dominate, especially if the casual advice of local booksellers is not available.

The pandemic dealt another blow in the form of cancelled book launches, academic and professional conferences and book fairs. These

gatherings are a lifeline for presses with shoestring marketing budgets, but they only work if people can meet face to face. The widespread adoption of social distancing also closed schools and universities. As teachers and instructors scrambled to bring their classes online, they began to bombard small presses like Fernwood and Between the Lines with requests for free PDF copies of books.

Amazon took part in the mauling too when, soon after pandemic-related panic buying erupted, the company unexpectedly suspended its book orders and announced it would focus instead on more lucrative merchandise. Direct online sales are now higher than before, but publishers in general are not set up to do retail. When distancing was put in place, printers closed and the mail system became clogged. The ensuing disruption to supply chains posed a major hurdle in getting books to people. It's not surprising that Crocker describes publishing as an ecosystem. When one vital element falters, the knock-on effects on the whole are profound.

The pandemic has also exacerbated some of the older difficulties confronting small presses, says Edwards. Money has always been a challenge. But over the last couple of decades, small presses have been coping with the combined effects of inexorable digitization, growing concentration across the industry, the downward pressure on prices, and the rising cost of producing books.

One ongoing challenge deepened by the pandemic results from the

decades-old convention of allowing retailers to return any unsold books to the press for a full refund. At first gloss, this trade practice seems like a good way to support booksellers contending with the slim margins that define a market in which big presses with considerable budgets dominate the scene. But as Crocker explains, if a corporate chain decides to stock every store with a title that doesn't sell out, it can return the leftovers and the press is suddenly stuck with thousands of dollars of credit it now owes to the bookstore and a deluge of surplus books that already proved hard to sell in large volume.

Mass bookstore returns can easily throw off a small publisher's entire production schedule as new debts threaten to displace new books. Now imagine that scenario playing out on a national scale with chains, university bookstores and small independent stores simultaneously triggering this sort of shock on small press revenues.

The growing primacy of monopoly retail is another stubborn problem that the pandemic has inflamed. While they are competitors, over the last two decades corporate chain stores like Chapters Indigo and Amazon have simultaneously driven prices down, squeezing out small booksellers and focusing marketing on best-selling titles with hefty promotional and distribution budgets. Publishing costs have increased, Edwards explains, but "book prices have remained flat for 20 years while the culture of discounting has affected people's sense of the cost of a book." Presses have borne the brunt of this shift through diminishing margins.

This erosion of margins has coincided with the rise of ebooks, a galloping digital turn that has brought new ways to make and distribute books but also additional production costs. The new costs are not offset by ebook sales, which, according to Edwards, account for only 10% of all sales. The public's growing expectation to find books in multiple formats is one cost that publishers have to cover.

How radical presses are responding

The fissures and vulnerabilities that the pandemic laid bare have sparked the public's interest in critical analyses of the society that produced them. "People are hungry for in-depth analysis that will help us grapple with what's really happening now," Fazeela Jiwa of Fernwood Publishing affirms. For this reason, readers are flocking to the websites of the indie presses I talked to, including Fernwood, Between the Lines, and ARP Books. This is a promising development for the presses, even while it introduces another new challenge in a time of jumbled supply chains.

Radical publishing is a "critique of the system as it exists," says Crocker. Progressive publishers are unique in that they not only champion the critical ideas found in books, they are likewise attentive to *how* they publish

those books. While they lack hefty financial resources, they do have something that large, profit-oriented concerns do not: an open disposition and a limber structure that lends itself to the kind of experimentation demanded by our strange and unpredictable times.

In keeping with their roots in progressive movements, these small presses were quick to respond to the current crisis by joining in on the flurry of solidarity initiatives that erupted everywhere the pandemic touched down.

"Publishers and sellers quickly came up with really creative ideas [like] home delivery, curating packages for people, just a huge effort," says Edwards. Fernwood pitched in with the Winnipeg Mutual Aid Society, contributing books to be delivered as part of COVID care packages that included food, stuff for kids, and other essentials. "People loved that books were in the box!" exclaims Jiwa. Books are a tonic in hard times, ARP editor Irene Bindi tells me, "because they are the most giving of all."

Soon after the shutdown, Crocker initiated a meeting of radical publishers to strategize about how to take action. The discussion rapidly morphed into a new transnational initiative called the Radical Publishers Alliance. The budding consortium, whose participants include presses in Canada, the U.S. and the U.K., was the force behind #RadicalMay, a month-long virtual extravaganza of book launches, panels and discussions where presses could introduce audiences to books and authors, share resources and continue to nourish critical thought.

