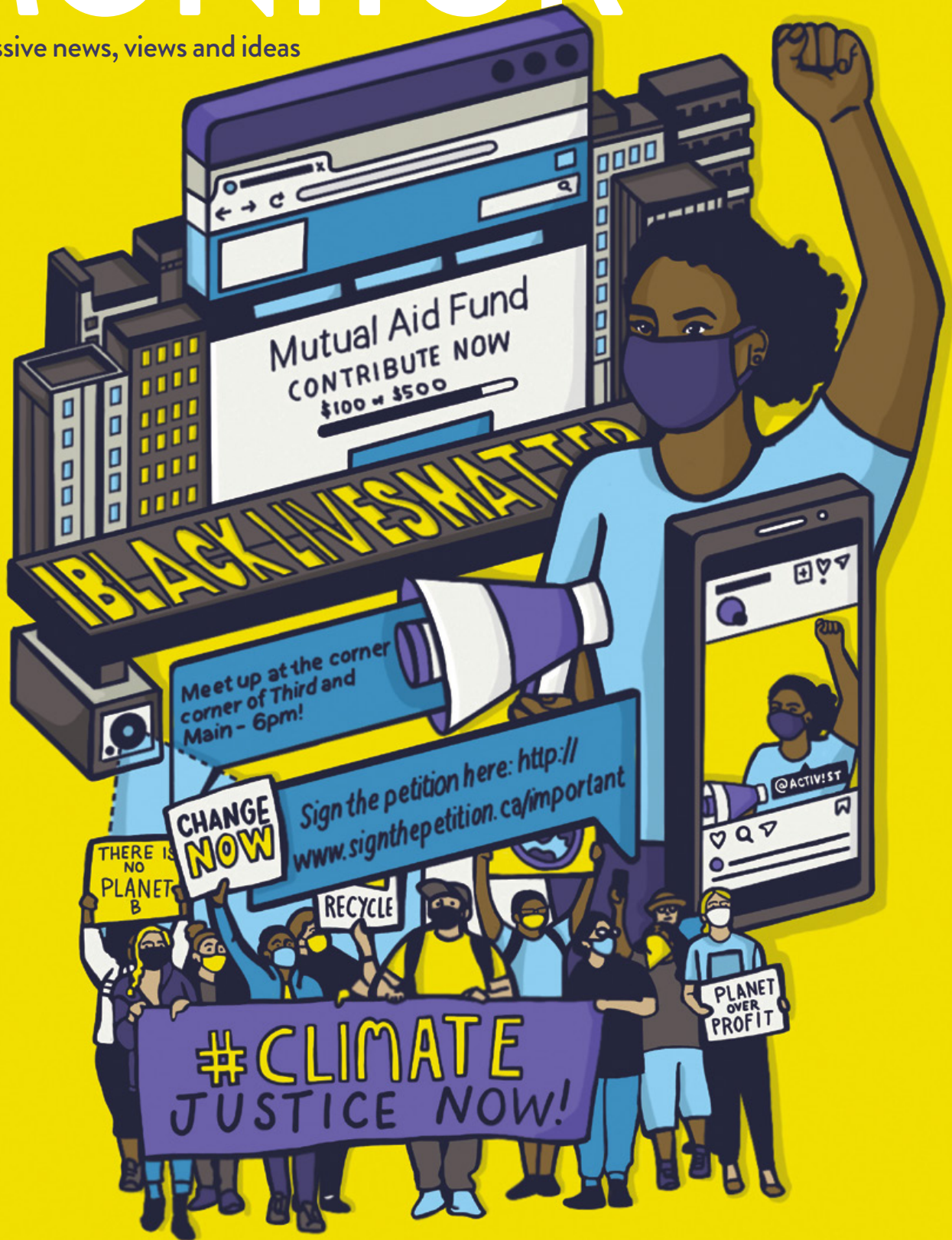


# MONITOR

Progressive news, views and ideas



CANADIAN CENTRE  
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
CENTRE CANADIEN  
de POLITIQUES ALTERNATIVES

MAY/JUNE 2021



**CCPA**  
CANADIAN CENTRE  
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## MONITOR

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Founded in 1980, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) is a registered charitable research institute and Canada's leading source of progressive policy ideas, with offices in Ottawa, Vancouver, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto and Halifax. The CCPA founded the *Monitor* magazine in 1994 to share and promote its progressive research and ideas, as well as those of like-minded Canadian and international voices.

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KATIE RASO

# What's below the surface

HAVE SOIL on my mind.

It's partially the time of the year—I just nestled 144 seeds into their starter pods today. Seedling day is one of quiet awe for me. I love to set up at the kitchen table, carefully dropping each seed into its new home, covering it over, then sitting back to marvel at the idea that the future contents of my winter pantry, hours of fall canning, and the ripest, freshest flavours of my summer—at this point, they all fit in two trays on my table, dormant.

We moved into our house two years ago and were blessed to find a yard that had been left to grow without pesticide or much disturbance. The result is a supernetwork of fungal activity. After every big rain, a new type of mushroom blooms in a different corner of the yard. Prior to this, I had never realized how at the mercy you are to the last homeowner's predilections for RoundUp. And I'm grateful to Judith, the previous owner, for her stewardship of this place that has made it a safe and successful home for our bounty of tomatoes, peppers, squash, and sunflowers.

Judith's wisdom, to let the soil be, is shared by many organic farmers across the country. There's a growing no-till movement that recognizes the critical role that fungal networks play in the growth and survival of plant life. Mycorrhizal fungi form symbiotic relationships with plants, exchanging nutrients as part of the soil food web. While plants can access sugar through photosynthesis, they may need to gain access to additional water, nutrients and protection against pathogens. These are offerings that mycorrhizal fungi exchange for the plant's excess sugars. The most common mycorrhizal are the arbuscular mycorrhizal

fungi (AMF), and they are known to support 85% of plant families, including major agricultural crops, trees and grasses.

I think a lot about about unseen fungus networks, how an ectomycorrhizal mushroom that pops up in my yard seems to have arrived out of nowhere overnight but is, in fact, part of a large, intricate system that extends beyond the property lines for my garden (a single fungus' mycelium network can extend over six square kilometres) and predates my arrival in this place (it's believed that plants started trading with fungi roughly 400 million years ago).

If you're wondering if this editorial is supposed to be running in the upcoming issue on food, I promise it is not misplaced. Part of the reason that I think so much about soil and fungus networks is that I am fascinated by the similarities between these systems and the systems of community care, activism and mutual aid that exist all around us. Unless they are part of our own networks, we are rarely aware of them until a boiling point or milestone makes them visible. It can seem that an issue appears overnight, when a movement suddenly comes within public view. But our lack of experience with an issue is not the same as the related network not existing.

I think about soil and community networks, how the latter don't just shape the lives of those within the network, they deliver hard-fought victories for the society as a whole. Organizing is the network that carries change through our communities and sustains us. And I think about how every young organizer I speak with wants to talk not only about the future but about the rich history that makes their work possible. So much of Western culture

is wrapped up in the ethos of "one great man" —the single visionary who leads the way, corrects the course and guides us forward. But organizing is inherently a collective action, recognizing that everyone has a role to play in shaping an equitable and just future. So much of the work is unseen: the sharing of knowledge, resources and food across our largely invisible channels.

There are powerful, loving, life-sustaining networks of hardworking people committed to creating better futures connected from end to end across this country, in this moment. They are caring for people that brutalist policies have failed. They are organizing workers in previously non-unionized fields. They are imagining hopeful futures beyond fossil fuels.

It is my hope that the articles in this issue provide a peek behind the curtain, or perhaps below the surface, at this work and how it is resisting inequity to shape a just future.

Before I close, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge my own unseen network for this issue. I had the privilege of working with Kevin Philipupillai on this issue. In addition to providing thought-provoking research for our Index, Kevin's feature article on the Alphabet Workers Union truly speaks to both the opportunities and challenges facing the future of worker organizing. I want to thank him for his incredible efforts and energy. **M**



## Credit where it's due

In his otherwise excellent article in the *Monitor* on the right to housing, Paul Taylor repeated a common error, that cuts to housing programs “were deepened in 1993 when Paul Martin, in his role as finance minister, abruptly cancelled all spending on new social housing projects.” It wasn’t Paul Martin who did that; it was the last budget of Brian Mulroney’s Conservative in April 1993, with Don Mazankowski as finance minister. See page 55 of the 1993 budget on the Government of Canada’s website for more information.

Martin’s first budget was in early 1994. And in his 1996 budget, he went a step further on social housing, announcing that the federal government “will phase out its remaining role in social housing, except for housing on Indian reserves.”

Martin was still Finance Minister when the Chrétien government had to reverse course, a bit, when those 1990s decisions made homelessness—a growing problem since the early 1980s—even worse. There was some money for homelessness in late 1999. Then, in 2001, there

were some new affordable housing investments, although on a much less generous basis than the programs abandoned in the 1990s.

**Bill Johnston**, Chair, Affordable Housing Team, First Unitarian Church of Hamilton

## Highlighting India’s farmer protests

I read the most recent issue of the (March/April) *Monitor* with great interest. I found the articles engaging and I appreciate hearing points of view being expressed by diverse Canadian voices. The focus on housing and health care is critical—understanding that the environment trumps everything.

In particular—I loved André Picard’s *Five books to understand...a pandemic*. I have read two of the books and I am looking forward to the others. I loved Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood’s *Parable of Two Roads*. I found the Index informative as well as the articles and opinions. I loved the graphic art by Katie Sheedy—somehow it hit the spot! I also appreciated the editorial.

I wonder if there would be a place in the *Monitor* for reporting and analysis on the Kisan movement against the Farm Bills in India. I see these demonstrations as direct opposition to the IMF policies favoring factory farms which benefit the extremely wealthy at the expense of everyone else. There are many concerned Canadians in the Indo-Canadian diaspora.

Thanks for all you do.

**Linda Munroe**

## The nuclear option

I’d like to refute arguments made in Ramana and Schacherl’s article on nuclear power in the Jan/Feb issue of the *Monitor*.

First, the article’s portrayal of nuclear safety and waste result from the misleading idea that any amount of radiation can be deadly. For example, decades ago people became convinced that plutonium in nuclear waste is extremely toxic and will cause harm thousands of years from now. This is not true. Radiation is only dangerous at high dose rates.

The idea that there is no safe level of radiation has caused serious harm. By contrast to the excellent safety record enjoyed by nuclear power in Canada, Health Canada estimates there are 14,600 air pollution deaths per year in Canada. Nuclear power reactors and Small Modular Reactors (SMR) have negligible greenhouse gases or other emissions, consequently, nuclear decreases the number of air pollution deaths by allowing coal plants to shut down. We are in the strange situation where people prevent nuclear power from reducing greenhouse gases, air pollution, and water degradation in the present, because they are afraid of a fictional hazard in the form of plutonium causing harm thousands of years from now.

The second error concerns cost. Nuclear

energy is much cheaper than wind for space heating and industrial heat applications. Further, nuclear downtime can be scheduled for low demand periods or on a rotation if there are 10+ reactors, as Ontario has, however, wind power follows its own schedule and so requires more backup power. Finally, every wind farm site has different costs and wind availability.

The third error concerns what an SMR is for. The article suggests an SMR in Canada’s North would be for electricity generation. In fact, they produce heat first, then electricity. A SMR can be sized for the community and produce both heat and electricity for: industry, space heating, clean water, and residential use.

SMR and CANDU power plants can be run safely and reduce greenhouse gas and other pollutants. The federal government wants to build SMR in Canada’s North because it will provide reliable heat, clean water, electricity, and process heat for residents, mines, and industry. Critics of nuclear power would have us use only renewables; let’s listen to reason.

**Ken Chaplin**

*Letters have been edited for clarity and length.*

*Send your letters to [monitor@policyalternatives.ca](mailto:monitor@policyalternatives.ca).*

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### Mapping Ontario's pandemic school funding

Ontario Education Minister Stephen Lecce can't stop talking about millions and millions of dollars in COVID funding, thousands and thousands of additional teachers, and endless measures to make schools safe and operational. So CCPA-Ontario Senior Researcher Ricardo Tranjan asked, what's the true story about Ontario's schools funding during the pandemic?

New analysis from Tranjan reveals that, on average, Ontario's 72 boards added the equivalent of just 1.5 staff per school to deal with all of the pressures from school closures, online learning, preventive health measures, additional mental health challenges, and growing learning gaps. Readers can find an interactive map with the board-by-board breakdowns on the Monitor website.

---

### Accounting for the cost of poverty in Atlantic Canada

New research from CCPA-Nova Scotia provides the total cost of poverty

in the Atlantic provinces. The new report, released at the start of April, reveals that the annual cost ranges from \$2 billion in Nova Scotia to \$273 million in Prince Edward Island. It costs close to \$959 million in Newfoundland and Labrador and \$1.4 billion in New Brunswick.

The report authors, CCPA-NS Director Christine Saulner and Houston Family Research Fellow Charles Plante, argue that the funds currently spent on these costs could be reallocated to affordable housing, food security, and programs to address intergenerational trauma rather than being spent to keep people entrenched in poverty. "This costing exercise shows that there is an economic benefit to eliminating poverty, and an economic cost to having poverty in our communities."

---

### Building a feminist COVID-19 recovery for Manitoba

Following the release of Katherine Scott's national report, *Work and COVID-19: Priorities for supporting women and the economy*, CCPA-Manitoba Director Molly McCracken published an inclusive and just feminist recovery plan for Manitoba. The policy brief focuses on investments in three areas: social infrastructure and the care economy; living wages, paid sick leave, EI and CPP reform; and help for those who were marginalized prior to the pandemic.

On the question of how Manitoba could fund an ambitious recovery plan,

McCracken rightly points out that "Manitoba gets \$1 billion more in equalization payments than it did in 2016 and our per capita allocation is \$3,477, well above the national average of \$2,181." She also notes that recent research from David Macdonald revealed that the federal government had, thus far, been responsible for footing 89% of the bill for COVID-19 spending in Manitoba. Thus, Manitoba has the fiscal room to fund a robust and inclusive recovery plan that benefits all of its citizenry.

---

### Building affordable housing is possible

The accepted narrative about rental housing in Canada is that affordability is a thing of the past. But a new report from CCPA-B.C.'s Marc Lee suggests that we can achieve the goal of affordable housing. Doing so requires us to, first, stop relying on private, for-profit housing to solve the crises in B.C. and Canada. Then we must expand the stocks of both non-market and co-op housing and adopt public-led approaches and non-profit development.

Lee's new report finds that non-profit housing builds could offer average break-even rents as low as \$1,273 per month for a one-bedroom and \$1,641 for a two-bedroom. By contrast, Padmapper's March 2021 Rent Report pegs current one-bedroom apartment prices at "record low prices" of \$1,900 in Vancouver and \$1,750 in Toronto. It is clear that relying on

private sector property developers as the primary builders of housing is not working. Check out Lee's new report for a promising, scalable alternative housing plan.

---

### The life and death of NAFTA's Chapter 11

In his final report as the Director of the CCPA's Trade and Investment Research Project, Scott Sinclair provides an analysis of the North American Free Trade Agreement's Chapter 11 and how it has informed subsequent trade agreements' investor-state dispute settlement clauses. Sinclair's research reveals that Canada has incurred more than \$113 million in unrecoverable legal costs (up to March 2020). Furthermore, Canadian governments have paid out more than \$263 million in damages and settlements resulting from ISDS claims.

While the ISDS clause was removed from the new Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, Sinclair cautions that Canada remains vulnerable to ISDS lawsuits through the web of bilateral and regional accords Canada has signed onto, which do contain ISDS clauses. The report offers a step-by-step approach for removing ISDS from all Canadian trade agreements to remove this vulnerability. **M**

Alex Hemingway / B.C. Office

## Wealth tax would raise far more money than previously thought

WHILE THE LIVES of millions of working people have been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic, the wealth of the richest few has continued to balloon in Canada. A wealth tax on the super rich is an important policy needed to address extreme inequality and help raise revenue for sustained, long-term increases in public investment in key areas after the pandemic.

Inequality has reached new heights in Canada in recent years. The richest 1% now control 25% of Canada's wealth, according to a recent Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) report. Research from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives shows that the 87 richest families in the country each hold, on average, 4,448 times more wealth than the typical family. Together these 87 families hold more wealth than the bottom 12 million Canadians combined.

Inequality is linked to worse performance on a wide range of health and social outcomes, as international epidemiological research shows. High levels of inequality also damage economic growth, as organizations like the IMF and OECD have begun to acknowledge in recent years.

Tackling inequality with a wealth tax on the super rich is hugely popular, backed by an overwhelming majority of Canadians across party lines in the most recent polling. This approach is also supported by a growing body of economic research and analysis.

Our latest analysis provides a new estimate of the revenue potential of a wealth tax using up-to-date

national accounts data and estimating tax avoidance and evasion based on the latest academic research. A 1% tax on wealth over \$20 million in Canada would generate about \$10 billion in revenue in its first year, substantially more than the commonly cited estimate of \$5.6 billion.

With a \$10 billion boost to annual public revenue, Canada could lift hundreds of thousands of people out of poverty, implement long-term increases to funding for important social programs like child care, health care and seniors' care, and help pay for more ambitious climate action.

A moderately more ambitious wealth tax could further reduce inequality and fund additional investments. For example, a wealth tax with rates of 1% on net worth over \$20 million, 2% over \$50 million and 3% over \$100 million could raise nearly \$20 billion in its first year.

Wealth taxes of these kinds, targeted to net worth over \$20 million, would apply to only about 25,000 wealthy families, representing the richest 0.2% of the country. This tiny fraction of Canadians—the richest of the rich—together control \$1.8 trillion of the country's wealth.

Notably, these wealth tax rates do not even approach the much higher rates called for by Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren in the United States. Their more aggressive plan would apply rates as high as 6% on wealth over \$1 billion and 8% over \$10 billion.

A wealth tax is just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to tackling inequality and raising revenue for important public investments.

It should be accompanied by a suite of other tax fairness policies, including ending the costly special treatment of capital gains income in the Canadian tax system and closing a range of other tax loopholes that benefit the affluent.

### Updated wealth tax revenue estimates: the details

This analysis' updated estimates of wealth tax revenue corrects for two limitations in the most recent and commonly cited wealth tax revenue estimate from the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) in July 2020, while maintaining the core of the PBO's methodology.

First, the PBO's July 2020 estimate of wealth tax revenues reflected a large drop in asset values early in the pandemic (a factor that the PBO acknowledges in its publication). Asset values have since rapidly bounced back in Canada. In the current estimates, I use the most recent Statistics Canada data to update the PBO's wealth data set. This is done using the methodology that the PBO provides in an earlier report for updating its wealth distribution data set.<sup>1</sup>

When the latest aggregate wealth data is used, this adds \$800 million to the projected net revenue for a 1% wealth tax, compared to the earlier PBO estimate of \$5.6 billion.

