

MONITOR

Progressive news, views and ideas

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MAY/JUNE 2023



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MONITOR

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

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Cover illustration: Jamileh Salek is an Iranian-Canadian artist, writer and illustrator. Pattern, colour and art making was part of her childhood and life in Tabriz and Tehran. This rich Persian heritage shows in all her work. Themes of migration, culture, and the shape of women's lives are woven into her painting, textile art and books.

JON MILTON

Rebuilding the working class

Organized workers have the power to fundamentally transform the economy

IT'S NOVEMBER 3, 2022 and a group of workers is being escorted by security out of the gallery in the Ontario legislature.

"You have no idea what you've started," they shout, as they're pulled out of the chamber.

After those workers, including leaders of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), were ejected, the Conservative government got on to the real business of the day: crushing a planned strike by CUPE education workers by invoking the notwithstanding clause.

A few days later, following a wildcat strike and labour's largest mass mobilization in decades, the government backed down and withdrew the legislation.

Much ink has been spilled about the decline of organized labour since the 1980s and '90s—a phenomenon not isolated to Canada and Quebec. The U.S. and UK launched full-frontal attacks on working class power during the Reagan and Thatcher years, respectively. Even mighty European labour unions, while still enjoying enviable levels of influence compared to their North American counterparts, have been on a downward swing.

Concurrent with this decline in organized labour's strength and militancy has been a rise in inequality—in fact, when mapped onto a chart, the two correspond almost perfectly. The working class has stagnated while the wealth of the super-rich has shot into the stratosphere.

It didn't happen by accident. In the 1970s, elites responded to an inflationary economic crisis—and a dramatic rise in labour action—by dismantling the "postwar

compromise" which had, for a generation, created a "truce" in which elites allowed (some, white, male) workers to accumulate wealth and build a middle class. In that era, higher taxes on the wealthy and their corporations financed strong public services, and powerful fighting unions bargained strong contracts on behalf of workers across key industries.

That changed with the "stagflation" crisis of the 1970s. The capitalist class responded to that crisis by blaming government spending and workers' wage demands for inflation—and created a dizzying array of counter-institutions dedicated to advancing their anti-worker deregulatory agenda.

It worked. In the decades that followed, they restructured the economy in their image. All levels of government sold off and privatized public services and infrastructure. Private capital offshored key production facilities, breaking the back of powerful manufacturing unions. Owners of infrastructure that couldn't easily be shipped overseas, like grocery stores, went on a long, grinding, and successful war against staff and their unions—turning "good jobs" at markets and meatpacking plants into low-wage precarious work.

It was a decades-long series of defeats for organized labour. Union density—that is, the proportion of the workforce represented by a union—declined precipitously in the 1980s and '90s and has been on a less sharp, but constant, decline since then. That has not just been a problem for unions as institutions, but for the working class as a whole.

Working people in Canada began to identify less with the working class

and more as individual consumers. The end of history had arrived and the working class, as an organized and conscious force capable of bending the arc of history, disappeared from the stage.

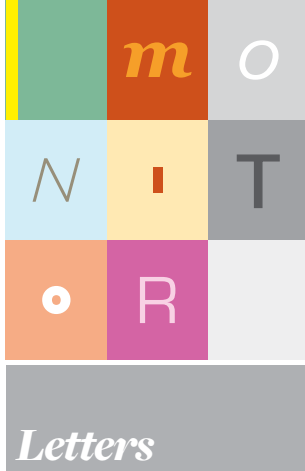
We've all heard the murmurs that things might be turning around in recent years. From the years-long wave of teachers' strikes in North America, to unprecedented union victories in union-resistant companies like Starbucks and Amazon, to the (still too rare) inflation-busting wage increases won at the bargaining table, it seems like unions are having a moment again.

Mike Davis, a historian of social movements, wrote that the power of organized labour does not grow at a steady pace but, rather, in explosive upswings driven by social crises and the raised expectations that accompany working class victories. Organizing, fighting, and winning are contagious. To break the rut that we're in, we have to start fighting again.

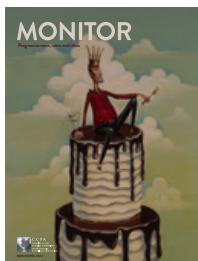
Across Canada, that's what workers are doing. They're building organizations and trying to organize the unorganized majority into a force that can step back onto the stage of history, in a moment that demands it.

We can only hope, then, that the CUPE-ON leaders were right—that after all this time, our opponents really don't know what they've started. **M**

Jon Milton is a senior communications specialist with the CCPA's National Office.



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



March/April 2023
Income inequality

I was especially impressed by your March/April issue that focused on inequality. The articles by Bruce Campbell and Lars Osberg really hit a nerve since they mirrored the exact observations that I encountered through several decades.

I have come to the conclusion that inflation is not our main concern but enjoying a living wage is. It stands to reason that if any man or woman in any given community

invests 40 hours a week in filling a need—whether he be a night watchman or nursemaid—he/she deserves to be paid sufficiently to shelter his/her family, put nourishing food on the table, enjoy an annual vacation, invest in some recreation and still have something left over for some modest investing.

Is this an oversimplification? I don't think so.

I turned 14 just before VE-Day [1945] and through the next decade, I became aware that my dad and all our Leaside neighbours had managed to do exactly that. Few of them were what we would call 'rich', but all of them were comfortable and paid off their mortgage before they retired. Future decades would prove that the income of these hardworking people stagnated while the greedy advanced to obscene proportions. As a business owner in later years, I too, felt the pain of this terrible transgression.

The time to reverse that trend is long overdue.

Robert S. Wright
Revelstoke B.C.

As a young radical activist back in the '60s, I was part of that generational global movement that scared the shit out of international capitalism (especially in that annus mirabilis, 1968).

But a few years later, once it had recovered from its initial shock, corporate capitalism began to plan and then initiate its successful counter-revolution. I first really discerned this reactionary movement in the later '70s.

The '80s, of course, was when it went into full swing and where it has remained until today. That hateful decade saw the pernicious so-called 'new age' doctrine widely promulgated. Its ideological purpose, of course, was to persuade people that each individual solely creates their own individual reality and, therefore, has no responsibility whatsoever for other people's situation. Presto! A phony 'spiritualized' version of methodological individualism. How convenient!

Ever since that deliberately orchestrated ideological attack on collectivity, I have observed that the historical growth on the left of insistence on the minutiae of 'political correctness' (by many self-identified progressives and their grouplets) has created a counter-productive divisiveness and is, consequently, in inverse proportion to actual political effectiveness.

If we are to escape from the top down régime imposed on us ever since the '70s by neoliberalism, we need massive broad-scale collective organization and action, not microfactional ideological nitpicking.

Here in Canada, the CCPA is one significant vehicle for building such a broad-based movement of resistance against the socio-political system that is destroying our planet.
David Bouvier
Gabriola Island B.C.

Many thanks for reviewing the book *Dying To Be Seen* by Catherine MacNeil in the March/April 2023

Monitor. The privatization of Medicare in health is but one issue resulting from reducing funding to key humanitarian institutions to less than inflation.

I recently wrote a letter in response to a newspaper report that some parents are urging a school board to hire a full-time fundraiser since schools are being forced to reduce full-day kindergarten, nutrition programs and other services like swimming events and occupational therapy services because budgets are not keeping cost-cutting in schools sufficient to meet needs.

I suggested we would next hear of the costs of urgent care, operations and other health programs now suffering from underfunding. I thought governments were at least charged with funding health and education. Hiring full-time fundraisers to help cover costs in these areas is just another privatization plan.

Can we not elect governments that alert us to these privatization thrusts in health and education? Your book excerpt ought to help.

Barry Hammond
Winnipeg MB

Thank you for the excellent articles on the problem of inequality in Canada.

It led me to wonder whether there should not be a social limit to the excessive growth of CEO incomes relative to workers' incomes over the past several decades. In the U.S. in the 1960s, a ratio of 20 to 1 was considered normal. In

the 1980s, that grew to 50 to 1. In the 1990s, the discrepancy shot up from 77:1 to 370:1. The figure in the U.S. is now close to 400:1. In Canada, the widening income gap is not as severe, but it is still substantial—175:1 in 2008 to over 240:1—the ratio of pay of the 100 best-paid Canadian CEOs to that of the average worker.

The only social mechanisms for dealing with this widening discrepancy are progressive taxation and the minimum wage. I wonder whether it's not time for there to be a more direct form of social regulation for enterprises that raise the income of their CEOs without a proportionate increase for their workers.

Perhaps it's time to consider the possibility of legislation (e.g. under Employment Standards, the *Canada Labour Code*) that would prescribe a maximum ratio between the total remuneration of the top earner in any corporation (typically the CEO) as compared to any employee, dependent or independent contractor engaged by that corporation. Say, for example, if the ratio was initially set in legislation at 150:1 or even 200:1, that would mean improvements to the wages of the lowest paid. It would also check further deterioration of the ratio. The program could be administered like pay equity.