Amidst the chaos of furloughs and layoffs, child care, rent coming due, and anxiety about a world in free fall, #RadicalMay provided intensive skill-sharing sessions online. Some of these sessions involved teaching each other techniques for hosting virtual events, a skill that enriched daily online author talks that month. Readers couldn't be there in person, but the events allowed the audience to do something we'd never imagined being able to just a few weeks ago: to take part in at least one packed book event every day for a whole month.

The people I talked to for this article don't know yet if these actions will be enough to save small presses from the pandemic fallout. There is reason to be worried. Small presses have had an outsized cultural impact on our world and how we understand it. The books they have championed have historically been crucial to the circulation of new and radical ideas. But small presses need sales to continue to do this work. Books are sustenance, and their collective character joins us together. Buying small press books can help us deal with our virus-inflicted isolation. It is also a great way to help these catalytic institutions to endure. **M**

REVIEWED BY MARTIN LUKACS

Socialism or Bidenism

**BIGGER THAN BERNIE:
HOW WE GO FROM THE SANDERS
CAMPAIGN TO DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM**
MEAGAN DAY AND MICAH UETRICH

Verso (March 2020), \$33.95

**YESTERDAY'S MAN:
THE CASE AGAINST JOE BIDEN**
BRANKO MARCETIC

Verso (January 2020), \$25.95

THEY WERE LIKE two ships passing in the night. It was 1980, and Joe Biden had just been re-elected to the Senate from Delaware while Bernie Sanders had become mayor of the largest city in Vermont.

Even if Biden had won his campaign, he was losing his compass. Ronald Reagan had swept into the White House on a surge of right-wing momentum. And while Biden talked about the “middle class,” he had more or less embraced his elite agenda, abandoning the mantle he had donned to first get elected in 1972. “Win, lose, or draw, Joe Biden isn’t a liberal anymore,” his defeated Republican opponent crowed. “I think that’s a victory.”

Several hundred kilometres to his north, Sanders had taken a diametrically opposed approach to power.

Though Vermont at the time was still a resoundingly conservative state, Sanders had made no concessions, running instead as an unabashed democratic socialist. On winning he would immediately begin a pitched battle against the local conservative establishment, rallying the same working class voters whom Biden scorned, and ultimately transforming the city of Burlington into a beacon of progressivism.

By the time Biden and Sanders would meet head on in a Democratic primary, some four decades later, these characteristics would be even

more pronounced. Biden’s victory over Sanders would demonstrate the durability of the Democratic power structure and neoliberal ideology that Biden has served, and Sanders fought against, their entire careers. But the popularity of the campaign of the Vermont senator, astonishing considering the marginal status of democratic socialism a few short years ago, may prove that his are the politics of the future.

Biden’s story is told in Branko Marcetic’s *Yesterday’s Man: The Case Against Joe Biden*, a sobering account of a politician who, for much of the last decades, has governed as a conservative in all but name. Despite the polemical bent of the title, it’s an even-handed and deeply researched political biography. Marcetic ably traces how Biden took a leading role in transforming the Democrats from the party of the New Deal into a neoliberal force, supporting endless wars, instituting mass incarceration, and slashing welfare, ending his career as an incredibly vulnerable nominee against a right-wing pseudo-populist president unafraid to gesture to the left of the Democrats.

Though Marcetic doesn’t put it in quite so few words, Biden was in many respects the prototypical progressive neoliberal politician. As early as 1974, Biden began identifying as “a social liberal who was conservative fiscally.” Yet he would continue drifting further rightward during the Reagan years, bashing the president publicly but telling crowds that “we can’t solve all social problems by an endless succession of government programs.” Biden voted for Reagan’s tax cuts for the wealthy, the biggest in U.S. history (until Trump’s in 2018), exhibiting an obsession with federal deficits and spending cuts that would mark the rest of his career.

When Jesse Jackson, his primary opponent in the 1988 Democratic nomination, denounced politicians who are “combing their hair to the left like Kennedy and moving their policies to the right like Reagan,” everyone knew who he meant. Biden was eventually forced out of the race after plagiarizing from a U.K. Labour leader’s speech and being caught out lying about his supposed civil rights activism—a habit that would crop up again in 2020. On multiple occasions this winter, Biden claimed to have been arrested doing civil disobedience while trying to visit Nelson Mandela in South Africa, yet no such event ever transpired.

Under Clinton, for whom Biden provided something of a political model, the Democrats would do more to advance a right-wing economic agenda than the Republicans could ever have dreamed. He would help write and pass a crime bill—the “Biden crime law”—that would lead to the mass incarceration of mostly poor and Black people, doubling the prison population in the following two decades.

