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MONITOR

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Please send feedback to
monitor@policyalternatives.ca.

Editor: Stuart Trew
Senior Designer: Tim Scarth
Layout: Susan Purtell
Editorial Board: Alyssa O'Dell,
Shannon Daub, Katie Raso, Erika
Shaker, Rick Telfer, Jason Moores

Contributing Writers:
Asad Ismi, Elaine Hughes, Cynthia
Khoo, Anthony N. Morgan

CCPA National Office:
141 Laurier Avenue W, Suite 1000
Ottawa, ON K1P 5J3
Tel: 613-563-1341
Fax: 613-233-1458
ccpa@policyalternatives.ca
www.policyalternatives.ca

CCPA BC Office:
520-700 West Pender Street
Vancouver, BC V6C 1G8
Tel: 604-801-5121
Fax: 604-801-5122
ccpabc@policyalternatives.ca

CCPA Manitoba Office:
301-583 Ellice Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 1Z7
Tel: 204-927-3200
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

CCPA Nova Scotia Office:
P.O. Box 8355
Halifax, NS B3K 5M1
Tel: 902-240-0926
ccpans@policyalternatives.ca

CCPA Ontario Office:
720 Bathurst Street, Room 307
Toronto, ON M5S 2R4
Tel: 416-598-5985
ccpaon@policyalternatives.ca

CCPA Saskatchewan Office:
2nd Floor, 2138 McIntyre Street
Regina, SK S4P 2R7
Tel: 306-924-3372
Fax: 306-586-5177
ccpasask@sasktel.net

Contributors

Sheila Block is a senior economist at the CCPA-Ontario.

Natasha Bulowski is apprenticing at the *Monitor* from Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication where she is completing her bachelor of journalism with a minor in human rights.

Fathima Cader is a lawyer, academic and writer, and was co-counsel on the unionization of delivery drivers servicing Amazon in Toronto.

Ryan Campbell is an economist with the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada.

James Clark is a socialist, trade unionist and anti-war activist based in Toronto.

Simran Dhunna is a CCPA placement student, MPH epidemiology candidate at the University of Toronto, and an organizer with Climate Justice Toronto and Peel.

Viveca Ellis is Interim Community Organizer with the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition and a co-founder of the Single Mothers' Alliance BC.

Cam Goff operates a grain farm with his brothers near Hanley, Saskatchewan and is a member of the National Farmers Union.

Alex Hemingway is an economist and public finance policy analyst at the CCPA's B.C. office.

Iglika Ivanova is a senior economist and public interest researcher at the CCPA-BC.

Shoshana Magnet is an associate professor of feminist and gender studies and criminology at the University of Ottawa.

Linda McQuaig is a journalist and columnist, and the recent author of *The Sport and Prey of Capitalists* (Dundurn).

Alyssa O'Dell is Media and Public Relations Officer for the CCPA's national office.

James Robins is a second-year history and statistics major at the University of Toronto.

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

Paul Shaffer is a professor of international development studies at Trent University who works on poverty in the Global South.

Jim Stanford is Economist and Director of the Centre for Future Work. He sits on the Members Council of the CCPA.

Paul Weinberg is a freelance journalist and the recent author of *When Poverty Mattered: Then and Now* (Fernwood).



Maura Doyle has a studio practice in Ottawa/Algonquin Anishinaabeg Aki. Her multidisciplinary practice has included video, ceramics, sculpture, printed matter and drawing. Her work has been exhibited across Canada in artist-run centres and art institutions, as well as internationally in New York, Japan, Sweden and Vienna.

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STUART TREW

Canada after the “Great Lockdown”

ON APRIL 2, the North American hardware and lumber store Lowes announced it was raising wages for all its workers by \$2 an hour for the month of April only—a way, said CEO Marvin Ellison, to thank them for their “heroic actions in serving the needs of our communities.” Canadian companies, including several grocery chains and Maple Leaf Foods, made similar gestures to their workers in March, in response to substantial pressure from their unions for danger pay and better workplace protections.

News coverage played up the largesse and foresight of these CEOs, but let’s be realistic. Full-time workers will see at most an extra \$350 a month from the raise. That’s a pittance, when you think about it, for people who are literally putting their lives on the line. (Contrast this with the \$800,000 in “safety bonuses” paid to six CP executives in 2019, despite six employee deaths over the previous two years.) On April 8, Maple Leaf shut down a chicken processing plant in Brampton, Ontario after three employees tested positive for COVID-19, followed shortly after by two more cases.

The gross inadequacies in the income and job security of legitimately essential workers—in the primary care, food, hospitality, cleaning, transportation and other sectors—are just one of the capitalist hypocrisies underlined by the pandemic. Add the criminal neglect of people living in deregulated, largely privatized long-term care homes, which account for nearly half of all COVID-19 deaths in Canada, and the disregard of frontline health workers deprived of adequate medical gear due to lack of planning and years of cuts.

Topping it off is the sudden embarrassment of riches among most OECD governments. Federal debt in the U.S. is set to exceed GDP this year for the first time since the Second World War. Fiscally prudent Germany, which

obstructed a fair bailout for Greece five years ago and continues to spoil EU-wide plans to help neighbouring Italy avoid financial catastrophe, promised unlimited cash (an “economic bazooka”) to support its struggling businesses through the crisis.

In Canada, the Trudeau government was projected to spend \$100 billion on direct support for individuals, corporations and small businesses. Where did all the money come from? Deficit spending and quantitative easing by the Bank of Canada, of course. Measures that were supposed to be unthinkable, or so we have been told (forever it seems), to justify public belt-tightening amidst private excess. In 2008, we bailed out the banks but left all the other contradictions of hyper-globalized capitalism in place. In 2020, that’s not going to be a viable option.

The rapidly designed and moderately generous (and, as the Monitor went to print, still growing) Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) was necessary to make sure the Canadian economy didn’t collapse during the lockdown. CCPA economist David Macdonald estimates that between February and March, 3.1 million workers (16% of the workforce) were laid off or saw big reductions in their hours. In mid-April we found out that nearly six million people—one in four Canadians aged 15 to 64—had either applied for the new CERB benefit or had their new employment insurance (EI) application streamed through it and were already getting cheques.

Not everyone who applies for the CERB will get to keep the money, but by including self-employed, temporary, seasonal and other more precarious workers, the benefit is an improvement on EI and should provide a baseline for a more responsive and fair employment insurance system for the future. The CCPA has welcomed these emergency measures and likely

had some role in their development, as our economists and researchers were quoted regularly in the news on the gaps in our current EI system and inadequacy of the first version of the emergency benefit announced by the government in March (see page 6).

The CERB has sparked a debate about a basic income level that should be guaranteed to Canadians in all circumstances, not just temporary unemployment. Provincial welfare and disability payments are cruelly low. They make Canada look like a backwater compared to many European countries. The CERB provides more than double the income relief of the most generous provincial income assistance program, which is in Newfoundland and Labrador (see page 10).

Surely with all the cheap money going around, the federal government can afford a new “dignity dividend,” or top-up to provincial income supports, as recommended in the 2020 Alternative Federal Budget. Some stimulus money should go toward building and maintaining public and not-for-profit housing with rent geared to income, providing affordable shelter to those on modest incomes and creating what economists call an automatic stabilizer to weather future crises (see page 20). While the wallet is open, why don’t we start paying oil workers to stay home as part of a just transition away from fossil fuels?

The IMF predicts Canada’s economy will shrink by 6.2% this year due to the “Great Lockdown.” The shock of the pandemic will be long-lasting and traumatic for many people. Rolling self-quarantines and physical distancing are a possibility into 2021. This is a new world with new demands, and a new acceptance of wartime-like government spending to meet them. We can do better than a \$2 raise. In fact, a true recovery depends on our doing much more. **M**



Nothing's gonna stop the flow

Thank you for your editorial on the B.C. government's lack of justice for the Wet'suwet'en Nation ("Inconvenience and indifference," Mar/Apr 2020). It is painfully true. Since you wrote it, things have gotten worse. Premier Horgan refuses to shut down the man camps building the Coastal GasLink pipeline across Wet'suwet'en land and, as far as I know, at Site C, another project being protested by several First Nations.

With COVID-19 raging, the situation is critical. Sanitation is rudimentary at best, men cannot keep the required distance for safety reasons, and the workers fly in and out every two weeks, putting northeastern B.C. and their

home communities across Canada at risk. Mr. Horgan is not as blatant as Jason Kenney in his commitment to oil and gas, but his actions show he won't let anything stand in their way.

Given future prospects of B.C. making profits in oil and gas, this makes little sense. But then oil extraction seems to render some "leaders" senseless.

Dorothy Field,
Victoria, BC

In defence of the BDS movement

The letter by Raffy Dotan ("BDS's questionable values," January/February 2020) concludes that anti-Semitism underlies BDS. Not untypically, he argues that Israel is being singled out and that other countries are worse. That is arguable. Is there a scale on which to rate brutality, disproportionate violence, impunity before laws on torture, the treatment of children, the use of unconventional weapons and the possession of nuclear weapons? I personally don't think so.

The persistent effort to illegalize BDS might function to deflect attention from Israel itself, or from the other states Dotan refers to: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Syria, Iran, Turkey, Russia, Myanmar and China. I would think that rationality indicates that BDS ought to include all these states—and certainly the United States, Canada, Colombia, India, Brazil and Hungary.

The BDS campaign brings attention to Israel's history of racism and military occupation. BDS

does not call for the kind of sanctions imposed by the U.S. on North Korea, Iran, or previously on Iraq; such killing sanctions deprive ordinary people of the necessities of life. They are atrocities and must not disappear through moralizing about BDS.

Judith Deutsch,
Toronto, ON

Raffy Dotan is wrong about boycotts being applied only to Israel. Aside from the historic boycotts applied to South Africa and the grape growers in California, there are many boycotts and embargoes in place today.

Canada embargoes—or has embargoed—Venezuela, Iran, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nicaragua, North Korea, Russia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, Yemen and Zimbabwe, but fails to boycott Saudi Arabia (a rival to Israel). The Canadian government cozies up to other repressive regimes while abrogating its international responsibilities regarding commerce emanating from Israel's Occupied Territories.

There is no denial of Israel's repressive character in dealing with the BDS issue by pro-Israel types. They don't deny that Israel is violating international laws or carrying out abhorrent actions against Palestinian citizens. No, what they complain about is that Israel has been spotlighted doing these things. It reminds me of when I was a teacher and a student who got caught misbehaving would tell me

that I was ignoring all the other misbehaviors, and therefore they shouldn't be singled out. This is the plaint of a scoundrel.

The anti-BDS complainants have no solution to the worsening situation for the Palestinians as Israel prospers and Jewish immigrants take over Palestinian land. The so-called two-state solution has been eschewed by the Israeli government. Palestinians have responded by a non-violent way of drawing attention to their otherwise ignored plight.

Gord Doctorow,
Toronto, ON

The reason for applying BDS to Israel and not to other countries is rather simple: the oppressed people in these countries have not requested this type of action. BDS of Israel, on the other hand, originated from July 9, 2005, when virtually every sector of Palestinian Civic Society (well over a hundred unions, professional societies, political parties, community associations, etc.) called for BDS against Israel for its "persistent violations of international law." The call stresses the non-violent aspect of this opposition to Israel's oppression of the Palestinian people.

Norman Epstein,
Vancouver, BC

BDS: A rebuttal

The idea that a singled-out political entity should be judged by rules and moral codes not applied to others is unfortunately common. Branding this legal and

moral contradiction as an “apples to oranges” comparison (Letters, Mar/Apr 2020) is not only morally wrong, but its adoption by the BDS movement has not and will not do the Palestinians any good.

This misguided morality makes it perfectly clear why the lives of thousands of Palestinians killed by the Al-Assad regime in Syria, or the well-being of the tens of thousands exploited in Qatar or Saudi Arabia, do not matter to the BDS. Yes, because Israel could not be blamed for them!

The BDS movement inflames hatred and possibly helps in venting frustrations. However, offering the Palestinian people no constructive support, BDS is leaving them with neither apples nor oranges, and regrettably, with no real prospects of being able to escape their predicament

any time soon. Singling out Israel as the villain in this sad story is not only dishonest but yet another form of chastisement that will not advance the Palestinian cause one bit.

Raffy Dotan,
St. Catharine’s, ON

Splitting heirs

I find there is some twisted logic by including “pension income-splitting” under tax expenditures for men, inferring that this is a benefit for men (“Close these tax loopholes now,” November/December 2019).

In order to split the benefit, there has to be a partner, which means the benefit would be for the family unit. Even income splitting, which gets the same criticism, is a benefit

for the family. It is no benefit for the rich, since the split income would also be at the highest marginal rate for both partners, but it would help many middle class families and would be a reward for the many hours of unpaid labour, which especially a family with children performs.

I do like the idea of an inheritance tax, but I would structure it so that if, as an example, an inheritance of \$1,000,000 is divided between five people it would be taxed according to the recipient and therefore be tax free. This would break up the amassing of large fortunes in too few people’s hands.

Elisabeth Ecker,
Toronto, ON

Send all letters to monitor@policyalternatives.ca, and make sure to say if you would like to see your letter included in a future issue.

– CCPA’S SEVENTH ANNUAL –

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New from the CCPA

CCPA responds to COVID-19

Life changed dramatically for just about everybody when COVID-19 settled into North America. Health fears and insecurities, which ebb and flow with the spread of the virus, have been compounded by the sheer scale of the state-facilitated economic shutdown. As Alyssa O'Dell, CCPA media officer, writes on page 6, it is hard to remember a busier or more fateful time to be working at the CCPA. Between March 9 and April 2, the CCPA's national and provincial offices, along with comrades at the IRIS research institute in Quebec and Parkland Institute in Alberta, published more than two dozen articles and several major reports that looked at the pandemic from various social policy perspectives.

CCPA economist **David Macdonald** found huge gaps in the federal employment insurance program that would leave millions of people stranded, without any income, if they were not plugged—preferably for good. CCPA-Ontario researcher **Ricardo Tranjan** found that more than 40% of renters in Canada had only a month's worth of income saved in the event

they lost their jobs. CCPA economist **Katherine Scott** pointed out how the many COVID-related deaths in long-term care facilities exposed the lack of national standards in the sector, while CCPA-Ontario's **Sheila Block** and **Simran Dhunna** promoted higher wages and better working conditions in Ontario care homes.

When the Monitor went to print, millions of Canadians were not sure when, or if, they would get back to work this year. The fate of many companies and even whole sectors was uncertain, as the world stood at the edge of a possibly long-lasting global recession. The CCPA will continue to advocate for immediate emergency measures to support people in this time of great need, while also looking to how we can rebuild our economy in a more sustainable and inclusive way for the post-pandemic world.

Child care fees shock

The March 12 *Toronto Star* headline almost says it all: "Child care sticker shock plagues parents in Toronto and across the country." The newspaper was reporting on the CCPA's latest survey of child care fees in Canada, conducted in October 2019 then analyzed by **David Macdonald** and **Martha Friendly** in their report, *In Progress*. The sixth in an annual series from the CCPA, *In Progress* provides a snapshot of the median child care fees parents pay for full-time licensed child care of infants, toddlers and preschool-age children in 37 cities across all provinces and territories.

As reported in the *Vancouver Sun*: "Fees for infants and toddlers were highest in Toronto, which topped the list at \$1,774 and \$1,457, respectively. For preschoolers, fees were highest in Iqaluit, Nunavut, at \$1,213 (before fee reductions), followed by Oakville, Ontario (\$1,210) and Toronto (\$1,207). Across the board, fees were lowest in the five cities surveyed in Quebec, which has a provincially set monthly fee of \$179."

Various governments have attempted different child care fee interventions, some of which have been more successful than others, claim Macdonald and Friendly. Yet by and large, child care remains unaffordable for many people. "Families pay over \$10,000 a year for an infant space in 78% of the cities we examined," notes Macdonald.

How to transform Nova Scotia's social policy

In partnership with the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers, the CCPA-NS released a report in March, *Creating the Future We All Deserve*, which lays out a blueprint for transforming social policy to meet everyone's needs in the province. "Evidence-based policy making is not something that only the wealthy or powerful can or should be doing.... We all can, and should, engage in policy analysis," emphasizes the report, which makes recommendations for the public provision and democratization of services across a number of areas, including child care, housing

and labour market supports. "For too long, Nova Scotians have been told that real solutions to poverty and inequality are unaffordable and impractical. But we don't have to accept that," says lead author Tammy Findlay, associate professor and chair of political and Canadian studies at Mount Saint Vincent University.

Manitoba Alternative Budget

On March 3, the CCPA-MB launched the **Alternative Provincial Budget (APB)**, which promotes a number of investments the province can easily make to fight poverty, climate change and improve the well-being of Manitobans. With input from public consultations and volunteer experts across many sectors, **Change Starts Here** details measures that would lift close to 80,000 Manitobans out of poverty and create thousands of good-paying jobs. "We outline steps toward a Green New Deal... that would dramatically ramp up Manitoba's efforts to transition from a fossil fuel economy," says the APB introduction. "We invest in health care, post-secondary education and K-12, in public transportation, housing retrofits to lower energy bills and lower greenhouse gases. These are the sorts of investments that restore the public services that all Manitobans rely on."