If this was done in Canada, it could serve as a model for advancing equality in other countries.
Chris A.
Toronto ON



CCPA National Office

CCPA National Office Senior Researcher Katherine Scott continues to track the pandemic's impact on women and gender-diverse people. Her newest report, *Canada's Gender Pandemic Response: Did it measure up?*, shows that the federal government did the heavy lifting by funding far more programs and services that support women during the pandemic—the provincial governments' contribution pales in comparison. You can read her full report at <https://monitormag.ca/topics/reports/>.

To stay on top of a very active file, CCPA National Office Senior Researcher Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood follows the latest climate change research around the world. Now, he's bringing those findings to a broader audience through his new newsletter *Shift Storm: Transforming work in a changing climate*. Stay in the know by signing up here: <https://mailchi.mp/policyalternatives/subscribe-to-shift-storm>.

On the blog, pharmaceutical expert Joel Lexchin writes about the long history of the federal government cosying up with the pharmaceutical

industry. "Just as previous interactions between government and industry have had negative effects on how drugs are regulated," Lexchin writes, "the gutting of the proposed changes to the Patented Medicine Prices Review Board (PMPRB) will ensure that drugs remain overpriced."

Erika Shaker, *director*,
CCPA National Office

CCPA Nova Scotia

We recently released the *2022 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Nova Scotia*. Using 2020 data, the latest available, authors Lesley Frank and Christine Saulnier found that Nova Scotia's child poverty rate decreased by 24.3 per cent due to temporary pandemic supports.

This is the most significant single-year reduction on record.

Despite this reduction, 31,370 children were left living in poverty in Nova Scotia. It is important to note that the drop was possible due to government benefits, with temporary federal pandemic relief support and top-ups making the biggest difference.

The report card included 2021 census data that provided additional disaggregated poverty rates, underlining systemic inequalities in Nova Scotia. We saw a higher incidence of poverty for racialized children, immigrant children and Indigenous children.

The report also provided 17 government recommendations to tackle ending all forms of poverty.

The *2023 Nova Scotia Alternative Budget* included a set of fiscal policy measures in a workable budget responding to the province's fiscal, social, environmental, and economic realities. The alternative budget was a collaborative effort by 30+ individuals and organizations in Nova Scotia.

We also recently released the report *Mapping fossil fuel lock-in and contestation in Eastern Canada*, with the CCPA-BC office and the Corporate Mapping project.

Christine Saulnier,
director, *CCPA Nova Scotia*

CCPA Manitoba

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

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

begin at \$100,000 rather than \$79,625. Tax bracket changes are estimated to cost an additional \$160 million in 2023–24.

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

In reality, low-income households will get little benefit from raising the Basic Personal Amount. The average savings for the

bottom 20 per cent of tax filers in Manitoba will be just \$37 in total.

The true cost of these tax cuts will increase over time in the form of compounding annual lost revenue. This loss of provincial revenue reduces our capacity to invest in public services like healthcare, education, or addressing poverty. At a moment in our province's history when we are sending patients out of province for elective surgeries and when school divisions are cutting teachers, we cannot be diverting hundreds of millions of dollars from the public system into the pockets of the wealthiest among us.

Certainly, many Manitobans need support to

get through the next year. Wages have not kept pace with inflation, putting a squeeze on many households that were already struggling to make ends meet. This support should be targeted towards those in our community who need it most and can easily be done through income-tested refundable credits, like the federal GST credit.

At the same time, we need to invest in our public institutions that provide the services we rely on at a low cost. \$10 per day child care is excellent, but more public spaces need to be created and staff trained to help families in need access child care. School nutrition programs or further investments in social housing are other options to lower the cost of living while ensuring basic needs are met.

Niall Harney, senior researcher, CCPA Manitoba

CCPA Ontario

Public health care in Ontario is fighting for its life.

Provincial budgets, reports from the Financial Accountability Office (FAO), and analysis from CCPA authors all say the same thing: the Ford government is budgeting less than needed and spending less than it budgets to maintain current service levels.

The result is a system that is gasping for air. An underfunded workforce is struggling to maintain services at current levels, let alone improve them.

When it comes to paying for-profit companies to

perform surgeries, though, it's a different story. The Ministry of Health spent 104 per cent of its budget for "independent health facilities" in the first nine months of the current fiscal year—and that was before news emerged of a for-profit corporation performing surgeries *inside* The Ottawa Hospital. There, 26 surgeons have formed a company that is hiring nurses at a reported \$750 a day—more than double the going rate—to assist with surgeries.

The government has not explained how this is better than simply expanding the capacity of the public system through proper funding. Premier Ford's talking point is that "the status quo is just not working," but he neglects to note that the status quo is his government's own creation. And while for-profit procedures may be an "innovation," as he says, they are an innovation in private profit-making at public expense—not health care.

Watch for a full report from CCPA Ontario on the privatization of surgeries and diagnostic services later this year. **M**
Randy Robinson, director, CCPA Ontario

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Canada's gender pandemic response

Did it measure up?

By Katherine Scott

David Macdonald
National Office

No strings attached Canada's health care deal lacks key conditions

As emergency rooms are overwhelmed, surgery wait times continue to lengthen, and under-resourced children's hospitals face surges related to viral infections like COVID, the provincial and territorial governments have accepted the federal government's new health care funding deal.

But there's more than meets the eye with this deal.

It provides an additional \$46.2 billion to provinces and territories over the next 10 years, but not all of that money will have conditions attached.

The deal requires provinces to spend 58 cents out of every new dollar on actual new health care programs—barely a majority—while leaving the remaining 42 cents without requirements.

So what will this new money buy? Not necessarily new health care improvements.

A position paper jointly authored by all of the provinces and territories in 2021 suggests that the provinces' position coming into the negotiations was a plan to spend *zero dollars* of the increased federal transfers on higher health care spending.

They actually wouldn't change any operational funding in any department if they got extra federal funding. According to the model they outlined, the provinces and territories would use the extra federal health care money to pay down their deficits—although all of the

big provinces now have cumulative surpluses projected for the future.

So despite provincial ad campaigns that show destitute doctors and nurses begging for federal funding, the question of who is responsible for the crisis in Canadian health care is not so clear cut. Health care is a provincial jurisdiction and the big provinces are flush with cash. It's not money stopping them from fixing their systems, it's political will.

How much will be spent on health care?

The proportion of new funding that the federal government requires the provinces and territories to spend on health care varies quite a bit by jurisdiction. Across all jurisdictions, 58 cents of every dollar from this new package will have to be spent on new health care programs.

The federal government is going to require that P.E.I. spend 78 cents out of every new health care dollar from this new package on new health care expenditures that aren't already in the plans.

The big provinces—notably Quebec and Ontario—will not be required to spend as much of what they receive on health care. Of the \$16.7 billion in new money that the federal government will send to Ontario over the next 10 years, for instance, the federal government only requires the province to spend \$9.1 billion on new health care improvements (or 54 cents of every dollar they receive).

The federal government isn't looking for matching funding; it simply wants 54 cents out of every dollar they send to Ontario to actually be spent on better health care. How much of the rest ends up improving health care will depend on how much public pressure is brought to bear on Queen's Park.

It's similar for Alberta and B.C.: the federal government only requires that they spend 57 cents of every dollar on improving health care. Of the \$5.5 billion the federal government will send Alberta over the next 10 years, it only requires \$3.1 billion

to be spent on health care. Of the \$6.3 billion the federal government will send B.C., it only requires \$3.5 billion to be spent on better health care.

Premiers wanted no strings attached

The federal position is that the provinces only have to spend 58 cents out of every new dollar that they get on health care. But what's the provincial position?

Two years ago, all of the provinces and territories, except Newfoundland and Labrador, put out a position paper on exactly what they wanted from new health transfers. This was the provincial/territorial starting position: over the next 10 years, they wanted to receive \$326 billion, much more than the \$46.2 billion that the federal government has on offer.

That's obviously a big difference. But there was another, even more revealing element: the proportion of the new health transfers that the provinces/territories would want to actually spend on improving health care.

The provinces wanted to receive an extra \$26 billion in the first year, rising to \$44 billion in the tenth year. So the revenue difference between the before and after scenarios is exactly those amounts.

What's truly shocking—and revealing—is the graph of planned provincial/territorial operating expenditures before and after a new federal health transfer.

Program expenditures before and after a massive infusion of federal cash are identical! What this means is that whether the provinces and territories receive \$26 billion or \$44 billion more in federal transfers a year, they haven't planned to spend an extra dime on health care.

It's important to note that the provinces and territories are planning to grow their health care budgets, to varying degrees, but provincial leaders have an underlying assumption that their existing health care budgets are adequate to deal with overwhelmed emergency

rooms, surgery backlogs, and under-resourced childrens' hospitals.

The provinces' and territories' own position paper shows they had no intention of changing their budgets by even a penny to address these issues.