It was a fitting cap on a career of pushing reactionary criminal justice policies. Throughout the 1980s, Biden worked with notorious segregationist Strom Thurmond to escalate the “War on Drugs” (he would later eulogize Thurmond’s funeral). Under the presidency of George W. Bush, Biden would become the biggest Democratic enabler of the war on Iraq. He called the Patriot Act “measured and prudent,” and lamented that it didn’t give police more powers.

Biden would continue to play a conservative role as Obama’s vice president. He watered down Obamacare, steered the “war on terror” to counter-insurgency air war in seven different Muslim majority

countries, and became the foil of ruthless Republican negotiators like Mitch McConnell, who “realized that Biden was the administration’s soft underbelly,” Marcetic writes. McConnell’s greatest triumph was using Biden to extend Bush’s tax cuts in exchange for practically nothing, depriving the federal government of trillions of dollars in revenue.

Since establishment consensus held that it was Hilary Clinton’s turn to run for president, Biden bid his time. In the run-up to 2020, he tilted even more toward big donors, taking money from the superrich and Wall Street, big tech and fossil fuels. Wedding to his outdated notions of bipartisan chumminess, Biden suggested that Trump’s exit would lead his “Republican colleagues to have an epiphany.” It was a deluded conclusion befitting a man whose greatest career accomplishments had been helping implement Republican objectives.

Biden’s campaign for president has had all the markings of being a horrifying repeat of Clinton’s loss. In 2019, Biden would tell a ritzy audience of donors in Manhattan that if he won the presidency, “no one’s standard of living will change, nothing would fundamentally change.” His climate plan was written by a gas lobbyist. His main electoral strategy appears to be harkening back to a golden pre-Trump era that for millions of Americans never really was, while focusing on peeling off some of the Republican’s middle class suburban voters. And Trump, who has the bully’s knack for zoning in on and ridiculing his opponent’s weaknesses (in this case Biden’s mental deterioration), has given him the nickname “Sleepy Joe.”

It’s a sad irony that potential Democratic voters are stuck with a doddering upholder of the status quo at a moment when their appetite for fundamental change has never seemed greater or more urgent. That appetite for change isn’t even so new. But it has lacked for a movement, and a politician, up to the task of breaking through the power of the United States’ two capitalist parties.

That’s the argument that Meagan Day and Micah Uetrict make in *Bigger Than Bernie: How We Go from the Sanders Campaign to Democratic Socialism*. An analysis of Sanders’s trajectory and campaigns for the leadership of the Democratic party, the book doubles as an introductory guide to a fledgling democratic socialist current in the U.S. And it makes the case that, win or lose, the senator has provided an unlikely spur to a radical movement set on changes beyond Sanders’s agenda.

Sanders has gone about it by doing everything Biden told Democrats for decades not to do: speaking honestly about inequality, rejecting corporate money and showing the power of small donor fundraising, advocating for bold government investment in the place of deregulation and privatization, and calling overtly for class warfare against billionaires and the corporate elite.

Day and Uetrict are both *Jacobin* magazine staff and members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which lends the book its pamphleteer’s style: exuding the confidence of a stump speech, sprinkled with humour, and geared toward distilling socialist ideas in a plain manner. One conviction they are keen to impart is that socialism in America is not destined to flounder, as Werner Sombart once wrote, on “the shoals of roast beef and apple pie.” Bernie Sanders himself, after all, is a uniquely American leftist—the son of working class Jewish immigrants to New York, whose democratic socialist politics are rooted in homegrown traditions of civil rights activism, anti-imperialism and New Deal politics.

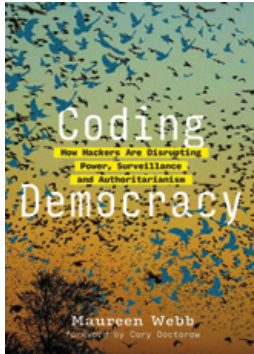
Day and Uetrict suggest that what distinguishes Sanders’s brand of electoral activism—and those of a recent spate of more local socialist successes, like the election of six Chicago city councillors—are “class-struggle campaigns.” It’s a useful concept to refer to campaigns in which candidates “openly identify as socialists, aren’t afraid to name the enemy, and work to build working-class movements beyond their election—and beyond electoral politics altogether.”