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



ICONEO

ALYSSA O'DELL | NATIONAL

The CCPA's responsibility during the COVID-19 crisis

As media and public relations officer for the CCPA's national office in Ottawa, Mondays are always busy: scanning the news, meeting with our research team about the week ahead, letting journalists know about our next big report. By Monday, March 9, things were starting to feel different.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which had led to near complete economic shutdowns in several Asian and European countries, was just starting to grip Canada as well. It quickly became clear, as physical distancing rules grew stricter in province after province, that the way Canadians and their governments responded would have both immediate and long-lasting consequences.

From our ad hoc home offices, kitchen tables and apartment corners, the entire CCPA team shifted into rapid response mode. While self-quarantine would be tough for everyone, it was obvious some people would be especially hard hit. We considered it our first job to find out who and where those people were in Canada, and to propose ways our governments could support them in their greatest need.

CCPA economist David Macdonald speaks to CTV News Ottawa about his research on the government's COVID-19 income support programs.

On March 16, we published a report from David Macdonald, senior economist at the CCPA, showing how many workers in Canada have no access to paid time off in the event of a forced quarantine.

"Only 38% of sick leave and 23% of family responsibility leave in Canada is paid," noted Macdonald. "If they are lucky, lower-to-middle income workers will be able to use their paid vacation time in the event of quarantine, though of course this is not ideal. In contrast, only 14% of the leave taken by Canada's lowest income workers was paid leave, vacation included, in 2019."

The report, which was widely picked up by radio, television and print media, made seven recommendations for amending the federal employment insurance system to make it more responsive to coronavirus-related leave from work and more inclusive of workers currently shut out of EI benefits. Some of these ideas were incorporated into the Trudeau government's Emergency Care Benefit (later transformed into the Canada Emergency Response Benefit) when it was announced two days later, along with an enhanced Canada Child Benefit payment also supported by the CCPA.

We followed Macdonald's report with one from Ricardo Tranjan, on March 23, which found that of Canada's 3.4 million renters, 46% only have enough savings to last them a month, while one-quarter could only last a week without income. "As the crisis worsens, the need to support low-income renters becomes



even more urgent. Both the federal and provincial governments must work to keep renters safe and solvent,” said Tranjan.

This work, which includes dozens of blogs and commentaries from CCPA researchers across the organization, has been noticed. A steady stream of journalists and key policy-makers have sought CCPA expertise in every province on critical questions about what the unfolding situation means for workers, small businesses, families and society’s most vulnerable—and how provincial and federal governments should respond.

Our expert analysis made headlines and drove public conversation in over 1,000 news stories. We shifted the discourse and without a doubt influenced federal and provincial government policy.

“The depth of our analysis, our familiarity with government policy at all levels and the broader socioeconomic context, has never been more relevant,” said Erika Shaker, CCPA national office director. She noted how in times of crisis, when the “normal” course of action no longer makes sense, it is even more important to be ready with progressive ideas that have the potential to make long-term positive changes.

Events in Canada show how true this is. In just two weeks, the entire EI system was revamped to become a more modern emergency benefit that is faster to access, less bureaucratic and more inclusive. Upwards of \$1,000 will end up in the bank accounts of lower income families by piggybacking payment increases on the GST and Canada Child Benefit credits. And Tranjan’s research on the precarious situation faced by renters helped spark a national conversation about banning evictions.

“Our work on these issues has heavily influenced policy development that is happening at warp speed,” Macdonald told me in early April. “We’re suggesting changes to policies on the fly and seeing those changes implemented a few days later. Without years of research on these issues, we wouldn’t be able to analyze and suggest changes this quickly or effectively.”

CCPA-Ontario Senior Economist Sheila Block told me something similar about our work on a short break between media calls on a particularly heavy news day.

“I really haven’t seen a policy window like this open up in my working life, and we can’t not contribute to this discussion at this moment,” she said. “The immediacy and importance of our work feels very different, because we are in a national emergency.... It places an added burden on a requirement, that we always have, for accuracy—to be measured and to be thoughtful and timely about what we say.

“I think what’s happened is that our relationship, both with government policy-makers and with the media has become more of a collective problem-solving process.”

That sentiment has been echoed by reporters on the other side of breaking news desks, several of whom have told me how much they appreciate the CCPA’s expertise and willingness to be available, at any hour, as the situation unfolds.

Jolson Lim, a reporter with the Ottawa-based online news publication iPolitics, told me the pandemic has highlighted the challenge of getting the most important, correct details to the public quickly, in an environment where initial government responses usually have a lot of significant details missing.

“People’s lives are depending on the right information.... In a time of crisis where things are moving fast, there’s not a lot of room for thorough scrutiny of public policy,” Lim said. He compared the relationships between journalists and economists or other experts to an “ecosystem” able to create order out of complexity, and potentially produce better policy for everyone.

Our challenge leading into the summer will be to keep the momentum going, to try to make the positive changes to social supports permanent while keeping an eye out for moves to scale back government programs under a banner of austerity. “My hope is that supporting the unemployed and low-income Canadians doesn’t end when we finally beat this virus, but stays with us for many years to come,” said Macdonald.

Indeed, the CCPA team will be here, putting research into the public conversation to help make sure that is the case. The only thing I’m certain of these days is how much more work there is ahead.

ALYSSA O’DELL IS SENIOR MEDIA AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER FOR THE CCPA NATIONAL OFFICE.

WORTH REPEATING

From chaos to quarantine

Excerpt from a March 2020 paper by **James Robins**, second-year history and statistics major at the University of Toronto.

Starting on the feast-day of St. Sebastian, 1631, all Florentines were ordered to stay at home for forty days. Enforcing the quarantine required a massive expansion of the state’s administrative capacity and the hiring of 1,100 people. These officials were tasked with punishing quarantine breakers, carrying out censuses to determine who required aid, and then providing meals and firewood for 30,452 of the city’s 61,408 population. One pass was given to each household, allowing a male over the age of 14 to go out for food, and rations were delivered directly to households that didn’t have an adult male. These meals were deliberately more nutritious than the food normally eaten by the poor, since bad diet was believed to corrupt the air. Taking care of the poor provided three clear benefits: improving the air, appeasing God, and reducing civil unrest.

Certain professions such as blacksmiths and wine vendors were allowed to work so long as they stayed in their workshops without returning home for the duration of the quarantine. Each neighbourhood was assigned an apothecary, a physician, and a surgeon, who were instructed to treat the sick without payment from the poor. Doctors had to live alone and wear the iconic plague doctor costume, supposed to protect them from corrupted air. Despite these precautions, attrition among the medical profession was high, and the Colleges of Physicians responded by issuing special licenses to people without formal training as surgeons. Makeshift altars were set up in the streets so that Mass could be held as people watched from their windows. Punishments for breaking the quarantine included fines, corporal punishment, and forced labour. Above all, the health board was concerned with social gatherings and people entering/exiting homes where someone had been sick, ultimately prosecuting 566 people for such crimes.

Sources: John Henderson, *Florence under Siege: Surviving Plague in an Early Modern City*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019; Dean Phillip Bell, *Plague in the Early Modern World: A Documentary History*, London: Routledge, 2019.

How do we care for frontline care workers?

The failure of governments to ensure adequate supplies of personal protective equipment for health care workers was making headlines in early April. Sharleen Stewart, health care president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), likened it to “sending firefighters into the fire with no equipment.” Unfortunately, the lack of protective equipment—dangerous as it is—is not the only problem long-term care and home care workers face.

About 58% of long-term care homes in Ontario are for-profit facilities, and evidence shows that for-profit homes have poorer quality of care than not-for-profit homes. Private care providers must make profits, and to boost those profits they cut costs. Underfunding by governments, even in not-for-profit homes, has the same effect, with not-for-profit care managers feeling the pressure to cut costs too.

In frontline care, cutting costs mostly means cutting staff. A recent Ontario Health Coalition report attributed the shortages of personal support workers in long-term care homes to low wages and poor working conditions. The onset of the pandemic has only made things worse. Simply put, when the people caring for our most vulnerable are paid poorly and must rush from patient to patient under unsafe conditions, the likelihood of transmitting COVID-19 increases.

The 2016 census data tells us 86% of workers in nursing and residential care facilities are women, along with 89% of workers in home health care services. Racialized women make up 13% of the total workforce but represent 25% of workers in nursing and residential care facilities and 27% of workers in home health care services. Workers in long-term care and home care earn, on average, between 75% and 77% of the average income in Ontario across all industries (\$51,105).

Earnings in long-term care and home care are far below average despite the essential services they provide.

The data on employment and earnings by occupation paint an even clearer picture: 89% of nurse aides, orderlies and patient service associates are women, along with 91% of home support workers, housekeepers and related occupations. Racialized women work in these occupations at nearly three times their share of the total labour force. Home support workers made half the average income in Ontario, while nurse aides and orderlies make 65% of that amount.

Labour force survey data gives a glimpse into the employment conditions facing these frontline health care workers. Workers in “assisting occupations in support of health services,” which includes a broader range of occupations than just nurse aides, orderlies, and other assisting occupations (although the latter accounts for 77% of the total), worked in different institutional settings including hospitals as well as long-term care facilities. In 2019, 24% of these workers had a part-time job; 12% held multiple jobs; 9% were temporary, term, contract or casual employees; and their average hourly wage was \$21.40, or 76% of the average Ontario wage.

The impact of the pandemic on workers and residents in long-term care is

evident. Yet the Ontario government’s response has been further deregulation of this critically important sector. Premier Ford’s COVID-19 emergency order eliminates training requirements for workers in long-term care, allows homes to bring in volunteers and eliminates the need for administrators to report some complaints to the Ministry of Long-term Care. (As the *Monitor* went to print, the Ford government announced changes would be coming to the regulation of long-term care, but it was not clear what they would look like — ed.)

The provincial government’s announcement of \$243 million for surge capacity in the long-term care sector is welcome, but it does not address the decade-long staffing shortages and issues around quality of care. A further \$75 million announced for personal protective equipment for frontline staff is also critical, but money alone does not address the immediate need for supplies, especially for personal support workers, who are too often left out of the discussion about frontline workers.

The B.C. government recently implemented a policy ensuring that all workers in long-term care become provincial employees, are hired as full-time workers, are limited to work at one facility, and are paid a standardized wage that is equal to the pay that workers in public sector unionized facilities are paid.

Ontario should do the same for its long-term care workers, by returning these essential services to the public sector and improving wages and working conditions. Better jobs mean better care for residents and clients, not only during this crisis, but also well into the future.

SHEILA BLOCK IS A SENIOR ECONOMIST WITH THE CCPA-ONTARIO. SIMRAN DHUNNA IS A CCPA PLACEMENT STUDENT AND MPH EPIDEMIOLOGY CANDIDATE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, AND AN ORGANIZER WITH CLIMATE JUSTICE TORONTO AND PEEL.

How should we react to a \$185 billion deficit?

Pandemics are real. People are real. Jobs are real. Federal deficits are just a construct. Sometimes we forget. Hopefully this time we remember.

We are in the midst of a terrifying and historically significant crisis. To meet the challenge, Canadians have made it clear they want the government to use all resources at its disposal to protect them and reduce human suffering. Whether or not the cost fits into existing budget plans is irrelevant.

Containing COVID-19 and protecting those on the frontlines is the top priority. But it also means shutting down entire industrial sectors. Doing so resulted in four million people applying for employment insurance within a few weeks. These people need to be protected. In the short run they need income support so they can stay home, isolate themselves and prevent the spread of the virus. Eventually, when we come out the other end, it means sustained economic stimulus for years to come.

The immediate response from policy-makers has been big, bold and fast. Canada's COVID-19 economic response plan outlines measures to support individuals, big business and everyone in between. There are flaws, naturally, but also an ongoing commitment to go further and keep people from falling through the cracks. Price tag be damned!

Public discourse about debt and deficits has changed in step with the development of these sweeping policies. Questions about affordability are rare and sound as if they were beamed in from a different universe. The threat to the economy does not come from spending, it comes from not spending enough. The real human cost of inaction easily outweighs the cost of increased federal debt. The first phases of the response passed Parliament with unanimous support.

In the alternate reality we all lived in a few weeks ago, critical questions

The threat to the economy does not come from spending, it comes from not spending enough.

would have seemed appropriate. If the finance minister had released a budget with a \$185 billion deficit (8.5% of GDP) it would have caused an uproar from the opposition. The 2015 federal election was fought over which political parties would balance the budget and which would run a deficit in the range of 0.9% of GDP. But that was a different time. Or was it?

It was not. There's only one reality we live in, and in the last few weeks, policy-makers have broadcast loud and clear which one it is. We live in a world where the responsible policy to meet the challenge is to spend whatever's necessary. "Conventional wisdom" about debt and deficits is completely out of whack and seems petty in hindsight. It may be tempting to compartmentalize debates into two categories, before and after COVID-19, but it would be wrong to do so.

It is crucial that we not return to pre-existing deficit politics once the crisis is contained. There will need to be years of enhanced stimulus spending to ensure people get back to work.

During the 2008 financial crisis, Parliament agreed on a substantial fiscal stimulus package. However, shortly thereafter, the minority Conservative government began dismantling it,

aggressively attacking the deficit and restricting growth at a time when the economy needed investment. Estimates show that austerity measures in 2014-15 alone stunted GDP growth by 0.84% and resulted in approximately 90,000 job losses across the public and private sectors. All for the political goal of balancing the budget before the 2015 election.

Recall that to combat the early 1980s recession federal deficits reached this same peak in the mid-'80s (8.1% of GDP). Mobilization during the Second World War required deficits almost three times as large (22.5% of GDP). The Canadian economy persevered.

After COVID-19 is contained there will be economic fallout. In response, we need to protect the people who lost their jobs for the sake of limiting the spread of the virus. If we can't tolerate higher deficits these people will face very real hardship. We need to prioritize the real impacts of higher unemployment and poverty over the intangible costs of increased debt.

Collectively, we seem able to grasp the irrelevance of deficit politics during the critical moments in history. But then we forget. The job of the federal government is to do everything within its power to mitigate the negative effects of the impending downturn. Government has fiscal capacity to spend as much as necessary. That means providing swift, broad and bold support right now and prolonged stimulus spending in the coming years.

RYAN CAMPBELL IS AN ECONOMIST WITH THE PROFESSIONAL INSTITUTE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED ON THE NATIONAL NEWSWATCH WEBSITE ON APRIL 10.



Small relief for people on income assistance

On April 2, the B.C. government announced emergency financial support for some of the province's most vulnerable, including an extra \$300 per month (for three months) for people receiving income and disability assistance and some very-low-income seniors. This necessary and welcome measure can't come fast enough. When the Monitor went to print, B.C. was only the second Canadian province to extend COVID-19 financial relief measures to people on income and disability assistance, after Nova Scotia launched a paltry \$50/month supplement at the end of March.

Income and disability assistance, also referred to as welfare, are the programs of last resort for people who find themselves without work, or who are unable to work because of a disability, illness or caregiving responsibilities. In B.C. there are two streams of benefits: temporary income assistance (for people who are considered employable) and disability assistance. Both are extremely difficult to access and require the exhaustion of virtually all savings before a person can even apply. In nearly all provinces, income and disability rates leave recipients with incomes far below the poverty line.

It's telling that people receiving these benefits have been largely forgotten in this crisis so far, as they are hardly top of mind during normal times as well.

The good news

The good news is that the \$300/month emergency crisis supplement in B.C. is automatic and will not require a special application. Also welcome is that recipients of the provincial supplement who qualify for the federal Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) or regular employment insurance benefits will not have that money clawed back (as EI benefits are, dollar for dollar, from monthly cheques).

The federal CERB is available to people who have lost income due to COVID-19, provided they earned a minimum of \$5,000 in 2019. A small minority of welfare recipients in B.C.—including an estimated 10,000 households with disabilities and 1,000 households on temporary assistance—will qualify for the CERB because, under provincial allowances, they have been able to earn some income through paid work. It means these people will be able to escape poverty for a few months.

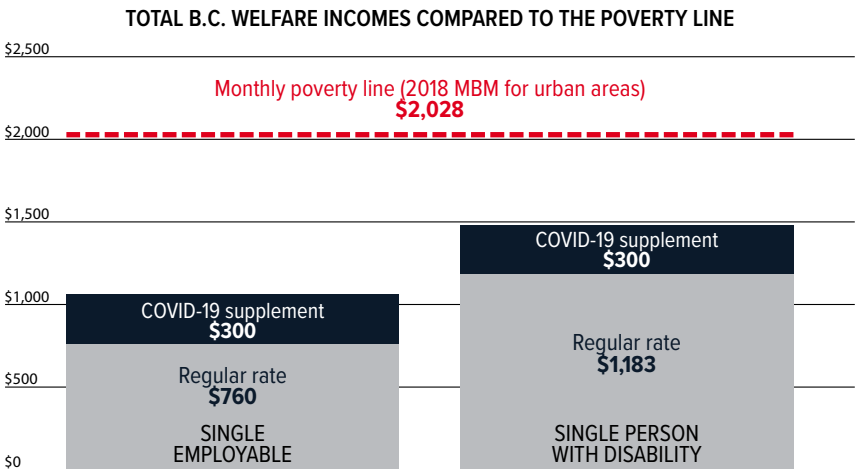
Typically, welfare payments are contingent on the recipient being able to demonstrate they actively looked for work or engaged in approved training programs. This requirement has been dropped for the duration of the pandemic, as recommended by the CCPA-BC, while disability assistance recipients (who are already excluded from the work-search requirement) will receive the \$52/month cash payment for transit for as long as bus fares are suspended in B.C.