Second, and more significantly, the PBO assumed that 35% of the wealth tax base would be wiped out by "behavioural responses" such as tax avoidance and evasion.<sup>2</sup> However, this estimated behavioural response rate is out of line with the latest economic research on wealth taxes.

Surveying academic studies of European wealth taxes, University of California, Berkeley economists Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman estimate a substantially lower average behavioural response of 16%. Furthermore, they suggest that this figure should be understood as an "upper bound." That is, behavioural responses to these European wealth

taxes were higher than they needed to be as a result of policy design flaws that can be readily avoided.

The large-scale use of tax havens and other large-scale tax avoidance and evasion is often assumed to be inevitable, whether it relates to a wealth tax or the existing tax system. But, as leading experts like Saez and Zucman emphasize, we largely know how to crack down on this behaviour and how to design a wealth tax that minimizes it. What's been missing is the political will to challenge the interests of the wealthy and powerful who oppose these steps.

Key measures include increasing funding for enforcement efforts focused on the rich, steeper penalties for tax evasion, enforcement against financial services providers that help organize and enable evasion, and imposing stronger transparency and third-party reporting requirements on financial institutions doing business with Canada. Focusing a wealth tax on a narrow band of the richest 0.2% also facilitates a high rate of audits. The growing body of economic research on wealth taxes outlines the various practicalities of enforcement in more detail.

Notably, Saez and Zucman applied their 16% behavioral response estimate to the much more aggressive wealth tax proposals of Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren, which use higher tax rates than have so far been proposed in Canada. We would expect a smaller behavioural response to a well-enforced wealth tax at the low 1% rate proposed by the federal NDP.

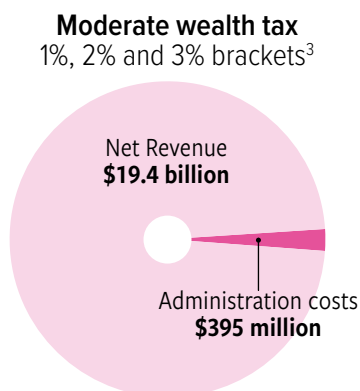
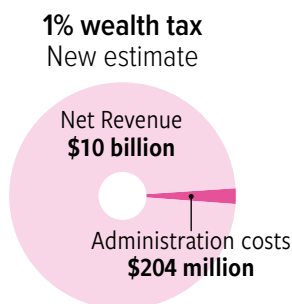
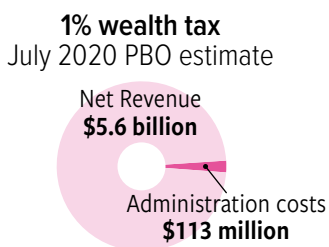
An extensive new body of research produced by the UK Wealth Tax Commission, based out of the London School of Economics, reinforces this view. For a 1% annual wealth tax in the United Kingdom, the commission's review of the evidence suggests a 7–17% behavioural response rate.

Using behavioural responses that are in line with the scholarly economic research on wealth taxes yields substantially larger projected

revenues than the earlier PBO estimate.

For a small 1% wealth tax, this analysis uses the midpoint of the UK Wealth Tax Commission's 7–17% behavioural response range, applying a 12% reduction in the wealth tax base. This yields net revenues of \$10 billion in the first year of the tax. If we use behavioural response estimates across the full 7–17% range, revenues vary from a high of \$10.8 billion to a low of \$9.2 billion.

The chart below shows the estimates of the gross revenue, administration costs and net revenue for the 1% annual wealth tax, alongside the PBO's older revenue estimate.



I also include estimated revenues for a moderately more ambitious wealth tax with additional brackets (1% over \$20 million, 2% over \$50 million and 3% over \$100 million), using Saez and Zucman's higher 16% behavioural response to be more conservative in the estimate. This moderate wealth tax would raise an estimated \$19.4 billion in net revenue in its first year (net of administration costs), though this estimate has a higher level of uncertainty.

Following the PBO's methodology, I have deducted 2% of gross revenue for administrative costs. In absolute terms, these estimates allow for administrative costs nearly double those earmarked by the PBO for a small wealth tax (\$204 million compared to \$113 million), which double again for a moderate wealth tax. This approach adds a layer of conservatism to my net revenue estimates and allows for substantially more investment in enforcement. These administrative costs are a drop in the bucket compared to \$10 billion or \$20 billion in revenue.

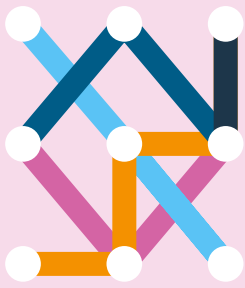
### Tackling the super rich and funding the public good

When it comes to taking on the super rich and expanding public services, a wealth tax is only one piece of the puzzle. In the area of tax policy, a range of additional measures is needed.

First, Canada needs to end the preferential treatment of income from wealth (i.e., capital gains from stocks, real estate, etc.) compared to income from work. Currently, capital gains are taxed at half the rate of income from work, costing billions of dollars in lost public revenue. Ninety-two per cent of the benefits from this policy flow to the top 10% of income earners. Recent estimates from University of Toronto economist Michael Smart suggest that closing this loophole could raise nearly \$16 billion in annual revenue to federal and provincial governments.

Canada should also end a proliferation of other tax expenditures that





## Index Numbers for Organizers

### COMPILED BY KEVIN PHILIPUPILLAI

#### 37.5

The percentage of migrant care workers, mostly women of colour, who reported that they were not allowed to leave their employer's home during the pandemic, according to a report released in October 2020 by the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change. 40% of the respondents also reported that they were not paid for the additional hours of work that employers expected of them during the pandemic. The report estimates an average of \$226 in unpaid wages per worker per week, or \$6,552 over the first six months of the pandemic.

#### 7

The number of languages served by the Workers Action Centre, an organization in Toronto serving workers in low-wage or unstable jobs. WAC staff run a telephone hotline and provide online resources in Bengali, Cantonese, English, Punjabi, Somali, Spanish, and Tamil.

#### 4,862,300

The total number of workers in Canada with union coverage, according to Statistics Canada's January 2021 Labour Force Survey. That's 31.8% of the overall workforce.

#### 17.7

The percentage of workers aged 15 to 24 across Canada who have union coverage, as of January 2021. 24.8% of workers 65 and over are part of a union, which means that the youngest and oldest workers are the least likely to be part of a union.

#### 4.69 to 1

The ratio of non-union job losses to union job losses across Canada between February 2020 and April 2020. Unionized workers in every province were more likely to keep their job than non-unionized workers.

#### 551

The number of Instagram followers that workers at an Indigo store in Mississauga, ON gathered as part of their successful union drive. The workers started posting to Instagram in September 2020 to counter disinformation about unions. Workers at other Indigo stores took note, and there have since been successful union drives at stores in Montreal, Coquitlam, B.C. and Woodbridge, ON.

#### 226,000

The approximate number of private rental apartments in Berlin that affordable housing activists are trying to turn into public housing. The campaign is using a clause in Germany's 1949 constitution to try to force a city-wide referendum on expropriating the property of all landlords that own more than 3,000 homes. The city would have to raise the money to buy the properties from these private landlords, the largest of which owns approximately 110,000 rental homes.

#### 48

The number of accounts that U.S. technology company Clearview AI created for Canadian law enforcement agencies, according to a joint investigation by the privacy commissioners of Canada, Quebec, B.C., and Alberta. Clearview AI maintains a database of more than three billion images scraped from the internet. Canadian law enforcement agencies performed thousands of searches before Clearview AI voluntarily withdrew from Canada in July 2020, saying that it was prepared to stay away for two years.

#### \$2,000–\$3,000

The "resignation bonus" that Amazon offered workers at its warehouse in Alabama in February 2021, during their seven-week union election period. Workers had to have been with the company for two peak seasons or longer to accept the offer. The resignation bonus resembles Amazon's "The Offer" program, where workers are offered up to \$5,000 to quit and never return.

#### \$16.5 million

The amount that Toronto Police agreed to pay to settle a class action lawsuit brought by people who were arrested or detained during the G20 summit in Toronto in June 2010. The police surrounded and detained approximately 1,100 protesters and bystanders and held them in a temporary detention centre. Each member of the class is entitled to between \$5,000 and \$24,700. The police also agreed to acknowledge wrongdoing and expunge arrest records.<sup>1</sup>

disproportionately benefit the affluent, reform corporate taxation based on innovative models, implement an inheritance tax on estates over \$5 million, and substantially raise the top marginal income tax rate.

But a wealth tax can play a unique role by honing in on the richest of the rich. While a broader group, like the top 10% of income earners, can afford to pitch in more to help increase public investments, they will be more willing to do so if the wealthiest 0.2% are paying their fair share.

Of course, the tax system itself is only part of the solution. A whole range of other actions are necessary to take on extreme wealth and equalize economic power in Canada, including the strengthening workers' rights and new models of public, employee and community ownership.

Taxing the super rich enjoys overwhelming public support among Canadians across party lines. So why is a wealth tax not front-and-centre in our politics? Governments do pay attention to public opinion, but when the interests of the wealthy few are at stake, the will of the majority often doesn't translate into substantive policy change.

The economic and political power of the super rich is real. But there has always been an answer to organized money: organized people. Building on a deep well of public support and backed by a growing body of research, a wealth tax can be won if Canadians get organized to demand it. **M**

#### Acknowledgements

Thanks to Gabriel Zucman, Rob Gillezeau and Rhys Kesselman for comments on earlier drafts of this analysis.

#### Notes

1. Specifically, I use the latest Statistics Canada population data and the National Balance Sheet Accounts data (Q3 2020) to bring PBO's High-net-worth Family Database (HFD) up to date. See page nine of PBO's June 2020 report for a full description of how it describes updating its 2016 HFD data set using these same population and NBSA data series from Statistics Canada.
2. In brief, it scales down the aggregate wealth totals on its High-income Family Database by 35% before applying the 1% tax.
3. Rates of 1% on net worth over \$20 million, 2% over \$50 million and 3% over \$100 million.

Gavin Fridell / Trade and Investment Research Project

# Canada and the COVID-19 waiver

## An unethical position that needs to change

**O**VER THE PAST few months, Canada and a group of mostly wealthy nations blocking the proposed World Trade Organization (WTO) COVID-19 waiver put forward by South Africa and India have come under increasing pressure to change their position. The waiver now has the support of over 100 mostly low- and middle-income nations, the WHO, several UN agencies, and a growing global solidarity movement that has organized public events, civil society letters, and petitions signed by hundreds of thousands of people.

In Canada, on March 10, 2021, a coalition of over 40 organizations, including Amnesty International, Unifor, the United Church and the CCPA, wrote a forceful open letter in support of the waiver to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. This movement has put the Trudeau government in a difficult bind. On the one hand, Trudeau and several ministers have echoed the call that "No one is safe until everyone is safe." Canada has contributed \$940 million to the ACT-Accelerator, a global collaboration aimed at developing and distributing affordable COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. On the other hand, while claiming it does not outright reject the waiver, Canada has also refused to support it. Instead, it has held firm with a group of wealthy countries blocking and delaying the waiver, dragging things on with requests for information and clarifications, with no end in sight.

### Canada's position: contradictory or consistent?

On the face of it, Canada's position on the COVID-19 waiver might seem

a bit contradictory. At the same time as the government is claiming to be a leader in global efforts to produce and deliver affordable vaccines and treatments, it is blocking a major initiative led by Southern countries to scale up manufacturing and distribution of those same vaccines and treatments.

Looked at another way, however, there is great consistency in Canada's approach.

While the Canadian government certainly wants vaccines and treatments rolled out as quickly as possible, its definition of what is possible is tightly constrained. The number one constraint, and Canada's clear priority at the WTO, is the defence of intellectual property (IP) rights.

There are many complex reasons why Canada is such an adamant defender of IP rights. Direct lobbying by large pharmaceutical firms is no doubt one major consideration. According to the Government of Canada's Registry of Lobbyists, over the past 12 months, the pharmaceutical lobbying group, Innovative Medicines Canada, has met with government officials 44 times. These meetings covered a range of topics, including explicitly IP rights at the WTO.

Beyond this, it is likely the case that many Liberal politicians believe the arguments made by big pharma, and the corporate sector more broadly, that unbreakable IP protections are needed to spur vaccine innovation. This position has been criticized on numerous fronts, including by those who have pointed out that tens of billions of dollars in public funding has played a key role driving vaccine development,

along with billions of dollars more in guaranteed, advanced contracts from governments for the vaccines.

Critics, moreover, argue that existing IP protections have been blocking low- and middle-income countries and their industries from making better and quicker use of new knowledge around vaccines and treatment, ramping up the manufacture and distribution of needed medicines and equipment.

Wealthy countries have argued that existing flexibilities within WTO rules allow countries sufficient space to address the crisis through such mechanisms as compulsory licensing. South Africa, India, and their supporters. However, counter that such mechanisms are too slow, exist only on a “product by product” or “country by country” basis, and do not protect low- and middle-income countries from the very real threat of costly litigation with big pharma or Western governments down the road.

Canada, for its part, remains undeterred and firmly committed to defending IP rights at all costs.

### **Canada: a world leader in “vaccine nationalism”**

Despite its faith in the global pharmaceutical industry at the WTO, the Canadian government is anxious about the relatively sluggish rate of vaccine distribution at home. Here, its primary approach has been spending on two main fronts.

First, Canada has pledged over \$1 billion in advanced purchases for vaccines, all of which are produced elsewhere. In doing so, Canada has emerged as a member of a small group of countries that represent around 13% of the world’s population but have bought up over 50% of the world’s promised vaccines.

Even within this elite group, Canada is a leader, having bought more vaccines per capita than any other country, enough to eventually vaccinate 4 or 5 times the Canadian population.

Second, Canada has also begun to spend money on “made in Canada”

vaccines, which will not be ready for many months. This has involved tens of millions of dollars upgrading facilities, including \$126 million for a facility in Montreal in partnership with the private company, Novavax, and \$173 million to produce vaccines in Quebec with Medicago.

These strategies are entirely consistent with Canada’s resistance to the WTO waiver, as it avoids any changes to the existing vaccine production system in favour of doling out support and subsidies to private companies.

Perhaps most significantly, this strategy is a common one in neoliberal times, pursued by relatively rich countries that have the money to do so. Many low- and middle-income countries, however, are not in the position to follow suit, and will find themselves increasingly falling behind in vaccine manufacturing and access, now and into the future.

### **The age-old strategy of aid and charity**

Confronted with the injustices of the global vaccine rollout, Canada has drawn upon the age-old strategy of aid and charity. In particular, Canada has sought to position itself as a leader in the COVAX initiative, a global vaccine alliance aimed at providing equitable access to vaccines for low- and middle-income countries.

Canada has pledged \$220 million to COVAX to purchase vaccines for other countries, combined with \$220 million for vaccines for Canadians. While Canada’s involvement has been welcomed, its reputation has been tarnished by the decision to draw 1.9 million doses for Canadians in the first round of availability.

While technically this is within Canada’s rights, COVAX was designed first and foremost to assist low- and middle-income countries and not necessarily, in the first round, Canada, a wealthy country and world leader in “vaccine nationalism.”

Either way, what is perhaps most notable about the COVAX strategy

is that it seeks to replace urgent demands for reforms, such as those represented by the WTO waiver, with paternalism and charity. The money comes with acceptance of the status quo.

In this case, the status quo means that millions in low- and middle-income countries will have to wait much longer for vaccines than those in rich countries like Canada, and longer than the world would be capable of if the existing IP barriers were eliminated or reduced, rather than preserved and protected. By some estimates, the majority of people in low-income nations may not have access to vaccines until 2024.

Canada’s charitable position, moreover, falls short compared to the efforts of emerging powers like China, India, and Russia. China, in particular, has massively ramped up its own vaccine production and pledged half a billion doses to more than 45 countries. This means that China is offering 10 times more vaccines abroad than it has distributed at home.

While some have raised concerns that Chinese companies have not been fully transparent on the trials of their vaccines, they have been embraced internationally in a context where rich countries have been buying up so much of the potential supply. As a result, Huizhong Wu and Kristen Gelineau from the Associated Press suggest that, “a large part of the world’s population will end up inoculated not with the fancy Western vaccines boasting headline-grabbing efficacy rates, but with China’s humble, traditionally made shots.”

As a growing chorus of nations, movements, and international organizations call out the unethical hypocrisy of Western nations, valuing IP rights over human lives, the time has come for Canada to change its position at the WTO. The global appeal that “no one is safe until everyone is safe,” is not just a slogan, but a call to action. **M**



## Trade and investment

STUART TREW

# Enforcing the new NAFTA, but for workers or the bosses?

HERE'S A NEW trade sheriff in Washington and she plans to “walk, chew gum and play chess at the same time.” Katherine Tai laid down her challenge on February 25, in opening remarks to the Senate Finance Committee, then considering her nomination for the job of United States Trade Representative. Both Democrats and Republicans expect top-notch gum chewing from their USTR, but the chess-playing really impressed. The senate confirmed Tai's nomination with a vote of 98-0 on March 17.

The question now is where Biden's new USTR plans to walk, at what pace, and whether she is a spearmint or peppermint kind of person. During a public webinar in December, Senator Rob Portman, one of Tai's predecessors as USTR, said he would hope that the Biden trade team could conclude Trump-era free trade deals with the U.K. and Kenya while still pursuing reforms to U.S. trade policy promised during the election. No reason why Biden “can't walk and chew gum at the same time,” said Portman. Indeed.

However, the U.K. and Kenya bilaterals do not seem to be Tai's immediate concern, nor does jumping back into the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiated by Obama then ditched by Trump. Since her senate hearing, Tai has clarified to congress, her staff, the media and several foreign governments that her immediate priorities will be 1) holding China to its commitments under a “phase one” trade deal struck at the beginning of last year by the Trump administration, and 2) solving a 16-year aerospace subsidy dispute with Europe, and 3) enforcing Canadian and Mexican commitments under CUSMA (the new NAFTA).

The tough-but-constructive approach to China is exactly what the powerful U.S. Chamber of Commerce called for last November, claiming the U.S. “can walk and chew gum at the same time, which is why we also support efforts to keep pressure on trade practices that are harmful and unfair.” Outside of China, those allegedly harmful practices include Canada's allocation of new dairy imports (a Trump-initiated CUSMA dispute

hangs in the balance), Mexican health labels on packaged food, Canadian plans to regulate single-use plastics, and Mexico's proposed phaseout of GM corn and the herbicide glyphosate.

As anyone with a bit of common sense will tell you, chewing that much gum can be dangerous, walking or no walking. And Tai should recall how badly her predecessors blew this particular game of chess with the corporate class. Obama, no slouch in the walking and chewing gum department, attempted to trade government-wide business-friendly regulation and an Asia-Pacific FTA (the TPP) for corporate investment in new economic growth. Business held onto its cash, while Obama's regulatory reforms laid the foundation for significant deregulation under the Trump administration.