So while the federal position is that it would like the provinces and territories to spend 58 cents out of every new health care dollar on actual health care, the starting provincial position is that they wouldn't spend any new federal health care dollars on actual health care. Not one cent.

Not on health care, and not on anything else

But wait, there's more.

If the provinces' operating expenditures would remain completely the same even if they receive between \$26 billion and \$44 billion more a year from the federal government, it's clear that they didn't plan any net new spending on anything else either. Not on better education. Not on expanding affordable child care. Not on improving the justice system. Not on post-secondary education.

The position paper explicitly shows that their only intention was to spend additional new federal funding on reducing their own deficits.

It's worth noting that the provincial-territorial position paper was

written in February 2021, when the provinces were predicting doomsday scenarios for deficits. Those predictions weren't worth the paper they were written on, they were so off the mark (as I documented in my November 2022 report *Flush with Cash*).

I've updated those figures to February 8, 2023, the day after the federal agreement details were released. Guess what? Nearly every province is projecting a huge surplus for 2022-23—and going forward, as far as the eye can see. What's the deficit emergency? There is no emergency. Quite the opposite.

All of the big provinces—B.C., Alberta, Quebec and Ontario—have budgetary surpluses rolling in. If they wanted to fix health care today—and it is a provincial responsibility—they don't have to ask permission, they can just snap their fingers and do it.

Need to hire more nurses? Need to fully staff emergency rooms and expand capacity? Need to clear wait list backlogs? Money isn't the object. Ontario is projecting \$15.6 billion in surpluses over the next five years. Alberta is projecting \$23.3 billion in surpluses over the next three. Quebec is projecting \$13.7 billion in surpluses in the next five. **M**

David Macdonald is a senior economist at the CCPA National Office.

Molly McCracken
Manitoba Office

Forging progressive populism in 2023

“Please put that away, we can't have that here,” I said to the man who just took an 8x11 piece of paper with a Nazi symbol out from inside his winter jacket.

“No, I need to talk with you about this, it's not what you think,” he replied.

A group of us had just launched a new local group, Community Solidarity Manitoba, at a press conference at a downtown church. Masks had been required at the event, but right after it started, about a dozen men entered without masks. Several had spoken up during the press conference and agreed to talk with the organizers afterwards. Then this incident took place. The church pastor, Bill Millar, was able to connect with the man and helped him leave the room.

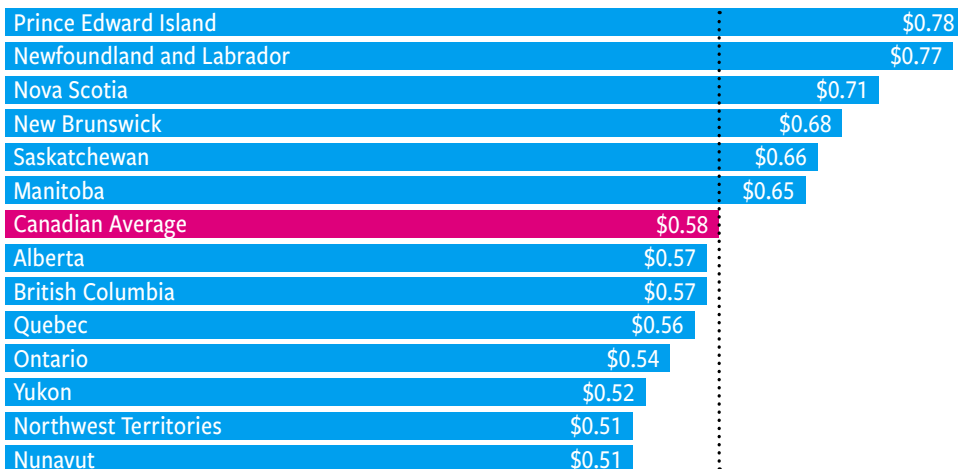
It was a shocking disruption of the formal launch of Community Solidarity Manitoba and demonstrated why the group had not only formed, but was needed.

Community Solidarity Manitoba began organizing almost a year prior, as part of the Community Solidarity Canada project supported by the Council of Canadians. Local efforts in five communities began, modelled after the residents organizing in Ottawa in response to the “Freedom Convoy” of 2022.

The press conference was held on the eve of the arrival of the World Unity Convoy to Manitoba this past February. This group is connected with the Freedom Convoy and decided to meet in Manitoba instead of Ottawa in 2023. It was not at all on the scale to what took place

How much will be required to be spent on health care?

How much of every dollar of new federal health money must actually be spent on health care, by province



in Ottawa, but in February 2022, residents close to the Manitoba legislative buildings experienced lengthy and serious disruptions and were subjected to displays of hate and harassment from some convoy supporters.

While some may have supported the 2022 convoy out of anger at public health measures, it is well-documented that the Freedom Convoy began long before the pandemic. Researchers have connected the 2022 Freedom Convoy with the 2018 Yellow Vest and 2019 United We Roll movements, backed by the Canadian oil industry and against the carbon tax and climate action. According to the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, many convoy leaders have been linked to white supremacist and anti-immigration movements and opposed Motion 103, which called on the Canadian government to “condemn Islamophobia and all forms of systemic racism.”

Diwa Marcelino, spokesperson and member of Migrante, has been called racial slurs more often recently. Marcelino explains, “Workers and families who are struggling are vulnerable to some of the convoy’s

Becoming a part of a union is one of the best ways out of a lot of the challenges people in the convoy are facing.

hateful messaging. Social justice organizations need to come together and forge real unity to fight for the solutions that will combat long-standing inequities.”

A number of Indigenous-led organizations have denounced the convoy for its white supremacist values and practices and for appropriating the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIWG2S+) to further a colonial agenda.

“On behalf of the Women’s Memorial March, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre and the families and survivors of MMIWG2S+, we have no affiliation or working relationship with any freedom convoy members. We demand they immediately cease using and appropriating and using the lives of MMIWG2S+ to further their own white supremacist leadings,” stated Anna Huard of the MMIWG2S+ Implementation Committee at the launch.

Locally, the misappropriation of MMIWG2S+ by convoy protestors had horrific implications—an alleged serial killer accused of murdering three First Nations women and one unidentified woman had links with antisemitic, misogynistic and white supremacists, as documented in the alleged killer’s posts on Facebook.

This past winter, MMIWG2S+ activists have been protesting outside the Brady landfill, calling for public efforts to find the remains of three women police believe are located there.

The crisis faced by First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples in Canada is the most profound example of the failure of governments to live up to their legal and moral responsibilities. Canada perpetuates colonialism by permitting resource extraction from Indigenous land and communities. On top of this, corporations fail to pay their fair share of taxes, while Indigenous and marginalized communities do not have sufficient health care, education, social services, income or decent work.

As CCPA Manitoba research associate Jim Silver recently wrote in his February 2023 op-ed, “Whose

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WE
CAN
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Community Solidarity is a collective response to the rise of the politics of division and hate in Canada.
www.communitysolidarity.ca



Freedom”: “Governments must act now to reverse the 40-year trend to ever greater inequality. A small minority are becoming astonishingly wealthy, while most are left further and further behind.

“That needs to change before the far-right gains even more traction. We need higher rates of taxation on wealthy individuals and large corporations—some prominent economists are calling for a return to marginal tax rates in the 70 per cent range, where they were in the 1950s and 1960s—and investment in meeting the real needs of the rest of us.”

Community Solidarity Manitoba’s statement explains further: “The pandemic laid bare how inequitable our society has become. Far too many people struggled prior to the pandemic, and lockdowns, job loss, and public health regulations added to the financial and emotional strain.

“Our communities face many overlapping crises, including rising inequality, a broken health care system, systemic racism, and climate change. Community Solidarity Manitoba is a coalition of local community organizations that are

committed to the actual practice of creating a safer and more just world. Together, we are members of labour unions, abolitionist groups, student movements, and social justice organizations with longstanding commitments to economic justice, equity, and public health.”

Solidarity groups are coming together across Canada to show a progressive way forward. Unions have been a key aspect of this movement.

“Becoming a part of a union is one of the best ways out of a lot of the challenges people in the convoy are facing,” Liz Carlyle of the Canadian Union of Public Employees said at the press conference.

But unionized work—with better pay, benefits and job protection—is on the decline in Canada. The percentage of employees who were union members in their main job fell from 38 per cent in 1981 to 29 per cent in 2022—a drop of nine percentage points, according to Statistics Canada.

For men without a post-secondary education, it fell from 43 per cent to 27 per cent—due to the loss of jobs in manufacturing, resource

extraction and construction. Men of this demographic have been able to find well-paying jobs in the oil and gas sector in Alberta, for example, and feel particularly threatened by anything that challenges their livelihood.

This, on top of the rise of precarious work and stagnant wages, coupled with the isolation and increased use of social media during the pandemic, created fertile ground for this rise of right-wing populism in Canada. But instead of being angry at the “other,” a populist, evidence-based political economic progressive movement is needed. **M**

Molly McCracken is the Manitoba director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives





Labour power

JON MILTON

Ontario's Bill 28 is dead. Now what?