Not so good

The emergency support payments started on April 22, which left people in deep poverty stuck for too long trying to absorb the extra costs of living during the pandemic. This delay could have been avoided had the income assistance supports been announced a little earlier and paid at the end of March, as was done in Nova Scotia (though with a much smaller supplement amount).

Fortunately, the federal government expedited its one-time GST credit top-up payment to April 9, providing some desperately needed funds in the meantime. Income assistance recipients in B.C. who filed their taxes for 2018 will qualify for a one-time extra benefit of \$290 for a single employable person and just over \$700 for a single parent with one child (slightly more for families with more children), which will not be clawed back.

The other federal and provincial emergency benefit top-ups that have been announced (via the Canada Child Benefit and B.C.'s Climate Action Tax Credit, which are also not clawed back from welfare) are not expected to be disbursed until May. Also troubling is the discrepancy between what CERB recipients will take home in emergency support (up to \$8,000 over four months) and the amount available for those who cannot work due to complex health conditions and therefore do not qualify for the federal assistance (\$900 over three months). Income assistance recipients will not be eligible for the provincial rent supplement of up to \$500 per month, or the one-time \$1,000 B.C. Emergency Benefit for Workers, even if they worked enough last year to qualify for the CERB.



Deep poverty in B.C.

The monthly assistance rate for a single person considered to be “employable” is \$760, and for them a \$300 crisis supplement will be significant. However, even with this temporary increase, the welfare income for a single person amounts to half of the poverty line as measured by Statistics Canada’s market basket measure (the official poverty line recognized by the federal government). The monthly poverty line for 2018 was around \$2,000 a month for a single person in large B.C. cities (populations over 100,000), and between \$1,730 and \$1,785 for smaller towns and rural areas.

People with disabilities receive a slightly higher benefit of \$1,183 a month, but they also face extra costs due to their disability. The chart on page 10 shows that even with the crisis supplement they will continue to live at least \$500 below the poverty line every month and remain in deep poverty.

These pitifully low welfare rates force many to live in substandard housing or become homeless if they’re unable to get a subsidized housing unit, waitlists for which are very long. Even single room occupancy units (a type of affordable housing) are too expensive for many welfare recipients; in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside the average unit was renting at \$663 a month in 2018, according to the latest Carnegie Community Action Project housing report.

Low rates also force people to spend much of their time meeting their basic needs; for example, by lining up for free food and relying on now-closed public libraries and community centres for essential services like internet access, important for staying informed about the latest public health advice and developments in the pandemic or accessing government services that are increasingly provided online. With other community services also closed or operating with reduced capacity, hunger and social isolation looms as a real problem for some of the most vulnerable British Columbians.

We have previously called on the province to immediately and permanently raise welfare rates to at least 75% of the poverty line, and for a medium-term plan to bring rates the

rest of the way up to the poverty line. That way we can ensure people who have fallen on hard times or are unable to work due to illness or disability can live with dignity. At \$2,000 a month, the federal CERB points to a standard—one that is remarkably close to the 2018 market basket measure poverty line for urban areas—that Canadians consider the bare minimum needed to live on. Why are people on provincial income and disability assistance forced to live on much less?

Reality check on “temporary” income assistance

Over 206,000 British Columbians received income assistance in February, or about 4% of the provincial population. The majority of these people (64%) received disability assistance; a quarter (26%) received temporary assistance in the “expected to work” category; and one in 10 (10%) were receiving temporary assistance but were not expected to be able to work (e.g., due to being the sole caregiver of young children). The temporary assistance recipients include 23,000 families with children, the vast majority of which are single-parent families. Another 10,000 families with children live on disability assistance.

The only way many welfare recipients can make ends meet is by supplementing their income with formal or informal work. However, much of this has likely dried up with the pandemic, and most working social assistance recipients would not qualify for the federal COVID-19 worker supports because they earned less than \$5,000 last year. Without these lifeline sources of income, welfare recipients will be forced to try to survive on pitifully low regular assistance rates.

According to B.C. government data, the median length of time on temporary assistance was 10 months last year, which means that half of recipients left income assistance sooner but half needed benefits for more than 10 months. This is a very long time to be living on totally inadequate incomes. People with disabilities stay on assistance much longer, frequently for the rest of their lives. And with the economic disruption we are seeing

because of COVID-19, it’s likely that even temporary assistance will be required for longer than usual.

More income assistance will be needed

We should expect to see a surge in welfare applications over the next few months. About a third of unemployed Canadians won’t qualify for the federal relief benefits and some of those will have to turn to provincial social assistance. The provincial government should be prepared to process these new applications quickly.

The current application process is burdensome due to barriers that discourage applications or delay support to people who find themselves in crisis. Although some very positive changes to several of these rules were made in the 2019 B.C. budget, asset limits remain low for people on temporary assistance, forcing them to exhaust most of their savings before receiving assistance even for a month or two. Often that means they have to leave their housing or won’t be able to afford a phone or a data plan, among other essentials.

Waiving asset limits for the duration of the pandemic and streamlining the application process would get support out faster during this challenging time and cushion the longer-term human and economic costs of the pandemic. In the medium term, an overhaul of the application process, ending unfair clawbacks, and higher asset limits would ensure that all British Columbians who find themselves in crisis can receive income support without being forced into even deeper financial insecurity once life goes back to normal.

IGLIKA IVANOVA IS A SENIOR ECONOMIST AND PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCHER AT THE CCPA-BC. VIVECA ELLIS IS INTERIM COMMUNITY ORGANIZER WITH THE BC POVERTY REDUCTION COALITION AND A CO-FOUNDER OF THE SINGLE MOTHERS’ ALLIANCE BC.





Mel Watkins, May 15, 1932–April 2, 2020

Mel Watkins as teacher, scholar and activist

HUGH GRANT AND DAVID WOLFE | IN MEMORIAM

FOR ANYONE FIRST exposed to Canadian political economy in the 1960s and 1970s, Mel Watkins was an iconic figure. Through his strong association with the Watkins Report, commissioned by Liberal cabinet minister Walter Gordon in the mid-1960s, and his critical role in the drafting of the Waffle Manifesto in 1969 (documented in Dave Godfrey's *Gordon to Watkins to You*), he gained instant recognition among a generation of students and activists deeply concerned with the growing degree of foreign control over the Canadian economy and the inadequate response to the issue by the mainstream political parties of the day. Through his subsequent involvement with the Berger Commission in the 1970s and his passionate opposition to the Free Trade Agreement and the

NAFTA in the 1980s and 1990s, political activism was, and remains, a central part of Mel's contribution to Canadian society and politics.

Along with his continuing engagement in Canadian political life, Mel was always an active scholar, born in the Innis tradition of Canadian political economy, and shaped by the work of a contemporary generation of economic historians and political economists, including Kari Levitt, Jim Laxer, Tom Naylor and Wallace Clement. Through his many contributions to magazine columns, government reports and books and scholarly journals, Mel profoundly influenced the intellectual development of Canadian political economy over the course of more than four decades. The scope of his work ranged from theoretical

writings on the staple thesis; analysis of foreign investment, the multinational corporation and international trade; observations on the state of Canadian economics and political economy; commentaries on a range of political issues; and reflections on technology. The themes addressed and the arguments made continue to resonate and offer important insights into the nature of Canadian political economy today.

His contribution to Canadian political economy is, or will be, apparent to those who have an opportunity to read his work. Less well known, except to those who had the good fortune to enrol in one of his courses, is his influence as a teacher and mentor to undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Toronto.

Our association with Mel dates from the early 1970s at a time when the Department of Political Economy was a rarefied if not rather strange place. In the politically charged atmosphere of the Vietnam War period, it was not unusual for incoming undergraduates to be familiar with the Waffle Movement, the Committee for an Independent Canada and the findings of the Watkins and Gray Reports on foreign ownership, or to read regularly *Canadian Dimension* and *The Canadian Forum*. Eager first-year students in search of their lecture hall in Sidney Smith Hall ran the gamut of newspaper sellers from a wide range of political parties and factions of the day. Most of the writings of Marx, Lenin, Mao and Tim Buck were available for purchase. Rare times indeed.

Once acclimatized to the University of Toronto, it was possible to find a number of courses scattered through various academic departments that dealt with the issues pertaining to the New Left. This was less true in the Department of Economics; however, Ian Parker was a source of inspiration and two faculty members had definite name recognition: Abraham Rotstein and Mel Watkins.

Despite the presence of Parker, Rotstein, Watkins and others, pursuing an alternative program of study in economics grew more difficult as the neoclassical orthodoxy extended its grip on the former home of Innis and Easterbrook and the Keynesian consensus crumbled. The *Political Economy Course Critique* for 1973/74, published by the students' association, observed that, "Numerous students emphasized the need for courses on the exploitation of multi-national corporations or on Marxist economic theory." Lest students' criticisms be shrugged off by faculty and administrators, they were accompanied by a warning: "We, the editors, sincerely hope that this course critique will aid in pinpointing some of the inadequacies in each individual course. This, however, is not enough. Words must be followed by action."

In a curious act of pluralism, or perhaps product differentiation, the department responded by creating two versions of a course on Canadian economic issues, one taught by Ed Safarian and the other, not recommended for commerce students, by Mel Watkins. Presumably designed to assuage the small band of dissident students, the department was doubtless surprised when the latter was consistently over-subscribed and was the overwhelming choice of commerce majors seeking to complete their economics requirement. The *Course Critique* for "Eco 337: Contemporary Issues in the Canadian Economy" reported that: "Professor Watkins' course is one of the few, if not the only economics course to follow the Marxist viewpoint of economics. Watkins is, in addition, not afraid to point out the shortcomings of the Keynesian school of economics." Despite this blessing, he did not escape criticism, "because he spoke for practically the entire two hours each lecture." When Mel was seconded to work for the Dene during the Berger Inquiry, the course's popularity forced the department to arrange a last-minute replacement. The best it could come up with was the equally witty and urbane, yet less renowned academic from the Hautes Études Commerciales, Jacques Parizeau.

As the opportunity to study political economy within the Department of Economics slowly disintegrated, Mel took refuge in the undergraduate Canadian studies program at University College and in teaching a graduate course in Canadian political economy with colleagues David Wolfe and Stephen Clarkson in political science, and distanced himself, both physically and intellectually, from his colleagues in economics. Just the same, his courses—whether offered in economics, political science or Canadian studies—became a rite of passage for those concerned with political economy, drawing students from every discipline and interdisciplinary program. One observation was unavoidable for his students. Political economy could be a strongly grounded theoretical discipline while commenting on the immediate issues of the day. The former required an acute awareness of the intuition, or vision, that informed the theoretical model, while the latter demanded a personal engagement in the current issues.

For his part, Mel was never far removed from the important political issues of the day, be it through his principal authorship of the Watkins' Report on Foreign Ownership, his involvement in party politics (from the Waffle Group to his candidacy in two federal elections under the NDP banner in the Woodbine riding), as an advisor to the Dene Nation during the Berger Commission hearings, as an anti-free trade advocate for the Canadian Labour Congress during the FTA debates, as a columnist and contributing editor at *This* magazine, and through his work for Science for Peace. Yet throughout these various activities, Mel could almost always be found in his office and the lecture halls at University College, University of Toronto where he provided a guiding hand to the intellectual development of successive generations of students until his retirement in the 1990s.

Throughout this period, he continued an active program of scholarship, contributing new papers to academic conferences, participating in several versions of edited collections on the development of Canadian political economy and to academic journals. As scholarly trends evolved over the course of these decades and the dominant academic issues of the day changed, Mel remained firmly committed to two critical values: the seminal contribution of the Innis tradition for an understanding of the development of the Canadian economy, society and the polity; and the need to analyze the factors contributing to, and the political implications of, a growing loss of Canadian sovereignty. His intellectual contribution to understanding these issues remains as critical today as when he first started writing about them in the 1960s. **M**

EXCERPTED FROM *THE STAPLE THEORY* © 50: REFLECTIONS ON THE LASTING SIGNIFICANCE OF MEL WATKINS' "A STAPLE THEORY OF ECONOMIC GROWTH", EDITED BY JIM STANFORD AND REPUBLISHED BY THE CCPA IN APRIL 2020. THIS CHAPTER WAS BASED ON MATERIAL ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHORS IN THEIR EDITED COLLECTION, *STAPLES AND BEYOND: SELECTED WRITINGS OF MEL WATKINS* (MCGILL-QUEENS UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2006). MEL WATKINS PASSED AWAY PEACEFULLY, WITH FAMILY PRESENT, ON APRIL 2. A DEAR FRIEND TO THE CCPA, WE WILL MISS HIM VERY MUCH.

Up Front

CAM GOFF | NATIONAL

Will Canada's grain farmers be CUSMA collateral damage?

On March 12, Prime Minister Trudeau and at least two other MPs had to self-isolate after being exposed to the COVID-19 virus. The following day, Parliament unanimously agreed to clear its agenda and recess until at least April 20. One result of this otherwise prudent decision was that Bill C-4, implementing legislation for the Canada–U.S.–Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) that will replace NAFTA, received royal assent without a full hearing in the Senate.

Many farmers were shocked to find a series of omnibus-style amendments to the Canada Grain Act in Bill C-4. These changes, which affect the Canadian Grain Commission, were not negotiated in CUSMA and have nothing to do with implementing the trade deal. But because all attention was focused on ratifying CUSMA as quickly as possible, the unnecessary Canada Grain Act amendments were passed without proper scrutiny by Parliament. Those responsible no doubt knew that attempting to weaken the Canadian Grain Commission through a standalone act would elicit heated debate, as occurred with the previous government's Bill C-48, which died on the order paper in 2015.

Canada's CUSMA negotiators agreed to treat wheat grown in the United States the same as Canadian wheat and not to identify its country of origin on inspection documents. However, Bill C-4

makes it so Canada must treat *all* U.S.-grown grain—not just wheat—as if it were Canadian-grown. The implementing legislation also enables regulations that would allow inspectors to assign Canadian grades to grain grown outside of Canada or the U.S. It both weakens the grain commission's authority in areas that affect grain transportation and quality control and increases elevator company power over farmers.

It is hard to see Bill C-4's unnecessary amendments to the Canada Grain Act as anything other than an end-run designed to avoid public debate.

The National Farmers Union (NFU) informed a number of senators of our concerns. On March 11, during the pre-study of Bill C-4 by the Senate's international trade committee, Senator Paul Massicotte asked Canada's chief agriculture negotiator in the CUSMA talks whether the NFU's understanding of the bill was correct. The reply was that we were correct in our analysis of the changes being unnecessary, including the expansion of access to our commodity export system to all types of grain from the U.S. instead of for U.S. wheat only.

By allowing U.S.-grown grain of all types (barley, corn, soy, oats, etc.) into our grain handling and export system, we can also expect impacts on our grain transportation system. One can imagine that U.S. shippers would take advantage of Canada's rail system instead of using more expensive U.S. transport, making existing capacity issues and bottlenecks worse. Railways would no doubt suggest "solving" the problem by ending the revenue cap (the regulated maximum revenue entitlement on grain shipments), allowing CN and CP to raise freight rates to whatever the market can bear.

When Bill C-4 became law on March 12, it ended the possibility of amending the CUSMA implementing legislation to remove the unnecessary clauses affecting grain. All of this was done after the government had given notice of upcoming consultations on the Canada Grain Act. It is hard to see Bill C-4's unnecessary amendments as anything other than an end-run designed to avoid public debate.

Now farmers need to work together. It is imperative to get these harmful parts of the bill removed before CUSMA goes into effect. Allowing Bill C-4's amendments to the Canada Grain Act to stand would be an affront to the decades of work done by farmers and our public institutions and agencies to establish premium markets and customer loyalty based on the quality of Canadian grain.

CAM GOFF OPERATES A GRAIN FARM WITH HIS BROTHERS NEAR HANLEY, SASKATCHEWAN AND IS A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL FARMERS UNION.

The public lab that could have helped fight COVID-19?

Canada once had a publicly owned pharmaceutical company that could have made a difference in the current coronavirus crisis—except that we sold it.

Connaught Labs was a superstar in global medicine. For seven decades, this publicly owned Canadian company performed brilliantly on the national and international stage, contributing to medical breakthroughs and developing affordable treatments and vaccines for deadly diseases. Hated by its corporate competitors, Connaught was unique among pharmaceutical companies in that its focus was on human need, not profit.