Back to CUSMA enforcement, it was expected the first dispute under the new NAFTA's strengthened labour protections would be against Mexico. But on March 23, the *Centro de los Derechos del Migrante* claimed that milestone by filing a challenge that accuses U.S. employers of regular sex-based discrimination under two migrant visa programs. According to the centre:

Through discriminatory recruitment and hiring practices, women are largely excluded from accessing these visas. For example, in 2018 3% of all H-2A visas were issued to women, while women made up approximately 25% of all farm laborers in the United States. Migrant worker women who are hired on H-2 visas are often channeled into lower-paying jobs under the programs and face gender-based violence.

Mexico's labour ministry must agree to investigate the complaint, which will “test the new, stronger language on migrant workers...and on discrimination against women,” said Lance Compa of Cornell University, a panel member on the CUSMA Rapid Response Mechanism for labour complaints. So, *¿Pueden caminar y mascar chicle al mismo tiempo?* In other words, will the Mexican government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador be so bold as to challenge the Biden-Harris regime on migrant rights while it is also testing corporate America's patience with energy re-nationalization and domestic farm supports?

The CCPA's Trade and Investment Research Project (TIRP), a network of academic, labour and NGO researchers, will be chewing on all of this. In a recent video call, TIRP members were especially interested in Tai's plans to review past U.S. trade agreements for their impacts on workers (intended or unintended), women, incomes, the environment, and communities of colour, and to develop a climate- and worker-focused trade policy.

The Obama administration promised the same and disappointed. But these are different and probably more urgent times for a Democratic establishment that appears, so far, ready to *do something* to level the playing field between bosses and workers—even in the chewed, flavourless realm of trade policy. **M**

JENNIFER CHEN

# Trust and relationships in community organizing

WHEN WE TALK about engaging and empowering under-represented populations with the purpose of increasing awareness of the issues that affect their lives, or increasing their influence in policies and decision making, community organizing is fundamental. Traditional “western” approaches to organizing, which often begin with issues and then action (think election organizing), or begin with organizers—often external to the community (think international development approaches)—may not work with diverse communities. When we organize within ethnocultural communities, we need to use a different approach. Sometimes, indeed most times, organizers external to the community may do more harm than good, no matter how well-intentioned.

Organizing within diverse communities takes time, trust, and a lot of patience and flexibility.

In newcomer communities, where I organize, people talk about current issues but understand the system differently, with different interpretations and expectations. Organizers need to first build relationships and trust with community members, and listen to how they understand the issue.

I became involved in organizing while at university as an international student from China. I joined my student union, where I learned campaign strategies and how to lobby effectively. The student union had the resources and capacity to make change, and I was impressed at how the movement could fight. Gaining the trust of fellow students was a matter of striking

up conversations in the halls, and students were easy to find. We could take one issue, like rising tuition fees, and mobilize our community around it.

However, after graduation when I ventured out into the community and tried to mobilize, I found there were no shortcuts, no “lobby kits”, and not even a “community of interest” the way there had been at university. The stakes were completely different and trust had to be earned.

Some people may have a romanticized vision of what community organizing is, where they can jump in with their passion and make meaningful change within a couple weeks. But true organizing isn’t just a project. It’s people’s lives. It’s long-term. It’s a relationship.

Why do trust and relationships matter in community organizing? When jumping into issues too soon, it turns people off. For many ethnocultural communities, there may already be trauma and mistrust directed to anyone who attempts to introduce issues to the community or group. You can’t assume the community will see things the way you see them. In organizing, trust is more valuable than a PhD. It’s important to know that conversations about issues will happen in time, and until that time comes, you have to continue putting in work on the community’s timeline, not your own.

Over the past few years, a women’s organization I’m working with has been organizing family activities, hosting programs including a walking club and new skills for newcomers, and more recently delivering meals to health

care workers during COVID-19. All of this has been developed to build relationships and trust with the community. The community we work with is traditionally averse to political engagement for a range of reasons. Now that we have shown up for the community, when we organize webinars and rallies on education reform and anti-racism, there is greater interest and turnout from the community, and people are not shy to express opinions because they trust the organizers. Organizers who don’t see the value in a cooking night, or a walking club, will fail to truly mobilize their community.

When we do community organizing with ethnocultural communities, we also shouldn’t assume that relationship building is done by an organizer, or organization alone. Communities have multiple layers of involvement, from individual families to faith-based groups to informal women’s circles. All of these networks exist before and after the organizer is gone. So, when organizing, you should always ask yourself, “will I stick around too”? The answer to that will determine your success as an organizer, and the value of the impact you hope to achieve.

Community organizers play an important role in the fight for social justice, racial justice, and gender equality. The connections organizers can make between critical issues and peoples’ daily lives is crucial to helping build capacity as a community. But it takes a lot of work, and shouldn’t be seen as a project or something you can list on your curriculum vitae. If you want to be a community organizer, you have to be in it for the long haul. **M**



KEVIN PHILIPUPILLAI

KATIE SHEEDY

## Alphabet workers go wall-to-wall

ON JANUARY 4, 2021, workers at Alphabet, the parent company of tech giant Google, announced through an op-ed in the *New York Times* that they had formed the Alphabet Workers Union (AWU), as part of the Communications Workers of America (CWA). This would be a wall-to-wall union, meaning it would be open to all employees at Google and its affiliated entities, across all departments and regardless of whether they were full-time, permanent employees, contractors or temporary workers.

At that point, 226 workers had signed union cards with the CWA. Several hundred more signed up in the following weeks, out of an Alphabet workforce totalling more than a hundred thousand. Thus far,

the union has decided not to pursue a vote under the United States' National Labor Relations Board, meaning it remains a minority or solidarity union as opposed to a legally recognized bargaining entity.

Still, news of the union spread quickly. "It's a big signal," says Johanna Weststar (she/her), a professor of labour relations at Western University in London, Ontario. "The fact that there is a unionization movement going on at Google really changes the tone in the industry."

Weststar has studied recent developments in organizing in creative and high-tech fields, including the gaming industry. She says there has been a noticeable increase in union activity in the wider digital sector in recent years. "When I first came to study industrial relations," she says,

"there was nothing. There was no conversation about unionization in these spaces."

There are no Canadian tech companies that rival Google for size and complexity. But the momentum and the political consciousness that motivated these Alphabet workers is not confined by borders and industries. For organizers looking to pick out trends or ideas from the Alphabet experience that might be relevant for the future of Canada's labour movement, it may be surprising to recognize the degree to which Alphabet worker-organizers looked to examples of organizing from the late-nineteenth century and the early-twentieth century, specifically wall-to-wall organizing and organizing as a minority union outside of a legal regime.

Auni Ahsan (they/them) is a software engineer at Google and a member of the AWU executive council. They know some people wonder why Alphabet workers need a union. “Our conditions are much better than the average worker in America, at least as far as full-time workers goes,” says Ahsan. “But it’s because of the dirty secret that Google doesn’t like to talk about, which is that over half of the global workforce is contracted.”

“These workers are Google workers,” says Ahsan. “They work on Google stuff. They keep Google going. But they’re not treated with the same dignity. They’re not treated with the same benefits, basic pay, job security. I’ve known people who are waiting months and months to know if they’ll have a job next month. And they find out at the end of the month whether their contract will be renewed the next day.”

“I think some of the shine has come off the idea of the new economy,” says Weststar. “There was a real excitement around about the idea of a post-bureaucratic time... That workers and capital are no longer in antagonistic class positions. I think there is a growing understanding, now that we have learned a lot more about what these, quote unquote, new workplaces look like, that they’re actually not so different overall.”

Workers have also become more vocal about a wider range of issues, including diversity and respect in the workplace. “In the past it was always better pay, better working conditions,” says Martin O’Hanlon, the president of CWA Canada. “The standard things. And we were very well versed in handling that... In the last few years, we’ve noticed a bit of a change. It’s not necessarily all about pay.”

“Every group of workers we’ve heard from in recent years has had these broader goals of equity,” says Kat Lapointe, an organizer with CWA Canada who works primarily with digital media workers. For educators at Second City, racial and sexual orientation diversity were driving factors in their recent union drive with the CWA. And Canadian game workers have made trans rights an issue in their organizing in the last two to three years.

“It is certainly driven by young people,” O’Hanlon says. “The new generation that are coming up have a different sense of what’s right, and they’re more sensitive to the fact that if their coworkers aren’t being respected for their diversity and their differences, that they’ve got to stand up and fight for that.”

Ahsan says larger societal problems, such as climate change, the ethical use of artificial intelligence, and the role of technology in the workplace, are important to many union members at Alphabet. These were also a key focus of earlier advocacy efforts at the company. Ahsan’s first experience with advocacy at Alphabet was with a walkout in November 2018 to protest the company’s handling of sexual harassment and abuse of power, and its broader treatment of women.

Ahsan, who was born in Bangladesh and now lives in Boston, first became involved with organizing as a student at the University of Toronto. But they didn’t initially see Alphabet as a place to do organizing work. That changed when employees found out that some of them had unwittingly been contributing to Project Maven, a contract with the Pentagon to use artificial intelligence to improve the imaging systems of U.S. drones.

“I work at Google Cloud,” explains Ahsan, “and seeing the brazenness with which our executives were willing to pursue these military contracts to work with the Defense Department and really go against all of the stated values of the company by doing so, that’s when it became too close to my situation, to my job, for me to ignore.

“But at the same time,” Ahsan says, “we should be careful about the distinctions that we draw. Because ultimately these are working class issues. War is definitely a working class issue.” Ahsan points to the example of a bomb falling on a worker in the Global South. “Some of the brightest moments for the labour movement in the past have been when these issues come together and we understand a global working class solidarity.”

“I think there’s a stronger political consciousness in some of these emerging organizing groups,” says Weststar, the labour relations professor. She points out that the wall-to-wall approach that the AWU adopted recalls an earlier approach to unionization. “If you look back in labour history,” she says, “there were the industrial unions that emerged with the rise in factories, and those unions really had a stronger ideology towards thinking of unionizing everybody. Historically there were unions called ‘one big union’... To really stop reproducing class distinctions even within the labour movement.”

As a wall-to-wall union, the AWU is open to all Alphabet employees regardless of their job or whether they are permanent or temporary employees. As a minority union, there is no obligation for the employer to talk to them, but there is also more flexibility.

“What that allows them to do,” says Weststar, “is completely disregard the precedent in the legal system that says you wouldn’t have a union with programmers and cleaners and massage therapists and contract workers and full-time workers.”

“The first thing employers do when you apply for legal certification of a union is essentially try to dispute the bargaining unit that the union is putting forward,” says Weststar. “Because the employer wants to shrink that bargaining unit down... And then that just creates the circumstance where you have a group of privileged workers who are unionized, and a group of other workers who aren’t.”

“The industrial union movement of the 1930s is such an important and inspiring part of the history for me,” says Ahsan, who was involved in the initial process of

deciding which established unions to approach, if any. “A big part of our confidence in the Communications Workers of America is that they organized under this model.” The CWA was founded in 1938 as the National Federation of Telephone Workers, at a time when minority unions were more common.

There are other wall-to-wall and minority unions under the CWA umbrella today. “People love talking about Google in the press,” says Ahsan, “but the Texas State Employees Union and the United Campus Workers are unions in the South where many of the workers don’t have any access to a legal bargaining process or legal union recognition. But they’ve formed unions all the same, with full voting power in the CWA.

“We’re not re-inventing the wheel here. It did take something special to do this at Google, but ultimately we followed the same playbook that thousands of unions have followed before us.”

“The principle that we have demonstrated with AWU,” says Ahsan, “is that we have a union because we say that we have a union. And it doesn’t matter what the law says because the law was made by workers forced into concessions in the first place, back in the 1930s.”

“What’s happening in this space then, is unionization has become much more of a political space, like it used to be,” says Weststar. “Like it was in the late-1800s, where unionization was not legal. And what workers had to do was go on strike and agitate and struggle, and politically force their employers to recognize them. Because there was no legal regime to force the employer to the table.

“They’re just plowing ahead with their political campaign and social campaign, knowing that the legal regime is a stumbling block for them right now,” says Weststar. “What will be very interesting to see is whether they can sustain that.” **M**



## Colour-coded Justice

ANTHONY N. MORGAN

### “The first thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers.”

THESE ARE WORDS uttered by the fictional character, “Dick the Butcher”, in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part 2*. In the play, this line is shouted out during a rallying speech given by a rabble-rousing rebel leader named Jack Cade. Dick the Butcher’s comical and crude call for lawyer-cide punctuates a pause in Cade’s inspired speech to a mass of bloodthirsty rebels, which Cade uses to declare his aims to lead a people’s revolt, ostensibly to help better the lives and lot of poor, oppressed, landless and illiterate classes of 14th century London, England. What actually happens in the play is that the frenzied rebels brutally murder their countryfolk for such whimsical deeds as being able to read and count. Their brief tyranny, fuelled by contorted notions of justice, is quickly put down.

There’s much debate about the meaning of Dick the Butcher’s declaration. One school of thought holds that it is meant to be a jab, pointing out that they tend to maintain systems of social, economic, political and cultural disadvantage by serving as the gilded agents of the propertied and powerful, at the expense of the oppressed. As this line of thinking goes, the Butcher’s words acknowledge that defeating structures of power also requires ridding society of the primary protectors of the status quo, namely lawyers.

An alternative school of thought holds that the famous line serves as a coded compliment to lawyers for being protectors of justice. This line of thinking relies on an interpretation of this scene in which these rebels recognize that succeeding in violently stealing power and summarily executing anyone who gets in the way of this requires that there be no lawyers to defend the rights of the hapless victims of their revolt and/or to prosecute the rebels for the violence inflicted in the name of their unrighteous rebellion.

Anyone who has led or supported social justice organizing and advocacy would likely say that regardless of what Shakespeare actually intended to convey with this line, based on continuing struggles against social inequities, both interpretations are valid and accurate. Whether it’s righteous resistance in support of rights of Indigenous people, Black communities, people of colour, workers, women, queer and trans folks, religious minorities, the disabled community, or climate justice, lawyers often feature quite significantly on both sides of social struggle: on one end as agents and, on the other, as assailants of justice.

The histories of global Black freedom struggles provide prime examples of the somewhat inescapable involvement of lawyers as significant actors who serve to propel or impede progress of social justice organizing efforts. The Afrophobic institutions of slavery, segregation, colonization, apartheid, systemic anti-Black racism in education, employment, housing, health care and the systems of policing, prison and immigration have all been most effectively resisted, reformed and/or more fairly reshaped or restructured through the insistent and incessant collective organizing efforts and mobilizations of Black people, communities and our allies. But within struggles for



Black communities to realize greater forms of freedom in relation to these institutions, the letter, spirit, interpretation or total absence of law, policy and legally protected practice has often played a central role in the outcomes of Black justice struggles.

Take, for instance, the U.S. civil rights movement of the '50s and '60s and the current global Black Lives Matter movement. Indeed, it is millions of everyday Black individuals and allies who've been at the centre of forcing change and freedom for Black lives through these movements. However, systemic, structural and sustainable changes, both then and now, often rely on law, policy, practice and legal interpretations argued and determined by lawyers. Examples include the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, which had to be passed to protect the rights African-Americans mobilized en masse to affirm through the civil rights movement. Today, the letter, spirit and scope of laws granting the power of a police officer and/or civilian to shoot and kill a person who triggers a fear for their life is one of the central concerns of the Black Lives Matter global uprising. Personal, social and political convictions concerning who has the legitimate right and/or duty to what is the fundamental tension within all progressive struggles for justice, including organizing against anti-Black racism. When it comes to achieving substantive change laws, policies, programs and practices impacting the material realities of Black communities, managing, resolving and/or resisting this tension almost inevitably involves lawyers, on one side of the issue or other. Given these considerations, it is difficult to imagine realizing liberation for Black people without critically considering the role of lawyers in the struggle.

This is not to say that the future of racial justice organizing must involve lawyers. It is only to suggest that a credible and defensible account of the future of Black intersectional organizing must critically consider the past, present and potential function of lawyers as crucial actors in fostering, and too often, frustrating racial progress sought through global and local Black organizing and advocacy. In other words, a seemingly unavoidable question to contend with when considering the future of progressive Black racial justice organizing is, "what is the role of lawyers?" More specifically, "how can, and should, progressive Black organizing engage lawyers in the struggle given that the inevitable resistance to their Black freedom fighting will be supported and sealed in some significant measure by lawyers serving the institutions of power that purvey systemic anti-Black racism?"

Because I am a Black lawyer with an interest and commitment to lawyering for Black lives, I happen to be invested in an even more specific question, namely, what is the role of Black lawyers in particular, when it comes to progressive organizing for the betterment of Black lives?

The most effective answers to this question that I've come across come from African-American legal scholar, law professor and dean, Carla Pratt, in her 2009 article, *Way to Represent: The Role of Black Lawyers in*

*Contemporary American Democracy*. Pratt argues that through race-conscious lawyering, Black lawyers improve and enhance democratic citizenship and participation of the African-American community. She identifies three ways in which Black lawyers satisfy this role: First, she argues, Black lawyers serve a representative function in U.S. democracy by acting as ambassadors to democratic institutions such as courts, legislatures and executive agencies. Secondly, she asserts that Black lawyers serve an interpretive function by speaking the language of democracy and being able to translate that information into language that is meaningful and helpful to the Black community. Thirdly, she reasons that Black lawyers serve a connective function by acting as a conduit that affords both Black and non-Black citizens of lesser economic means access to democratic institutions we call courts and justice institutions.

Pratt provides a framework of analysis that allows us to explore the question of Black law and leadership beyond the individual, and consider it in the context of its broader social significance for Black community organizing. In Pratt's essay, she explores the question of whether racial status of Black lawyers enables them to serve any unique functions in democracy. Guided by this question, she ultimately argues that when committed to a practice of race-conscious lawyering, as opposed to what she refers to as "bleached out" colour-blind lawyering, Black lawyers "enhance the participatory dimension of citizenship for Black citizens." Pratt describes race-conscious lawyering in this context as Black lawyers embracing their 'dual membership' in both the Black community and the legal profession and leveraging this status to marshal the power of the law to serve the democratic interests of individuals and institutions within the Black community.

Though Pratt's article focuses only on the American context, because Black communities in Canada are so similarly situated with their African-American counterparts on the margins of social, economic, political and cultural well-being of society, I find Pratt's framework deeply relevant, persuasive and instructive for racial justice struggles of Black communities in Canada.