Laura Walton talks organizing, leadership, and the future of the labour movement

In November 2022, the Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU-CUPE) went on a mass wildcat strike against Bill 28—the Ontario government's attempt to legislate education workers back to work and make their otherwise-legal strike illegal. Bill 28 would have suspended education workers' Charter rights in order to shut down their strike.

Despite these heavy-handed threats, OSBCU members went on strike anyway. With the support of the whole labour movement, which threatened a general strike if the province didn't back down, OSBCU members managed to defeat Bill 28.

The *Monitor* sat down with OSBCU President Laura Walton, who led the strike, to talk about how it happened, what it means, and where we go from here. The following interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Jon Milton: What was the organizing model that allowed OSBCU to build the movement that defeated Bill 28?

Laura Walton: I think there's two pieces on how we got there—there was the pressures being felt by workers, and then the organizing in response to those pressures.

In 2019, we had our second piece of legislation that capped our wages. The first time, of course, was in 2012, under the Liberals with Bill 115. And in both cases, as somebody involved in the union—more than just, you know, a dues paying member—I looked at it and said that this can't be what it is. If every time you go to the bargaining table, the government just has this ability to legislate you, then we've got some real big problems in our society and within unions themselves.

So I started doing a lot of research, and talking to different people, talking to folks who had been in fights prior to me, and learning about how they did what they did. Andy Hansen is one that comes to mind. We actually are from the same area, he'd been an ETFO (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario) president. I was looking at his book and had talked to him about, you know, how did it come to be? We realized that when you look at it historically, people didn't rely on social media, people didn't rely on emails, people didn't rely on really cool memes or anything like that. They talked to one another.

When you think back in labour history, that really is the common catalyst—talking to workers and empowering workers, who take it into their own hands. That's where major gains were won.

And so then we started organizing. There was [union trainer] Jane McAlevey, yes, a lot of it was modeled off of that. But unlike Jane, who has more of a staff-centered approach, we really approached it from a perspective of “centre the workers in the fight.” So the vast majority of the folks that we had doing this organizing work, only a very few of them were booked off full-time. The vast majority of them were doing this work off of the side of their desks, and just having conversations—and not just conversations in their worksite. We were looking at workers from a holistic perspective—yes, you work with me at this school, but what else do you do? Oh, you're a football mom or a hockey dad, or your kid goes to guides, or you belong to this faith group. We really started to learn more about workers that way.

JM: So the distinction you're making between OSBCU's organizing and the McAlevey model is that you organized through direct worker-to-worker organizing.

LW: Our model was worker-to-worker, because our work sites are so spread out. You might only have two or three people. So worker-to-worker—with somebody helping them keep it all organized—worked really,

really well. I'm not going to say that what worked in our worksites is going to work for everybody's worksites. But you've got to start somewhere. And it doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to be done. So you pivot a lot along the way.

JM: You make reference to past struggles that we can learn from—you reference talking to Andy Hanson from the ETFO, and learning from labour history, reading about labour history. What are some of the things that you're taking from the history of the labour movement, and what are some of the things that you've been doing that are new?

LW: The first thing that I'm taking from labour history is that it didn't all happen at once. It was a series of gains, one after another after another. That really got us to where we are today. Unfortunately, the last 40 years have not been as momentous, you know, in the labour movement as they could have been.

I think a lot of that comes from this drive towards individualism. We can sit around and say it's because Ronald Reagan laid off all of the air traffic controllers—you can say that. But really, what I think happened is that we started to become more and more isolated as a society, and we stopped talking to each other. And we *need* to talk to each other.

When I'm seeing someone like Pierre Poilievre doing a video with an Early Childhood Educator, and this ECE believes that he is going to put more money in her pocket, it just shows me that we haven't been talking to workers. Talking to them and listening—like what is your real struggle? And what are you going to do about it? That was how we're doing things a little bit differently.

It isn't about workers talking to or at workers, it's about listening to workers and what their struggles are, and then empowering them to actually make change, and what that change will look like and how they can do it. I think that is what we're doing differently. I'm not here to fix anything for anyone, but I will fight *alongside* you every step of the way.

JM: In my experience, organizing—particularly when that organizing leads to victory—is contagious. You see the effects that it has on people, it makes them want to organize more. Has that been your experience since November?

LW: I think so. When we have successes, people want to build on it. But what I find interesting is, it's workers want to build on it. It's typically workers themselves who come and ask us how we did what we did. And what I find really neat is workers engaging and really holding leaders accountable and saying “this is what I think we need to do.” That, to me, is very exciting as well.

It's contagious, but it's also exhausting. There's like this moment where you think okay, we've done it. Now what? I think that's the next battle. It's not a one and done—this is a model that now needs to be part of our culture moving forward.

I am seeing it spreading. It's growing more and more. What really excites me is how it's changed the way education worker activists approach problems.

So currently, there's threats from the OMERS (Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System) sponsor corporation to make cuts to the OMERS pension plan—which our members rely on for a decent wage when we retire. And it was so neat to listen to education workers approach this problem from an organizing perspective, which was far more empowering than just approaching it from a panic—oh, God, this is happening, let's write a strongly worded letter and do an action and call it a day. So that was really exciting for me—to watch workers say, okay, we know what to do. That to me was really, really exciting to watch.

JM: You mentioned that the big question now is what happens in the future. Where do we go from here? What do you see happening? What do you hope happens?

LW: Well, I hope we come to a place where we can ignite the labour movement. What we had in November was a moment. And it was a magical moment, a wonderful moment, a hard-fought moment. I don't want to downplay the effort and the organizing that happened. But it was only one moment.

What we need to do now is build a movement—a movement that brings us to a place where governments recognize that devaluing and disrespecting workers will not be tolerated. Not to sound like a cliché, but the power of the people will always be stronger than the people in power. I really hope that we can get to that point for my

kids and for my grandchildren. All labour has value, but for such a long time, we've undervalued those that are toiling while we've rewarded those who are making profit off the labour.

The other thing that I would say is that I hope this organizing model doesn't get confined to labour. I think there's a lot of community issues that labour can lend a hand in—and community can be pushing labour to do better, as well.

Moving towards that common good is one of the reasons why we made our bargaining public. We're a public sector union—the public should know what's happening in our bargaining! So really lifting up some of the issues that we're seeing in our communities is something I'm hoping we'll also take off from here, because that's really super important as we move forward.

JM: One of the really powerful things in November was watching the way that, while workers were really at the forefront, there was also an enormous amount of community support. How did OSBCU build those links with the community?

LW: We started even before bargaining proposals happened. We did outreach with parents, and the Ontario Autism Coalition and the Ontario Parents Action Network. We said we're going into bargaining, we know that our working conditions are your children's learning conditions, so talk to us about what you need to see. This isn't just about us, it's also what the parents and students and families need. We had an opportunity to do a great deal of networking, about what the community needed to see for their students. And I think that was really, really important.

Then just going back to that holistic worker thing—workers used to think well, I'm just an EA, or I'm just a custodian. We said, well what else do you do? And they would say something like, well, my son plays

hockey. So while you're sitting in the stands with your hockey moms, you can talk about these issues! Those people already like you. They want your son to be on that team. If you had more disposable income, your son would be able to do the hockey camps. So talk to them about the importance of this issue. And I think that that was really our secret—we took it away from “the union,” and it just became “Max's mom needs this.” And I think that was a really important piece.

What the right wing wants to do is keep us divided, to pigeonhole people in kind of interest-based politics. And we encourage people to look beyond that. In your faith group, for example those folks want you to be successful. Talk to them about why this is important. They already have trust in you. And I think that really changed the narrative from “us versus them,” to one where it was truly all of us versus [the government].

A lot of people would say to me, well, I don't have anything. But then we would keep talking. And you would find out that they go camping with so-and-so once a year. If that's all they had, then we would say okay, connect to the people there! There was a point where people were literally talking to workers in Tim Hortons. Anywhere that they could talk, they were talking. We actually put out, at Thanksgiving, the “Let's Talk Turkey” campaign—which was a little campaign designed for you to have difficult conversations around the Thanksgiving table. We all had that one Uncle Norm, the staunch conservative. That took off like wildfire, because people were talking at their tables! And Uncle Norm, as much as he's a staunch conservative, wants you to be successful. That type of thing broke down a ton of barriers for us.

Through all this, we just keep hoping that we can ignite one more person. If we can ignite that next person, it just is another fire that's going to continue to grow. **M**

ADAM D.K. KING

New union organizing puts employers on notice, but challenges remain

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY MEXICAN politician, Porfirio Diaz, once lamentably described his country as being “so far from God” yet “so close to the United States.” In a different register, Canada’s proximity to the United States can, at times, feel like a comparable burden for those of us who wish to see better of this country. Things might be bad, but at least we’re not in America.