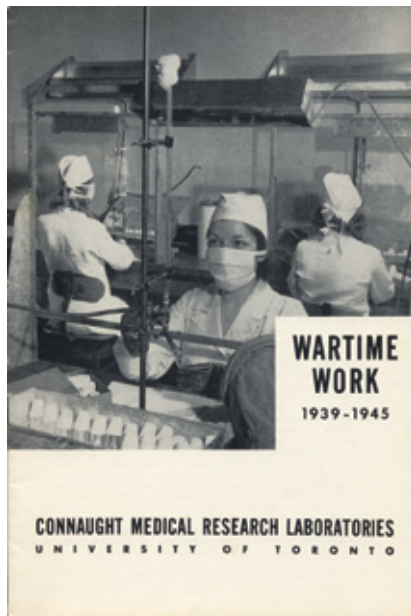
It would have come in handy today.

In fact, Connaught got its start amid a diphtheria outbreak in 1913. Toronto doctor John Gerald FitzGerald was outraged that children were dying in large numbers even though there was a diphtheria treatment available from a U.S. manufacturer. But, at \$25 a dose, it was unaffordable to all but the rich. FitzGerald set out to change that—and did.

After experimenting on a horse in a downtown Toronto stable, FitzGerald developed an antitoxin that proved effective in treating diphtheria and made it available to public health outlets across the country. Then, with lab space provided by the University of Toronto, he and his team went on to produce low-cost treatments and vaccines for other common killers, including tetanus, typhoid and meningitis.

Connaught developed an impressive research capacity, with its scientists contributing to some of the biggest medical breakthroughs of the 20th century—including penicillin and the Salk and Sabin polio vaccines. It also played a central role in the global eradication of smallpox.

“It was a pioneer in a lot of ways,” says Colleen Fuller, a research associate of the Canadian Centre for Policy



Alternatives. “It did things commercial companies wouldn’t do because they weren’t willing to take the financial risks.”

Fuller argues that if a publicly owned Connaught were still operating today, it could be contributing to the development of the coronavirus vaccine—and ensuring a Canadian supply if there was a global shortage.

Yet, tragically it isn’t.

Succumbing to corporate pressure and a misguided belief that the private sector always does things better, Brian Mulroney’s Progressive Conservative government privatized Connaught Labs in the 1980s. Today, what remains of this once-dazzling Canadian public enterprise has been taken over by a giant French pharmaceutical company.

The coronavirus outbreak may finally help expose the fallacy of the notion that the private marketplace is innately superior—which has been the guiding principle in Anglo-American countries (including Canada) for the past four decades, leading to the constant denigration of government and its functions.

Fortunately, Canada’s public health care system, established in the 1960s, has been so popular that it has survived, despite attacks of “socialized medicine”—although our political leaders have quietly whittled away funding for the system in recent decades.

If the foolishness of cutting funding for public health care wasn’t already abundantly clear, the coronavirus has driven it home with a sledgehammer, as we’ve witnessed the extra struggles the U.S. faces in containing the virus with its lack of public health care. Still, our willingness to go along with the privatization cult in recent decades has left us weaker and less protected than we could be.

Not only do we no longer have Connaught Labs, but Canada spends \$1 billion a year funding basic medical research at Canadian universities, yet relies on the private marketplace to produce, control—and profit from—the resulting medical innovations.

For instance, the crucial work in developing a vaccine to treat Ebola was done by Canadian scientists at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg—and financed by Canadian taxpayer money. But sole licensing rights to the vaccine were granted to a small U.S. company, which then sublicensed it to pharmaceutical giant Merck for \$50 million.

Although Merck is now producing the vaccine, critics have charged that the company did “next to nothing” to rush the vaccine into production during the deadly Ebola outbreak in West Africa, according to a recent paper published in the *Journal of Law and Biosciences*.

With a surge in future global pandemics expected, it might well be time to rethink Canada’s foolhardy attachment to the notion “the private sector always does things better.” Always unproven, that theory is looking increasingly far-fetched.

LINDA MCQUAIG IS AUTHOR OF *THE SPORT & PREY OF CAPITALISTS*, WHICH CRITIQUES THE PRIVATIZATION OF CONNAUGHT LABS AND OTHER PUBLIC ENTERPRISES. THIS ARTICLE ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE *TORONTO STAR* AND IS REPRINTED HERE WITH PERMISSION FROM THE AUTHOR.

Gig workers win the right to unionize

Setting the stage for a potential transformation of the gig economy, Foodora couriers recently won the right to unionize.

In February 2020, the Ontario Labour Relations Board dismissed the food delivery company's arguments that its delivery couriers are independent contractors. Instead, the board ruled that the couriers are dependent contractors. This is a category of workers who are more like employees and who are allowed to unionize under Ontario's Labour Relations Act.

"The gig economy as a whole is a scam," said Alex Kurth, Foodora courier and union organizer, in an interview with the CBC last August. "It's founded upon misclassification of workers in an attempt to shirk basic legal responsibilities and basic workers' rights."

Indeed, far from sharing the fruits of their labour in the so-called sharing economy, multibillion-dollar corporations like Amazon, Lyft and Uber have argued in courts and tribunals across the world that these workers are independent contractors, and thus not entitled to unionization, living wages, paid sick leave, discipline and termination protections, or unemployment insurance, among other rights and benefits.

In the same CBC story, Foodora spokesperson Sadie Weinstein expressed the concern that unions "could be detrimental to most participants in the gig economy, including newcomers to Canada." In fact, the above protections are essential for all gig workers, including and particularly low-waged immigrant workers forced into gig work precisely because of systemic barriers to other, more stable forms of employment.

The labour board's decision to agree with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers that Foodora couriers are dependent contractors was based on a number of interrelated considerations.

1. Foodora's app, which it owns and controls, is "the single most important

part of the delivery process." Couriers cannot licence or buy the software; they are only permitted to use it.

2. Unlike independent contractors, couriers are not entrepreneurs. They can make more money only if they do more deliveries, whether for Foodora or another app. Analogously, "if a bartender wants to work at night because there are more tips, it would not influence the classification of the bartender as an employee."

3. Couriers have limited economic independence. The fact that many couriers had other sources of income, "reflects the common challenges faced by workers with multiple part-time jobs. The only difference is that couriers are on-call for work through sophisticated technology and utilize their downtime to work a second job."

4. Unlike independent contractors, couriers cannot control how much Foodora pays them.

5. Couriers are heavily, if not entirely, integrated into Foodora's business. Foodora's revenue depends entirely on their reliable and timely services, while the couriers rely solely on Foodora's App.

Foodora's Toronto couriers had actually already voted on whether or not to join CUPW before the decision came out. But before their votes could be counted, the board first needed to decide if Ontario's labour laws allow gig economy workers to cast unionization votes in the first place. The results of the Foodsters' vote remain outstanding, now pending the board's determination of other legal issues in dispute. If that vote ultimately proves successful, Foodora couriers could become Canada's first unionized app-based workforce.

Regardless, while this is the first decision from a Canadian labour board about how to classify gig workers, it likely won't be the last. Since 2018, Amazon has been embroiled in a legal

fight with Local 175 of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union Canada about the unionization of its delivery drivers. UFCW Canada, meanwhile, is in the process of organizing Uber Black drivers, and workers at many other app-based workplaces continue to push for recognition as full employees.

Workers and employers at social media platforms will be monitoring the repercussions of this case closely. A unionized workforce presents a curtailment on the ability of software companies to exploit vulnerable workers for corporate profit. This exploitation has become especially stark under COVID-19 quarantine.

Over the past two months, people have increasingly turned to food and grocery delivery couriers to avoid infection in crowded stores. Despite that potentially lifesaving function, couriers do not receive sick pay or even protective gear. Besides representing unfair workplace policy, this is also a clear public health failure.

The gig economy is notorious for fracturing the traditional, physical workplace, where workers could naturally congregate, into a nebulous virtual sphere controlled by faceless algorithms. Against those isolationist odds, the Foodsters were nevertheless able to organize each other for what remains a long legal fight. They have been unflagging and have inspired workers at other companies, despite the fact gig economy workers are "dispersed, precarious, and sometimes short-tenured, and they are working in an industry where unions are demonized," as Ryan White, one of CUPW's lawyers in this case, noted on Twitter.

Against COVID-19's shadow, we need to be prepared for at least some of our workplaces to grow even more fissured. With people increasingly physically isolated from each through social distancing directives, the organizing lessons we can learn from the Foodsters about how to build real-world solidarity and trust in an online age are arguably more important than ever.

FATHIMA CADER IS A LAWYER, ACADEMIC AND WRITER, AND WAS CO-COUNSEL ON THE UNIONIZATION OF DELIVERY DRIVERS SERVICING AMAZON IN TORONTO.



Below the Fold

CYNTHIA KHOO

When artificial intelligence becomes artificial intimacy

WITH THE WORLD in self-isolating lockdown, people are relying more than ever on technology to maintain a range of relationships and social bonds. Some in the technology sector want to take this dependence even further. They envision a world where we don't just use their products to talk to each other, but also to talk to technology *as if it were another human*—through advancements in artificial intelligence (AI).

While interactive AI can provide real benefits in some circumstances—customer service chatbots are continually improving, and robots such as Paro the seal provide therapeutic companionship to isolated patients—the use of AI to replace human-to-human conversation in personal situations raises a host of ethical issues.

For example, AI-based chatbots for mental health, such as Woebot or Wysa, attempt to “converse” with users and guide them through cognitive behavioural therapy techniques. Google Duplex can make reservations and appointments on your behalf, in a hyper-realistic human voice, by phone. The messaging app Mei will advise you how to continue a conversation after purportedly analyzing the other person's emotional state based on incoming texts.

Even more intimately, the unreleased Assist app supplies users with fully composed comments, questions, invitations and “opening lines” based on their personal dating preferences, with the goal of making the user appear “curious,” “cute,” “witty” or “funny.” Assist users can set the app to send out messages in large automated batches to potential dating matches, who are none the wiser.

Not all ethical, legal or sociological concerns about AI-assisted communication may apply in all cases. However, developers, users and regulators must keep four critical considerations in mind when assessing whether a particular service would ultimately benefit or harm human relationships and well-being in the long run.

First, lack of transparency and disclosure risks manipulation or exploitation. A business might use Google Duplex to cultivate a false human connection with individual customers and engender higher spending. In a dating context, as podcast host Laurie Segall noted in an interview with Assist founder Shane Mac, “When the machine [as secretly deployed by the other person]...gets some kind of

vulnerability out of you, it feels like you've been violated in some way.”

Second, AI has shown notorious bias problems to date; for instance, in racist and sexist online search results, facial recognition technologies, and hiring and criminal justice algorithms. If AI is used to analyze and suggest text for social conversations, it may similarly perpetuate the biases of its developers and its users, or exclude the perspectives of entire groups outright. “We don't really have it [Assist] for a woman,” Mac told Segall in the same interview.

In fact, the very existence of Assist and similar dating bots reflects a broader gender bias in the AI-based tech world: the devaluation of what is generally known as emotional labour, which is disproportionately performed by women in society. Consider the “problem” these apps set out to “solve” with AI: the need to spend time putting thought into communication, parsing your tone and that of others, engaging with another's interests and words, assessing their emotional state and considering the impact of your own words.

Women are expected to do all this “naturally,” or often learn to do so to avoid negative repercussions; for men, there's an app for that. (To be clear, some individuals with autism or speech disabilities may benefit from similar technology, in which cases the tool is closer to a logistical aid to the act of expression rather than the source of the words or sentiment being expressed.)

Third, apps that analyze or store users' sensitive personal information, like their health conditions, sexual interests and conversational patterns, automatically raise privacy, security and consent issues. The Mei app could disclose to a co-worker that you're depressed, for example.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, we must ask whether the human communication to be substituted by AI generally serves an end in itself, or as a means to some other objective.

Customers of banks or retail stores do not usually talk to the bot, or the human, *for the sake of talking to them*. Therapy chatbots are more complicated due to the vulnerability of those seeking help, but ultimately they too can be seen as a means to an end—that of improved mental health.

But in the context of dating and relationships, meaningful human connection achieved through conversation is often an end in itself. Relying on software like the Assist app sets up those involved for failure or disappointment at best, and manipulative deceit at worst.

In short, using AI to replace human conversation, where connecting through conversation is the end and not the means, sets the groundwork for friends, partners, or those in other intimate or significant relationships, to outsource empathy, sensitivity, understanding and general emotional intelligence to a bot. In this transaction, users risk losing the ability—and responsibility—to genuinely develop those skills in themselves.

That is the point at which we risk becoming the most isolated of all. **M**

CYNTHIA KHOO IS A TECHNOLOGY AND HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER AND FOUNDER OF TEKHNOS LAW, A SOLE PRACTICE DIGITAL RIGHTS LAW FIRM.



Colour-coded Justice

ANTHONY N. MORGAN

The prison as petri dish

INFORMED BY HIS 27 years in prison, the political organizer, lawyer and late president of South Africa Nelson Mandela is known to have said: “No one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”

I considered Mandela’s words on Sunday, March 21, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, as I wrote this column from COVID-19 self-isolation. I can see how this nation has leapt to action to protect many of its citizens from harm. I am safer from being able to listen to the advice of our health officials. But what of the so-called lowest among us?

A growing number of tenacious and caring lawyers, advocates, allies and family members of incarcerated loved ones are calling for provincial and territorial governments, as well as the federal government, to extend compassion and common sense to Canada’s incarcerated civilians, a disproportionate number of whom are Indigenous, Black or otherwise racialized, as part of their COVID-19 response.

I have joined this campaign for both humanitarian and personal reasons: my younger brother is currently incarcerated at a federal medium-security correctional institution in Ontario. Admittedly, his well-being is driving my advocacy on this issue as much as my commitment, as a human rights lawyer, to de-policing and decarceration as a method of abolition. But we all need to realize that if my brother is safe, we will all be much safer too.

Like no other previous event, the COVID-19 outbreak is exposing the human rights crisis that is the contemporary prison. By its very nature, structure and function, the institution as we know it invalidates the supposed universality and ostensible inalienability of human rights as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, along with all other quasi-constitutional federal and provincial human rights legislation.

Incarceration results in the loss and/or severe limitation of basic human rights (to free movement, expression, assembly and association, to privacy, etc.). It also dramatically restricts social, economic and political opportunities and deprives people of human and humane contact, due to overly risk-averse and stigmatizing policies and social practices reserved specifically for those who have been incarcerated. There’s a reason the American sociologist

Joshua Price describes incarceration as a kind of “social death.”

The full weight of that idea hit me in a recent conversation with my friend, the award-winning writer NourbeSe Philip, who casually referred to these “Covidian times.” To quote my brother, “prisons are simply not equipped for a crisis like this.” Inmates are confined two to a small cell, or up to 12 at a time in living pods. How does anyone in that situation heed the advice of the world’s leading health care professionals to practice social distancing? It’s simple: you cannot.

Inmates must be escorted at all times, at close distance, by a correctional officer who is leaving and re-entering the prison. Guards must keep no more than two steps from the inmates as they bring them to see visitors or take them into different parts of the prison, to access such things as programming, the kitchen, jobs, health care and even showers. Inmates are required to live, exercise, wash themselves and eat in social settings and gatherings that are now banned, or would result in a fine, in many countries under pandemic states of emergency. As you might expect, there are no compulsory facemasks in jail, even for inmates showing symptoms of COVID-19.

If we take seriously the analogy of COVID-19 as a war, then our prisons are powder kegs being carried and cared for by chain-smoking soldiers. Tens of thousands of lives are at risk, and the fight against this pandemic critically undermined, if we don’t move more aggressively to apply COVID-19 emergency containment measures to Canada’s federal and provincial prisons.

That means making sure bail court judges are only denying bail to the most extremely and demonstrably high-risk accused. It means allowing offenders serving intermittent sentences to serve the rest of their time in the community. It means quickly releasing low-risk accused and offenders.

And it means providing cellphones (if without data) to inmates to avoid the few available pay phones becoming COVID-19 transmission points—and so inmates can better keep in touch with their lawyers and the family members and loved ones that often play a pivotal role in their rehabilitation.

Though some of these measures have been adopted or are being explored, they’re not being pursued nearly as fast as the virus is spreading. The urgency is not theoretical: Toronto recently confirmed that a provincial correctional officer—notably at an institution with considerable overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous inmates—had contracted the infection. This accentuates the point that COVID-19 is not a colour-blind crisis, but a litmus test of Canadians’ commitment to racial equity as a national norm.

In sum, if immediate and dramatic action to safely depopulate Canada’s prisons isn’t taken up as part of our governments’ containment measures, our efforts to address the outbreak won’t be judged by who is left, but by who was left behind. **M**

ANTHONY N. MORGAN IS A TORONTO-BASED HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER, POLICY CONSULTANT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATOR. HIS COLUMN, COLOUR-CODED JUSTICE, APPEARS REGULARLY IN THE CCPA MONITOR.



NATASHA BULOWSKI

OUR OPPORTUNITY TO END HOUSING POVERTY

To fix Canada's affordable housing crisis, we must take out the profit motive, say experts. Can the massive scale of the COVID-19 emergency response shake us out of complacency?