The future of organizing for Black freedom, justice and equity in Canada will be meaningfully influenced by the role lawyers play in justice struggles for Black communities, good or bad. As such, it is up to Black lawyers and lawyers progressively allied in support of Black communities to serve as vehicles and vessels for seeking and securing the rights and remedying the social wrongs suffered and faced by Black communities. For lawyers to play this progressive role effectively and ethically, as Pratt suggests, they must retain an authentic and genuine connection with the Black communities they aim to serve. Without this, lawyers risk reproducing many of the same oppressive power dynamics within Black organizing that this organizing aims to resist. **M**

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ASAD ISMI

# The farmers' protests and the looting of India

IN RECENT WEEKS, the farmers' protests in India have become an international cause célèbre, attracting support from Rihanna, Greta Thunberg, Susan Sarandon and more. The women farmers at the front lines of the protests were featured on the cover of *Time* magazine in early March. One month prior, in Canada, labour and community organizations took out a full-page advertisement in the *Toronto Star* voicing their support of the farmers. Despite only recently gaining attention in the West, the farmers' protests in India have been ongoing for over half a year, making them, by *Time* magazine's estimate, "the world's largest ongoing demonstration and perhaps the biggest in human history."

About 41% of India's 501 million-strong workforce is involved in agriculture. The 300,000 protesting farmers—mainly from Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh states—are demanding the repeal of three laws passed by the Hindu supremacist, neofascist and neoliberal government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in September 2020. These laws open up India's agricultural sector to corporate domination by eliminating the officially guaranteed minimum support price (MSP) to farmers for their crops and the government-controlled markets (mandis) that the crops have been sold in. The laws also undermine the agricultural produce marketing committees (APMC) and state procurement. These safeguards have protected India's farmers from total exploitation by the free market for decades.

Under these new laws, farmers sell directly to corporations, which in India often assert monopoly control over markets and so can dictate low prices to farmers. This new process could result in small and marginalized farmers—who make up 85% of all of India's farmers—losing their land to corporations. The three laws, which were passed without any consultation with farmers and in violation of parliamentary procedure, are so blatantly pro-agribusiness that they even forbid farmers from suing corporations, leaving the former completely at the mercy of the latter.

As farmer Sukhdev Singh Kokri told the BBC, "This is a death warrant for small and marginalized farmers. This is aimed at destroying them by handing over agriculture and market to the big corporates. They want to snatch away our land. But we will not let them do this."

The government's reaction to the protests has been suppression. It has shut down the internet in the area of the protests and repeatedly pressured Twitter to suspend accounts critical of the BJP government. In February, Twitter cooperated by suspending 500 accounts, later restoring some accounts associated with the protest, including the enormously popular Kisan Ekta Morcha and Tractor2Twitr. On the ground, protestors are met with government-backed violence including tear gas, water cannons and police barricades, and alleged state-sanctioned attacks on farmers. So far, 248 have died from state-sanctioned violence in response to the protests, as well as from suicides and the cold weather in December.

Prior to these new laws, farmers in India had already been suffering profoundly for three decades due to the steady withdrawal of official supports. In 1992, neoliberalism became government policy in India. Since then, 330,000 farmers have died by suicide. Modi's new laws have now pushed farmers completely to the edge.

"The farmers' agitation has enormous transformative potential for Indian society," Prabhat Patnaik tells me. Patnaik is Professor Emeritus at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi and a leading Indian expert in economics. For Patnaik, the farmers' movement is "a reminder" of the anti-colonial Indian struggle for independence against British rule, which sought to build "an egalitarian democratic society" that would improve the peoples' "conditions of life." Patnaik emphasizes that "this conception alone can enable India to survive as a nation" and that the farmers' movement "is a struggle for the revival of the life of the nation."

Satya Sagar agrees with Patnaik when he tells me that "the farmers' movement is a turning point in the battle against the fascist designs of the upper caste Hindu supremacists [led by Modi and the BJP] and truly historical—on par with the Indian struggle for freedom from British colonialism." Sagar is a prominent leftist Indian journalist and associate editor of the online magazine *Counter Currents*.

The rule of Modi and the BJP, which won their second majority in the 2019 elections, is characterized by blatant discrimination against and violent attacks on India's minorities. Discrimination has been

most acute for the 200 million Muslim Indians who collectively make up 14% of the country's population. At the same time, the BJP promotes a culture of Hindu domination—Hindus make up 84% of India's population—particularly that of upper castes, while advancing an agenda to ensure corporate control over the Indian economy. Modi uses neofascism to spread neoliberalism.

As Patnaik argues in a recent interview: “Neofascism is the culmination of the global pursuit of neoliberalism which greatly widened income and wealth inequalities in every country and led to an absolute immiseration of vast masses of the working people in [countries] like India.” To enforce such massive deprivation, “the corporate-financial oligarchy forms an alliance with neofascist elements to shift the discourse away from conditions of material life towards vilifying the ‘other’, typically a hapless religious and ethnic minority.”

Sagar describes the particular corporate interests that Modi is serving in the farmers' case. “Modi is nothing more than a facade for the designs of large corporations...The main beneficiary of the new farm laws is expected to be Mukesh Ambani, India's [and Asia's] richest business tycoon [and Modi's biggest funder].” Ambani has received US\$21 billion in investments “from Facebook, Google, the Saudi and Abu Dhabi sovereign funds. This was possible mainly because Ambani is known to be close to the current regime and investing in his business is expected to ensure profitable returns.”

Sagar points out that “Facebook is the biggest investor in Ambani's Jio Platforms, that owns both Jio—India's largest mobile network—and Jio Mart which hopes to dominate the country's fast-growing e-groceries market. The plan is for Ambani's telecom empire to join forces with Facebook's messaging service WhatsApp, which has over 400 million users in India, to expand Jio Mart's consumer base.

“While e-groceries companies like Jio Mart will control purchase, processing and retail of food products, large agribusinesses are likely to enforce everything from choice of crops to selection of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. Digital payment services—that include the Facebook-owned WhatsApp—will provide credit, finally reducing farmers to the status of wage earners permanently at the mercy of whimsical corporate executives and investors. The new farm laws are meant to facilitate the growth of such ventures and without this legal framework no foreign investor will want to put money in India.”

Sagar calls Amazon, Facebook, Google and Walmart successors of the British East India Company, which along with the British Crown, colonized and looted India for 200 years, condemning it to an abyss of poverty.

The continued neocolonization of India by corporations is, however, dependent on the BJP maintaining

its success through its divide-and-rule policy of vilifying minorities, which is how it wins elections. But this policy has been significantly undermined by the farmers' protests, which are uniting farmers, workers, Hindus, Muslims, Dalits—the lowest caste in Hinduism known as “untouchables”—and Adivasis—Indigenous Indians. Altogether, Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis constitute close to half of India's 1.3 billion people.

Patnaik explains that the farmers' protests are evolving into a national political movement against the BJP by allying the groups listed above. “The farmers are making common cause with other struggling sections like the workers against whom too repressive laws were passed during the pandemic-induced lockdown.”

Similarly, adds Patnaik, Jat [an ethnic group prominent in agriculture] farmers and Dalit agricultural labourers, who have both “a class and caste contradiction”, are united in opposition to the farm laws. “These are fundamental shifts in the political landscape of India,” emphasizes Patnaik, “and they will have great importance in the future.”

Sagar agrees that the BJP's “attempt to terrorize, corrupt and suborn all institutions of Indian democracy is being challenged very seriously by the farmers' movement, which is also inspiring other sections of the Indian population to join it.”

Lagging behind the farmers are India's opposition political parties, the most prominent of which is the Congress Party, that the BJP's political victories have reduced to near irrelevance. Sagar likens Congress to “a dead horse whom the bravest of knights cannot motivate to give chase.” However, even in its weakened state, Congress swept the recent municipal elections in Punjab due mainly to the farmers' protests, kindling hope that it could make a comeback. Patnaik is optimistic that as the farmers' movement gathers further steam it will also have the effect of galvanizing political parties.

The BJP's political power is not as solid as it looks. The party actually wins about 37% of the national vote, which is enough to give it a majority under India's British-style first-past-the-post parliamentary system. This means that more than 62% of Indians vote against the BJP, but for different parties, thus splitting the vote. The farmers announced on March 2 that in alliance with 10 Central Trade Unions (CTUs), they will campaign against the BJP in upcoming elections in five states. “The farmers have certainly reduced the electoral prospects of the BJP,” says Patnaik.

Ramzan Chowdhary, a farmer from Haryana, told The Hindu newspaper that people have decided to break the “cycle of division in India's social fabric by the BJP. We will not sit back and watch this force divide Jat-versus-non Jat, Sikh-versus-Hindu. This movement will link Indians together everywhere.” **M**

PAULA ETHANS

# Reinvigorating climate organizing

## From climate action to climate justice

2019 WAS A YEAR with unprecedented climate action. The climate crisis was at the forefront of everyone's mind. Prominent climate action groups like Fridays for Future and Sunrise Movement, were reframing the climate change conversation from one of piecemeal policies to a global emergency.

A new generation of young activists were spearheading climate strikes to challenge the complacency of political elites. Mass mobilizations became a key tool in their arsenal for affecting real transformation. Indeed, the 2019 Climate Strike saw four million people take to the streets.

The momentum was there. 2020 promised to be filled with sit-ins, marches and strikes. Organizers were counting on these tactics to keep pushing for meaningful change.

Then the pandemic hit. The world turned upside down and climate change took a back seat.

But if times of crisis are opportunities to rebuild, how can the climate movement harness this moment to reinvigorate itself and fight for radical transformation?

After a year of seeing the pandemic expose stark economic inequities, and Black Lives Matter (BLM) spearheading unprecedented organizing around racial justice, climate organizers must use this juncture as an opportunity to rebuild as a more just, more intersectional movement.

### Organizing in the time of COVID-19

The implications for climate organizing during a pandemic are obvious. How do you maintain interest in

an issue that's superseded by other concerns? How do you execute mass mobilization during social distancing? How do you command government attention from your living room?

Actions have been cancelled, government budgets have been rewritten and every conversation is about the pandemic. For the climate movement, it's an uphill battle.

First, the audience is barely there. People are in crisis—tracking daily death tolls, clinging to their jobs, worrying about the health of loved ones—and they don't have the capacity to think about the existential threat of climate change.

Second, organizers themselves are struggling to cope. Several climate activists cite burnout, job insecurity and isolation as big challenges to organizing. Dominique Souris, Co-Founder of Youth Climate Lab, says her team is not doing well. "Mental health is all time low, and climate anxiety is all time high."

Still, humans are resilient and climate groups have modified their strategies, changing their focus and finding creative ways to organize. They've reflected, imagined and repositioned themselves.

Naia Lee, an organizer with the youth climate movement in Vancouver, says that Climate Strike Canada has capitalized on this time when in-person organizing is hindered to focus on training, intake and other foundational work.

Atiya Jaffar, a senior digital strategist with 350 Canada, says the organization always had a digital focus and has used this opportunity to help other organizers develop the same. Jaffar believes, "Any group has the power to engage in

digital campaigning. Sometimes the simplest tactics can be the most effective."

Not surprisingly, we've seen a huge uptick in online organizing: webinars, social media campaigns and online petitions. Earth Day 2020 was the biggest online mass mobilization in history.

Despite recognizing the benefits, some activists know online organizing isn't enough on its own. "In-person connection is incredibly valuable and I don't think it will ever be replaced....," says Lee.

### A "Just Recovery" for twin crises

The COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis are deeply intertwined and can teach the climate movement many valuable lessons: what does a state of emergency look like? What can governments accomplish when they take threats seriously? What's an "urgent" timeline?

In many ways, the pandemic is a preview of what's to come for the climate crisis. Just like COVID-19, the climate emergency is a threat to humanity and governments must act accordingly. Like COVID-19, climate change doesn't respect borders, but it harms the most marginalized and gets exponentially worse when decision-makers downplay its harm and ignore science.

The climate movement in Canada has caught on to these intersections, rhetorically weaving the crises together in an effort to capitalize on this moment.

Climate activists are saying the pandemic is just a preview of what's to come with climate change, arguing that the pandemic lays bare the inequalities that will only be exacerbated by the climate crisis.

It's a smart move on multiple fronts. First, they've inserted their agenda into the dominant conversation, ensuring it maintains visibility. Second, by acknowledging the intersections, it demands governments address the pandemic and the climate crisis in tandem.

As Daniel Friesen, an organizer with Manitoba Energy Justice Coalition, says, "Change has never been more possible or needed than with the massive disruption to normalcy that is the pandemic."

In Canada, the clearest iteration of the connection between the pandemic and the climate crisis has been the coalition of 500 organizations calling for a "just recovery." It's an intersectional approach, grouping environmental, housing, disability and migrant organizations. The call has six principles, calling for things like: build resilience to prevent future crises, strengthen safety nets and prioritize the needs of workers. They're broad and that's what's promising. No longer are environmental issues kept in their own silo. They're now assembled with other social justice demands.

There have long been calls to pursue a "green recovery"—focusing on melting ice and carbon emissions—but it needs to be more. A "green recovery" doesn't address the cruel capitalism that has devastated the planet for profit. It doesn't account for unfair labour practices harming migrant communities and developing countries. It doesn't address how colonialism has ignored, jailed and killed Indigenous land defenders. Building bike paths and banning plastic bags won't abolish these systems. As Lee says, we need to provide "an alternative that everyone can see themselves in."

### **The future of climate organizing**

The pandemic has exacerbated the inequities and injustice in society. Billionaires have gotten richer, wealthy white people have remained wealthy, while poor, mainly BIPOC, families have suffered.

Friesen believes the pandemic has helped the climate movement understand which problems it needs to tackle. "The pandemic provides really clear examples of issues that we need to address to create a better world. From workers' rights, to wealth inequality, to racial injustice...so many of the problems that have been highlighted by COVID-19 are also at the root of the climate crisis."

Armed with this knowledge, it's time for the climate movement to conduct high-level analyses and build intersectional coalitions with other movements.

Courtney Strutt, a climate organizer in Thunder Bay, says this moment presents an opportunity for the overwhelmingly white climate organizing circles in her city to form new relationships. As the movement pushes forward, she hopes white people can approach organizing with more solidarity. "Climate as climate isn't a strong enough movement."

Indeed, Souris thinks it's been beneficial for the climate movement to be in the background while BLM

has seen unprecedented momentum. "White people in the climate movement...have always centered themselves in the movement, so it's an important moment of de-centering."

From that perspective, 2020 wasn't a loss for the movement; it was necessary. Organizers, especially white organizers, did a lot of learning and reflecting, and will hopefully take this new understanding to their collectives and classrooms, transforming how the climate crisis is conceived.

And the climate crisis must be conceived differently. The movement needs to push its outdated boundaries and expand its focus to include racial, gender and economic justice. It needs to recognize that these issues are interconnected and borne out of the same system.

"Climate organizations working within capitalism won't achieve any form of justice...because it's always tweaking a fundamentally flawed system," says Rebecca Granovsky-Larsen, an environmental organizer in Regina. "You need to shed the systems if you're going to combat the problem in the time we have."

As Larissa Crawford, the founder of Future Ancestors, recently said in an interview with Oxfam Canada, "These practices of colonialism and capitalism have led to the climate change that we see today. So, if we are to say that we are working in the environmental sector, that we're trying to address climate change, then we cannot do that work, without recognizing how certain people have been dehumanized in the interest of the practices that have led to climate change."

If Black lives really do matter, if we really do believe women and if we are truly committed to reconciliation, then the movement will tackle climate change in a way that honours those communities. It will acknowledge that these communities bear the brunt of the climate crisis and are on the front lines fighting it. It will tear down the systems that perpetuate harm.

Friesen says it's imperative climate groups "consider how we are supporting and advocating for those who have no choice but to make this fight their lives." Not necessarily advocating for one giant group, Friesen urges environmental organizations to examine where power in the movement lies and consider how it can be shifted to serve where it is most needed most.

"If there's one thing I'd hope be extrapolated from this year, racial capitalism is the biggest threat we have to combat," says Granovsky-Larsen, "and that movements should be working together if they're going to be effective." **M**

DECLAN INGHAM

# An organized system of organized labour

## An introduction to sectoral bargaining in Germany

**C**ANADIAN LABOUR HISTORY can sometimes appear trapped between the dramatic rise and fall of the American Labour Movement and the tragic erosion of European trade union power; never quite reaching the heights or defeats of the American movement, but also never achieving the institutionalized policy-making influence enjoyed by unions in Europe.

After reaching a high-water mark of 37.9% in 1984, there has been a steady decline in the number of unionized Canadian workers. Still, since 1999 the unionization rate has held steady at just under 30%. Declines in the private sector, where union membership has fallen from over a quarter (26%) in 1984 to around one-in-seven (14.3%) by 2020, have been offset by gains in the public sector, where union density has gradually risen from 69.8% in 1997 to nearly 75% in 2020.

Even with the 8th highest union density in the OECD, the Canadian labour movement has been hard-pressed converting this working-class currency into political or economic change. Unions in Canada have been unable to secure a more comprehensive welfare state or institutionalize their bargaining power to the same degree as their comparators in western continental Europe and the Nordic countries. To that end Canada ranks near the bottom in public social spending as a percentage of GDP. One answer to this deficit of worker power is reforms to our industrial relations system that make it friendlier to worker organizing and collective bargaining. A proposal that is always on the table but never on the agenda

is a shift from firm-level bargaining to sector-level bargaining. Rather than unions negotiating collective agreements with employers one by one, the agreements would cover multiple employers in an industry or sector.

Trade unionists and advocates have submitted various proposals over the years to this effect. Recent submissions made by the United Steelworkers and Unifor to Ontario's Changing Workplaces Review (2015) advocated for this in the form of broader-based bargaining.

Proposals of this nature, especially those inspired by European examples of industrial relations, are sometimes difficult to imagine because of how enormous a departure they are from our way of doing things. By the same token, we are often uncritical in our desire to simply import a solution and overlook the fact that industrial relations systems are dynamic, under enormous pressure domestically, and the result of class struggle and compromise in particular places and times. Still, it is a telling exercise to explore what sectoral bargaining looks like in practice. Germany's industrial relations regime, held up as an archetype of sectoral bargaining, offers exactly this critical example.

### The German context

Germany is often heralded as an economic marvel, but what is missed by the headlines of the business press is the extraordinary degree of union involvement in the economy. Through collective bargaining, board-level co-determination, and local works councils, unions set wages across the economy, sit on company boards, and even co-manage the

shop floor. In the words of Stephen J. Silva, an American industrial relations scholar, "German industrial relations institutions extend into the boardrooms, workplaces, and government to a degree that is unimaginable in most other countries."

The context of German industrial relations begins, as most things in Germany do, in the "hour zero" of the post-war period. Exhausted and traumatized by the tumultuous inter-war and fascist era, labour and business both sought autonomy from the state and shunned class conflict in favour of a more apolitical relationship, now known as *Sozialpartnerschaft*, or social partnership.

The post-war German state quickly moved to secure the legal framework for this autonomous bargaining by constitutionally guaranteeing under Article 9, The Freedom of Association, so that workers can organize trade unions and managers can form employer associations. Later, jurisprudence enshrined the inverse: no one shall be compelled into association and union benefits shall not be secured only for union members. Effectively, this closed the door on the closed-shop model of mandatory union membership in unionized workplaces.