They also point to the electric growth of DSA, a predominantly non-electoral organization whose membership since Sanders’s first campaign has increased more than tenfold. As of late 2019, nearly 60,000 people have joined this big-tent socialist organization. That includes DSA’s highest profile member, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, who has remained with the group even after becoming a congresswoman. DSA has struggled, however, with a lack of racial diversity, and it is a weakness of the book that it offers only tepid explanations and no answers to changing this situation.

Where Day and Uetrict are strongest is in bucking a trend of despair on the left since Sanders’s loss. After five decades of political marginalization, socialist perspectives have completely shifted the arena of debate and discussion. Even in states that Sanders lost to Biden in the primary, his policies of a Green New Deal, Medicare for All, and higher wages proved overwhelmingly popular. Day and Uetrict’s conclusion is a convincingly hopeful one: Bernie’s campaign may have fallen short, but the socialist movement is better positioned than ever to keep growing.

But if Biden is thoroughly yesterday’s man, he is bewilderingly also today’s candidate. While Marcetic coolly dissects Biden’s shortcomings, what’s missing in his book is any analysis and clues to show how Biden might be susceptible to being pushed beyond an old neoliberal consensus. Without the kind of politics that Sanders proved popular, it’s hard to imagine Biden rallying the energy and enthusiasm among voters needed to beat Trump in November. **M**

Is computer code more powerful than legislation?



**CODING DEMOCRACY:
HOW HACKERS ARE DISRUPTING
POWER, SURVEILLANCE
AND AUTHORITARIANISM**
MAUREEN WEBB

MIT Press, April 2020, \$38.95

COMPUTER HACKERS ARE standard characters in the movies so many of us have been streaming to escape the pandemic. These unlikely rogue nerds hunch intently in front of multiple screens, fingers flying over keyboards, navigating the depths of cyberspace to penetrate the security systems of governments, ill-intentioned mega corporations and other criminal organizations. Or they use their eerie cyber skills to gather personal data, steal identities and otherwise advance the plot.

Hackers have also figured in some of the most dramatic real-life events of the past few decades—from Edward Snowden’s revelations about U.S. cyber spying, to Anonymous and WikiLeaks whistleblowers uncovering government and corporate misbehaviour, to the impacts of Putin-sponsored hackers and trolls on U.S. elections.

As more and more of our daily life, both personal and political, is conducted over the internet, the impacts hackers can have multiply

exponentially. Worrisome as their pranks and occasional criminality can be, Vancouver lawyer Maureen Webb argues in an important new book that hackers may also represent a healthy force for change, one that could help reinvent democracy for the 21st century.

Webb has been paying attention to these issues for a long time. She is the author of the influential 2007 book, *Illusions of Security*, about the post-9/11 rise of online state surveillance, and she serves on the board of directors of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association. (Full disclosure: I was a BCCLA board member as well, which is how I came to know and collaborate with Webb on liberty issues.) Think of Webb as our version of Dante’s Virgil. She is an interested, well informed lay person whose research, travels and reflections make her the perfect guide to the sometimes divine, sometimes infernal world of hackers.

As Webb tells the story, the hacker phenomenon started in the middle of the 20th century with a band of young eccentrics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The school housed an early mainframe IBM computer, and offered the first known university course in programming. The students, almost exclusively men, were nerds *avant la lettre* who became obsessed with using the computer to extend and elaborate an enormous model train layout they had created. Often breaking into offices at night, gorging on Chinese take-out, sleeping in their rumpled clothes and using the computer without permission, these brilliant if malodorous and unkempt young men invented the term “hacker” and did a lot to establish the hacker style.

From these beginnings, MIT students and faculty went on to become major figures in the development of computers, computer code and artificial intelligence. In 1970, Marvin Minsky, one of the early campus hackers, helped create an artificial intelligence lab at MIT. Journalist Steven Levy profiled these young men and their values in his 1984 book, *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*, in which he sketched out a six-point “Hacker Ethic” capturing the insurgents’ core beliefs:

1. The hands-on imperative. Access to computers should be unlimited and total.
2. All information should be free.
3. Mistrust authority. Promote decentralization.
4. Hackers should be judged by their hacking, not by bogus criteria such as degrees, age, race or position.
5. You can create art and beauty on a computer.
6. Computers can change your life for the better.

An important step forward in computer technology, and one explicitly grounded in the hacker ethic, was Richard Stallman’s pioneering work on “free software,” particularly the Linux/GNU operating system. In Stallman’s lexicon, “free software” does not necessarily come free of charge. It is software that users can access, modify and improve, and then pass on to others, with or without a charge. Software that is the proprietary secret of a company, locked away from user access (like Apple’s macOS, for example) represents the opposite of free software.