The fortunes of organized labour—and declining union density in particular—are an apt illustration of this “could be worse” posture.

American labour has taken a pummeling since the 1980s. The latest figures from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that union density has fallen by half between 1983 and 2022. In the early 1980s, over 20 per cent of American workers belonged to a union. Last year, despite unions adding 273,000 new members, density continued its precipitous fall, dropping to 10.1 per cent from 10.3 per cent in 2021.¹ Meanwhile, so-called “right-to-work” laws have eliminated union security and depressed wages in half of the country, including in the federal public sector.² As a further sign of American labour’s weakness, major work stoppages now barely register. Whereas strikes and lockouts at large workplaces idled production 470 times in 1952, workers hit the picket line in “major work stoppages” just 23 times last year.³

Gazing south at this carnage can understandably leave Canadian labour advocates breathing a sigh of relief. But things are hardly rosy in

Canada when it comes to the health of organized labour.

In November 2022, Statistics Canada released a report tracking unionization from 1981 to 2022.⁴ Far from a counter-narrative to the American story, the Canadian figures evince a similar rate of union decline. Over the last 40 years, union density in Canada has dropped by nine percentage points, going from a high of 38 per cent in 1981 down to 29 per cent last year. When only full-time jobs are included in the count, the fall is close to 11 per cent—greater than the American union slump.

Canadian labour’s relatively better position is largely maintained by the size and breadth of public sector unionization. At 77 per cent, public sector union membership is nearly universal for non-managerial employees. Moreover, women in the public sector are even more likely than their male counterparts to be union members.⁵

The fall in Canadian union coverage has, therefore, occurred entirely in the private sector. In this so-called “commercial sector,” union density has nearly halved, going from 29.7 per cent in 1981 to 15.2 per cent in 2022. Roughly two-thirds of this drop in unionization took place between 1981 and 1997, though private sector union density has continued its steady downward slide since.

Although falling union density in Canada is hardly news to those keeping a close eye on the Canadian labour market, connecting the predicaments of the present to long-term trends is both revealing

and prescriptive. Identifying the sources of the problem points us in the direction of possible reform.

As Statistics Canada’s report points out, private sector union decline has been driven, in part, by deindustrialization and the changing composition of jobs. In other words, fewer jobs in union strongholds like manufacturing and resource extraction mean fewer union members. Service sector jobs, particularly those in retail and food and accommodation, have been and remain largely non-union.

However, industrial restructuring is only one side of the story. Within private sector industries—including manufacturing and resource extraction—union coverage has also dropped. Between the early 1980s and the late 1990s, union density fell between 13 and 19 percentage points among men in manufacturing, mining, forestry and construction. The economy was not simply shedding union jobs; employers were aggressively driving unions out of the jobs that remained.

Unionization also dropped among workers with and without a bachelor’s degree, a further indication that declining membership was not as concentrated among blue-collar men as the deindustrialization story emphasized.

While union density fell by 15.7 per cent among men without post-secondary education, it dropped 12.8 per cent for men with at least a bachelor of arts degree. Women with a bachelor’s degree also saw their unionization rate fall by 11.5 per cent between 1981 and

2022, though they remain the most likely group to be union members.

Industrial restructuring and employers' anti-union crusades have combined to reconstitute a Canadian working class that is historically less protected and less organized. Unions' ability to set high wages for members, as well as indirectly influence and improve the wages and working conditions of non-union workers, has weakened considerably.

Post-pandemic inflation has starkly revealed the extent of labour's structural challenges. While inflation averaged 6.8 per cent in 2022, average hourly wage growth trailed at 4.2 per cent.⁶ Meanwhile, union wage settlements in major contracts covering 500 workers or more averaged only 2.6 per cent in 2022.⁷

Settling for less than inflation when the latter is running around 2 per cent is tolerable, if inauspicious. When price increases are running at 40-year highs, such capitulation is devastating for workers' standards of living.

Wage increases are not the only casualty of weakened bargaining power, however. Because union members are more likely to enjoy workplace benefits, such as extended health insurance plans and pensions, fewer workers now retain such advantages. As well, the job security available to union members is afforded to a shrinking share of the labour force—a reality that became all too apparent during the worst days of the COVID-19 pandemic when unemployment spiked, particularly among the non-unionized.⁸

To reverse these troubling trends and rebuild working-class power in Canada, we need a combination of new organizing and policy reform. The two go hand-in-hand. Without a coordinated fight, labour has little hope of rebalancing the scales. But without changes to the laws and regulations governing labour and employment, organizing on its own will not be enough to build back Canadian union density.

We may be seeing the beginnings of such reform in British Columbia. Last June, the New Democratic Party in B.C. reintroduced "card-check" union certification, allowing a majority of workers who have signed union cards to form a bargaining unit without holding a labour board-supervised vote. This is a welcome reform worth celebrating—and one for which unions in B.C. and beyond have long been fighting.

The B.C. Labour Relations Board's 2022 Annual Report shows that card-check is making a difference. Overall, union certification applications in B.C. increased 59.3 per cent year-over-year, going from 108 filed in 2021 to 172 filed in 2022. Notably, over 66 per cent of applications for new bargaining units occurred after card-check came into force in June 2022. The law appears to also be improving the success rate of union applications. In 2021, slightly more than 79 per cent of applications resulted in a union certification. Last year, 87 per cent of applications resulted in a new bargaining

unit. Impressively, unions applied for certification with an average of 74 per cent of eligible workers' support after the card-check law came into force.⁹

The news from B.C. is especially promising, given that the province has suffered the largest union decline in the country. While all provinces—with the exceptions of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia—saw union membership fall by roughly two to three per cent between 1997 and 2022, B.C. has the dubious distinction of leading the pack with a unionization decline of 6.8 per cent.¹⁰

How much card-check might contribute to reversing the decline in union density over the long run remains an open question. While certifying 135 new bargaining units (of the 155 decided applications) in 2022 is good news—and an improvement over recent years—it is still a far cry from the number of annual union certifications registered in B.C. a couple of decades ago. In 1996, for example, 430 new bargaining units were formed. In 1997, unions formed 409. In 1998, 348 new units represented a significant drop-off. In other words, 2022 may have halted the province's downward trend in union applications and certifications, but it's less clear that card-check alone can fully turn the tide.

New union organizing, particularly among young workers at retail outfits like Starbucks, has clearly excited many and put employers on notice.

Young workers want to be union members. Yet their concentration in sectors that are typically hard to organize, such as retail and other services, make building density difficult. What former administrator of the Wage and Hour Division of former U.S. President Barack Obama's Department of Labor, David Weil, calls "the fissured workplace" makes both union organizing and enforcing employment rights challenging.¹¹ Small workplaces, franchising and subcontracting place obstacles in the way of collective organization. The laws that facilitate unionization and collective bargaining in North America were designed for large, industrial workplaces with many workers all congregated at a single worksite under the direct supervision of an easily identifiable employer. For many workers today, these are unfamiliar conditions.

To win union representation, workers in many parts of the private service sector need some form of sectoral bargaining arrangement, wherein unions can negotiate contracts covering multiple workplaces across an industry. New Zealand has already introduced such a policy, and as some labour scholars and lawyers have pointed out, these "fair pay agreements" could work in Canada too.¹²

Winning a broader-based bargaining reform would, however, call for Canadian unions to work together in ways to which they are largely unaccustomed. Unions that frequently compete for members would need to cooperate in order to represent workers across a range of sectors and workplaces.

More importantly, building toward a broader and more inclusive system of union representation and collective bargaining would first require worker self-organization, militancy and disruption. Past labour victories—even in the forms of new laws that make it easier to unionize and bargain—were invariably the outcome of social struggle.

To facilitate this fight, there is one reform worth borrowing from our American counterparts. Unlike here in Canada, U.S. workers who are not members of a union have a legally protected right to strike. In Canada, only union members are ostensibly afforded this protection. As the Labor Action Tracker at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations reports, while U.S. strikes of all sizes increased by 52 per cent in 2022, 32 per cent of workers who walked off the job were not members of a union.¹³

If Canadian workers could lawfully strike, regardless of union membership status, would this help reverse the decline in union membership? Could non-union worker walkouts help build the momentum for a sectoral bargaining reform? It's worth finding out. **M**

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PEGGY NASH

A transformational time for labour?

A NEW GENERATION of leaders is gradually getting elected to lead unions and central labour bodies in Canada.

For the first time, the president of the largest labour council in Canada—the Toronto and York District Labour Council—is a Black woman.

Women now head up the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress.

There is also a growing number of women, Black, racialized, and gender non-binary leaders who are leading unions and are elected to bargaining committees and local leadership.

Is this just a shifting of the deck chairs in static organizations or is something more transformative afoot? Will new leaders simply replicate past behaviours in old structures or are they reshaping how unions represent their members and building themselves into a greater force for change?