### Collective bargaining in Germany

Collective bargaining is set out in the *Collective Agreements Act of 1949*, which lays the groundwork for voluntary sectoral bargaining. Collective agreements are negotiated in each sector between the employer's association and that sector's leading union. These agreements determine

compensation for, among other things, a majority of German employees, but with extraordinary variation between sectors as coverage is based on voluntary membership in an employer association.

According to 2014 figures from the Federal Ministry for Labour, 50% of workers are covered under sectoral agreements, 8% under company-level agreements, and 21% under contracts using sectoral agreements as reference. While some sectors, like banking, have national agreements, the cornerstone of the system is regional agreements with each sector divided into districts.

Formally, negotiations take place in each individual regional district, but in practice the unions engage in pattern bargaining. They identify a ‘pilot’ district where they hold the most bargaining power and work to negotiate a model agreement. This is fairly effective in setting a national sectoral standard, as employers and unions are both committed to limiting differences in labour costs. Yet, management has retained the prerogative to improve compensation and benefit packages “unilaterally above the rates (but not below) spelled out in a region-wide collective agreement” and they use it.

### **Co-determination in the boardroom**

The industrial relations regime in Germany extends beyond collective bargaining into a specific framework for industrial democracy called *Mitbestimmung*, or co-determination.

Under the *Codetermination Act of 1976* and the *One-third Participation Act of 2004*, firms of a certain size are required to have worker representatives on their corporate supervisory board. The supervisory boards, distinct from the management board which is composed of corporate executives and chaired by the CEO, are made up of shareholders and employee representatives who scrutinize firm strategy, performance, and hold the right to appoint and dismiss the management board.

The number of worker representatives ranges from one-third to one-half, depending on the size and structure of the firm. Generally, employee representatives make up one-third of the board for companies with between 500 and 2,000 staff and one-half for companies over 2,000 staff and for limited liability corporations over 500 staff. The worker representatives, except in the coal, steel, and iron sectors, never constitute a majority on the supervisory board as the chair is elected by shareholders and holds the tie-breaking vote.

The worker representatives are directly elected by the workforce but, again, depending on the firm, the process looks different.

### **No utopias**

Even with a legislative framework amenable to union organizing and economic involvement, Germany is no worker utopia.

While it has one of the highest labour costs per hour at US\$42.00 (compare that with Canada’s US\$26.27) it

also has one of the biggest low-wage sectors in Europe, according to research by the German Institute for Economic Research. This is explained by the unequal divergence taking place in the German labour market. Take, for instance, the 20% difference in labour costs between those in private services (retail, hospitality, etc.) and those in the more prestigious German manufacturing sector. Much of this wage inequality is explained by the decline in bargaining coverage in certain sectors.

Like many other industrial relations regimes around the world, Germany is facing continual erosion of coverage and this contributes to labour market “dualism” where bargaining power, pay, and working conditions vary widely by sector. Rather than traditional union-busting as we know it, German employers have engaged in different tactics—fleeing their employer associations, refusing collective agreement coverage, or using local agreements to undercut sectoral standards.

This is experienced across the economy but, also, by workers in different sectors. Coverage of the pivotal industry-level agreements has fallen from 70% in 1996 to 49% by 2018. In certain sectors, like financial services (91%) and the metal sector (67%), a majority of workers are still covered by sectoral agreements, but in retail trade (28%), hotels and restaurants (23%) and IT-services (15%) coverage is disappearing.

The institutional stability of the *Sozialpartnerschaft* has done little to stem the decline in union membership in Germany which stood at just 17% in 2016, over 10 percentage points lower than Canada in the same year. While this mirrors a global decline in union membership, scholars blame the decline on the disappearance of trade unionism as a social custom as much as industrial restructuring.

The German experience demonstrates the trade-offs inherent to any industrial relations system. Broader-based bargaining boosted collective agreement coverage and raised living standards but created distance between grassroots members and their unions. The social partnership enabled unprecedented gains when unions were strong but gave employers the flexibility to undermine the system in the long run.

The unfortunate reality for many of us who wish to re-organize Canadian workers and re-energize the labour movement is that there are no shortcuts to organizing for power. Each system has benefits and drawbacks, and the German model has its fair share of both. **M**

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ROBERT HACKETT AND HANNA ARAZA

# The oil blotter

## Postmedia and Big Oil's symbiosis

CANADA'S FOSSIL FUEL industries, backed by a network of allies, anchor a "regime of obstruction" against effective climate policy. As identified by the CCPA's Corporate Mapping Project, Canada's Fossil-Power Top 50<sup>1</sup> includes *emitters*, the extractive corporations with the greatest carbon footprint; *enablers*, mainly banks and industry-friendly regulators; and *legitimizers*, who publicly advocate against an urgent shift from fossil fuels. Legitimizers include industry associations, think tanks, lobby groups, business councils and pro-oil advocacy groups.

That list should also include some of Canada's corporate-owned news media—particularly the largest newspaper chain, Postmedia. Researcher Marc Edge estimated that by 2016, Postmedia published 37.6% of Canadian paid daily newspaper circulation—75.4% in the three westernmost provinces—and owned 15 of the 22 largest English dailies.<sup>2</sup>

It's fashionable to dismiss newspapers as yesterday's news. Their advertising-based business model is collapsing, circulation declining, newsrooms shrinking and audiences turning to online distractions. Yet, as Edge argues, reports of their death are "greatly exaggerated."<sup>3</sup> Newspapers remain profitable on an operating basis. They are still engines for originating news, retaining residual prestige, and branching heavily into digital operations.

Researcher Robert Neubauer found that of the top 10 mainstream media outlets whose opinion articles were most often cited in Facebook posts by six prominent pro-petro groups, all but one (the *Globe and Mail*) were Postmedia dailies.

"Their opinion pieces and uncritical industry reporting are a major source of content for the social media feeds of pro-oil advocates, who recirculate this content to legitimize their own talking points," says Neubauer. "Moreover, accessing 'legacy media' is a common use of social media for many Canadians, especially on Facebook. Thus, legacy media are still very important, even if their modes of content circulation have changed."<sup>4</sup>

Does that matter? Yes, if Canadians want a conversation about energy and climate policy undistorted by Big Oil's outsized influence.

Calgary-based journalist and researcher Sean Holman found that in covering Canada's "big five" petro corporations—Canadian Natural Resources, Suncor Energy, Cenovus Energy, Imperial Oil, Husky Energy (now merged with Suncor)—Canadian newspapers conducted relatively few interviews with environmentalists, and downplayed negative news about the fossil fuel industries' economic prospects; their damage to the environment, society and economy; or environmental impacts of climate change. Postmedia newspapers, in particular, tend to favour fossil fuel development and to bash climate action.<sup>5</sup>

With some notable exceptions, like the *Globe and Mail's* feature<sup>6</sup> on the enormous cost of remediating Alberta's abandoned oil wells, Canada's corporate press hasn't paid much critical attention to this powerful industrial sector. Why not?

### Are journalists at fault?

Within a hierarchical media organization, journalists are arguably more influenced by career ambitions

and the implicit assumptions of their social and professional cultures, than by their individual backgrounds. They accept the extractivist narrative linking fossil fuels to jobs and prosperity, because they don't understand the alternative and don't want to be seen as outliers.

Canadian reporters have been less likely than their U.S. counterparts to sacrifice truth-telling about climate change to the ethic of neutrality between scientists and deniers. But, arguably, there is still a comparative reluctance to challenge conventional wisdom. Compared to the crusading climate journalism of the *Guardian*, writes journalist and Ecotrust founder Ian Gill, Canadian mainstream journalism has been so pale that "nobody comes anywhere near as close to calling our energy sector (and our investment community) to account."<sup>7</sup>

There's little evidence that reporters soft-pedal news, eyeing better-paying corporate public relations jobs. But don't discount Big Oil's efforts to win media's hearts and minds. A mini-scandal erupted in 2014 over the lucrative honoraria paid to Peter Mansbridge, then anchor of CBC's *The National*, for public appearances to industry groups. Public exposure by the watchdog website Canadaland forced the CBC to beef up its conflict-of-interest policies.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike reporters, columnists are expected to express their opinions. As Neubauer notes, they are a key link between the press and the petro-lobby. Two types of columnists appear to predominate at Postmedia. There are political analysts who aren't explicitly ideological; they represent politics



as a game, analyzing the strategies of players without challenging extractivism's basic assumptions.

Then there are hardcore ideologues—Postmedia's carbon-coddling conservative columnists. Some are veteran journalists with Jurassic political views, like libertarian climate denier Terence Corcoran, hard-right political columnist John Ivison, and Claudia Cattaneo, described by Hislop as "an attack dog" for "the rabidly conservative part of the Alberta oil patch."<sup>9</sup> Others have been actively involved in right-wing politics, like former Wildrose Party leader Danielle Smith, and Licia Corbella, who—unbeknownst to her editors—was a voting member of Alberta's United Conservative Party while touting Jason Kenney's 2017 leadership bid in the *Calgary Herald*.<sup>10</sup> Some of the most widely read columnists are not employees of Postmedia, but guest commentators with extractivist credentials. These include researcher Vivian Krause, who touts the conservative conspiracy narrative that Canadian environmental non-profits are dupes of American foundations.<sup>11</sup>

What's missing, of course, is sustained analysis from the left.

Journalists do not work in a vacuum. Political interventions and top-down orders to avoid a topic are infrequent, though they do occur—like the Postmedia directive to its dailies to endorse Harper's Conservatives in the 2015 federal election.<sup>12</sup> More typically, management and ownership exert influence through key decisions about resource allocations, marketing strategies, newswork routines, and hiring. In recent decades, media corporations have rationalized their resources and trimmed costs while intensifying productivity demands on journalists. Under these conditions, more reporters become generalists covering a range of topics in multiple platforms rather than specializing in particular beats. Coverage thus tends to be reactive, offering little background, sometimes just reproducing press releases, helped by readily publishable data and graphics from the petro industry. Investigative journalists can still be found, but they need senior editors' green light to pursue particular stories. As Postmedia consolidated operations to create "common pages" of political and national coverage centrally prepared and distributed to the local dailies, homogenized editorial positions became more possible.

### **Postmedia and Big Oil: corporate symbiosis?**

Postmedia emerged from previous owner Canwest's ill-fated gamble on multimedia "convergence" between broadcast, print and digital media. The papers were bought at bargain prices by its creditors with U.S. hedge fund backing.<sup>13</sup> Since 2016, Chatham Asset Management has held about 66% ownership, the same company with an 80% stake in American Media Inc., controversial for its ties to Donald Trump.<sup>14</sup>

In effect, Postmedia is a revenue conduit for the U.S. hedge funds, which extract loans at a high rate of

interest. Postmedia circumvents the Canadian tax laws intended to preclude foreign ownership of Canadian media, by making the U.S.-held shares non-voting—an end-run approved by the Harper government. Postmedia dailies are still profitable, in that operating revenues exceed expenses—but at the cost of cutbacks that arguably reduce its asset value. Growing digital revenue has not offset declining revenue from print circulation and advertising.<sup>15</sup>

Does Postmedia's petro-boosterism derive from a board with intercorporate connections to Big Oil? Not directly. The biographies of nine Postmedia board directors reveal that just one, Wendy Henkelman, had direct links. Most of the others have experience in other private-sector corporations.

Several board members have strong ties to conservative politics. Janet Ecker was a senior cabinet minister under two Ontario Tory premiers and a fellow at the C.D. Howe Institute. Ex-CEO Paul Godfrey is a longstanding and active Conservative. Along with Postmedia's previous board chair, Rod Phillips, Godfrey held a \$1000-a-head fundraiser for the Ontario Conservative party in 2019. Phillips was finance minister in Premier Doug Ford's cabinet until his COVID-19 advisory-breaking Caribbean vacation.

A right-wing political stance is also about market positioning. The *National Post* has long presented itself as a voice of thoughtful conservatism, including support for fossil fuel expansion and climate skepticism. In Canada, neoliberalism comes marinated in oil. In 2013, Douglas Kelley, then publisher of the *National Post*, described his paper as a "leading voice...on the importance of energy to Canada's business," promising to "leverage all means editorially, technically and creatively to further this critical conversation" and to "work with CAPP [Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers] to amplify our energy mandate."<sup>16</sup> Energy mandate, not journalism?

More recently, Postmedia ownership promoted Kevin Libin, arguably one of the chain's most conservative editorial voices.<sup>17</sup> Libin's mission as "executive editor of politics" is "to oversee...political reporting and certain commentary published across Postmedia's newspapers", and to move the chain even more reliably to the right.

What is the rationale?<sup>18</sup> Some observers see narrowly political motives, such as the political ambitions of board members, while others interpret it as a business decision to "capture the mainstream conservative audience segment while competitors fight for other pieces of the pie."<sup>19</sup> One observer sees the columnists' extremism as "rage-bait", intended to provoke online readers to "hate-click" on their articles.<sup>20</sup>

Another speculation focuses on "sponsored content"—articles, resembling regular news, generated by journalists but paid for by advertisers. That gambit is part of a broader trend in the corporate print media.<sup>21</sup>

Sponsored content can be deceptive, difficult to differentiate from news reports. Moreover, writes researcher Victor Pickard, it fosters a “pay-to-play” society where “inequalities are increasingly inscribed into its media system.”<sup>22</sup> Those inequalities include Big Oil’s potential influence through both the direct purchase of news media space, and implicit pressure on outlets not to bite the clients who feed them.

There is a potential inter-industry symbiosis. With their advertising revenue siphoning off to the giant Internet platforms, newspapers need cash flows and can offer a “trusted brand”—in the words of Postmedia’s website<sup>23</sup>—something that Facebook ads can’t deliver. Conversely, Big Oil is a wealthy industry with public image problems and a need to reach decision-makers and public. As described by industry-friendly journals, the industry’s PR challenges include attacks from environmental groups, low trust in the industry, growing public concern about climate change and pipelines, and insufficient advocacy from the industry itself.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, in 2014, the *Vancouver Observer* disclosed a proposed partnership between Postmedia and CAPP to “bring energy to the forefront of our national conversation” and “link Postmedia’s sponsored energy content with CAPP’s ‘thought leadership.’” The proposal suggested “topics to be directed by CAPP and written by Postmedia,” with a series of 12 single page “joint ventures” in the *National Post* and other major newspapers.<sup>25</sup>

However, there is little evidence that this relationship continued on an ongoing basis. Around 2016, the industry shifted its PR gears, mobilizing its own “natural” constituency—its employees and resource communities—through weaponizing social media and supporting grassroots engagement.

But the industry still sees newspapers as important in shaping the narrative, and Postmedia appears to be a particularly reliable partner.

Between 2016 and 2020, Postmedia published at least 19 articles by CAPP CEO Tim McMillan and several by other CAPP directors or executives. CAPP appears to find a higher chance of editorial acceptance and a more receptive readership in Postmedia papers, compared to other outlets—although CAPP also talks to other leading media, such as the *Globe and Mail*.

In short, Postmedia and Big Oil share an agenda around institutional legitimacy, political influence, and economic interests. Their relationship is often personal and informal, anchored in a shared ideology in a polarized political environment. The result: journalism that treats Big Oil with kid gloves and environmentalists and climate scientists with hostility.

### The bigger picture

Some obvious caveats are in order: Newspaper-owning corporations other than Postmedia also have strong ties to Big Oil, from LNG-investor David Black’s community weeklies in B.C., to the Irving family industrial-media complex that dominates New Brunswick’s three major dailies and its domestic oil refinery business. Postmedia sometimes publishes dissident voices on energy policy, like David Hughes’s critique of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, in the *Vancouver Sun*.<sup>26</sup>

Scholarly research<sup>27</sup> and conversations with journalists over the years identify many influences on news narratives, beyond corporate self-interest. Local markets and social ecologies. Routine dependence on official sources. Governments and leading politicians as “primary definers” of the terms of political debate, even in an era of cynicism and populism. Implicit acceptance of extractivism and economic growth, in corporate newsrooms and senior governments alike. Canada’s historical status as a resource hinterland—hewers of wood, drawers of water, and now, drillers of oil—related to

colonialism and dispossession of Indigenous people, and frankly, systemic racism.

So it’s not about demonizing one company or denying columnists’ right to rant. Postmedia’s relentless ‘petroganda’ amid our climate emergency exemplifies a larger problem—the lack of ideological diversity in Canada’s press. The moderate environmentalism, sometimes found in CBC or *Toronto Star*, is not an adequate counterbalance.

Public policy can address that issue. It can build on the Trudeau government’s belated recognition of journalism as a “public good”—a service valued by society but difficult to finance through market mechanisms. The \$600 million journalism support program<sup>28</sup> could be confined to Canadian-owned media, and/or to journalists themselves, not to foreign-owned corporations that channel subsidies to shareholders while continuing to cut reporters. Increased support to non-profit and independent outlets is justifiable on grounds of representative, democratic diversity; as a by-product, they are more likely to offer critical energy and climate coverage.<sup>29</sup> If Postmedia is eventually bled dry by the hedge funds, facilitate acquisition of its remaining dailies by local newsworker co-operatives. Stronger enforcement of competition policy could preclude one-company dominance of the press in the future.

Above all, let’s recognize that a habitable planet, a healthier democracy, and independent journalism are overlapping goals. **M**

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This analysis was undertaken as part of the Corporate Mapping Project, a research and public engagement initiative jointly led by the University of Victoria, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives’ BC and Saskatchewan Offices, and the Alberta-based Parkland Institute. This research was supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). References are available on [monitormag.ca](http://monitormag.ca).

SAM HERSH

# The future is municipal

## How city-based movements have become the key to progressive policy change

WHEN ONE THINKS of progressive campaigns around the world that have made waves in politics, there are a few obvious ones that come to mind such as the campaigns of Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn. Although both campaigns were successful in significantly shifting the policy window, both campaigns were ultimately unsuccessful in posing a successful challenge to the nation-state. This then leads us to ask: what is the best way to challenge the state and put power back into the hands of average people?

An often-overlooked form of political organization by the left is movements based at the local level. What has been dubbed as “municipalism,” this approach to organizing sees the city as the most effective vehicle to implement significant social, economic, and environmental change.

The issues that centre around municipal politics affect people’s daily lives. Will my bus show up? Will my street be plowed? Will I be able to find an affordable place to live? The experts on issues are not highly paid teams of political staffers but those who live in and experience the city every day. It is this type of neighbourliness and solidarity that makes the potential of city-based movements so powerful, especially in a world where far-right movements across the globe have been feeding off the idea of the unknown.

Fundamentally, municipalism is about decentralizing politics and making it more accessible—and could not be any more relevant than during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has forced us to radically re-imagine our cities. On top of that, many of the movements we have seen come to the fore in the past year around policing, mutual aid and housing evictions have been primarily based at the local level. If anything, COVID-19 has shown us the importance of getting involved at the local level and relying on the solidarity of our neighbours.