SOMETIMES IT TAKES one crisis to bring another into the light.

By the end of March, in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, all of Canada was in a state of emergency and self-quarantine. Thousands of businesses shut down, sending hundreds of thousands of workers home, with or without pay, indefinitely. In one week alone, a million people applied for employment insurance. Canadians with mortgages were struggling to secure deferred payments from the banks. And while some provinces had temporarily banned rental evictions, none had offered to pick up rent payments for those who had lost their income.

How were people supposed to live in these conditions for more than a few weeks? How were they going to afford their rent? A CCPA report in March by political economist Ricardo Tranjan found that of the 3.4 million households who depend on employment or self-employment income to pay their rent, more than 40% have less than one month's worth of income saved. And of that group, nearly a quarter only have enough savings to last them a week in the event that they lose their income.

Tranjan's report called on the federal government to provide immediate relief for low-income households through measures like increased rental subsidies, exempting unemployed low-income households from paying rent, or offering a goods and services tax supplement to

low-income and unemployed renters. In the short term, these and other immediate actions would put money in the pockets of everyone struggling to pay the bills in a period of rising unemployment and prolonged quarantine.

But the sad truth is, Canada's housing affordability crisis has been 30 years in the making. In a nation where housing needs drastically outstrip availability in most cities, and where the private sector is unwilling or unable to build more truly affordable units, could the COVID-19 pandemic offer a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to embrace new policies and new partnerships with the non-profit housing sector? Could we not use this moment to fix Canada's housing crisis for good times and bad?

In January, Ottawa became the first Canadian city to declare a housing and homelessness emergency. In the past two years, average rental prices in the city have risen by 13.5% while vacancy rates are stuck around a relatively low 1.8%. (For comparison, Victoria and Halifax had vacancy rates of 1% in 2019 while in Calgary and Edmonton they were 3.7% and 4.9%.) An average-priced bachelor apartment now goes for \$933 a month while provincial disability payments for shelter are stuck at \$497 a month. The emergency motion, spearheaded by a group of five Ottawa city councillors, has put a spotlight on these numbers, but the situation it describes will be familiar to many other cities.

Nationally, between 2006 and 2016, the number of actually affordable units on the market (renting below \$750 a month) declined by 830,000, according to data from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Rental Market Survey and the 2011 National Household Survey. In a 2017 paper, Steve Pomeroy, a senior housing policy consultant, noted that new additions to Canada's rental stock over that same period were typically priced at 140% of the average market rent and therefore did not contribute to the affordable housing supply.

Existing stock is also disappearing fast. Landlords use tactics like personal-use evictions, above-guideline rent increases, "renovictions" (where tenants are removed to upgrade a unit that becomes unaffordable to them when the renovation is finished), and will neglect to repair or maintain units to get rid of current tenants so they can relist the unit at a higher rent. These and other tactics help some landlords get around provincial rent increase guidelines, but they are not the primary driver of average rental price increases. There are simply not enough affordable rental units to go around.

A 2019 study by David Macdonald for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, titled *Unaccommodating: Rental Wages in Canada*, put the affordability crisis into a context everyone can understand. Macdonald set out to determine the minimum hourly wage a person would have to make in order to comfortably afford to rent (using no more than 30% of their income) a one- or two-bedroom apartment in nearly 800 neighbourhoods within Canada's major cities. The answer: \$22.40 an hour for a two-bedroom apartment and just over \$20 an hour for an average one-bedroom unit.

These "rental wages" are at least \$5 an hour more than the highest provincial minimum wage in Canada (\$15 in

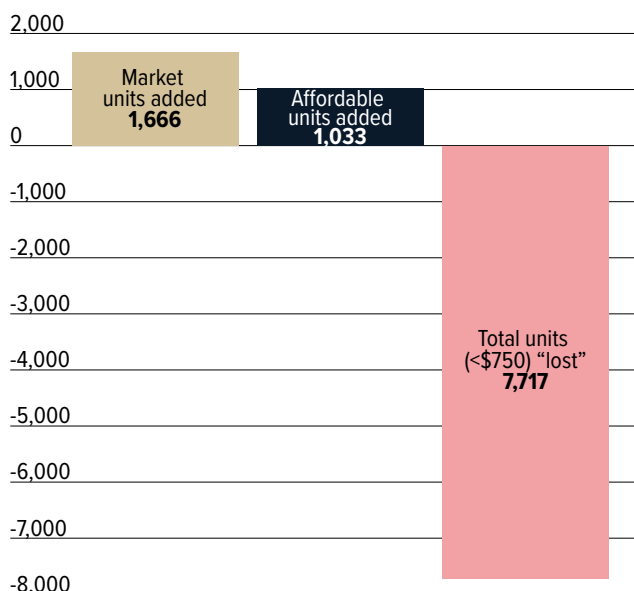
Alberta). In most Canadian cities, including Canada's largest metropolitan areas of Toronto and Vancouver, Macdonald found there are no neighbourhoods where it is possible to afford a one- or two-bedroom unit on a single minimum wage, and even people earning much more than that will struggle to find a home they can afford.

Not only is there a woefully inadequate supply of affordable rental stock, but what little stock is available is eroding at alarming rates. CMHC data from 2011 and 2016 show that for every new affordable unit constructed in Ottawa, seven are lost to demolition, reconstruction or raised rents. Slowing and offsetting this erosion will be key to solving Ottawa's housing affordability crisis and meeting recent federal targets, in the National Housing Strategy, for reducing chronic homelessness and renter housing needs by 50%.

As you might expect, these targets are easier to set than they are to meet, especially with existing affordable housing frameworks and plans at the local and provincial levels. That's why Ottawa's downtown city councillors went looking for new ideas as part of their housing emergency motion.

Based on his work at the Centre for Urban Research and Education, they commissioned Pomeroy to produce an in-depth analysis of Ottawa's 10-year housing and homelessness plan and to suggest new targets and actions the City could take to get back on track. If there is an underlying message to Pomeroy's study, it is that we cannot rely on the private sector to build all the affordable units we need.

CHANGE IN AFFORDABLE RENTAL UNITS
OTTAWA, 2011–16



SOURCE: CENTRE FOR URBAN RESEARCH AND EDUCATION, "A HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EMERGENCY IN OTTAWA," JANUARY 2020.

“The private sector is not going to get us out of our housing emergency,” said Ottawa-Centre Councillor Catherine McKenney when I spoke to her in March. “When we talk about affordable housing, supportive housing, social housing, we can’t look at a profit margin. We have to look at a health, social service margin. We have to make sure people are well taken care of and once you put profit into that you will lose that.”

Not only must cities figure out ways to prevent the erosion of existing housing stock—“so that we aren’t losing that affordable stock as property owners and landlords renovate and push out tenants,” said McKenney—but also how to drastically increase the construction of new affordable rental units, preferably by public or non-profit actors and in combination with provincial and federal rental assistance programs, so that people can afford to pay for their homes.

Though Ottawa council is discussing new rental replacement policies and inclusionary zoning rules for affordable units (more on these below), the trick to achieving a more sustainable housing sector, according to Pomeroy, will be to make it easier for non-profits to compete with private developers. That could be done by encouraging and supporting (with financing) non-profit actors to bid on and win contracts to construct and manage mixed-income communities.

We can compare the breakeven rents—the rent needed to cover operating costs, mortgage payments and return on equity—of private builds versus non-profit builds to show why this makes sense. According to a 2019 study prepared by Coriolis Consulting, which outlines strategies for facilitating affordable rental construction in Vancouver, the breakeven rate on private one-bedrooms is between \$600 and \$1,000 more per unit, depending on the type of unit, than a similar unit built as a non-profit. And of course it would be: no profit, no extra costs to renters or the city.

However, as Pomeroy told me in March, for non-profits to build and maintain affordable housing, they need land, financing and rent supplements. He pointed to Vancouver’s

Supportive Housing Strategy as an example of how it could work. In 2007, the City of Vancouver purchased one and leased 11 City-owned sites to non-profit housing sponsors for 60 years, at nominal prepaid rents, for the supply of supportive housing to people who require social supports, such as mental health care or substance abuse counselling, on site.

“That way,” Pomeroy said, “the City continues to own the land, but the non-profits get to lease it for a buck instead of paying full price.”

Once those sites were leased to the non-profits, Vancouver was able to set up a land trust and transfer those

properties so they could be held in perpetuity as affordable housing. It is the land trust aspect of the Vancouver plan that McKenney said she will push in Ottawa, where the City has recently identified 18 parcels of land deemed suitable for mixed-income developments.

McKenney’s housing emergency motion is asking council to look at setting up a land trust to hold those lands for non-profit housing developers. But the discussions are moving slowly and there is a risk that private developers will purchase the lands before a trust can be established.

“We’ve seen it happen before where lands have been identified for non-profit and then have been sold by the City,” she told me. “There is absolutely no reason to think that it wouldn’t happen again.”

Building new developments on unused land is important for increasing affordable stock, but it is a very costly thing for non-profits to do. Building takes time and does not stop the erosion of existing affordable rental stock through raised rents. Helping non-profits acquire existing moderate-rent properties so the rents cannot be raised is one way to preserve existing affordable stock.

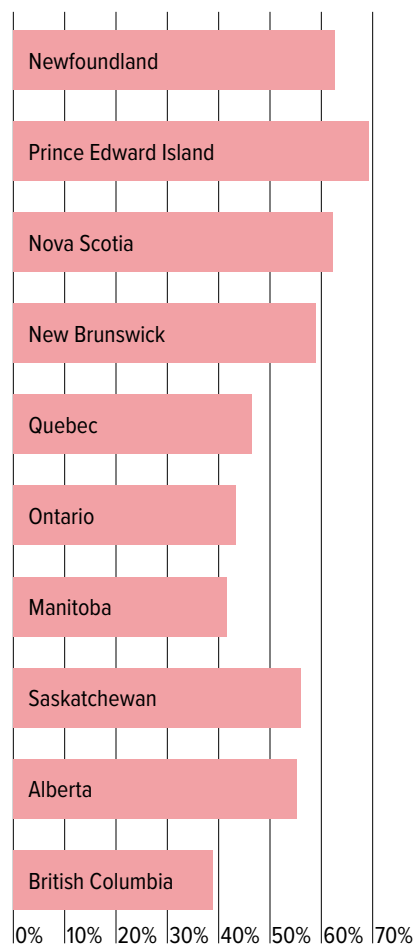
“What we can do is we can enable the non-profits to behave like private capital funds and real estate investment trusts,” Pomeroy said, suggesting that the way to do so is through an acquisition fund.

The problem is, current federal programs, through the National Housing Strategy, aren’t configured to enable acquisition—they focus on creating new supply and retrofitting existing social housing. And even if these programs did fund acquisition, it takes time to access government funding. When existing properties come on the market, they can be sold within 30 days, making it easy for wealthy private developers to snap them up.

“It’s very, very difficult for the non-profits to compete with that,” Pomeroy said. “We need to...create an intermediate step, some kind of an acquisition fund that could help the non-profits go and buy that property.”

Pomeroy is working on a concept called a revolving loan fund. It would

SHARE OF WORKING TENANT HOUSEHOLDS WITH LESS THAN A MONTH OF SAVINGS BY PROVINCE, 2016



SOURCE: THE RENT IS DUE SOON: FINANCIAL INSECURITY AND COVID-19, RICARDO TRANJAN, CCPA, MARCH 2020.

encourage social impact investors and foundations to invest in a fund that would help provide the non-profit housing sector with the capital needed to buy properties. The City of Toronto simply used its own funds to help small non-profits buy existing rooming houses, but that money was given away as a grant.

“When you give it away as a grant, you can only spend it once,” said Pomeroy. “In a revolving loan fund, you can keep spending that money over and over again.”

With Pomeroy’s setup, when a building comes on the market, non-profits could then borrow from the revolving loan fund to supplement their bank loan, and in a few years the fund would get its money back with a modest return. That money could then be spent on another building, and the returns on that building then allow the acquisition of yet another property.

“For all the reasons we know now about the erosion issues and the commodification and the financialization of housing, giving the assets to private developers is not going to preserve affordability in the long run,” he said.

Though policies like inclusionary zoning and rent controlled for income incent private developers to include moderately lower-rent units (at or slightly below market rents) in their developments, these units are not actually affordable in most cases. Rental support subsidies and housing allowances for low-income renters can help bring costs down. But with an estimated 2.4 million Canadian households experiencing core housing need in 2020, according to Macdonald’s assessment, many middle-income households also struggle to find rentals for reasonable prices.

In Ottawa, for example, most new developments rent at up to 180% the market price. Non-profits provide much lower rent-g geared-to-income housing. This leaves a gap in the intermediate housing market that could be filled by non-profits—as long as they can find a way to make it cost-effective.

Building and maintaining affordable housing is incredibly difficult for non-profits because deeply affordable units don’t generate enough rent to operate very well, said Pomeroy. “You can’t get the funding to make the program work with 100% really-low-income-targeted [units].”

The way to get around this constraint is to incorporate some units at intermediate rents, from \$1,400 to \$1,500 a month. This ensures the non-profit builder is stronger financially and at the same time provides housing for middle-income individuals who exist within that intermediate gap—unable to afford 180% market rent, but not in need of deeply affordable housing.

There are considerable spinoff benefits to this model that make it more attractive than status quo inclusionary zoning. Having high- and low-income tenants living in the same community helps create a sense of interconnectedness and merges the worlds of people who typically live in very different neighbourhoods, for example. McKenney said this is especially beneficial for children because they all get exposed to the same opportunities—opportunities not always available in the more isolated Ottawa Community

WHAT IS CORE HOUSING NEED?

Core housing need happens when:

- major repairs are required and residents don’t have the means to move to a good unit in their community;
- there are not enough bedrooms for the residents, and they don’t have the means to move;
- the current home costs more than the residents can afford, and they do not have the means to make a move or find an available affordable home in their community.

SOURCE: UNDERSTANDING CORE HOUSING NEED, CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

Housing neighbourhoods. “We all need to grow up together,” she said.

On top of the financial hurdles to a larger non-profit role in affordable housing management and creation, there are the bureaucratic barriers. Currently, as soon as a call for applications goes out, every non-profit in the city puts precious time and money into creating a proposal only to have it turned down because there are eight other organizations applying for the same project. For non-profits with limited staff and resources, \$50,000 per application is a significant loss.

Pomeroy said a better system could involve asking for expressions of interest instead of putting out a full request for proposals to begin with. Interested groups could then be evaluated according to their ability to develop and manage the project, and then be put on a list for when opportunities arise. Eliminating this competition between non-profits not only saves them time, energy and money, but also helps ensure they are well-equipped to take on the development.

For many housing experts, however, nonprofits are the second-best option, and under current funding conditions not a very good one at that. In early April I spoke to Shauna Mackinnon, associate professor and chair of urban and inner-city studies at the University of Winnipeg and former director of the CCPA-Manitoba, who told me public housing is the most effective way to provide deeply affordable housing to as many people as possible, but there is poor public perception of these programs.

“The public model has been far from perfect, but that’s not because it’s public—it’s because we’ve starved it,” she said. There have not been any significant new additions to public housing stock in decades and what little stock exists is often in poor repair and typically goes to people

in most desperate need. This feeds into the notion of public housing as ghettos, she said.

“The only reason why people get ghettoized in public housing is because there’s not enough public housing. If we had more public housing you would have more variety of people, maybe with low income, but a greater variety of people, not just the most destitute with the most complex lives.”

Nonprofits providing deeply affordable rent-geared-to-income housing require a government subsidy to be able to provide that affordability and still cover their operating costs. For many non-profits these subsidies come from bilateral agreements involving the federal and provincial governments that were signed 35 to 50 years ago and are in many cases about to expire.

According to Sarah Cooper, assistant professor in the Department of City Planning at the University of Manitoba and a CCPA-Manitoba research associate, governments are in no mood today to renew those subsidies, based on a misplaced belief that with mortgages paid off, the nonprofits will be able to maintain the affordable housing on their own. In reality, without those government subsidies many nonprofits have to price some units at market rent or convert to mixed-income communities to make ends meet, which results in the loss

For many housing experts, however, nonprofits are a second-best option, and under current funding conditions not a very good one at that.

of invaluable rent-geared-to-income units, Cooper told me.

Another, more fundamental problem with relying on nonprofits, according to MacKinnon, is their relative lack of transparency and accountability compared to government-run public housing. Nonprofits may or may not be democratically run; some will want to “honour the spirit of housing that is rent geared to income, but they may not, and they may not even actually have any choice because they need to survive as well, so without deep government subsidy they may need to set rents at the market rate.”

Seen from this perspective, the federal and provincial downloading of housing responsibilities to the nonprofit sector is a contributing factor to the affordable housing crisis, not a reality housing advocates need to grudgingly work within. “Their (governments) goal is to basically get it out of their hair and let somebody else deal with it,” MacKinnon said.