Representation matters. As employers hire workers, they increasingly reflect broad changes in society. With greater immigration in Canada, more Black and racialized workers are getting hired and, over time, they are running and getting elected to union leadership positions.

In other words, union leadership is beginning to reflect the diverse faces of labour in Canada.

That said, representation in union leadership has tended to lag societal changes. For example, women had always done paid work, but there was a huge influx of women into our workplaces, which accelerated in the 1970s with the coming of age of Canada's baby boomers. There are women all along who were pioneering activists and leaders but the leadership remained overwhelmingly male.

When I first got involved in my local union at an airline in the late 1970s, the membership was mostly women but the leaders were almost all men.

When, as a young activist, I was given the opportunity to attend a convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour, there were very few women in attendance. While some of the speeches were inspiring, I was most intrigued by a small band of women who were trying to open up more space for women members.

Mostly white women, they focused on issues of abortion, child care, domestic violence, and access to leadership positions—perennial goals for the women's movement. In spite of the civil rights movement in the U.S., second-wave feminism was much less attentive to racism than it should have been.

Labour faced serious head winds with the deregulation of capital from the Reagan era in the 1980s, especially with open global trade and the push to privatize government responsibilities. Industrial workers' solidarity had been the strength of the labour movement, but their power dwindled as companies moved production offshore and technology transferred knowledge and skills from workers to tech programmers.

At the same time, with new government services delivering health care, education, and other programs, women poured into new unionized jobs.

But, generally speaking, the labour movement was restricted by hostile governments and restrictive labour laws—despite some inspiring struggles in the late post-war era. Much of the dynamism, energy and success of labour in previous decades was constrained. The labour movement did, however, keep pushing on human rights issues, including fighting racism, homophobia, sexism. Often, the labour movement was a leader in pushing employers towards more equitable hiring and promotion.

There was, and still is, much more to do on this front.

The global pandemic has shone a spotlight on the vast inequalities in our society. Even during the pandemic, billionaires and conglomerates have grown wealthier while workers who truly ensured our survival put themselves on the line, working long hours for limited pay and with few rights.

In the early phases of the pandemic, many rallied around the “build back better” slogan. Now that this new generation of leaders is increasingly taking the helm of labour organizations, what can they achieve? Can labour build back better? Become more inclusive? Harness the power of workers struggling in the face of entrenched income inequality?

These leaders are taking office at a time of unique opportunity.

A real plan to build worker power needs to be based on a strategy of organizing. Workers talking to workers, listening to their concerns.

Decades of right-wing theories promoting “trickle down economics”, “a rising tide lifts all boats”, and “the private sector does it better” left the majority of Canadians less secure, our social services frayed, and our institutions undermined.

People are fed up, overworked, and feeling tricked. They are looking for solutions.

The recent action by CUPE-OSBCU education workers in Ontario, led by OSBCU President Laura Walton, forced the Ontario government to back down from an unconstitutional attack on collective bargaining. The union's action drew tens of thousands of people to the streets and galvanized labour solidarity.

We need to build on that energy.

Many other union efforts in Canada defend some of the most vulnerable workers, from catering staff to warehouse workers, from long-term care workers to hospitality workers. Labour laws are still unfavourable to workers who are organizing and bargaining in sectors where workers most need a union.

It's clear that labour won't make progress without a fight.

Tough, committed leadership is only part of the solution. A real plan to build worker power needs to be based on a strategy of organizing. Workers talking to workers, listening to their concerns, inviting them to join a movement to make change—within their union or by forming a union.

Social media can help, but face-to-face organizing is more powerful. Walton herself has told me that face-to-face organizing was the key to building membership support for their struggle.

Having a goal, a strategy to achieve it, and the organizing power of workers talking to other workers can move mountains.

Less encumbered by the hierarchies and routines that sometimes stymied labour action in the past, this new generation of leaders, connected by identity and experiences to the workforce of today, can win badly needed changes. Whether it's sectoral organizing and bargaining, card check certification, or ensuring that contract workers are classified as employees to gain their full rights, they can make progress.

Huge hopes rest on their shoulders. **M**

Peggy Nash is a former senior union negotiator, a former member of parliament, and is a senior advisor at Toronto Metropolitan University. Her book, *Women Winning Office: An activist's guide to getting elected*, is available at [Between the Lines](#).

A day in the life of migrant workers

Low-waged migrants come to Canada on employer-tied permits to plant, harvest, produce and package agri-food. The vast majority of these products—from fruits, to flowers, to lobsters, to wines—are for export. Many migrants face employer harassment and abuse; they live in inhumane housing without even basic hygiene or clean drinking water; they are forced to work with dangerous pesticides without training or PPE; they face injuries, family separation and wage theft.

But despite these challenges, migrants are organizing and speaking up.

Since 2017, Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (MWAC) has been building a membership-based organization of migrants focusing on different sectors: agriculture, fisheries, migrant careworkers, undocumented workers in health care and current and former international students. Today, MWAC has 113 advanced members in agriculture and fisheries who lead our work and 2,376 migrants who are organizing with us.

Here are three of them in their own words.

GABRIEL

From Mexico, works with broccoli

Describe your worst day

I have come for 19 seasons. One of my worst days in Canada, that year I was assigned to a farm that workers do not want to return to because of bad treatment.

It was a long rainy day in September. We worked from 6 a.m. until 10 p.m., woke up at 5 a.m. to prepare food for the day. We had to take turns cooking, then travelled 30 minutes to the farm.

The furrows were full of water. It was hard to work. I cut my finger with the knife cutting broccoli. The bleeding did not stop. The supervisor put electric tape on my hand and asked me to keep working. It came off. I asked him to take me to the house or the hospital but he ignored me.

At noon, a thunderstorm started. We asked the supervisor to let us stop working. It was dangerous to keep working with knives outdoors. We saw lightning strike. But he said he needed to finish the order. Supervisors compete with each other: whoever gets the most production gets a bonus; that's why they make us work quickly.

That afternoon I slipped and hurt my hip and couldn't continue crouching to cut. The supervisor said: "I am sorry paisano, we come to work." I had to endure the pain and keep working until 10 p.m.

Why did you join MWAC? Why do you fight?

I joined MWAC to unite with migrant workers, to know our rights. Many times, employers do not want us to know because it is inconvenient for them.

Migrants like me are far from our families, fighting for permanent residency. We do not want to depend on one employer that can send us back or does not request us because we grow older or we are not useful anymore. With permanent residency, we would have equal rights.

What is your message to Canadians?

To Canadians: I ask you to respect our rights. We are not machines or slaves, we are humans. We listen, feel, and your insults hurt us. Treat us as people. Sometimes employers don't care how we feel, they just care about their harvest and their products but forget who harvests and produces them. We contribute and do a lot for this country. We know we come to work, but we deserve dignified treatment.

JESS

From Jamaica,
worked with strawberries
and is now undocumented

Describe your worst day

Most of my days are the worst. Being on the farm work program, no health care, losing my housing and status—those are my worst days.

On the program, when I got injured and requested to go to the doctor, the supervisor shut me down and it made me think twice, like, what am I doing? Why am I here? This is not the place for me.

And I remembered why I am here: to try and make life better for me and my kids, my family. So that is the reason why I stayed here. It's painful to be away from my children. Sometimes when I think about it, I cry. I want to enjoy life with my family.

Why did you join MWAC? Why do you fight?

I'm fighting because I'm homeless, I need health care and a job. It's not so many barriers, it's just one barrier: permanent status. That's it. That's the one barrier. That's what's stopping us from living like a regular person in Canada.

I keep fighting because people are there with me. I was introduced to MWAC by a co-worker and by talking with organizers on the phone and telling them my situation. They offered to stand up and fight with me. So that's why I joined, to fight for me and others, because it's not just about me. Other people are in the same situation. We're fighting for millions of people. We're building a new Canada with love, dignity, and open arms.

What is your message to Canadians?

Treat us right, with respect and dignity. Give us the chance to be a human being. We need more people to stand with us. Join the fight with us, fight for our rights! Come on board, fight for status for all. We need your support, 100%.

STACY

From Jamaica, works in fisheries
in New Brunswick

Describe your worst day

When you are a migrant worker and a single mom, you realize that the Canadian dream is more like a Canadian nightmare. The discrimination, the exploitation, and the inflation makes our lives harder. Some of the challenges that I had to face is an unstable job, since you are attached to a single employer. It is impossible to be free and the government does not allow you to get a different job, so you have to be with the employer that gave you the Labour Market Impact Assessment even though you are not getting enough hours. Having access to only minimum wage jobs makes our life miserable. Sometimes you have to choose between feeding your family back home and putting gas in your car here. This is the migrant worker's reality. We have to support two economies—the Canadian economy as well as our country's economy.

Why did you join MWAC? Why do you fight?

I want to tell all workers to join MWAC and tell them to come and join Status For All so we can work together, so we can win. We all need a better life, better education and we also need permanent residency for us and our families.