The hacker ethic spread like a computer virus in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Europe, especially after 1975, when Altair marketed the first kits allowing enthusiasts to build their own home devices. This DIY approach encouraged users to write their own computer code as well.

In California, early hacker groups included the Home Brew Computer Club and its associated newsletter, where Steve Wozniak, who later went on to design the first Apple computers, was an active member. California-based computer enthusiasts played an important role in opposing government attempts to regulate, control and spy on cyber activity.

Early hackers often saw themselves as rebels albeit on a broad spectrum from extreme libertarian right-wingers to anarcho-coders, the latter inspired by Vancouver-based writer William Gibson's early cyberpunk science fiction. But it wasn't too long before capitalism got interested in the money to be made in "cyberspace" (also Gibson's term).

As early as 1981, hackers at MIT founded a for-profit company called Symbolics, whose business plan was based on controlling the proprietary codes and programs they developed for private use and profit. And as the Silicon Valley area south of San Francisco emerged as a centre for cyber startups, many former hackers became entrepreneurs who believed they could be both rebels and titans of industry.

The hacker phenomenon surfaced in Europe a bit later than in North America. In 1982, a young German hacker named Wau Holland collaborated with other European pioneers to found the Chaos Computer Club. To be granted membership applicants had to submit an original quine, a sophisticated recursive joke written in computer code.

In an early media stunt, members of the CCC hacked a major Hamburg bank, transferring over a hundred thousand deutschmarks into an account the club controlled. The CCC members returned the money at a press conference the next day, explaining they had pulled off the cyberheist to demonstrate how vulnerable existing computer security arrangements were.

In 1987, West German police raided the CCC's headquarters and arrested Steffen Wernery for hacking into the computers of the Dutch electronics giant Phillips. Two years later, young German hackers, allegedly with ties to the CCC, broke into a group of European and U.S. systems and sold the access codes to the KGB. The CCC's Wau Holland publicly criticized the hackers who pulled off this ill-timed act of cyberespionage.

Webb suggests that the ensuing suspicious deaths of two young hackers may have been linked to the KGB incident. Things were getting serious in the world of hacking. With the launch of the World Wide Web in 1991, the possibilities for even more serious hacking emerged. And with those possibilities came attempts to

Orwell's Big Brother would have envied the network of privacy invasions constructed in the name of national security.

impose government and corporate control in the newly emerging wild west on the web.

The pushback from hackers and early "open internet" advocates was swift. Perhaps the most influential group to appear, in 1990, was the Electronic Frontier Foundation. Its founding members included John Gilmore from the Home Brew Computer Club, and (perhaps this book's most colourful character) John Perry Barlow, a Wyoming cattle rancher, libertarian and poet who wrote songs for the Grateful Dead. Barlow, who had some personal experience with government intrusion (having been interrogated by the FBI about a playful hack of the Apple system), announced the rationale for the EFF in a manifesto, "Crime and Puzzlement," which detailed anti-hacking crackdowns he and others had endured.

Where the EFF was relatively mild mannered and up front in the fight for freedom in cyberspace, an insurgent group of online activists led by Julian Assange upped the ante in 2006 with WikiLeaks, a searchable online database of documents hacked from government and corporate servers. WikiLeaks became famous in 2010 after revealing military atrocities committed by the U.S. during its illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq. The following year, the outfit actively supported the young rebels of the Arab Spring uprisings.

But it was arguably Edward Snowden who truly demonstrated to the world the power of a good hack. In 2013, the young National Security Agency contractor had a crisis of conscience that drove him to leak millions of classified files to the press. The data revealed the immensity of government cyberspying, and included captured phone calls and emails from millions of people around the world, including many world leaders.

U.S. security agencies had access to the servers at Apple, Facebook, Google, AOL, Yahoo and YouTube, to

name just a few of the victims of official hacking. Orwell's Big Brother would have envied the network of privacy invasions constructed in the name of national security. Snowden fled likely prosecution in the U.S., and eventually, in an ironic twist worthy of a le Carré novel, ended up in asylum in Russia, a nation with its own problematic history of government-sponsored hacking and trolling. (Assange's story took an even worse turn, as Asad Ismi writes in his feature on page 26—eds.)

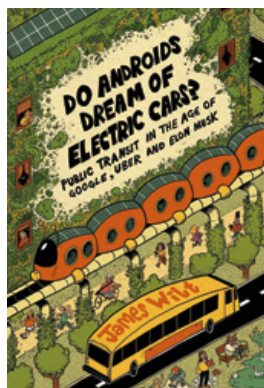
Webb portrays high profile hackers like Assange and Snowden as only part of the story of hacking and democracy. In lively prose the author takes readers with her on her travels from Berlin, where she gets lessons on how to protect her computer from government spying (it's not easy), to Madrid, Vancouver and elsewhere, as she traces the evolution of hacking and its impact on elections and popular mobilizations. Ornamenting her story are the vivid sketches of the often eccentric figures who created and embody the elusive hacker ethic.