Shortly into the COVID-19 crisis, the federal government asked banks to provide some mortgage relief to struggling households; by mid-April, more than 600,000 homeowners had filed applications. Meanwhile, rental relief has been mixed across the country.

Admittedly, homelessness and housing poverty is a more complex problem involving multiple levels of government. But as we throw away the standard policy playbook to deal with the coronavirus’ fallout, and find hundreds of billions of dollars to support struggling businesses and workers, has there ever been a better moment to come together, with some new and some old ideas, to fix Canada’s decades-long affordable housing crisis?

There are good options out there already that Ottawa and other cities can adopt, now and with federal and provincial support, to offset the erosion of affordable housing stock. According to Pomeroy, Ottawa is \$22 million short (for 2020-21) of being able to meet its goal of reducing core housing need by 50% and eliminate chronic homelessness by 2024. That amount is an insignificant fraction

of what the federal government has put aside so far in emergency benefits programs and tax deferrals.

“Less than 1% of all federal program expenditures are allocated to housing. And if housing is a basic human need, a basic necessity, a human right, then we should be putting more resources to addressing it,” said Pomeroy, adding that if everyone from big city mayors to advocacy groups collectively ran the same message, federal funding increases would follow.

“If anything positive can come from this it will be people understanding that we’re going to get out of this thing because of public investments, because the government is spending a tonne of money right now,” said MacKinnon. “That’s what we need people to start seeing, because its only public pressure that’s going to push us in a different direction.... The reality is we don’t have enough supply that’s low cost for people. And the best way to do that is through the public service.”

As the pandemic continues to unfold, more Canadians will see the disastrous effects of this long-term housing crisis firsthand. The federal government, working with the provinces, territories and municipalities, has a perfect opportunity to fund and prioritize affordable housing, so that future economic shocks are easier to absorb for everyone. **M**

by Molly Crabapple

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ALEX HEMINGWAY

Lessons from the Squamish Nation's ambitious new rental housing plan

AS WE FACE a severe housing crisis in Vancouver, the Squamish Nation is poised to add 6,000 new homes—mostly market rental housing—to its 11-acre reserve lands in Kitsilano. This will create a major new ongoing revenue stream for the Nation, while providing rental homes to help ease Vancouver's ultra-low vacancy rates. The Señákw project also offers important lessons about how to tackle the housing crisis, including the continuing need for a massive expansion of non-market housing.

The plan for the Señákw lands received overwhelming support from Squamish Nation members in a vote held in December. Phased construction is set to begin in 2021 and be completed in as little as five years.

The Squamish Nation's project represents one small step toward reconciliation in a city that is built on

stolen Indigenous land, as the City of Vancouver itself acknowledged back in 2014. The Señákw lands where the project will be built represent only a sliver of the original reserve on the site (which is, in turn, only a sliver of the vast unceded Indigenous lands in this region and province). In 1913, the B.C. government forced the Squamish people off the Señákw reserve and out of their homes, and the current smaller reserve land was only returned to the Squamish Nation in 2000.

As the Squamish Councillor Khelsilem noted to the *Globe and Mail*, "this whole city built up around [our people] with very little benefit." Now the Squamish are aiming to maximize the benefits to their Nation that can flow from this small piece of their land.

One of the main benefits to the Squamish Nation of the Señákw project will be economic—a large, steady

new revenue stream from rents, as well as short-term revenues from strata sales (which will be on 120-year land leases and may comprise up to 30% of the homes in the project). The Nation is also considering putting aside a few hundred of the homes specifically for Squamish members. They expect to employ Squamish workers and artists during the design and construction phase of the project.

In turn, the Señákw project will provide benefits to the broader community in the form of a huge number of new rental homes (with zero displacement), providing close to a quarter of the City of Vancouver's 10-year target for market rental housing.

To be sure, the biggest housing need in this region remains publicly funded, affordable rental housing, which should be a key focus for other levels of government. But rental housing of

all kinds can help ease the vice-grip that landlords have over tenants in an ultra-low vacancy rate environment. During a climate emergency, it also allows more renters an opportunity to live in the central city, which has added new homes at a much slower rate than suburban areas in recent decades, leaving too many households dependent on automobile transportation.

The structure of the Seḥákw project illustrates crucial lessons for tackling the housing crisis going forward. One key lesson is that when valuable urban land is community owned and controlled, it can unleash enormous shared benefits. At present much of the land wealth in Vancouver is privately held—and it's extremely unequally owned. As a result, hundreds of billions of dollars in land value increases seen in recent years in this region have flowed to private landowners, rather than shared broadly.

Fundamentally, this land value is created collectively, reflecting what makes a location useful and attractive to people. It's the result of public investments in infrastructure and services for transportation, water, sewer and electricity, as well as amenities like parks, community centres, libraries and public art. It also comes from everyone participating in the life of a thriving city—the people who create the services, community and culture that makes a place desirable. (The overwhelming portion of property wealth increases in Vancouver are in the value of the land, as opposed to physical investments in buildings on it.)

In the case of the Seḥákw development, the wealth flowing from these lands will be shared by the Squamish people as a community. In other words, this land wealth is being socialized for the common good of the Squamish Nation. In the same spirit, the enormous land wealth in this city and province should be shared much more equally among those who create it—all of us—rather than flowing largely to private property owners. The scale of the land wealth at stake in this province is truly extraordinary. Since the mid-2000s alone, property wealth in British Columbia increased by about \$1 trillion.

Just as the Squamish are unlocking the value in the Seḥákw lands, other levels of government can do the same when land is publicly owned. Indeed, this speaks to the importance of not selling off precious public land—especially in high-demand urban areas—as occurred rampantly under the last provincial government (costing us hundreds of millions of dollars in forgone land value gains).

Senior levels government should focus on harnessing the value of publicly owned lands to create below-market rental housing. After all, these governments have far more tools at their disposal to raise revenue than the Squamish Nation. Senior levels of government can also raise their own capital to create new housing, meaning they can rely less on private developers (as was needed for the Squamish in the case of the Seḥákw project).

We must also increase the stock of public land ownership and ensure that a greater portion of socially created land wealth is shared. Crucially, progressive property tax revenues can be used to help fund the massive expansion

of permanently affordable, publicly owned housing that we so desperately need. In the case of the Seḥákw project itself, the Squamish have indicated their willingness to include below-market housing if governments and bodies like Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CHMC) provide the funding needed to bring rents down.

The provincial government has already taken important steps on the housing file over the past two years. These include introducing the speculation and vacancy tax and additional tax on properties worth over \$3 million, as well as increasing direct public investment in affordable housing. But to address the scale of the housing crisis, action will have to be stepped up much further still.

Another important lesson from the Squamish project is their decision to build relatively few parking spaces as part of Seḥákw, focusing on providing homes that can be enjoyed without cars. The plan is to include about 600 parking spaces rather than the thousands of spaces that would normally be required by city regulations in a project of this size (even though a large portion of parking spaces in apartment buildings are ultimately left empty). Building fewer parking spaces has some major benefits and the practice should be expanded to other new housing around Metro Vancouver.

First, parking drives up the cost of creating new housing. In the case of Seḥákw, constructing the standard amount of parking would have added hundreds of millions of dollars in additional construction costs. Underground parking is expensive to construct, generally costing at least \$50,000 per parking stall in Vancouver (and using up extremely valuable land for surface parking would cost even more). On this particular site, the Squamish estimate that more spaces would have cost as much as \$120,000 per stall. Reducing parking means more benefits flow to the Nation rather than toward creating storage for cars.

Second, as we face a climate emergency, we urgently need to provide transit-oriented, centrally located rental homes for people rather than continue with regional growth patterns that increase dependence on costly automobile travel. Seḥákw provides a great example of this type of housing in a region choked by traffic congestion and where most of the residential land is reserved for detached housing that is largely dependent on car transportation.

In short, the Squamish Nation is poised to benefit enormously from their Seḥákw project—and renters in this region will benefit, too. We can learn from their striking demonstration of how land wealth can be harnessed for the common good, and how to bring a climate emergency lens to creating new housing.

The scale of the housing crisis can seem overwhelming. But it's a challenge we can overcome if we ensure that more of the vast land wealth in this region is shared by all. **M**

THIS ARTICLE IS A PART OF AN ONGOING CCPA-BC RESEARCH PROJECT INTO AFFORDABLE HOUSING FUNDED BY THE VANCOUVER FOUNDATION.

Meet Frank Bayerl, Monthly Donor and Volunteer

Every so often, the *Monitor* gets to know one of the CCPA's incredible supporters. In this issue we speak with Frank Bayerl, a retired federal public servant and long-time volunteer with the CCPA's National Office in Ottawa.

Hi Frank, as we ask all our supporters, have you read any good books lately?

I don't seem to find enough time as I'd like to read books for pleasure and probably spend far too much time on the internet and trying to keep up with current events. But I did read a book on history recently that impressed me—*Lawrence in Arabia*, about the First World War and Lawrence's role in the Arab revolt against Turkish rule. So many of the seeds of current conflicts in the Middle East were planted then.

Tell us about someone who had a big influence on your thinking.

I can't think of any particular person, but I always had an orientation toward social justice and equality, maybe because of early religious influences and my parents. They were of the generation marked by the Great Depression, and I was brought up with the awareness that wealth and power were not distributed equally in society. Another formative influence was the Vietnam War. I came to Canada from the United States when it was raging, and the whole leftist critique of U.S. power certainly resonated with me.

What made you want to volunteer for the CCPA?

I think I first became aware of the CCPA through the *Monitor*



and decided to support the centre because it reflected many of my values and views regarding society and politics. I started volunteering with the CCPA late in 2001 when I took an early retirement. It's something concrete that I can do to help in a small way to move things in the right direction when so many current trends seem to be headed in the wrong one, so it adds a positive note.

What do you think makes the CCPA special?

I was asked recently to proofread the French version of the 2020 Alternative Federal Budget, and in doing that I was impressed with the amount of work the CCPA put into the document, the wide range of

serious research that went into it. As for what makes the CCPA special, I find it's the collegial atmosphere in the office and the sense that everyone there is pulling in the same direction.

What are your hopes for the future?

My biggest hope is that the countries of the world can work together to fight climate change and prevent its worst effects. You asked also about a policy the government could implement today that would make a big change. In my opinion, though it's not directly related to climate change, that policy would be universal pharmacare.





PAUL WEINBERG

Policing of dissent, from the G20 to the Wet'suwet'en dispute

FOURS BEFORE THE police went berserk, my friends and I joined the throng of liked-minded protesters, including whole families, marching through the heart of downtown Toronto. It was a Saturday, June 26, 2010. Our destination was as close as we could get to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, venue for the fourth annual G20 leaders' summit, hosted that year by then-prime minister Stephen Harper.

As we wound our way through the streets, we ran into other protesters we knew, including the young son of a friend, who had come all the way from Halifax. People were drawn from across Canada and many other parts of the world to this highly publicized political manifestation. Their demands of world leaders, in the trough of the global financial crisis, were varied but also consistent with past mass mobilizations against corporate globalization: put people

and the planet ahead of the profits of the elite.

What most people (inside and outside the GTA) will remember about that moment, however, is the property damage and overblown police response to it. Sure, Black Bloc protesters could be spotted among the crowd. But it was impossible to miss the more intimidating army of riot police showing off their new "assets" (see "Harper's security spending spree" on the next page), as one observer later put it.

A few hours into the march, police locked down the city's core. Hundreds of demonstrators, but also many hapless observers, would eventually be arrested—even many in a "designated protest zone" established by the police

Police on the streets of Toronto for the June 2010 G20 summit.

SQUIRRELBAND (FLICKR CREATIVE COMMONS)

on the lawn of Queen's Park, about 15 blocks from where G20 leaders were meeting. At least 100 officers illegally removed their badges during the mayhem, and a total of 1,100 protesters were charged, making it the largest single mass arrest in Canada's history.

Toronto's police chief at the time, Bill Blair (now federal public safety minister), who was then regarded as a police reformer, defended the behaviour of the officers on duty, as did the city's mayor, David Miller. Yet Blair "never called the shots," according to the former general counsel for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, Nathalie Des Rosiers. Because this was an international event on Canadian soil and involving the prime minister, that was the RCMP's job.

According to Des Rosiers, who sat as a Liberal in the Ontario legislature from 2016 to 2019, the only way to understand the police behaviour in Toronto in June 2010 is to examine the agenda and

priorities of the Harper government. Many other observers point out how politics and policing remain dangerously entwined a decade later, with consequences for social movements and the civil liberties of everyone.

As the chair of the Toronto Police Services Board in 2010, Alok Mukherjee has a unique perspective on the events of a decade ago. In contrast with Blair or Miller, he eventually apologized for what had happened. “Innocent people had their rights abridged, their liberty interfered with and their physical safety jeopardized,” said Mukherjee in a prepared statement in July 2012.

Now a commentator and writer on policing, Mukherjee claims that the G20 was a dangerous example of how the post-9/11 national security framework had produced a newly aggressive policing that was reflected in uniforms and vehicles, surveillance practices, weaponry and tactics.

“Policing driven by national security and anti-terrorism operations...treats the community—or segments of it—as ‘the other’ and a legitimate target of surveillance and intelligence gathering,” he wrote in his 2018 book, *Excessive Force: Toronto’s Fight to Reform City Policing*.

Much of this shift occurred under earlier Liberal governments attempting

to integrate Canada’s response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks with the neoconservative government in Washington, D.C. But over a decade in office, the Harper government displayed an overtly harsh tone toward their self-declared enemies: anti-globalization activists and environmentalists were directly targeted, while Muslims and Indigenous people felt even more scrutinized and criminalized.

The Harper government (then in minority) did its best to stifle a House of Commons investigation of the G20 protest policing. Still, the March 2011 report of the public safety committee was critical of police behaviour and requested an apology to the thousands of people whose rights had been violated.

In a dissenting rejoinder, Conservatives on the committee praised “the good work done by Canadian law enforcement officers” and suggested the criticism of the police was “merely an attempt by the Opposition Coalition to score political points.” But according to a CBC News report later that year, this “good work” included an extensive 500-person security and intelligence operation ahead of the G8 and G20 that targeted and infiltrated activist groups across Canada in collaboration with private corporations, including “energy sector stakeholders.”

This public-private collaboration continued into the Harper government’s majority years. Two years after the G20 in Toronto, Joe Oliver, then natural resources minister, penned an open letter during the National Energy Board hearings into the Northern Gateway pipeline, in which he condemned “foreign special interest groups” for interfering in Canada’s affairs. “These groups threaten to hijack our regulatory system to achieve their radical ideological agenda,” the minister said. “They seek to exploit any loophole they can find, stacking public hearings with bodies to ensure that delays kill good projects.”

In 2015, the government passed a broad package of security measures in its Anti-Terrorism Act (Bill C-51), which expanded the definition of national security threats to include those posing a danger to Canada’s “critical infrastructure” (e.g., bridges, highways, mines, and oil and gas projects such as pipelines and resource extraction). As sanctions for interfering with these projects increased, environmental protections were weakened. Charitable groups promoting a low-carbon future, or whose views otherwise challenged the government, were targeted for political audits by the Canada Revenue Agency.

With C-51 in place, Indigenous rights and land claims activists and environmentalists could now be labelled, under the loose definition of national security, as “radicals” or “terrorists,” with the likelihood this would increase surveillance and harassment by the RCMP and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, said Tim McSorley, national co-ordinator of the Ottawa-based International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group.

Bill C-51 also introduced the Security of Canada Information Sharing Act, which for the first time removed internal barriers to the sharing of a citizen’s personal information among federal government departments or agencies if the data is considered relevant for an investigation.

“If the Canada Revenue Agency thinks it has information that could be relevant to the RCMP around some kind of information about protesters, they could in theory offer to share that information,” says McSorley.

Harper’s security spending spree

“The budget for the [G8 and G20] summits was \$858 million, the bulk of which was spent on ‘security’ for the G20 summit in Toronto. The RCMP... received \$330 million, or 38.5% of the overall expenditure. The budget included almost eight dozen (95) new CCTV (closed circuit television) cameras for downtown Toronto, more than 6 km of 3m/10ft zinc-coated fencing, sound canons, rubber bullets, smoke bombs, teargas, pepper spray, a temporary jail in a converted film studio, a pre-summit police training drill on counter-terrorism in the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce tower in Toronto’s finance district, NORAD (North American Aerospace Defence Command) monitoring air traffic, and hundreds of private security guards working for a company not licensed to operate security services in Ontario (the company was licensed in a rush right before the summits, after media had widely reported that the company wasn’t licensed to operate in Ontario). The budget also included the salaries, overtime, and benefits of 19,000 police, meals, travel and fleet requirements for police, accommodation for out-of-province police and commanding officers in the national police hierarchy.”

EXCERPTED FROM “THE BIG SMOKE’ SCREEN,” BY IAN HUSSEY AND PATRICE LECLERC, IN *SOCIALIST STUDIES*, FALL 2011.

After winning the fall 2015 federal election, the new Liberal government promised to reform the highly controversial and much hated Bill C-51. In 2017, the government introduced more changes to Canada's national security practices in Bill C-59, which underwent another public consultation and became law in June 2019.