Permanent residency would make a big difference for me because I would get a better paying job and I would be able to reunite with my family.

What is your message to Canadians?

Everyone needs permanent residency. There are a lot of migrant workers here facing the same situation, who need to become permanent residents in Canada to access all the services that are being denied, so it is important for all of us to fight until we win.



SYED HUSSAN

A chance to win permanent resident status for migrants

DUE TO A years-long campaign led by migrants and supporters, there is an historic opportunity to win permanent resident status for migrants, including half a million undocumented people and their families. If successful, it would be one of the most significant expansions of rights for working people in recent memory.

At the same time, there is a small but loud current among labour economists that argue that increased immigration will cause downward pressure on wages in Canada. Some have argued that Canada's target of 500,000 permanent residents by

2025 is simply a response to employer demands for cheap workers. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The first thing to understand is that, today, around half of the so-called "new" immigrants are transitioning from temporary resident status to permanent resident status. They are already living and working in Canada, as refugee claimants, as temporary foreign workers, and as graduated students, but with fewer rights.

Increasing temporary migrants' access to permanent resident status increases migrants' ability to protect themselves and reduces the

boss' ability to enact reprisals—and therefore increases the bargaining power of all workers. More permanent immigration means more workers with the power to actually walk away from bad jobs; and to negotiate for higher wages, not the other way around.

This is why the migrant justice movement has always called for permanent resident status for all. Unions and labour economists need to support the transition of temporary workers to permanent residency, because it increases labour mobility.

Part of the reason that some correlate migration and wages is

because, on the face of it, it appears to make sense. The story goes that Canada is facing very low rates of unemployment and there are more jobs than there are workers. In a fantasy of a free market, where costs are governed exclusively by the neutral forces of supply and demand, it would seem reasonable that when the supply of labour is low and demand is high, workers have greater negotiating power and should be able to increase their wages. Inversely, it makes sense that employers would organize for more workers (in the form of immigrants or migrants) to increase the supply of labour and keep wages low.

Such an analysis misses the central issue—power. Corporate profits are at historic highs right now, in part by keeping wages low despite low unemployment. Governments are freezing public sector wages. Increases in permanent immigration have nothing to do with it. Wages and working conditions improve when workers fight and win, not because of free market adjustments. The recent education worker strike in Ontario and by Molson Brewery workers in Quebec are just two of many examples.

Some on the Left argue for a closure of the temporary foreign workers program (TFWP)—not overall immigration—insisting that employers use these workers to artificially lower wages and worsen working conditions. Temporary foreign workers are on employer-restricted work permits—which tie their ability to stay in Canada to their work for a specific employer. This gives employers unchecked powers to exploit and abuse, using the threat of deportation to keep workers in bad jobs. While the impulse to oppose migrant worker exploitation is good, the “solutions” being shopped around are misguided; and connecting TFWP to overall wage decisions doesn’t hold water.

In 2022, Canada saw a modest increase of 38,320 TFWP workers compared to three years earlier (pre-COVID-19), a 39 per cent growth. The growth is largely in agriculture and fisheries. As a percentage of Canada’s overall labour force of 20 million people, the increase in temporary foreign workers is about 0.2 per cent of the whole, and the industries where TFW presence is growing the fastest are ones in which there are few citizens or permanent resident workers. The presence of more temporary foreign workers, on such a small scale relative to the labour force, is not impacting employers’ wage decisions across the economy.

Shutting down the temporary foreign workers program will remove the only route for some of the lowest-wage workers from around the world to be able to come work in Canada and support their families. Migrant movements have always called for those workers to arrive with permanent resident status—which would require a restructuring of the current permanent streams, not a shutting down of the TFW program.

More permanent immigration means more workers with the power to actually walk away from bad jobs; and to negotiate for higher wages.

Another oft-repeated myth, even in progressive economist and labour circles, is that the housing market and services can’t keep up with increased immigration or refugees. That’s Quebec’s Premier François Legault’s message, who said that “we’ve exceeded our capacity to welcome. We have problems with housing, places in schools, staff in hospitals.” The fact that progressives and right-wing xenophobic premiers are singing from the same hymnbook should give us pause.

Premier Legault has no desire to decrease the number of new arrivals. In fact, under his tenure, Quebec has had one of the highest increases in the number of people on work permits anywhere in Canada. These people require the same amount of housing and access to health care. The difference is that without permanent resident status, migrants may have to pay for health care and they can be exploited by bad bosses. Calls to oppose permanent immigration or refugees just results in an increase in the number of migrants with temporary status and fewer rights.

The employer narrative of a “labour shortage” is certainly a scam. What we face is a crisis of bad jobs and low wages. And many of the workers in these bad, low-wage jobs are migrants and immigrants. Our response must not be to fall into the age-old divisiveness and xenophobia that raises its head each time inflation and recessions emerge.

This is especially true right now, when regularization and expansion of permanent resident status (and therefore equal rights and labour mobility) is within reach and was promised by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in his December 2021 mandate letter. Many unions have already spoken up in support of permanent resident status for all.

Now is the time for unions, progressives, and working-class social movements to push the federal government to deliver on their promises for increased permanent immigration as a way to increase the power of all workers. **M**

Syed Hussan is the executive director of Migrant Workers Alliance for Change.

WE CAN DO IT

New leadership in Canada's labour movement



LILY CHANG

Secretary-treasurer,
Canadian Labour Congress

“Leadership is a privilege—a privilege to be in a position to serve and speak for others. As a union leader, I must understand the needs, concerns and wishes of my members in order to champion them forward. My style of leadership is about being accessible, building relationships and trust, and doing that with engagement and communication. As a leader, I will be open to diverse opinions, work to build consensus and progress forward with my members and affiliates beside me, not behind me.”

SIOBHÁN VIPOND

Executive vice-president,
Canadian Labour Congress

“Union leadership is about the movement. It’s about making space and taking space. It’s really important to ensure our issues and our people are everywhere that decisions are being made. Simply, being where workers are at and showing up day in and day out. Showing up for workers and showing up for the issues. We have a diverse movement with diverse needs and that lens that needs to be present in all our work.”

BEA BRUSKE

President, Canadian Labour Congress

“Leadership, to me, means that we make sure we bring everyone to the table, so that we’re not just taking up the space as leaders ourselves, but we’re making space for a variety of different voices to be heard, and making sure that we have voices from diverse backgrounds that are being heard. I want to know from the person who’s going to work every day—what is your biggest challenge? Too often, we think that we have the answers and we try to give them the answers, to say ‘this is what you need.’ But that doesn’t bring the member along and that doesn’t engage the member in political action either—which is critical to achieving what we want to achieve.”

JAN SIMPSON

President, Canadian Union of Postal Workers

“I lead differently, working towards a more inclusive and diverse decision-making process which will impact not just our workplaces but wider society. Canadians shouldn’t have to work without benefits—like sick leave, maternity leave and holiday pay, and pay equity. Equal pay for work of equal value should be the standard. Canadians should be able to work in just, safe and sustainable workplaces for a livable wage. We’re striving to harness our collective strength for the economic, political, and social justice for everyone. I plan to do things differently by putting an equity lens on the work that we do. This means including voices from all equity groups and levels of the union in the decision-making process, respecting people’s differences, and ensuring the voices of the grassroots are at the heart of our union. Work we do has to ensure a decolonized framework.”



SUSSANNE SKIDMORE

President B.C. Federation of Labour

“To me, union leadership in 2023, especially in B.C., is about making the most of a remarkable moment. We have a provincial government that listens to working people. Our labour movement is united and strong. And working people are more aware than ever of the value of our labour and the power of organizing. It’s about solidarity across lines of race, sexual orientation, Indigeneity, gender identity, ability and more. It’s about reaching well outside of the organized workforce and our traditional base. Leaning into that inclusive idea of solidarity, understanding how it requires leaders to listen, seeing where it requires our movement to change.”

LANA PAYNE

President, Unifor

“Workers today need unions to present a clear alternative to the current economic state of things, even if it clashes with dominant views and established political narratives. Union leadership has to build trust with its membership by listening to them, creating equitable spaces within the union for them to organize, and amplifying the voices of workers across all sectors to build a vision for a future in Canada that relies on good jobs, economic and social justice for everyone. There are no short-cuts to building worker power, and it requires a dedicated, consistent work.”



JESSICA MCCORMICK

President, Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour

“Trade unionism is the bedrock of my values system. It’s intricately woven into my entire life experience and how I see the world. From my grandfather’s activism in his union, the United Mine Workers of America, to my own journey as a student activist and union activist—collective action and solidarity have shaped who I am. To me, union leadership means lifting up others. I want to bring a new, feminist, intersectional approach to union leadership. As a young woman and a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, I know that in order to grow our movement, more workers need to see themselves reflected in the leadership of our unions. So many of the power structures within our society, including within the labour movement, are rooted in racist, patriarchal and heteronormative systems that often exclude and silence people, especially equity-deserving groups. Valuing organizing, activism and making space in our movements will help us transform into a more intersectional, inclusive, powerful movement for workers’ rights.”