But this is not a book of cyber hagiography. While Webb remains cautiously hopeful about the long-term prospects for hackers and their initiatives—as possible contributors to reaching the democratic goal of “privacy for the weak, transparency for the powerful”—she freely acknowledges that many hacker pioneers were and are deeply flawed figures. Their work, however, can point the way to building out democracy into cyberspace and protecting it in the non-computer world.

Any reader who cares about democracy, freedom and privacy will find in Webb's book a rich store of information, engaging human stories and provocative arguments about all things hacker. But much more than this, the author has given us an important look at history in the making, and some important conceptual tools to help make sense out of the complexities of our connected times. **M**

REVIEWED BY STUART TREW

How to drive off the new automobility



DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC CARS? PUBLIC TRANSIT IN THE AGE OF GOOGLE, UBER, AND ELON MUSK
JAMES WILT

Between the Lines, April 2020, \$27.95

BEGINNING AT MIDNIGHT on May 12, Greyhound Canada suspended all intercity routes, claiming a 95% drop in ridership due to COVID-19. Sadly, the decision only affected Ontario and Quebec: two years earlier, the company vacated B.C. and Alberta, leaving many northern communities without a reliable way to get medical treatment or see family and friends in the provinces' larger communities.

Clearly, intercity transportation in Canada and the United States is in a pitiful state. Intracity, public urban transit systems also face multiple, overlapping challenges from defunding, privatization and deteriorating service levels. Late or non-existent buses and broken down or overcrowded light rail cars drive people away from public transit and into their cars (if they can afford one). Crappy transit makes ride-sharing apps like Uber and Lyft more attractive and creates public appetite for high tech visions

of driverless, electrified, site-to-site auto travel.

Journalist James Wilt doesn't think we need to accept the status quo or Silicon Valley's unachievable and socially costly vision for the future of transportation. His book is at once a critique of the evolution of private automobility in a driverless age, a modern history of our crumbling sense of the public in public transit, and a call for democratic renaissance in transit policy. It is generously detailed on all three counts.

Early in the book, Hirst concedes that, as pompous and elitist as it sounded, Elon Musk's much repeated 2017 condemnation of public transit held some truth. In many North American cities, transit systems are rundown, frequently unreliable and can feel dangerous to use for many riders. “An analysis of forty bus routes servicing the Toronto suburb of Scarborough found a total of 11,000 delays of greater than ten minutes in 2018, averaging 15.25 minutes each,” he writes. Many of my commuting colleagues will agree the situation is much the same in Ottawa.

The reasons this is the case go back a century. In the early days of the automobile, cars were seen as a nuisance that delayed streetcars

Privatized transit will inevitably leave out poorer communities as companies seek out maximum returns.

and tended to kill pedestrians, more often in poorer neighbourhoods. Wilt records how the auto industry enlisted the police to help ridicule jaywalkers. The companies eventually succeeded in making the city “car dependent” enough so that everyone felt they needed to own one. Governments followed suit by stifling and in some cases killing off entirely public mass transit alternatives.

The “three revolutions” in automobility—electrification, sharing or pooling, and autonomous vehicles—threaten to deliver a “fatal blow” to public transit, Wilt writes. Not because they’re better, but like public-private partnerships (P3s) they have captured the public and political imagination. The environmental contradictions in fully seeing through this “revolution” are alarming.

Electric cars may be more efficient than the combustion engine, but they are also resource-intensive and keep city streets clogged. You need 63 kg of lithium carbonate to make one battery for one Tesla Model S. Replacing all current gas or diesel vehicles with electrics would, Wilt writes, “require a 70% increase in the production of neodymium and dysprosium, a doubling of copper output, and over a tripling in cobalt mining.”

There is no historical precedent for “ethical” mining that could get this done in a fair and sustainable way without massive global transformations, some of which will make these materials more expensive to extract. Currently only 2–5% of lithium batteries are recycled. Importantly, notes Wilt, there is no current trendline that gets us to full electrification before 2040, and that’s if every car purchased starting now is electric.