"There was less inflammatory rhetoric" from the Liberals toward protesters, said McSorley. But both the critical infrastructure and sharing of citizen data provisions (the latter under a slightly new name) were largely kept intact, as were new powers given to CSIS in Bill C-51 to disrupt activist groups.

A 2018 book, *Policing Indigenous Movements: Dissent and the Security State*, documents the extensive surveillance of Indigenous activists who are described as "aboriginal extremists" by the RCMP. The authors, Jeffrey Monaghan and Andrew Cosby, spent about five years accessing internal RCMP security and intelligence memos, which revealed widespread scrutiny of the resurgent Indigenous rights movements, particularly Idle No More and activity surrounding land claims, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and natural resource development.

Of special interest to the Mounties were 313 core Indigenous activists identified by the force in its Project Sikta, 89 of whom the force said met "the criteria for criminality associated to public order events," even though investigators were unable to find anything violent about the organizations monitored.

In late February this year, a few weeks before COVID-19 forced everyone indoors, nationwide protests by Indigenous and non-Indigenous supporters of hereditary Wet'suwet'en chiefs had brought rail traffic to a halt in much of the country. The tactic was meant to put pressure on the federal and B.C. governments to come to a mutually acceptable agreement with the Wet'suwet'en following the violent enforcement, in early February, of a Coastal GasLink injunction against camps standing in the way of the company's pipeline workers.

The RCMP officers had come equipped with helicopters and armed paramilitary personnel to confront unarmed men, women and children defying the injunction, recalled Grand Chief Stewart Phillip of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs. He told CBC's Michael Enright that the Mounties looked a bit like U.S. GIs in the Vietnam War, showing off their firepower.

Fortunately, no one was shot or wounded by the RCMP. But rights were violated, including those of supporters of the hereditary chiefs who were arrested on unceded Wet'suwet'en territory, and those of journalists covering the events.

Melissa Cox, an American documentary filmmaker, said she was roughed up a bit while filming the arrest of Wet'suwet'en hereditary chief and matriarch Gwinintxw (Yvonne Lattie). "The police officers applied multiple painful pressure points on my left arm as they pulled it behind me, while simultaneously using force to rip the camera from my right hand," she said.



Wet'suwet'en solidarity event, Vaughan, Ontario, February 15, 2020.

JASON HARGROVE (FLICKR CREATIVE COMMONS)

Cox was not formally charged and said she is currently "weighing my options" as to whether to sue the RCMP. "One of the conditions of my release is, 'keep 10 meters off any CN property or work site except as required in the normal and ordinary course of travel.' On legal advice, I intend to continue reporting on protests at rail sites."

Cara Zwibel, a spokesperson for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, said the filming of an arrest does not constitute obstruction in Canadian law and therefore should have been allowed by the RCMP. Meanwhile, Karyn Pugliese, president of the Canadian Association of Journalists, stated it is important that reporters are able to monitor and cover the "behaviour" of police because of their bad history with the Indigenous population.

Formerly the executive director of news and current affairs at the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), Pugliese said the shooting and killing of an unarmed Ojibway man, Dudley George, by the Ontario Provincial Police at Ipperwash in 1995 might not have happened if the media had been present.

A similar tragedy was avoided during the rail blockades that ended in March. The federal government resisted calls by the Official Opposition to send in the RCMP and other provincial police forces to arrest the "radicals," and eventually reached a tentative settlement with the hereditary chiefs.

From the Toronto G20 to the events in B.C., we are encountering what security historians call "political policing." But while Toronto Police got a slap on the wrist for the G20 work, and CSIS has occasionally been sanctioned for its racial targeting of Muslims since 9/11, the Mounties are still given a free pass for their past and present abuses. According to Monaghan, it's long past time to scale back Canada's "racist" and "rogue" national security state, and to hold those who built and maintain it accountable. **M**

A modest proposal for reducing poverty

Canadian governments have embraced the poverty reduction strategy as a way to make low income support programs more effective. **Ricardo Tranjan** and **Paul Shaffer** assess whether this approach, with its roots in “Washington Consensus” policies promoted by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, is worth all the hype.

POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES have gained considerable traction in Canada over the past decade. You could even call them a growth industry. All of Canada’s provinces and territories have developed one, as have many municipalities. The federal government released its inaugural poverty reduction strategy, “Opportunity for All,” in October 2018. In November last year, the City of Toronto put out its second poverty action plan; a month later, the Ontario government launched public consultations on the province’s third.

To be clear, when we speak of poverty reduction strategies, we do not mean any and all social or economic policies affecting or addressing poverty. The federal government’s 1973 working paper on social security in Canada, for example, though it was aimed at better co-ordinating the delivery of social security and ensuring basic income levels across the country, does not resemble the poverty reduction strategies of today.

Today’s strategies compile initiatives from diverse policy areas under a single action plan whose stated objective is reducing poverty. Common areas tackled in these documents include housing, employment, income supports, food security, and access to public services. Traditionally, each of these areas is the responsibility of a separate government department, or even different levels of government, but in poverty reduction strategies they are brought together into one, seemingly concerted plan.

The obvious question is whether these plans work. Are they more than the sum of their parts? Do they address the root causes of poverty or its consequences? Are elected officials truly committed to reducing poverty or only interested in looking like they are?

Many countries in the Global South have implemented poverty reduction strategies, and researchers from around the world have carefully evaluated them. In this article we distill a number of lessons from these experiences, which we subsequently apply to the City of Toronto’s poverty reduction strategy. We then discuss what to expect from these strategies.

Lessons from the Global South

The poverty reduction strategy process in the Global South was initiated by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1999, as a condition for low-income countries to qualify for debt relief under programs managed by the international lenders. In keeping with the core principles of the World Bank’s Comprehensive Development Framework, poverty reduction strategies were to be comprehensive, have sufficient political support in the country, involve partnerships with non-governmental stakeholders, and be oriented toward quantifiable medium- and long-term results. The process was soon expanded and transformed into the principal vehicle for the operationalization of the UN Millennium Development

Goals (MDGs) and, more generally, the allocation of development assistance.

The IMF website includes poverty reduction strategies from 67 countries across the Global South (the list was last updated in 2016). These strategies were implemented in the context of the so-called Washington Consensus, a set of neoliberal policies that were meant to assure that developing and poor countries could successfully integrate into the global economy. Although the Washington Consensus policy mix changed over time, at least two of its persisting core aspects have implications for poverty reduction strategies.

First, the “consensus” says that overall national macroeconomic policy should focus on taming inflation and maintaining fiscal balances. Second, governments must commit to reducing the role of the state in economic life by such measures as redirecting public expenditure to the social sectors or privatizing state-owned enterprises.

These political and ideological constraints on Global South poverty reduction strategies significantly limited the range of policy options available to participating governments that might otherwise have supported more fiscally expansionary or redistributive measures. National strategies were also limited by the heavy emphasis—in World Bank and IMF documents—on government action in social sectors, to the neglect of agriculture, manufacturing or other areas of the economy.

In part this emphasis on the social was due to ideological and political

aversion to direct state intervention in economic life. But it also reflected the important role that poverty reduction strategies have played as a vehicle for the achievement of the MDGs, themselves heavily weighted toward social sectors. According to Ruth Driscoll and Alison Evans, formerly of the Overseas Development Institute (London, U.K.), increasing public expenditure in health and education was a way to quickly satisfy international aid donors seeking rapid results.

Many Global South poverty reduction strategy proposals simply compiled existing public programs and policies that could be conceived of as having an impact on poverty in some way, making it difficult to identify new items, let alone analyze their impact on reducing poverty. This analytical work is made even more challenging by the minimal prioritization of action items in poverty reduction strategies within or between sectors and policy areas, differing meanings of poverty, the multifaceted nature of the strategies under consideration, and issues related to the politics or political economy of policy-making and resource allocation.

In spite of these limitations, several econometric studies have attempted to determine whether poverty reduction strategies have succeeded. Given questions about the quality of data used, and the way that the models are constructed,

we should approach these studies with caution. Nevertheless, three core findings about Global South strategies are worth noting before we look at our Toronto example:

1. there is no evidence of that poverty reduction strategies have negative effects;
2. statistically significant positive effects are found for some, but not all, variables; and
3. the results are generally sensitive to the type of data used and the estimation method.

Overall, then, we can say that poverty reduction strategies tend to have a positive but somewhat modest impact on some but not all dimensions of poverty.

Toronto's poverty reduction strategy

In April 2014, Toronto city council voted unanimously for a motion, introduced by Councillor Joe Mihevc, to develop a citywide poverty reduction strategy. There was significant overlap between the organizations and individuals involved in Toronto's process and the provincial government's strategy in 2008.

The latter was spearheaded by the 25in5 Network for Poverty Reduction, in response to increased poverty in the 2000s, and the crisis in social service provision that resulted from provincial cuts to social assistance and the downloading of costs to municipalities from 1995 through 2002. Similarly, Toronto's poverty reduction strategy stemmed from the realization that the public policy response to poverty in the city had been inadequate. Several influential studies, including from the University of Toronto's David Hulchanski and the United Way, backed the need for a new approach.

Municipal staff set up a public consultation that engaged close to 2,000 residents from across the city through public meetings, community-led conversations, roundtable



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALISHA DAVIDSON

discussions with policy experts, and online surveys. The consultative process within the city was also extensive: from July to October 2015, the poverty reduction strategy was discussed at every official council meeting, which put poverty reduction squarely on the political map in Toronto.

The resulting poverty reduction strategy contained 71 action split between its 17 recommendations in the six priority areas of housing stability, service access, transit equity, food access, quality jobs and livable incomes, and systemic change. Like in the Global South, however, the policy options on offer to Torontonians were limited by a restrictive fiscal framework, heavy reliance on social service provision, and jurisdictional constraints.

The City of Toronto is forbidden by law from running an operating deficit. Moreover, a central plank in Toronto Mayor John Tory's 2014 electoral platform was to restrict tax increases to the rate of inflation. This commitment to balanced budgets and fiscal tightness, both Washington Consensus mainstays, was (and is still) shared by a majority of city councillors.

As a result of ideological divides on these points, debate about the poverty reduction strategy concerned whether to raise property taxes and other sources of revenue—to expand public service provision—or to keep taxes and levies low and maintain or cut services. Toronto council ultimately opted to keep property tax hikes at or below inflation rates while providing some service ameliorations.

The fiscal room for the new poverty reduction strategy was also severely limited by the fact that property taxes make up the greatest share (about 40% in 2018) of city revenues in Toronto, and taxation of income falls under federal and provincial jurisdiction. The situation was compounded by the fact that council approved the poverty plan as a corporate-wide strategy, i.e., with no funding envelope. Accordingly, funding requests had to be made by divisions and agencies and had to compete with other approved strategies and divisional priorities.

As a consequence, the sums allotted to Toronto's poverty strategy have been modest. Annual expenditures

on “new” and “enhanced” initiatives ranged, in nominal terms, from \$45 million to \$250 million between 2015 and 2018. But this is only an approximate measure of the marginal impact of the poverty reduction strategy, since it is possible this funding would have been allocated in its absence. Furthermore, while these sums could generate positive impacts in many areas covered by the strategy, they represent a tiny fraction of total spending, ranging from 0.4% to 2.2% of the city budget.

A second point concerns the very heavy emphasis on social service provision to the detriment of measures in productive sectors geared to employment or income generation. It is likely that this limiting factor is due less to strong ideological commitment and more to pragmatic concerns. More specifically, a significant weighting on social services is understandable given the importance of issues such as housing, social services, transit equity and food access to poverty reduction in large metropolitan centres such as Toronto. Still, only two of 17 recommendations in the city's poverty reduction strategy, and around four of 71 action items, bear directly on employment creation.

A final limiting factor with respect to policy options is jurisdictional.

Obviously, municipal authorities in Canada cannot intervene in monetary, trade or industrial policy, where political decisions can have large effects on employment and poverty.

Obviously, municipal authorities in Canada cannot intervene in monetary, trade or industrial policy, where political decisions can have large effects on employment and poverty. Most income support programs (e.g., the Canada Pension Plan and social assistance), as well as minimum wage legislation, also fall under provincial or federal jurisdiction.

With these limitations in view, we can now ask, what is really new about Toronto's poverty reduction strategy? Based on our comparison of the strategy and a large number of strategies, service plans, strategic plans, council directions and staff-initiated policy files within city divisions and agencies, we conclude the answer may be, not much. Major actions in all six priority areas had already been included in council approved documents. In fact, in formulating the strategy, city staff and advocates found it useful to include ongoing or previously approved work in the new mayor's umbrella social policy strategy.

Do the selected actions in the strategy represent a subset of prioritized poverty reducing actions, even if drawn from other policy frameworks? The short answer is no. They were not selected on the basis of an impact assessment, cost-benefit analysis or any type of systematic review. The selection process involved balancing the voluminous input collected in the long community engagement process with the advice and concerns of several city divisions and agencies and the diverse voices and priorities represented in a dedicated advisory committee.

The task of the policy team in charge of formulating the strategy (which included one of the authors of this article) consisted of sifting through public input, organizing actions in clear and meaningful ways, drawing on progressive ideas circulating in the bureaucracy, and ensuring the buy-in of operational divisions and agencies that would have to carry out the actions. It looked, in other words, like bureaucratic inertia, or politics and policy-making as usual.

Overall, there is no evidence that the items in Toronto's poverty reduction strategy were prioritized with respect to their impact on poverty. Still, as



with the poverty reduction strategies we studied in the Global South, we can surmise the likely impact on poverty and other social outcomes of the Toronto plan has been modestly positive. Two examples help make the case.

First, in the period leading up to the 2017 Toronto budget, council directed poverty reduction strategy staff to prepare budgetary submissions with expenditure reductions in the order of 2.6%. Civil society organizations and other members of the public immediately expressed concern, given high profile in the media, about the negative impact this directive might have on poverty, especially if it meant reversing earlier strategy investments. In the end, prior investments were protected and a short list of additional requests received funding.

The second example concerns the low income transit pass, approved with almost unanimous support in 2016 as part of the poverty reduction strategy, and implemented in 2018. The pass provides discounted Toronto Transit Commission fares to low income residents at an estimated cost of \$48 million a year. The centrist mayor consistently framed this initiative—with its modest outlays and positive but limited effect on living standards—in terms of poverty reduction and defended it as one of the key strategy actions for council’s term.

The value and limits of poverty reduction strategies

What should we expect from poverty reduction strategies of the sort adopted by Toronto, Ontario or the federal government? We have argued that such strategies, which closely mirror approaches developed by the IMF and World Bank for Global South countries, are likely to produce positive but somewhat modest gains. This is due, as we have shown,

to a number of fiscal and ideological limitations in these strategies which tend to preclude more sweeping gains.

The core contribution of these poverty reduction strategy processes has been political. It puts poverty reduction on the political and public agendas. In some cases, the development of a strategy can help overcome obstacles to taking action on poverty reduction.

In the Global South the immediate obstacle had to do with relations between foreign aid donors and host countries in the context of new ways of delivering development assistance and new types of partnerships. In Toronto the original obstacle was related to the inadequate attention afforded poverty issues during Rob Ford’s tenure as mayor and, subsequently, to the restrictive fiscal environment of Mayor Tory’s centrist city council. In both cases, poverty reduction strategies have succeeded in modestly channeling additional resources to combat poverty.

On balance, the City of Toronto’s poverty reduction strategy is performing more or less as expected based on the Global South experience with this process. The Toronto plan is not bringing about transformative change on a large scale. It is however, modestly increasing public expenditure on measures that positively impact upon people’s lives. Absent more far-reaching changes to the fiscal framework—in particular, increases in property taxes or other sources of revenue and higher public spending—it is probably the most we can expect. **M**

BEFORE JOINING THE CCPA AS A SENIOR RESEARCHER, RICARDO TRANJAN CO-LED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY OF TORONTO’S POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY AND MANAGED THE TEAM RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION. PAUL SHAFFER, PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AT TRENT UNIVERSITY, WORKS ON POVERTY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH. THEIR ARTICLE IS ABRIDGED AND REPRINTED FROM A LONGER VERSION IN THE DECEMBER 2019 ISSUE OF *CANADIAN PUBLIC POLICY* (VOL. 45, NO. 4).



ASAD ISMI

PHOTO FROM ILO ASIA-PACIFIC

Workers on the edge in Bangladesh

The global COVID-19 response is shaking garment supply chains and changing how Canadian unions do solidarity with Bangladeshi workers.

“COVID-19 will be a catastrophe for Bangladeshi garment workers.” I am speaking with Kalpona Akter, president of the Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation (BGIWF). It is March 19. Governments around the world have ordered the temporary closure of retail outlets and other businesses, putting millions of people out of work. The shutdown in the West put immediate pressure on global supply chains, in particular for sectors like clothing.

“The international brands that source from garment factories in Bangladesh have already started cancelling their orders for clothes. Consequently, Bangladeshi workers are in very bad shape presently. They are not only afraid of getting infected by COVID-19, but also fear that thousands of them will be laid off and so have no money to put food on the table for their families,” says Akter.