One such movement that has shown this potential in action has been Barcelona En Comu, the current governing faction in Barcelona. In June 2014, they launched a platform that was collectively built upon by months of consultations with residents. To ensure the platform had the “people’s endorsement” they set and reached their goal of having 30,000 individual residents sign on to their platform. This allowed those across the city to feel as though they had ownership over the platform and persuaded more people to get involved. Unlike the hyper-centralized political election platforms that most of us are used to, this showed residents what real community consultation looked like. A couple of months later, Barcelona went from being led by a mayor who was mentioned in the Panama Papers for hiding millions in tax havens to Ada Colau, a former housing activist who had been arrested while occupying major Spanish banks.

Since coming into power, Barcelona En Comu has embodied the principles of municipalism and has been fighting to reclaim public spaces from wealthy property developers and putting power back into the hands of residents. One significant example of this is their

move toward participatory budgeting, a process where residents get an actual direct say on a proportion of a city’s budget. In 2020, for example, 5% of the city’s budget, 75 million euros, was completely in the hands of the public.

Although Barcelona is a noteworthy example, leftists and progressives have been winning at the municipal level all around the world from Democratic Socialist of America candidates in the U.S. to city councils across Europe and Latin America—and it makes sense; as leftists, our campaigns are usually more grassroots and funded by smaller donors. The lower barrier to entry in local politics makes it possible to go up against other competitors in a more meaningful way.

At its core, municipalism means that fighting the status quo starts at the local level but is not confined to the local level. The fight must also extend to creating a reality in which progressive cities work hand in hand across borders to strive for a world where the priorities of governments are not the profits of wealthy developers but human dignity, sustainability, and social equity. **M**

# Meet Keith Oliver, CCPA donor

**Meet Keith Oliver, a longtime supporter of the CCPA. For years, Keith was a monthly donor to the CCPA, but he recently made the decision to get in touch with Katie Loftus to set up a legacy gift. Keith tells us about what he's been reading and what gives him hope.**

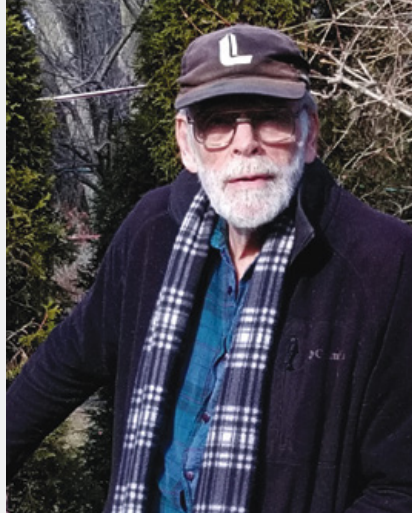
## **Tell us a bit about yourself.**

I'm 83 and a retired architect with considerable urban design experience. To me good architecture and the design of the space between buildings is about much more than aesthetics; it's about what encourages and supports desirable human behaviour; what supports an integrated, healthy community.

## **What is an experience that had a big influence on your life?**

I've made it a point to vote in every election since I was first eligible. In doing so, I tried as best I could to stay informed. Twice I ran for municipal office; once in London, Ontario, and once in Cobourg. When going door to door and talking with voters, I was impressed, at times, with how little voters knew about important issues. News broadcasts and the dwindling number of newspapers alert the public to various issues. They tell us what is happening, but few go into reporting the details as to why they're happening.

I believe that an informed voter is key to the success of any democracy, regardless of how it's structured. I believe in being skeptical but not cynical. What I'm looking for are different points of view, not just the ones I agree with. The experience of the pandemic seems to be a very real opportunity to debate and undertake meaningful change.



## **Why did you become a CCPA supporter?**

One reliable source of well thought out opinion and objective information products is the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which produces publications, blogs and, of course, the *Monitor*. Because of the quality of information I've found, I've been a monthly donor for many years. There is much to read and I've had to be selective.

## **If you had to curate a list of recent favourite CCPA publications, what would be on the list?**

In support of both my personal and professional concerns about housing, I started with the

Sept. 2004 book-length piece *Home Truths... Why the housing system matters to all Canadians* written by Andrew Jackson, and continued right on down to March 2020 and *The Rent is Due Soon* by Ricardo Tranjan. As for politics, there is the Oct 22, 2020 analysis, *Talk vs Action: Doug Ford's inadequate response to the second wave of COVID-19*. As for inspiration, which at my age is in short supply, there is the Jan. 1, 2019 piece written by two CCPA fellows, *The right to the city as a foundation for social justice*.

## **You recently changed your support from monthly to an estate gift. Can you share what your decision process was?**

I've always tried to support both the smaller and larger community in which I live. As a result, my income is both low and fixed. I've had to stop my long history of monthly donations to a number of causes and devote the funds to getting my heritage home ready for sale. In compensation, I have bequeathed 5% of my estate to the CCPA. I do feel it's the right decision and the sum will be meaningful. I won't be around to receive the thank you, but that's okay. It's part of the burden of being active and caring about the future that the benefits of your actions will only be realized at some distant time.

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



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SHAREE HOCHMAN

HANNAH GELDERMAN

## Organizing accessibility and intersectionality through 15-minute cities

SINCE THE first COVID-19 lockdown sent many people home, a sense of locality has been building throughout communities as people became reacquainted with nearby parks, shops and neighbours, leaving large city centres, malls, and office buildings empty. But, what about the people who have sheltered in place without green spaces and grocery stores nearby?

This resurfacing sense of locality has sparked a new interest in the concept of the 15-minute city, an urban design that reshapes how we live. Developed by Carlos Moreno, a scientific director and professor specializing in intelligent control of complex systems at the Sorbonne, the model prioritizes a higher quality of life and sustainability by ensuring everyday needs are reached

within 15-minutes of walking or biking. Moreno believes that cities will not return to their old “normal” post-pandemic and this is a great opportunity to reorganize how we live to become more sustainable and more accessible. Many Canadian municipalities seem to agree.

Cities across Canada, including Edmonton, Victoria, and Ottawa are engaging with some version of a 15-minute model in their new official plans for city development. Though, to truly improve the quality of life for all residents, the design of 15-minute cities *must* include an equity analysis. Without built-in intersectionality accounting for how socioeconomic disparity between races, genders, mobilities, and classes manifests geographically, the 15-minute city model will entrench pre-existing inequalities and further

stratify neighbourhoods along class lines.

Anne Hidalgo, the Mayor of Paris who used the 15-minute city as the core of her successful 2020 re-election campaign, says the concept is “a city of proximities—not only between structures but people”. Hidalgo’s hope is to use the 15-minute model to bring people together. However, this is easier said than done in Paris, an infamously segregated city and home to the *banlieue* neighbourhoods, which have concentrated Paris’ most marginalized communities in the North Seine-Saint-Denis region. This disparity was laid bare by COVID-19, which left affluent *quartiers* virtually untouched while it ripped through the *banlieue*. “We are locked down in our inequality,” the Seine-Saint-Denis MP Alexis

Corbière tells the Guardian. “The virus has just amplified the problems the *banlieue* has had for a long time. It has revealed how wide and deep the social fracture really is.” Introducing a 15-minute city model requires more than thinking about integrating new services into communities; it means addressing the multiple dimensions of race and class and how they currently interact with one another to keep marginalized communities pushed to the edges. This requires reexamining affordable housing allotments, zoning bylaws, and what spaces are dedicated to organizing to build community in order to live better as we live together, to remodel an inclusive social fabric.

### How affordable housing and zoning laws ensures 15-minute cities are diverse, inclusive, and accessible

Given the history of socioeconomic stratification by zoning, the BBC’s Peter Yeung reports many community advocates caution the 15-minute city will worsen social divides between people, increasing the inequalities between poorer and richer neighbourhoods. These fears are valid and it’s important cities who embrace this model ensure its use is wielded in a way that it becomes a tool of equalization, rather than entrenching inequality. To do so, it’s important to balance the quality and number of facilities and amenities in each neighbourhood to serve diverse populations equitably. Flavio Coppola, C40 Cities’ program manager for urban planning, argues that the neighbourhoods that need the most investment should be redeveloped first, ensuring they are not left with lower quality resources.

Elisa Pieri, a sociology professor at Manchester University believes if 15-minute cities do not find this balance, marginalized neighbourhoods can end up with fewer resources, including scarcer and lower-quality medical professionals and schools. The result, “could

bring about further discrimination and inequality and territorial stigmatization.”

Zoning bylaws are a critical tool in the fight to build vibrant, equitable communities. The bylaws that uphold affordable housing units in residential developments, for example, can ensure the quality of facilities is spread throughout cities, rather than concentrating them in higher-socioeconomic neighbourhoods. Vienna has implemented a municipal housing zoning law committed to create affordable housing. The city’s initiative acts as a positive example and builds on its history of prioritizing mixed housing availability, with 62% of residents already living in public housing. This commitment has contributed to Vienna being ranked as the city with the highest quality of living worldwide on Mercer’s Quality of Living Ranking for 10 years in a row. In 2015, the city’s new municipal housing construction programme was launched with the goal of developing 4,000 new housing units. In 2018, Vienna passed a new law requiring all new buildings of 5,000 square meters or more to use at least two-thirds of space for affordable housing.

In Canada, Montreal’s new 20-20-20 development bylaw aims

to meet community housing needs by including social, affordable, and family housing in new residential projects. Under the bylaw, developments greater than 450 square meters—approximately five dwellings or more—are required to dedicate 20% of space to each social, affordable and family housing. The new measure will create an estimated 600 social housing units and 500 family housing units per year, dispersed throughout the city. To maintain long-term availability of appropriate housing for all Montreal residents, the 20-20-20 ensures that a variety of units are built in all neighbourhoods:

- Affordable units whose rent or purchase price will be 10% or 20% (depending on their location) below market value;
- Social housing units whose construction is subsidized by social and community housing programs administered by the Québec government;
- Family housing that includes at least three bedrooms and has additional living space that is adequate for a family. Adequate area is set at 86 m<sup>2</sup> and 96 m<sup>2</sup>, depending on the sector of the city the housing is being built in.

Magda Popeanu, the executive committee vice-chair and Côte des Neiges councillor says the 20-20-20 rule was initially a strategy of inclusion, rather than an adopted official bylaw. But as such, it wasn’t uniform nor respected by the city’s existing zoning and bylaws. “Now it’s official,” Popeanu says, adding that through years of consulting with the public and affected communities, the bylaw represents the needs of the constituents.

Popeanu’s approach to consulting a variety of private and public stakeholders to create an inclusive development bylaw demonstrates the importance of organizing with your community, for them. Additionally, her efforts attest to the fact that neighbourhoods can be



developed to be more inclusive, if community engagement is the starting point.

### **Cars keep marginalized communities out—another reason to ditch them**

Apart from the benefits of affordable housing and social inclusion, the 15-minute city also addresses a fundamental social issue in city life—transportation. Low-income residents living on the outer edges of cities are less likely to own a car, making daily commutes longer and more complicated to reach basic amenities. In North America, where outer-ring communities are not designed to be walkable or rely solely on public transit, households often feel that, where financially feasible, the decision to invest in a car is a foregone conclusion. Both scenarios: low-wage workers stuck on multi-transfer transit commutes and outer-ring communities relying on cars to reach services are not sustainable: both from an equity perspective and the latter from a climate perspective.

As the 15-minute city prioritizes walking and biking over driving, the design ensures that lower income demographics have greater proximity to basic amenities without needing access to a car. Steven Farber, a researcher from the University of Toronto Scarborough found that, at present, families who do not own a car take part in 0.6 activities a day in comparison to 1.1 activities a day for families who do own a vehicle.

Reclaiming urban space for walking and biking also frees up space that has been inefficiently relegated to vehicles. Moreno, reports 66% of public space in Paris is committed to cars despite, “individual cars only mov[ing] 17% of the population”. Between the space dedicated to cars and the number of people without them is room to reimagine how to better use this space to serve historically marginalized communities.

This city reimagining is already underway in Amsterdam, where 10,000 parking spaces from the city centre have been removed and transformed into parks and public spaces, encouraging residents to spend more time in this green space, away from the built environment. This project contributes more broadly to Amsterdam’s half urban and half green neighbourhood plan, which offers a free space to residents to develop inclusive projects including gardens, clubs, fundraisers, and organized meetings.

Since Hidalgo took office in 2014, Paris’s neighbourhoods have seen a significant transformation. Roadways have been repurposed as greenspaces and paths for pedestrians and cyclists. Not only have emissions been reduced, but the changes are “tracing a path of community resilience” reports Coppola.

When necessities and housing are in a walkable and bikeable proximity to each other, repurposing roadways and parking lots becomes possible and allows more space for community engagement. The increase of

available space around residential buildings allows community members to mix and interact, creating shared identity, building trust and social bonds.

### **Repurposing office spaces could be the next horizon for imagining 15-minute cities, post-pandemic**

At the time of writing, office vacancy in downtown Calgary had reached a new peak of 27% and is expected to reach 30% within two years. Calgary is not alone as businesses across Canada reorganize and cancel their traditional office space leases during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this time of profound shifting in the ways that we live and work, there is space to repurpose to create more accessibility for a variety of shared services for a variety of people: particularly those who live in downtown centres.

When repurposing buildings to increase community engagement, it is important to ensure structures are converted with multi-functionality in mind. For example, a variety of public spaces and buildings can be used at different times of the day and week.

In Texas, a local church opens its doors as a coworking hub from Monday to Friday, outside of their hours of operation on the weekends. In Paris, school playgrounds provide residents access during the evenings, weekends, and summers as a space for recreation and community gardening. Similarly, office buildings, sport complexes, parks, gardens, and schools could serve residents a new purpose outside hours of operation. Allowing access to a variety of people to collaborate, organize, and engage, overcoming the challenge of accessibility many people face now.

### **Moving forward in a 15-minute city**

Moreno believes humans are increasingly turning into an urban species, though, urban environments remain uninhabitable for everyone. As cities swell in size, creating vibrant shared spaces will be vital to their—and our—future.

If the model is used to centre the needs of residents and address the inequities that are currently exacerbated by how our cities are structured, the 15-minute city has the potential to flourish as a tool to increase well-being and resiliency.

What we commonly see in our cities are neighbourhoods segregated by class, immigration status, and race. For a 15-minute city to properly serve *all* people, it needs to be undertaken for *all* people. Cities do not need new developments without adequate affordable and social housing or streets dedicated strictly for businesses. Both reproduce the segregation cities that we already experience, allowing exclusivity and inaccessibility to persist. It’s time to champion multi-functional zoning of neighbourhoods in the best interest of increasing inclusivity and accessibility, to reduce the distance between communities and services. **M**

MARIA DOIRON, LUI KASHUNGNAO AND STEPHANIE HART TAYLOR

# Public toilets—unquestionable and essential public health infrastructure

**Why do safe, clean and accessible public toilets matter?**

**It is about human rights and dignity, public health and creating a liveable city.**

**A**CCESS TO TOILETS is a universal need and a basic human right. Safe, clean and accessible public toilets are a health issue, and they are essential infrastructure<sup>1</sup> to maintain a healthy and inclusive society.<sup>2</sup> Despite their importance and benefits, toilets might be the most overlooked piece of essential public infrastructure risking the health, safety and dignity of the people who rely on them.

COVID-19 has made it clear just how essential toilets are as a public health service and municipal infrastructure. Pandemic closures have exposed the highly inadequate public toilet access and deeply rooted disparities, inequities and systemic discrimination. Before the pandemic, the limited availability of toilets was hidden, as many of us could access facilities in businesses and public buildings. But as the pandemic continues and facilities remain closed, there is no place “to go”. This predicament has shown the urgent need for policy-makers to step up and make public toilets a priority in order to build a robust and secure public health system.

Since 2013, the GottaGo! Campaign, a grassroots organization formed by concerned citizens in Ottawa, has advocated for a network of safe, clean and accessible public toilets. Like many cities across Canada, Ottawa needs an extensive network of toilets to serve its ever-growing community. GottaGo! proposals include signage for existing toilets and installing permanent toilets in high traffic areas. In our eight years of organizing, we’ve

achieved notable accomplishments including organizing a letter writing campaign to have public toilets included in Ottawa’s 2020–21 municipal budget; successfully having two additional toilets added to light rail transit node stations and portable toilets at parks and sports fields; and garnering increased media attention for the overlooked but serious public health issue that is the lack of toilets in our city.

This work is vital. As author Lezlie Lowe writes, municipalities rarely have a formal department or committee responsible for toilets. So, without responsible staff and coupled with scarce policy ensuring public access, what safeguards are in place to ensure access?

And here we are, in the midst of a global pandemic, advocating for recognition of a centuries-old forgone conclusion that sanitation is key to ensuring the health of a population.<sup>3</sup> But as the pandemic offers us the opportunity to rethink how our cities operate, now is the time for us to advocate for a network of public toilets.

Often the operational cost of maintaining toilets are considered a significant expense. Yet the consequences of inaccessibility and the costs to public health, city maintenance and local businesses are rarely held in balance.

Similarly, we are not deterred by arguments that public toilets could be sites for drug use activity. Instead, we look at how other cities have successfully alleviated these concerns. There is no single set of approaches that will completely

prevent incidents from happening. But with an intuitive facility design and operations plan, keeping toilets open, accessible and safe is possible. GottaGo! draws attention to successful, operational toilets in Canada, including Winnipeg’s and Kelowna’s pop-up toilets, which have support staff to monitor the conditions, support marginalized people and provide harm reduction services. Rather than ignoring the realities of peoples’ struggles, these toilets take a health-focused approach to support people. The result: clean and safe toilets.

After months of public pressure, the City of Ottawa started installing portable toilets in high-traffic areas in the summer of 2020. Ottawa now plans to build two new permanent facilities. This is more than an acknowledgement that toilets are an essential public health service and infrastructure. It demonstrates that our collective voice matters; we can bring change.

This is a wakeup call: we can work together to put pressure on policy makers to review outdated policies and create meaningful change. If there’s anything we’ve learned, current toilet access is far from adequate. Cities across Canada, cannot carry on with “business-as-usual,” using fragmented initiatives.

This is an opportune moment for all cities, including Ottawa, to take a hard look at existing urban planning. We need leadership to prioritize developing inclusive urban planning. This starts with safe, clean and accessible toilets—to care for our most basic, universal need. **M**



TIM ELLIS

# The Bernie blueprint

## The nuts and bolts of distributed organizing

IN JANUARY OF 2016, I spent nearly my last 80 bucks, hopped on a Greyhound bus and left for New Hampshire. I was putting aside my career as a rave DJ and writer to start a new job: building the movement to elect Bernie Sanders.

I was about to get an inside look at history in the making, as Bernie's upstart campaign helped to rekindle the American progressive movement. I didn't know it at the time, but I was also about to learn, first-hand, a new model of organizing that would empower a scrappy band of rebels and revolutionaries to redefine the political landscape.