The social implications of a privatized, individualized automotive future are equally grim. Lyft and Uber offer drivers “freedom” to work when they want, but for far below the minimum wage in most cases, while the companies

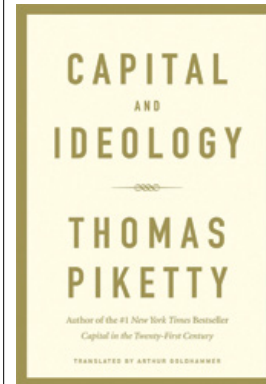
continually lobby against and legally challenge regulations and unionization drives. Privatized transit will inevitably leave out poorer communities as companies seek out maximum returns. Indigenous communities, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ and trans people are poorly served, and in some cases put at great risk, by both traditional transit systems and the private ride-sharing world. The public answer to the “three revolutions” will need to do better.

Wilt’s book is both a warning against falling too hard for the private, electrified, autonomous transit vision of the tech bros, and a rigorous defence of mass transit as the most cost-effective, lowest emission and most equitable option. It is loaded with the history, numbers and arguments citizen activists can use to fight off the Ubers as well as the naysayers and cost-cutters on city council. But the transit fight cannot stand alone.

“The ultimate objective,” writes Wilt, “is to densify existing residential areas with public housing and nearby healthcare, education, and social services to reduce the distance people have to travel to get what they need. That will rely on the power of activists fighting for public housing, universal rent control, anti-eviction measures, and community land trusts.” As we reimagine our economy for a post-COVID era, intra- and intercity transportation should feature prominently. **M**

REVIEWED BY ANDREW JACKSON

A long and winding road worth taking



CAPITAL AND IDEOLOGY THOMAS PIKETTY

The Belknap Press, March 2020, \$51.95

RENCH ECONOMIST Thomas Piketty has delivered a wide-ranging 1,100-page sequel to his famous and almost equally long tome, the unlikely best-seller *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, published in 2013 to great acclaim. A major focus of the new book is what he terms “inequality regimes” across time and space, by which he means distinct property and political systems and the associated ideologies that justify their existence. In his journey from slavery in the ancient and new worlds, to feudalism and serfdom, to the caste system in India, to Communism, postwar social democracy and the neoliberal revolution that began in the 1980s, Piketty offers many penetrating insights.

Of special interest to this reviewer was the overview of slavery in the new world, which arguably set the stage for the emergence of global capitalism by concentrating huge fortunes in the hands of slave traders and owners. Piketty notes that property rights were

considered by even liberal opinion to be so sacred that abolition of slavery without compensation was hardly ever considered. In the aftermath of a slave rebellion, Haiti won recognition by France in 1825, only by promising to pay a huge and developmentally crippling indemnity to the former slave owners, a debt the country would only pay off (to the Wall Street financiers who then owned it) in 1947. In a similar vein, after the abolition of slavery in the United States, it was the plantation owners who received compensation, not their slaves.

Many readers will skip to the last two-thirds of the book, which deal with the changing political and ideological forms of capitalism after the 19th century, with a major focus on the advanced economies, especially the United States, the United Kingdom and France. As in his first book, Piketty surveys the sharp reduction in income and wealth inequality from the 1940s on, and the equally spectacular increase in economic inequality since the 1980s.

Piketty places a major emphasis upon the role of progressive taxes in the rise and fall of redistributive politics. “The move to a less progressive tax system in the 1980s played a large part in the unprecedented growth of inequality in the United States and United Kingdom between 1980 and 2018,” he writes. As he shows, in the 1950s and 1960s, strong economic performance co-existed with punitively high top personal income tax rates, confiscatory inheritances taxes on large fortunes, and serious taxation of corporate profits.

Piketty provides a strong rebuttal of the ideological argument that wealth is a just reward: “The idea that strictly private property exists and that certain people have an inviolable natural right to it cannot withstand analysis. The accumulation of wealth is always the fruit of a social process, which depends, among other things, on public infrastructures (such as legal, fiscal

Piketty provides a strong rebuttal of the ideological argument that wealth is a just reward.

and educational systems), the social division of labour, and the knowledge accumulated by humanity over centuries. Under such conditions, it is perfectly logical that people who have accumulated large amounts of wealth should return a fraction of it to the community each year.”