“These are workers who were poor and vulnerable to begin with before the spread of the virus as they were

being denied a living wage that would allow them to buy basic necessities.”

While several countries including Canada have announced aid packages for wage earners who lose their jobs due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Bangladesh government had, by mid-April, taken no such step. According to Akter, “it is unlikely that it will do so in the future.”

Bangladesh is the second biggest exporter of garments in the world after China, and with 4.1 million workers in the sector it is the country’s leading export earner. Over 75% of these workers are women. According to Akter, the garment sector pays poverty wages and is notorious for the suppression of labour rights and the presence of high levels of gender-based violence. In the past, Bangladeshi garment manufacturers have also been notorious for dangerously unsafe factories.

On April 24, 2013, the Rana Plaza garment factory in the capital city of Dhaka collapsed, killing 1,134 workers

and injuring 2,500. It was one of the deadliest industrial accidents the world had ever witnessed. International and domestic public outrage and pressure on international brands from Bangladeshi and other unions, including in Canada, resulted in major improvements in factory safety, but the other significant problems remain unaddressed.

Since 2013, the Canadian labour movement has been working with the Bangladesh Centre for Workers’ Solidarity (BCWS), which is closely linked to the Akter’s federation, to press governments, employers and international brands to work together to improve working conditions for Bangladeshi garment sector workers. The Canadian unions involved include the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), United Steelworkers (USW), Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation (OSSTF), United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).

These unions give the BCWS funding for core operations and for providing training and support for women leaders in factories. Doug Olthuis, executive director of the USW Humanity Fund, explains that through their financial help, support in Bangladesh and support in Canada, “We’ve raised our political voice with the governments of both Bangladesh and Canada to make sure appropriate measures are taken to uphold labour rights, especially the ability to freely join unions.

“That has had some impact on the Canadian government, which knows that there is a constituency in Canada that is watching what Ottawa does,” he continues. “This has been helpful for sure. It is important for Canadian unions to make some noise to motivate the government to act on behalf of Bangladeshi garment workers because otherwise it won’t.”

Transnational solidarity has also amplified concerns raised by workers in Bangladesh with their country’s Ministry of Labour. “The fact that Canadian unions meet with the ministry means that the Bangladesh government knows that they are being watched and that unions and consumers from around the world are paying attention to what it does,” says Olthuis, who joined representatives from CUPE, PSAC, OSSTF and CLC on a delegation to Dhaka in May 2019.

Canadian unions are planning to launch a campaign for a living wage for Bangladeshi garment workers, who often have to work 16-hour days to try to make ends meet, which means they have no family life at all. The workers have no savings either, which makes it impossible for them to deal with a crisis such as COVID-19.

Louise Casselman, the PSAC’s Social Justice Fund Officer, also travelled to Dhaka with the union solidarity delegation in May last year. She points out that the cost of clothing has been dropping while other consumer products tend to get more expensive from year to year.

International brands have all adopted a strategy of “fast fashion,” in which clothing trends change every two months, rather than seasonally, as a means of boosting sales. To convince consumers back to the rack more frequently, prices must be kept low, explains Casselman, which has meant keeping the wages of garment workers low as well.

“This explains why workers in the apparel industry are facing such substandard wages and working conditions and why their attempts to organize to improve their living and working conditions face such resistance,” she tells me. Unionization and labour rights are not just under threat in Bangladesh, according to Akter, but effectively criminalized.

“When workers try to organize, they are fired. This is very common,” she remarks. “There is no freedom of association in Bangladesh.” In 2016, when workers raised their voices for a higher minimum wage, they were handed criminal charges. Many workers, including one of Akter’s organizers, were thrown in prison for months.

“During the last two years, over 10,000 workers have been fired for making wage increase demands and three dozen criminal charges have been laid against 7,000 workers. But our workers are brave, and in spite of this repression, they never stop raising their voices and never stop fighting.” However, the state crackdowns in 2016 and 2018 have

“pushed back our labour movement at least by a few years” Akter says.

If it is especially hard to change the insidious combination of lack of job security and official repression in Bangladesh, Akter explains it is because, “in many cases, our government is our factory owner.” Some legislators in Bangladesh own garment factories. “In a country like that, where the power dynamic is so critical, it is difficult to fight for your rights.”

Olthuis concurs with Akter that “a lot of the lawmakers in the Bangladeshi parliament are actually garment factory owners,” which he says compromises the Bangladesh government on this issue. “We talk about state capture, and in my opinion the government has been quite captured by the garment sector. Its room to maneuver is limited.”

There is also enormous gender-based violence and sexual harassment in Bangladeshi factories, says Akter. “Because of the culture it happens, it begins at the top. It is time for us to break that silence and get these manufacturers to have anti-harassment committees in the factories and also to pressure our government to pass a law against such violence and harassment.”

Akter is in agreement with the Canadian unions’ planned international campaign for providing a living wage to Bangladeshi garment workers. “It is very crucial to have Canadian unions pressure Canadian brands to pay garment workers a living wage. This is not just for the Bangladeshi workers, it’s for the whole supply chain, no matter which country they are sourcing from.

“We really need these jobs,” Akter continues. “But we want jobs with dignity. And at this moment the jobs we have are not dignified. Canadian consumers should know that the workers don’t have a living wage and should support their demands for better wages and raise their voices with the Canadian brands in this regard.”

But the chaos created by the COVID-19 virus has also thrown international solidarity into uncharted waters. Casselman observes that this moment “sheds new light on the vulnerability of a supply chain that offers no safeguards or protection for a workforce contracted out to local manufacturers whose own profit margin depends on the super-exploitation of labour.”

Garment workers, like many other manufacturing workers, face plant shutdowns “due to the lack of inputs from China and the contraction of demand,” explains Casselman, noting that isolation measures to contain the virus are shuttering demand across Europe and North America. Solidarity work will have to adjust.

“We already know we will need to increase the role of workers, women, Indigenous peoples and [people of African descent] and their access to social, economic and political rights. COVID-19 could wipe out many of the gains made by the social movements over the last generation, unless we are prepared to fight for a model of development based on a new equitable, green economy, based on fundamental human rights.

“It will not be given to us, so we will have to fight for it, and be prepared to accompany those on the frontlines of social change.” **M**



The good news page

Compiled by
Elaine Hughes

In February, Edmonton opened a new transit garage named after the city's first female bus driver, Kathleen Andrews, who started driving in 1973 as a single mother before becoming the service's first female dispatcher 23 years later. The first bus out of the new garage was driven by a woman. / Sara Brewer, 64, became the oldest woman to row the Atlantic Ocean this March, after setting off from the Canary Islands on December 12, with rowing partner Ann Prestidge, and arriving in Antigua 86 days and 4,828 km later. / An 11-year-old girl who was once bullied in school for her bug collecting, Sophia Spencer has just published a picture book about her experience,



titled *The Bug Girl* (Tundra Books, pictured). / CBC News / Guardian (U.K.) / CBC As It Happens

The Western South Atlantic humpback whale population, having dropped to just a few hundred in the 1950s, today numbers 25,000, according to a new study by the Royal Society, putting the species well on the way to a full recovery. / The bright fluorescent pink Mount Kaputar slug (pictured), found only at 1,500 metres above sea level at the top of the extinct volcanic mountain in New South Wales, had been assumed wiped out by recent extreme fires in Australia, but park rangers have confirmed the insect survived and is taking advantage of new moss and fungi growing in the wake of post-fire rains. / The International Wildlife Conservation Council, created by the Trump administration in 2017 to advise "on the benefits international hunting has on foreign wildlife and habitat conservation," and stacked with trophy hunting supporters, has been permanently disbanded after a federal district court found the lack of balance on the council violated the U.S. Federal Advisory Committee Act. / CNN / Guardian (U.K.) / NRDC

Satellite readings in the six weeks to March 27 showed drastically lower levels of nitrogen dioxide compared to the same period last year over much of Asia and parts of Europe; over Wuhan, China NO2 pollution levels (not to be confused with overall air quality) were 10–30% lower,



and they dropped 40% over densely industrialized northern Italy. / Fukushima, the scene of Japan's terrible nuclear disaster in 2011, has just seen the opening of the 10MW solar-powered Fukushima Hydrogen Energy Research Field (FH2R) project, a test facility that can produce up to 1,200 cubic newton meters (Nm3) of hydrogen per hour, energy that can be used to power stationary hydrogen fuel cell systems in cars, buses and other mobility devices. / Citing declining sales, Corteva, formerly part of Dow Chemical, announced it would stop making the toxic, brain-damaging pesticide chlorpyrifos and reduce the more than five million pounds of chlorpyrifos that are sprayed on U.S. food crops each year. / Guardian (U.K.) / Renew Economy / Reuters

Wales has pledged £5 million (\$8.7 million) to create a national forest running the length and breadth of the country. The initiative will see the planting of 4,900 acres of forest a year, connecting existing protected woodland environments with large-scale tree-planting projects as a means to preserve wildlife and fight climate change. / Sooke

District has just purchased a \$10,000 contraption from New Zealand that Mike Hicks, director of the Juan de Fuca Electoral Area on Vancouver Island, describes as "like a poop Zamboni." The Tow and Collect is dragged behind a tractor and can remove goose droppings, grass clippings and other debris from sports fields, all of which is turned into valuable compost. / A cellphone device modified in 2011 by American engineer Tophier White to pick up the sound of chainsaws in dense forest is today being used by park rangers in five countries, including Brazil and Cameroon, to protect primate populations from illegal logging. / Good News Network / CTV News / CNN

REVIEWED BY JAMES CLARK

A life saved, and lived, by solidarity



HOLOCAUST TO RESISTANCE: MY JOURNEY

SUZANNE BERLINER WEISS

Roseway, October 2019, \$22.00

SUZANNE WEISS BEGINS her recent memoir with these words by W. B. Yeats: “There are no strangers here, only friends you have not yet met.” More than just an epigram, they describe a practice of solidarity that saved Weiss from the Holocaust and later shaped her more than six decades of activity as a life-long socialist. It is this critical link, between the courageous acts that spared thousands of Jewish children during the Second World War and a life committed to the struggle for human liberation, that forms the central message of Weiss’s text. Solidarity inspires solidarity.

Breathtaking in its sweep of history, *Holocaust to Resistance: My Journey* follows Weiss from her childhood in Nazi-occupied wartime France to some of the most momentous struggles of the last 60 years: the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the rise of Black Power in the United States in the 1960s and ‘70s, the anti-imperialist movements in Latin America in the 1980s and ‘90s, the Palestine solidarity movement in the 2000s, and today’s fight for climate justice and Indigenous sovereignty—among many others.

As she recalls each of these events, Weiss is not only an eyewitness to history, but also an active participant

in it. And despite her immeasurable contribution to countless fights for justice, which punctuate her entire life, Weiss amplifies and celebrates the role that ordinary people have played in their own struggles for liberation. In particular, Weiss draws attention to the critical, but often invisible work performed by women, especially in activist and socialist organizations. By elevating these underrepresented perspectives, Weiss’s memoir makes a significant—and feminist—contribution to the documented history of the left in the U.S. and Canada.

Weiss also makes a significant contribution to the genre of Holocaust literature. First, writing as a survivor, she brings to life the history of hidden Jewish children in France during and after the war, unearthing the underground networks that safely delivered them to partisan families in the countryside, and later attempted to re-unite them with their parents. Weiss’s vivid recollections of orphanage life in post-war France are among the most moving and endearing parts of her text.

Again, Weiss emphasizes the lessons of solidarity. In this case, the bonds between Jews and non-Jews became the basis of their mutual resistance to Nazi occupation, and even had a powerful disciplining effect on anti-Semites who, in response to community pressure, refrained from revealing the presence of Jewish children in Christian households.

Second, Weiss expands the history of hidden Jewish children by considering its legacy today and connecting it to contemporary issues, especially the plight of migrants in Europe. A particularly heart-warming thread recalls Weiss’s return to France, decades later, to reconnect with the descendants of the people who saved her life and to share her remarkable experience with them.

At this point in her memoir, Weiss’s journey comes full circle, both as chronology and as narrative, and

demonstrates the urgency in today’s context of the solidarity that saved thousands of Jewish children during one of France’s darkest moments.

Third, Weiss aligns herself unequivocally with the struggle for a free Palestine. She praises the leadership of the young Palestinian activists in Toronto who helped launch in 2005 the global movement of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israeli Apartheid, and explains why, as a Holocaust survivor, she is moved to support *all* struggles against oppression and, especially in Palestine, for national liberation.

On this topic, Weiss’s narrative is especially sensitive to the unique and unprecedented suffering of the Jewish people during the Holocaust, and to the desire of its survivors to seek refuge outside of Europe after the war. Her explanation accounts for the sympathy that some readers might feel for Israel, but instead endorses a genuine solidarity among all peoples, including Israeli Jews and the Palestinians, as the path to mutual freedom.

At the same time as she grapples with the most urgent questions facing the world today, and for much of the last century, Weiss shares a deeply personal narrative that is full of tenderness, affection and love—not only for the people closest to her, including her husband, John Riddell, to whom she pays a special tribute in her text, but also for all of humanity. The sense of intimacy that emerges will make readers feel as if Weiss is speaking directly to them, like a lifelong friend.

Just as Weiss reminds us at the beginning of her text, there really are no strangers, only future friends—and that’s exactly how she treats her readers. In this beautiful and hopeful memoir, Weiss has reproduced the same solidarity that saved her life and thousands of others. We should let it inspire us and, like Weiss, be moved to build a better world. **M**

SHOSHANA MAGNET

Not that innocent

THE QUEER AESTHETICS OF CHILDHOOD: ASYMMETRIES OF INNOCENCE AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

HANNAH DYER

Rutgers University Press, Nov. 2019, \$24.95

AUDRE LORDE ONCE said, “there are no new ideas, just different ways of making them felt.” By taking a hammer to the traditional field of child studies, and viewing the pieces through a kaleidoscope, Hannah Dyer’s *The Queer Aesthetics of Childhood* is one of the most intellectually and emotionally satisfying reading experience I can remember. At a time when there are so many reasons to despair, this book reminded me of the beauty of ideas and their capacity to change the world.

A core argument of Dyer’s book is that the notion of childhood innocence has been used selectively to neglect and foreshorten the lives of some children while privileging others.

Artwork by children living under the Israeli occupation in Gaza, for example, which documented traumatic experiences of state repression, was deemed too upsetting or “not innocent” enough, to be displayed in a children’s museum in the United States. On the other hand, the child in western society is “a product of adult anxieties and epistemologies” (think of today’s intensive overparenting), which forced Dyer to consider “real children and their material social inequalities” in her analysis of our ideas of childhood.

While academic in scope, I found the exploration of how childhood is deployed by the neoliberal state helpful for both thinking through theories of child development and the practices of raising a child. Dyer’s book also feeds my hunger for a queer theory that embraces negative emotions without indicting the future to them.

In fact, emotions and moods are central here, as Dyer, assistant



Hannah Dyer

PHOTO COURTESY OF BROCK UNIVERSITY

professor in the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Brock University, uses what is known as *affect theory* to understand the child’s “instinctual loving, hating, aggression, and joy,” and the reparative potential for art to help them make sense of these feelings.

“Under the ideological sway of innocence, negative affects are often expected to be divorced from childhood experience,” she writes. “The symbolic value of innocence is, in part, its ability to raise public alarm about the child’s potential exposure to negative affects.”

Dyer’s book helps to explain both the saccharine, problematic nature of so much early childhood education and our lack of tolerance for children’s strong negative emotions. In Dyer’s words, we see children’s rights vehemently asserted in the field of child studies, but the child’s own negative and difficult feelings, such as anger, hate and resentment, are generally brushed under the carpet.

As someone who studies theories of early childhood education, I think this is why we love to talk about tolerating children’s difficult emotions but have trouble doing it. I was part of a research project looking into the teaching of an Indigenous curriculum in preschool classes. When the children were read aloud from Monique Gray Smith’s *My Heart Fills with Happiness*,

the educator replaced the word “ban-nock” with “bread.” When asked by the research team why they did this, the educator explained that this way the children would understand what the page was about.

Dyer might see this as an example of how we don’t tolerate discomfort (not knowing the meaning of a word), as a negative affect. Importantly in this case, the omission also may serve to avoid a potentially uncomfortable conversation about settler-colonialism. What makes us think that certain words are not known? Who does not know them?

In the groundbreaking picture book, *I Hate Everyone* (reviewed in the Nov/Dec 2019 *Monitor*), Naomi Davis and Cinta Arribas tell the story of the intimate relationship between hate and love in one little girl. When I have brought Davis and Arribas’s book to preschools, educators have expressed discomfort and refused to read it, saying “hate” is not a word for children, even if many use it on a near daily basis.

Dyer’s critical social justice project aims to pry open the hard and complicated conversation about negative emotions in children that ideologies of childhood innocence obfuscate. It is sorely needed. **M**



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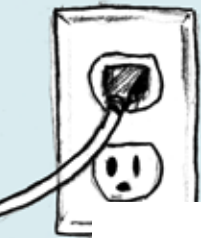
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