### Distributed organizing

So what is distributed organizing? If organizing is sharing a vision of a better future and then driving collective action to achieve that vision, then distributed organizing is the same, but using technology, toolkits and trust to empower geographically dispersed volunteers to take on "rinse-and-repeat" tasks that advance a central goal.

Whew! That's a mouthful. The simpler version: when volunteers can use technology to quickly plug into a campaign from anywhere and begin meaningfully contributing to the campaign's goal, you're doing distributed organizing.

Although likely not the first version of distributed organizing, Bernie 2016 took it to the next level out of necessity. When Bernie began the race, he had hardly any name recognition nor national support; in early polls, he often came in at single-digit support. Shocking upsets in the first two contests propelled the campaign into contention. When we won in New Hampshire, Bernie raised a million dollars *that night*

and suddenly our team swelled to include hundreds of thousands of volunteers in all 50 states.

But in the U.S. primaries, states don't all vote at once. Instead, it unfolds over months, as each week a few more states vote. The challenge then became marshalling all of that volunteer energy in a useful way for a long stretch of time across the entire country.

The answer: phone calls.

With distributed organizing, our campaign was able to centrally determine the most strategic groups of people to call, equip volunteers to call into those targets from anywhere in the country, then turn on the firehose and point it where it could do the most good.

### Distributed organizing in action

After we won New Hampshire, I moved on to Michigan. We were buzzing from the big upset in New Hampshire, but the "first in the

nation" primary state is tiny, rural and overwhelmingly white. Michigan is a very different landscape.

I arrived to find an incredible grassroots operation already humming, thanks to local volunteers. It was encouraging, but polls were against us here too—and this time, they showed no signs of budging, despite our efforts on the ground.

When it came time for Michigan to vote, most polls still showed us over 20% behind our opponent. One poll had us down by 37 points that week. But alongside an impressive and determined ground game, Bernie's distributed program had started to fire on all cylinders. On one call I remember hearing one of our field teams telling us that we had nearly 3 million phone calls into the state—in just the final week.

As we wrapped up our final shift on election day, one of our canvassers in the Ann Arbor office where I was stationed asked me, "do you think we're going to win?" Conscientious of the polling, but also aware of how strong our canvass operation was, I felt confident replying, "I think we'll do better than the polls."

Sure enough, we beat the polls. We won by a point and a half. It was one of the biggest upsets in primary history, described by Politico as the "Michigan Miracle." Distributed organizing unlocked a nationwide army of volunteers that helped put us over the top.

### Building a program

But not everyone is a gruff-but-beloved Vermont socialist who's been on the right side of history for 50 years. So how do you build a distributed organizing program without a national presidential campaign?

Not everyone is a gruff-but-beloved Vermont socialist... So how do you build a distributed organizing program without a national presidential campaign?

To be successful, a distributed organizing campaign must have:

- **A people-powered theory of change.** Volunteers have to believe that their efforts can make a difference. When they do, they'll work hard to make it happen. People believed Bernie could win and that winning would make a big difference. Becky Bond says of the Bernie campaign: "As it turned out, people were just waiting to be asked to do something big to win something big."
- **A support network.** Volunteers must know where to get answers, whether that's a toolkit or a phone call, and oftentimes this is with other volunteers. In the most recent primary, Bernie's volunteer Slack, email inbox and even his Twitter DMs were all managed by volunteer teams.

Supplementing communication from staff organizers with lateral communication between volunteers allows those volunteers to support each other, build each other's capacity and begin to self-organize—a hallmark of distributed organizing.

- **Digital infrastructure.** The technology connects people at scale. Google Docs allow for a central toolkit, Slack or Discord provide a shared communications space, and Callhub or Thrutalk allow for remote dialing and texting campaigns; whatever your needs, there's likely an app to solve it. Just don't forget that the technology is in the service of people, not the other way around. If it doesn't make things easier for your volunteers, keep looking.

- **A clear, accessible path for involvement.** Volunteers need to be able to plug in quickly, easily and accessibly from a multitude of points of entry.
- **Volunteer leaders.** A successful campaign depends on volunteers taking ownership of the effort and organizing among themselves.

If you're starting from scratch, you'll save yourself a lot of stress by putting real thought into your plan before you launch it. Write a comprehensive toolkit. It's better to be long and thorough than to shorten it but miss things. Have a very clear map of the journey a volunteer goes on when they get involved, all the ways they can join, what roles they can take on and what actions they can take. Know how you're going to identify leaders and give them essential roles. And set up and *thoroughly test* your technology before you start rolling—though don't be afraid to ask volunteers to help with that too!

When you're ready, kick things off with a launch event. Bernie pioneered a tactic called a "barnstorm"—an organizing meeting where the campaign's purpose and theory of change is explained, the tactics are laid out and then *everyone* leaves with a job. For example, we might be running phone banks. After we explain how it all works and why it will help us win change, we'll ask people to raise their hand (or fill out a Zoom poll) if they're willing to host a phone bank. Once everyone willing to lead has been identified, we'll ask everyone else to find their own phone bank host and sign up with them. Just like that, organizing teams have been formed. In 2016, barnstorms were run by staff at first, but the program really took off when the keys got turned over and volunteers started hosting their own barnstorms for each other.

### The key principles

After the Bernie campaign ended in 2016, I spent some time on other campaigns in the U.S. before



returning to Canada and taking a job with Leadnow, a people-powered progressive advocacy organization. At Leadnow, I've had the chance to be a part of many more distributed organizing campaigns, as we fused Bernie-style tactics with Leadnow's already impressive digital organizing chops.

We've coordinated spontaneous rallies against TMX outside over 100 MPs' offices across the country in a matter of days, and poured tens of thousands of calls into key swing ridings during the recent federal election. Most recently, COVID has driven us to push distributed organizing to its limits, and we have learned to apply a few key principles every time:

- **Turn over the keys.** As Zack Exley and Becky Bond write in "Rules for Revolutions", their account of the 2016 campaign, "the revolution will not be staffed". We hand over as much of the operation to our volunteers as possible, ensuring they help set the agenda and can take ownership of the operation.
- **Deep, in service of wide.** If you've heard of the 80/20 rule, it applies. You'll have some volunteers who want to give 20 or 30 or more hours a week and you'll have others who want to pop into an event once every couple of months. By having a core team of highly engaged supporters who can go deep, understand the ins and outs of your systems, and offer support to the more casual volunteers, you can unlock the full extent of their capacity and service a wide range of activities for more casual volunteers.
- **Live by the toolkit.** I cannot stress this enough—every question you answer in the toolkit is a question you won't get asked 5,000 times (you'll get asked it 300 times instead, which is at least more manageable). Your toolkit is your volunteer's one-stop-shop for information about the campaign. Let them know what you're asking them to do, how they can do it, how they can get help, and how they can find each other, all in a single, centrally managed document. Google Docs is great for this because you can share a single link and if you update the central document, everyone's toolkit gets updated at the same time. Remember: the *strategy* is centralized, but the work is distributed.
- **Eat the burrito.** You might think you make a great burrito, but until you try it for yourself, you don't know what it's like to eat your burrito. In the same way, it's great to come up with cool actions for your volunteers to take, but until you've taken that action yourself, you don't know what that experience is like. Try out your phone calls and rallies and technology for yourself early in the campaign so you know what you're asking your volunteers to do.
- **Automate it.** You are going to experience so *many* repetitive tasks. Automation exists for exactly that

## Worth Repeating

### Born to fight

"The picture-perfect image I had of my home growing up was broken some time ago. But I've come to realize I just wasn't seeing all of the pieces. And that, behind the shadow of corporations, beyond governments turning [away from] the citizens it has made most vulnerable, a love for nature and one another can prevail... There's no way we can know what the future holds, for them, or for our planet, unless we look to each other and those in power to be held accountable, unless we start to shift our view to see beyond ourselves, to see that what affects one of us affects us all.

"You share DNA with a fruit fly. You are connected to every living thing on earth. You have the power of life. Use it."

—Elliot Page, *There's Something in the Water*, 2019

### Pulling the pin

"In that room, it's not just people who look like me. In that room, it's not just people who are black and brown and melanated. In that room is the diaspora that is Alabama. It is the tapestry that is America. It is black, white, woman, man, every other race and ethnic group. And we should be ashamed of ourselves for allowing companies to come in and pillage our people. We should be ashamed of ourselves for allowing our need and want for a package to get there in two days to cause a woman with an injured arm to be told by a company, 'no matter your injury, you can exercise it off?'"

—Run the Jewels' Killer Mike speaking at a rally for Amazon workers in Bessemer, AL on March 26, 2021.

reason, and there are plenty of off-the-shelf automation tools you can find online for cheap. Every step of the process, you automate adds up quickly when repeated 5,000 or 50,000 times, and every freed up moment is time your volunteers can spend building real human connection

What Bernie unlocked in 2016 has empowered a transformative wave of grassroots activism and innovation. The technology will continue to advance, new tactics will be tested and deployed; but the underlying principles of empowering volunteers, and using technology to connect people and build relationships at scale, are redefining organizing and will be with us for a long time to come. This is the political revolution in action—and now, everyone can be a part of it. **M**

LUXE MULVARI

# Hit the streets

## Organizing community care in the face of criminalization and COVID-19

ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2014, Bill C-36, the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA) passed, banning the purchase of sexual services—despite it being legal to sell sexual services in Canada. Bill C-36 also makes it illegal to advertise sexual services in newspapers and magazines, making it illegal, too, for website administrators and web hosting services to publish such advertisements. This legislation has taken away the opportunity for sex workers to contract the services of support staff such as receptionists, accountants, drivers, and bodyguards. The ability to screen our clients for safety purposes, which has given people with nefarious intentions the upper hand and more opportunities to abuse workers with no way for us to have legal recourse.

Despite our communities' outcry for decriminalization and against the damage done by the Nordic model—the criminalization of the buyers—and the evidence provided by Nordic countries that this approach doesn't work, we continue to be ignored and left out in the cold. C-36 turned our clients into criminals overnight. In our already stigmatized reality, the Nordic model has placed many more barriers between us and safe work.

When C-36 was announced, then-Justice Minister Peter MacKay and MP Joy Smith announced a \$20-million fund that would help sex workers get out of the industry. The \$20 million offered—considered by frontline organizations and law enforcement to be “woefully inadequate” and “peanuts”—went to non-profit organisations working to end human trafficking. No

actual sex workers or sex worker organizations such as the Sex Professionals of Canada (SPOC), Maggie's Toronto Sex Worker's Action Project or Prostitutes of Ottawa-Gatineau Work, Educate and Resist (POWER) have received any of this funding nor have they received any funding for other vocational training or education.

Before COVID-19, I had travelled frequently within Canada for work. I've been a sex worker for most of my life, touring between strip clubs and private entertainment on and off for the last decade. At the beginning of March 2020, I was working my regular route between Ottawa and a long trip down the 401 to my usual haunts in Southern Ontario. I felt amazing when I was pulling into the city and to be in the south, where the atmosphere was more forgiving. My spirits were raised, happy to be back in my hometown after a brief trip to London to visit a long-time gentleman caller of mine who was always amusing.

After my visit, I got a text from another lady I know, “Syriah”. Like me, she would tour the south of Ontario frequently and has several years experience in the industry. We were planning on going up to Sarnia and dancing in one of the clubs there. As is common practice, we submitted our photos via email to the club and waited for the manager's approval. The phone rang minutes later, with the manager informing us that the club had been shut down temporarily over concerns of the novel coronavirus. A week later, we turned on the TV just as Premier Doug Ford announced that the province was under a state of emergency.

As a result, on April 1, I began to make my way back east. On the way back, I reconnected with another friend, Kingsley, who I had met several years ago in similar circles within the music scene and activism communities. She had just lost her job, so I stopped by the Durham Region to pick her up and we headed to her hometown before driving to my home in Ottawa to figure out what to do next.

The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) gave employed and self-employed Canadians who were impacted by COVID-19 financial support, as long as they filed taxes in previous years and had made a specific amount of money in the 12 months prior. The legal grey area in which sex work exists has made it difficult for many sex workers to access CERB, CRB or EI during the pandemic over fears of privacy and safety when declaring income from sex work and receiving judgment-free tax help. Even as taxpayers, we are not granted the same opportunity to participate fully in Canadian society as a vulnerable and stigmatized group that is virtually invisible in the eyes of our governments. It's also not safe for us to work during the pandemic, given the close nature of our professions. Those who are still working despite the risk are facing additional barriers to income such as curfews and hotel lockdowns.

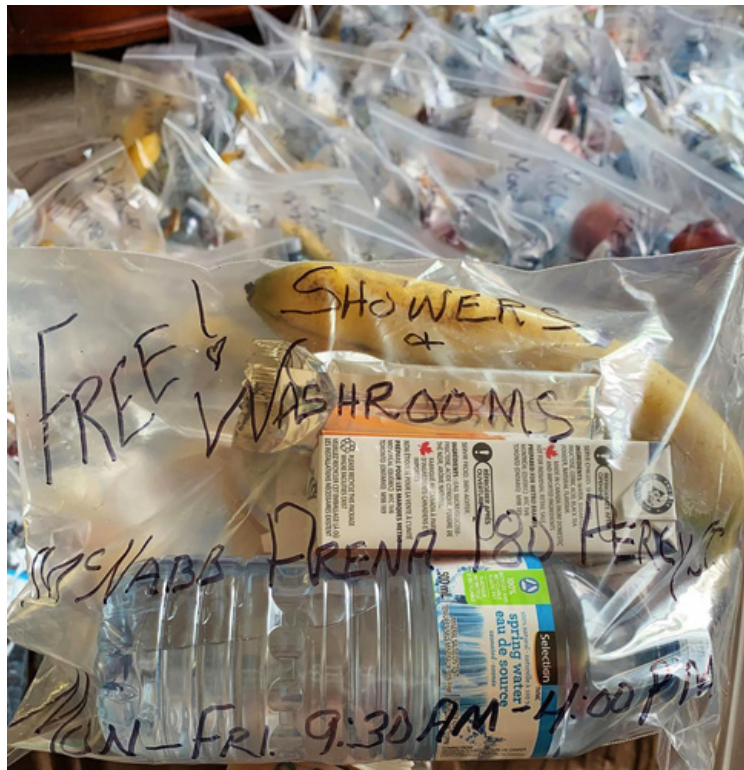
By mid-April, Syriah had come up to Ottawa to join us and the three of us began isolating together. One day, we were out in Dollarama, where we would make small trips to wander the aisles to distract ourselves from the reality of COVID-19. As we checked out,

I realized that I had forgotten to get tinfoil and went back to grab it. When I did, I saw a small aluminium single serving container on the shelf, and I thought to myself, “let’s feed some people tonight.” We bought pasta, sauce, parmesan, food containers and cutlery. We also picked up boxes of cake mix, granola bars, juice boxes, snack packs, and cases of water.

We got back to my place and went straight to work: boiling, chopping and baking until we finished forty plates and snack bags with hand-written labels promoting the recently opened emergency respite centre where people could shower and use the washroom. My superintendent lent us a two-level trolley cart, which we loaded up and set off into the night.

The three of us took turns pushing the trolley and walked up and down the streets of Centretown to deliver our homemade goodies. We connected with familiar faces of community members we saw daily on street corners, under bridges, and on the steps of rooming houses and under-resourced bawdy houses. We repeated the following week, and the week after that, and so on—from Centretown to Byward Market to Vanier, extending to Alta Vista, Carlington, Gatineau, and, more recently, Nepean. Eventually, we created a social media account, launched a GoFundMe, calling ourselves Hit the Streets Ottawa. Friends, families and strangers began donating funds, resources, and time. We would consult the neighbours we met up with on a weekly basis on which items they needed and would then bring the required items to them, no questions asked. Local businesses like Sala San Marco, a banquet hall in Little Italy, stepped up by initially donating kitchen space for us to cook in, then taking it upon themselves to cook up to 100 meals a week on our behalf while we prepared hygiene kits, respite and community support resource pamphlets, and snack bags.

In addition to street and house outreach, Hit the Streets Ottawa now collaborates with community partners and small businesses on free respite events and services for the community to access including laundry, HIV testing, hair cuts, acupuncture and more. We hook up neighbours with cell phones to stay connected and check in with their loved ones and case workers, public transportation fare, and appointment liaison. Hosting community garbage clean ups. Facilitating affordable housing for street-involved neighbours, plus rent help and eviction relief has been added to our list. As of October, we’ve been on 211 Ontario and have had an increase of elderly people reach out. We’ll also be launching a new partnership with the Criminalization and Punishment Education Project (CPEP)— we will support neighbours released from the Ottawa-Gatineau carceral facilities by providing them with necessary items, resources, and services. Our starter packs will include clothes, PPE, harm reduction supplies, books, care packages, foodstuff, spiritual and religious items,



A photo from Hit the Streets’ Instagram channel from a run distributing 80 bags across three neighbourhoods. “Our mixed bags consist of water, juice, chocolate pudding or applesauce, granola bar or cookies, and fresh fruit. Written on every bag is information for free washrooms & showers at McNabb Arena.”

transit passes, restaurant vouchers, phones and a resource directory of services related to mutual aid, mental health, physical health, employment support, housing, legal assistance, and more.

Our team is growing—composed of community members with lived experience and spanning multiple generations; boomers, gen Xers, millennials, and zoomers. Our generations see the errors in existing policy and neglect from government institutions and the resulting damage that’s incurred, which directly impacted us growing up and continuing in life today.

But we aren’t the only ones doing this. Mutual aid collectives such as Ottawa Street Medics and Food Not Bombs are taking to the streets to fill gaps and meet the needs of our neighbours, too. Recently the Ottawa Street Medics raised enough funds to secure a vehicle to further its barrier-free reach and support.

Sex workers have formed collectives across the country. Ottawa Independent Companions (OIC), of which I am a member, is essentially a business association, and fundraises to provide medical, dental, education, housing and mental health care to its members. As a Canadian sex worker under the Nordic model, we’ve had to learn to take care of our own and by extension our neighbours as well. **M**



## The good news page

COMPILED  
BY ELAINE HUGHES

### We're still here

For her historic March 18 swearing in ceremony to become the first Native American to hold a cabinet position in the United States, Deb Haaland wore a ribbon skirt. The colourful skirt, adorned with a cornstalk, butterflies and stars, was created by Agnes Woodward, a Plains Cree dressmaker from Kawacatoose First Nation in Saskatchewan. Haaland worked directly with Woodward on the ribbon skirt's design. The bands of colour represent all people, while the cornstalk represents Haaland's own community, the Laguna Pueblo, an Indigenous tribe in New Mexico.