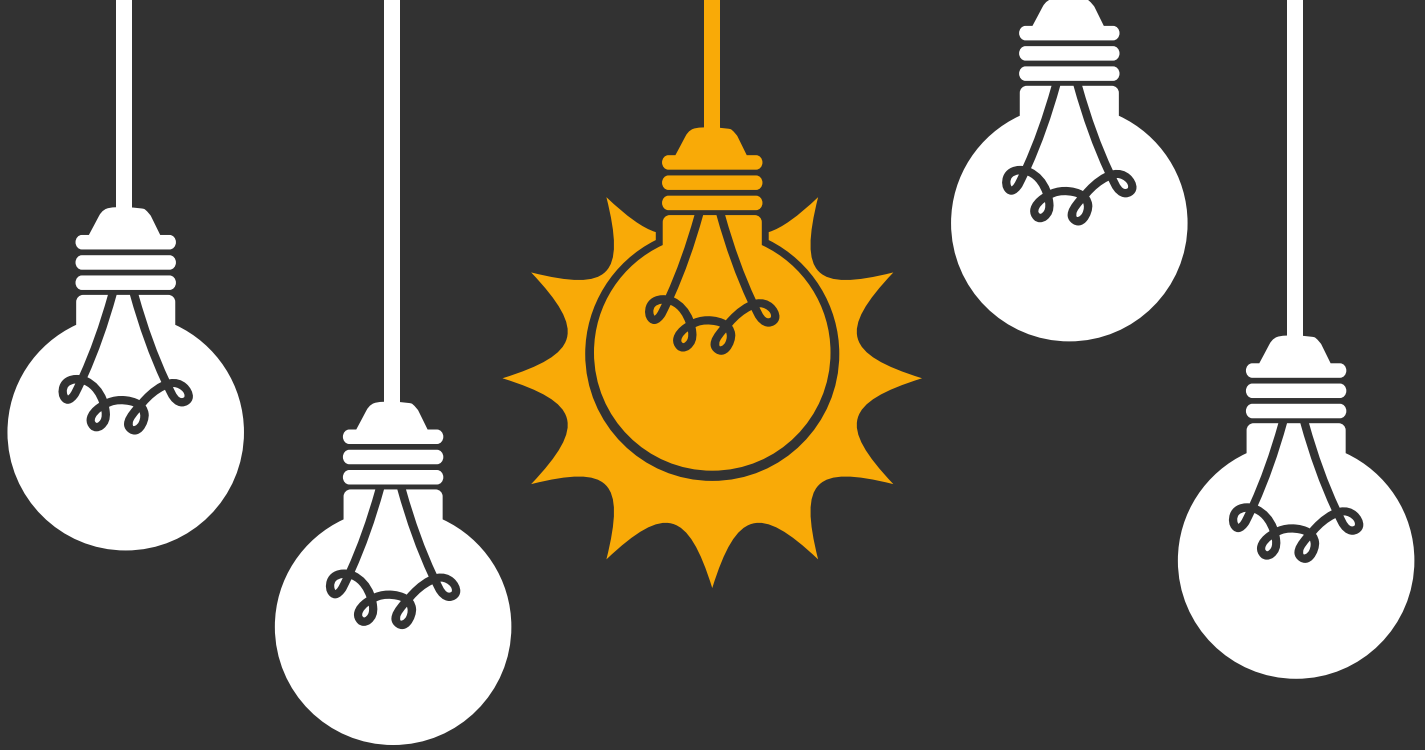
While it is surely correct, as Piketty argues, that the reduced progressivity of the tax system is a major factor behind rising inequality, he fails to really address the question of to what extent changes in the distribution of wages and salaries (predistribution) also boosted inequality. The assault on the labour movement and employment standards as well as financialization and the deregulation of global capitalism increased the economic and political power of capital compared to labour. In this light, the erosion of progressive taxes can be seen as a consequence of an underlying power shift rather than the key causal factor in its own right.

Piketty similarly attributes much of the political decline of social democracy to poor strategic choices rather than structural factors, arguing, with good reason,

that social-democratic parties abandoned redistributive politics. But he claims this was due more to social factors than to a shift in class power. In his view, which is supplemented by exhaustive analysis of a wealth of electoral data, these parties have become the political vehicles of the highly educated and urban cosmopolitans who embrace identity politics and celebrate supposedly meritocratic policies of equalizing opportunity rather than redistribution between social classes. The “Brahminization” of social democracy has, in his view, led to the shift of traditional working class voters from the left and centre parties to the nationalist and nativist right.

Piketty argues that the left should return to class-based redistributive politics and eschew identity politics. The twist is that he favours vigorously opening the way to such policies at a global level, for example by clamping down on corporate tax evasion and establishing a registry that would allow for national wealth taxes with real bite. Engagingly, he champions using the proceeds of a wealth tax to fund a universal capital endowment for all young adults. Piketty also favours “just ownership” and an attack on concentration of economic power through more public and social ownership, including worker representation and voting rights within firms.

By way of conclusion, *Capital and Ideology* may be a long read, but it is stimulating and highly relevant to current debates on the progressive left. **M**



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