/ [CBC Radio News](#)

Droughts in the 1970s and 1980s devastated farmers in Burkina Faso, with many choosing to leave their land. One farmer, Yacouba Sawadogo, decided to stay and try to rehabilitate the land. Adapting a centuries-old technique, the now-70-year-old Burkina Faso farmer is hailed across his province as 'the man who stopped

the desert', a title he won after tweaking a traditional farming method, Zaï, of growing plants in pits to trap water. A 2018 study credits the implementation of the Zaï method with playing a vital role in improving food security, groundwater levels, tree cover and biodiversity in the region. / [Reuters](#)

### New ways forward

For more than a decade, mycelium—the root network of fungi—has been considered a green substitute for materials including leather and plastic. Now it's being eyed for its potential as a building material. Mycelium is attractive because it can be grown from waste materials such as sawdust or agricultural residues like plant stalks and husks, recycling them into a new material within weeks in a low-cost, low-energy process. At the end of the product's lifecycle, the mycelium can be triggered to biodegrade, eliminating the practice of piling up demolition waste in landfills. / [CBC News](#)

Harnessing tidal energy, a Scottish electric vehicle charging point has started operations, providing road users on an island north of mainland Scotland with a new, renewable option for running their cars. The Scottish government is one of many around the world looking to move away from internal combustion engine vehicles. / [CNBC](#)

The world's second largest coal mining firm, Coal India Limited (CIL), has

announced that it will aggressively pursue solar energy while continuing to close coal mines. CIL plans to invest in a 3,000-mega-watt solar energy project in a joint venture with state-run NLC India. This announcement marks a major shift for the firm, which produces most of India's coal. / [BBC News](#)

### For the birds

The endangered California condor could return to the Pacific Northwest for the first time in 100 years. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plans to release captive-bred giant vultures into Redwood National Park as early as the fall of 2021. The project will be headed by the Yurok tribe, which traditionally considers the California condor a sacred animal and has been working for years to return the species to the tribe's ancestral territory. / [AP News](#)

Last fall, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 birds died in a roughly three-block radius located in downtown Philadelphia on a single Friday night. Partially in response to this news, Philadelphia is one of the latest recruits to the Lights Out program. Along with Fort Worth, Texas, Philadelphia has joined the Lights Out program to reduce deadly collisions for migratory birds. Since 1990, cities across the U.S. have gradually been cutting or dimming outdoor lights in order to help birds travelling at night. Organized by conservation and civil society groups, like the

Audubon Society, Lights Out programs have sprung up in 20 different states, as well as Washington, D.C. and Toronto, and involved enlisting the help of landlords, their tenants, and business owners to make cities safe for migratory birds in the spring and fall. / [Smithsonian Magazine](#), [Bird Watching Daily](#)

We see them nearly everywhere we go, we hear them every day, they live in every environment, and now, two new studies have shown their mere presence makes us happier. German research has even found that being surrounded by a wide variety of birds can offer increasing life satisfaction, equivalent to C\$190 per week of added income. In the second study of note, California Polytechnic University covertly subjected Colorado hikers to a test that measured their sense of well-being by placing speakers that played a variety of bird songs along certain sections of a popular hiking trail network and then interviewing the hikers about their experience. As a bit of CCPA National trivia, it's worth noting that our office has a small but mighty bird appreciation society and these studies have only emboldened us. / [Toronto Star](#)

# YOUR CCPA

## Get to know Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood

OFFICE: **NATIONAL**

POSITION: **SENIOR RESEARCHER**

YEARS WITH THE CCPA: **SIX**

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood is a Senior Researcher with the CCPA's National Office in Ottawa. He specializes in issues related to trade and climate change. Most recently, Hadrian published a paper detailing how Canada could implement a Just Transition Act. The report, *Roadmap to a Canadian Just Transition Act*, co-authored with Clay Duncalfe, details how Canada can achieve a managed transition to a lower-carbon economy that minimizes the potential harms and maximizes the potential benefits for workers and their communities. Hadrian took some time out of his busy schedule to tell us about his work and what he's excited for in 2021.



**This issue is all about the future of organizing. What are you most hopeful about when it comes to the future of organizing?** The youth climate movement totally inspires me. To see thousands of young people so passionate, engaged and vocal about one of the defining challenges of our time is a great sign for our political future.

**What are you most excited to do with the CCPA team in the coming year?** The pandemic has forced us to experiment with new approaches for getting CCPA research out into the world, like offering live video Q&A sessions between our supporters and researchers. I'm excited to build on what we've learned and continue to come up with creative ways to drive change during these unusual times.

**Outside of the CCPA, what progressive policy issues do you stay up to date on?** Since becoming a father, I've taken a keen interest in the effects of air pollution on vulnerable populations. Like so many "externalities" in our economy, the health consequences of poor air quality are felt most acutely by already marginalized people, including the young, the elderly and low-income communities. The good news is that we can tackle climate change and air pollution at the same time by getting fossil fuels out of our economy.

**What are some of the biggest challenges on Canada's climate file right now?** In their rush to get back to "normal" many governments are propping up industries, like fossil fuel production, that ought

to be phased out anyway. We need to ensure that our recovery from COVID-19 is a just and green recovery, not a return to an unsustainable status quo.

**Have you picked up any new hobbies during the pandemic?**

I've always loved board games and roleplaying games but the pandemic has taken that to the next level. I'm now playing Dungeons & Dragons virtually several times a week with friends from across the country.

**What is something that our supporters might be surprised to learn about you?**

I'm a competitive ultimate frisbee player. I interviewed for my job at the CCPA from Italy, where I was playing in the World Ultimate Club Championships!

SHOSHANA MAGNET

# Picture books for big feelings

**I**N THE MIDST of COVID-19's third wave, it seems an opportune time to think about picture books that might help both children and parents contend with daily life and expand their emotional skills. Children's picture books are unique—they're aimed at distilling complex messages with clarity and brevity, and they're free from the terrible burden of adult cynicism. You might not have time to read bell hooks' amazing trilogy on love or Brene Brown's book on vulnerability, but you and your child likely can share a children's picture book. I've included two books that are about death, fear and grieving, because the challenging reality of our time asks us to think about these hard questions.



**THERE MUST BE MORE THAN THAT!**  
SHINSUKE YOSHITAKE

Publisher, 2020

Although there are many books out there for children on how to help them deal with anxiety, this book is my preferred one. My partner and I have two kids who both tend toward anxiety. This book is perfect for people of any age who struggle with worrying about the future. It features a little girl who is racked with anxiety and terror because her brother has just told her that the future is sure to be terrible, filled with alien invasions, disease,

and other terrible calamities. She dissolves into a flood of tears and runs into talk to her grandmother. Her grandmother reminds her, gently, that we don't know what the future holds, but "there must be more" than just a horrible future or a sunny dystopia. Her grandmother reminds the girl that children are often offered a binary set of choices: a cat or a dog, the park or inside, but that the world is full of beautiful and endless possibilities that will only be revealed with time. I think this book is helpful for any person to remind themselves of the gentle aphorism that "worry is a rocking chair, it gets you going and it takes you nowhere." I find Yoshitake's writing be a helpful part of an anxiety toolkit, and alongside deep breaths and noting the sounds and sights of our environment when we get stuck on an anxious thought, I can now remind my sons that we don't know what the future holds, but there must be more than just the anxious option with which they are presenting me.



**DEATH IS STUPID**  
ANASTASIA HIGGINBOTHAM

Publisher, 2020

While I love all of Anastasia Higginbotham's books, her book *Death is Stupid* is a favourite. Talking to kids about death can be so frightening. We don't want them to fear loss and

yet death is part of the cycle of life. Death is, in Higginbotham's words, an "ordinary terrible thing" and we must find ways of having open and honest conversations about it. This book is wonderful, partly because it teaches us how to listen to people in pain. The author notes: "Even the people who care about you may not know what to say."

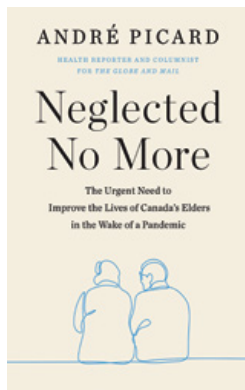
As *Death is Stupid* reminds us, "It takes courage to go on living... when the one you love has died." Higginbotham also notes that we can remain connected to people who have died by remaining open to grief. Although "we don't get to keep everyone we love who has ever lived" we do "get to remember them long after their lives have ended" by keeping up our connections with them. The book suggests a number of practical ways of remembering our loved ones that are child-friendly: whether (1) by doing something they enjoyed doing (2) by talking to them out loud or in your mind (3) by wearing something they wore or (4) by playing something they played with you (5) by reading what they read or (6) by making what they made. *Death is Stupid* helps both children and adults to understand that you can feel your feelings just as they are, even if nobody understands you or only offers minimizing words or gestures. This book is rare in its combination of unflinching honesty and child-centered suggestions for coping mechanisms after loss. For a book on the importance of the dangers of shutting down after loss, check out Oliver Jeffers' beautiful book *The Heart and the Bottle*. **M**

Shoshana Magnet's current research is in using children's picture books to make the world more socially just. If you'd like to be on her listserv about feminist picture books, please email her at [smagnet@uottawa.ca](mailto:smagnet@uottawa.ca)



ANN M. TOOHEY, PH.D. AND DAVID B. HOGAN, M.D., F.A.C.P., F.R.C.P. (C)

# More than an urgent need



IN FEBRUARY 2021, Canada lost a distinguished citizen: Dr. Ronald Bayne. Bayne was an early and highly respected geriatrician who devoted much of his professional career to building a person-centred long-term care system in Ontario modelled after Marjory Warren’s pioneering efforts in Great Britain. Yet, his vision for this system was gradually eroded to the point of being unrecognizable. At the age of 98, when his physical condition had deteriorated, Bayne opted for medical assistance in dying (MAID) rather than spending his remaining days in the long-term care system. In a moving interview with the *Globe & Mail*, Bayne counted this decision as a defeat of his earlier efforts. He was blunt. Of the future many older adults face, “They look around and what do they see happening to them? Put in long-term care, where care is terrible. Long-term care can be so extraordinarily painful. And distressing. And difficult.” Bayne’s warning about the future of this sector was particularly dire. “You’ll find that with the problems of recovering from COVID-19, and recovering from the environmental hazards that we’re creating every year, there’s not going to be any money left over for seniors and long term care.” He worried that the

cycle will simply continue—when resources are constrained, older adults’ lives simply don’t matter in the grander scheme of setting society’s economic priorities.

Dr. Bayne’s powerful message about the current state of long-term care in Canada clearly validates the importance of André Picard’s newest offering, *Neglected no more: the urgent need to improve the lives of Canada’s elders in the wake of a pandemic*. This is not a book about the pandemic, though the pandemic has highlighted the deficiencies of this sector. Rather, it is a comprehensive review of the long-standing systemic problems in long-term care that need to be addressed. Picard exposes the personal impact of these problems on the lives of Canadians—principally older adults but, also, Canadian families and workers—and offers a thoughtful

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prescription to remedy them. Picard is an eloquent and authoritative voice on public health matters in Canada. We thank him for focusing our attention on the widespread devaluing of older, vulnerable adults and, arguably, those who care for (and about) them in Canadian society. We hope his contribution will help galvanize the needed broad and deep reform of the long-term care system. As he and others have pointed out, though, finding the will and commitment to do the needed work has proven elusive.

In *Neglected no more*, Picard deconstructs the problems in Canada’s long-term care system. He gives examples of the shocking harms that have occurred and everyday indignities all too frequently suffered by those receiving facility-based care. He writes with passion and first-hand knowledge of the shortcomings of the system, having tried to navigate it while helping his own parents deal with their declining health and escalating care needs as they aged.

Picard notes that both home and institutionalized care have become transactional rather than person-centred and relational, which has allowed the system to become increasingly fractured and impervious to the experiences and wishes of those it is designed to serve. He offers a litany of egregious examples of neglect and mismanagement that came to light during the pandemic, but also reminds us of other high-profile cases in long-term care that fleetingly caught the media’s attention and then disappeared. Picard reflects on how commonly older persons and their families encounter obstacles as they attempt to access appropriate personalized care that addresses their needs in later life. This situation is often

tragically complicated by progressive cognitive decline and dementia. Social inequity, devaluing of the aged in society, and a regulatory system based on tasks rather than care are common underlying themes to this sad story.

We agree with much of Picard's prescription to heal the system. His comprehensive solutions aptly reflect the complexity of care delivery and support for an aging population. They range from focusing on the facilities themselves (i.e., appropriateness of the physical setting, adequate staffing and workforce issues, availability of palliative services), supporting aging in place (i.e., addressing informal caregivers' needs, improved access to appropriate and affordable home care), addressing policy and program issues (i.e., adequate funding, informed regulation, appropriate structure, improved access to information, assistance in system navigation), and, finally, to the need for advocacy aimed at countering both perpetuated systemic inequities and shortfalls in treating older persons with dignity and respect.

There is no lack of evidence to support these initiatives. They align well with the views of experts in the field, as reflected in the 2020 Royal Society of Canada *Restoring Trust* report<sup>2</sup> as well as the *Reimagining Long-term Residential Care* report recently published in the *Monitor*.<sup>3</sup> Yet, despite all that we know—and have known for a long time—the current system remains solidly entrenched. A recent example of this was the announcement by our own provincial government of the construction of another 198-bed continuing care facility in Calgary that emphasizes the number of well-paying construction jobs this will create and how it will “address a shortage of spaces.”<sup>4</sup> One can only wonder how the approved budget of \$130.5 million might have been used, instead, to improve community-based care. This example represents yet another lost opportunity to do something different, of which Picard has plenty to say in his book. This is not to dispute the need for state-of-the-art facilities, or that much good work is happening across Canada in long-term care. Rather, it raises the necessity to rethink what we are currently doing and to be truly open to new ways of meeting the challenge of societal aging.

We agree with Picard's conclusion that indifference is at the root of today's long-term care crisis. This indifference is linked to widely held values around social productivity and political economy, as well as an entrenched *modus operandi* that prioritizes regulatory frameworks and operating efficiencies over quality, appropriateness and flexibility in providing support. But we also think that a less-recognized contributing factor at play is benevolent ageism. Ageism is discrimination and exclusion based on age. Overt malevolent or hostile ageism is easy to identify. Benevolent ageism, though, is easily missed. It involves positive yet patronizing views of older people as a collective. It presumes that older

adults as a group require protection and assistance, excluding rather than including their views on if, when and what type of help they need.<sup>5</sup> By stripping them of their voice and agency, it excludes older adults from important conversations that must involve them.

This subtle form of ageism is rampant across society, including within academic walls, and even appears between the covers of Picard's book. For instance, he mentions “senior proofing” homes to protect older people from injury. This may seem, on the surface, to be caring and sensible. Indeed, there is a growing literature on physical and technological adaptations that will allow us to safely age in our homes. Yet, the term is unintentionally demeaning. It suggests that older people must be saved from themselves, the way babies and toddlers receive such protection from adults. A more positive framing is that we should advocate for universal design and adaptations that curtail limitations caused by disability. To quote another early geriatrician, Bernard Isaacs, “Design for the young and you exclude the old; design for the old and you include the young.” Relatively absent from *Neglected No More* was a strong call to include older adults themselves and disempowered members of the workforce such as personal care assistants and licensed practical nurses in re-imagining the long-term care system. We feel that both groups must be recognized and directly involved in the call to finally prioritize the funding needed to address the failings of the Canadian continuing care system.

We fully support André Picard's call for change and encourage others to read this important work on the current state of long-term care in Canada. As Picard attests, evidence of both the limitations of the status quo and the direction forward are plentiful. What is needed is the will to act. **M**

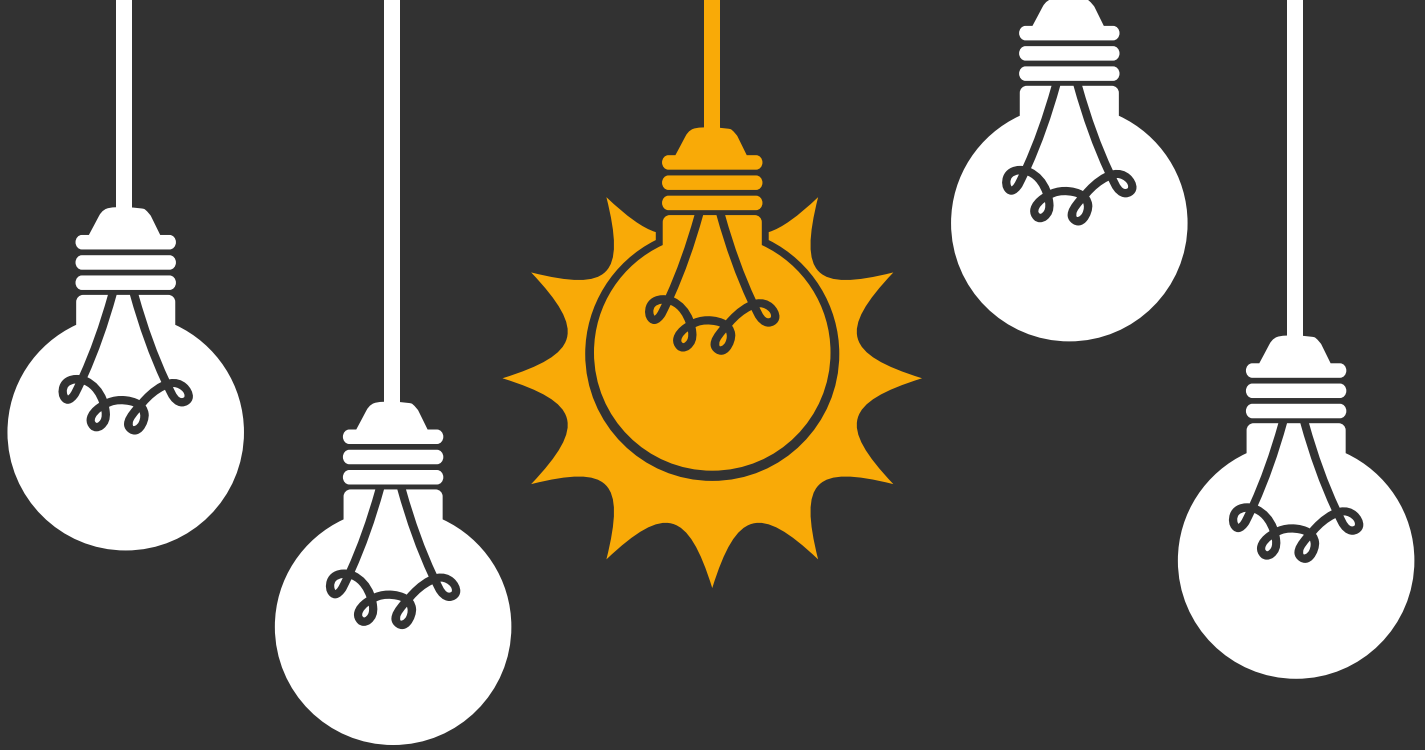
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