HADRIAN MERTINS-KIRKWOOD

The 10 commandments of sustainable jobs

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT has released its Sustainable Jobs Plan, presenting its 10-part action plan for advancing a sustainable jobs agenda. Let's briefly tackle each of these action items.

1. Establish a Sustainable Jobs Secretariat. Using money from the fall economic statement, the Sustainable Jobs Plan creates a secretariat to better link workers, employers and training institutions, as well as to take charge of the development of future sustainable jobs plans. It's a crucial first step toward an all-of-government approach to transition, and it's the closest we get to something like a Just Transition Commission or a Ministry of Just Transition (but a far cry from it). The composition and mandate of the secretariat will largely determine its effectiveness.

2. Create a Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council. Modeled on the Net-Zero Advisory Body, which provides advice on climate policy to the environment minister, the new Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council will perform a similar advisory function for the ministers overseeing sustainable jobs policy. This council will formalize and facilitate a social dialogue between the public sector, the private sector and the labour movement in a meaningful and ongoing way. Like the Sustainable Jobs Secretariat, it will be a vital component of the transition governance structure. But, once again, the details will matter.

3. Develop economic strategies through the Regional Energy and Resource Tables. Green industrial policy is the *key missing piece* in

Canadian climate policy. Canada simply needs more investment—like, *\$60 billion per year* more investment—to achieve its net-zero aspirations. The federal government created these regional tables last year as an attempt to bridge that gap, but getting provincial governments and industry to the table has been challenging. It's the right idea, but what's the federal government's plan if the provinces and the private sector don't buy into the decarbonization agenda? At some point, the federal government needs to be prepared to step up with more public money or more heavy-handed policy to mobilize private capital.

4. Introduce a sustainable jobs stream under the Union Training and Innovation Program. The Union Training and Innovation Program was set up in 2017 to provide resources to union-led skilled trades training programs. In general, union-based training is an untapped resource for accelerating a just transition, though, so far, the programs funded through the program have mostly not been *green initiatives*. The new sustainable jobs stream might change that, but with new funding merely in the tens of millions of dollars it won't be enough to massively expand the trades.

5. Advance funding for skills development towards sustainable jobs. There is significantly more money in this bucket—more than \$800 million over three years, all of it previously announced—mainly to support young people pursuing in-demand green careers. It's smart policy and the package even includes direct job creation through 70,000 annual summer placements.

It falls well short of the Youth Climate Corps *championed* by the Climate Emergency Unit, which would include two-year apprenticeships and in-depth training.

6. Promote Indigenous-led solutions and a National Benefits-Sharing Framework. Indigenous-owned climate projects are win-win-win solutions in terms of reconciliation, decarbonization and economic development. "Indigenous-led" leaves more room for interpretation. What's important is that Indigenous communities engage with the energy transition on their own terms and with the federal support that they are due. The Sustainable Jobs Plan commits to the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) for the National Benefits-Sharing Framework, which is a good start, though we won't get more details until 2024.

7. Improve labour market data collection, tracking and analysis. Better data makes for better policy, so the proposal to better define and track "sustainable jobs" and all of their offshoots is welcome. The Sustainable Jobs Plan will put that data into the hands of the Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council, discussed above, to help those advisors make stronger recommendations.

8. Motivate investors and draw in industry leadership to support workers. The Sustainable Jobs Plan notes that "private sector capital and expertise will be needed" to create jobs in a net-zero emission economy. That's true. But the government's preferred approach—to offer incentives to investors to solve social problems out of the goodness of shareholders'

hearts—has come up short *time and again*. Maybe the Net-Zero Accelerator and yet-to-be-revealed Futures Fund will be different, but there's reason to be skeptical of the government's carrots-only approach, especially given the scale and urgency of the climate crisis.

9. Collaborate and lead on the global stage. There's nothing new in this section, and it generally emphasizes the things Canada is teaching the world rather than the things the rest of the world can teach us. Places like Denmark, Costa Rica, New Zealand and Scotland are much further ahead in their reckonings with fossil fuels and we would do well to pay attention.

10. Establish legislation that ensures ongoing engagement and accountability. The exclamation mark on the Sustainable Jobs Plan is the don't-call-it-just-transition legislation we've been waiting for since 2019. The scope of the legislation, as outlined in the Sustainable Jobs Plan, is rather modest: it merely creates the institutions that will carry forward the sustainable jobs agenda rather than implement any major policies directly. On its own, that would be disappointing, but in the context of the preceding nine points, it's not an unreasonable approach. Still, there's room for greater ambition here and we'll be making that case moving forward.

How does the Sustainable Jobs Plan stack up to the CCPA's benchmark?

In 2021, the CCPA published *Roadmap to a Canadian Just Transition Act*, which laid out five guiding principles for an ambitious and effective just transition agenda in Canada. Those points serve as a useful benchmark for the Sustainable Jobs Plan.

1. Recognition of rights. On rights, the Sustainable Jobs Plan checks most of the boxes. Workers' rights and "decent, well-paying, high-quality jobs" are front and centre. The integration of the International Labour Organization's definition of a just transition is an important win for the labour movement. Indigenous rights are prominent throughout. The plan should pay greater attention to gender rights, migrant rights and to other marginalized groups who are disproportionately vulnerable to climate impacts and transition challenges.

2. Participation of affected workers and communities. The Sustainable Jobs Plan is very promising on this front. The new Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council will entrench the social dialogue process that started with the Just Transition Task Force several years ago. Despite their limitations, the regional tables are another avenue for workers and communities to shape their own future. Whether workers and communities are actually listened to through these processes remains to be seen. The greatest risk moving forward is perfunctory consultation that doesn't address stakeholders' real issues.

3. Expansion of the social safety net. We see little in the Sustainable Jobs Plan related to an expansion

of the social safety net. Few of the policy supports traditionally associated with a just transition, such as income top-ups, workplace transition plans, job transfers or pension bridging, are specifically included in the plan. Worker retraining is a priority, though mainly as a byproduct of the general emphasis on training. The plan asserts that Canada already has a "strong income-support system, including employment insurance," such that targeted supports are unnecessary, but that will come as little consolation to workers who are in volatile industries or vulnerable regions.

4. Creation of new economic opportunities. When it comes to job-creating investments in economic diversification, the Sustainable Jobs Plan reaches, but comes up short. By the government's *own admission*, there is a massive investment gap that needs to be filled for Canada to pull off the net-zero transition and create good jobs along the way. As discussed above, the federal government's preference for incentivizing the private sector rather than regulating the market and/or spending public money puts the entire transition at risk. There is nothing in this plan that resembles our proposed Economic Diversification Crown Corporation or the *Just Transition Transfer* touted by the Climate Emergency Unit.

5. Inclusive workforce development. The Sustainable Jobs Plan gets the broad strokes right here. The plan correctly identifies that national job shortages are a bigger long-term challenge than regional job losses in this transition and, consequently, that every part of the country is in need of workforce development. The plan also recognizes that we must do a better job of integrating historically marginalized and equity-seeking groups into the clean economy—not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because we will need to draw from a bigger pool of potential workers to meet the coming labour demands. The plan's commitment to a "proactively inclusive approach" is exactly what the CCPA has called for. In fact, the Sustainable Jobs Plan cites CCPA research on this issue. But the plan offers few details about how this will be achieved. It is imperative that the lower-carbon economy of the future be more equitable than the economy of today. That will take a more concerted policy effort.

In sum, the Sustainable Jobs Plan is a solid framework for advancing a workforce development agenda in the context of Canada's burgeoning green economy. The plan creates the right kinds of institutions and identifies the right priorities for future policies. The biggest sticking points are (1) the weak commitment to transformative climate action and (2) the lack of public money to fund the transition at scale. These are no small criticisms. **M**

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood is a senior researcher with the CCPA National Office.

JON MILTON

Inflation-busting with union contracts —a brief explainer

Your union contract could be the most powerful tool you have against the rising cost of living

IF YOU ASK the Bank of Canada, they would tell you that one of the main drivers of inflation is workers' wages. Tiff Macklem, governor of the Bank of Canada, has been frank about it, saying that "we need to rebalance the labour market."

What does that mean? For Macklem, the answer is clear. "The unemployment rate in June [2022] hit a record low—and while that seems like a good thing, it is not sustainable," he said in the same remarks. The "rebalancing" of "supply and demand" in the labour market means triggering unemployment and bringing down wages.

That's certainly one vision for how to fight inflation—with misery for working people.

As the CCPA has covered extensively, working people's wages didn't cause inflation—corporate profits are its main driver. Bringing down workers' wages, which have already been lagging behind inflation, is asking for workers to pay the increased cost of living twice.

There is, in fact, a better way to combat the rising cost of living—by paying workers more. While most workers' pay is still lagging behind inflation, some workers have been winning inflation-busting wage increases in their union contracts. If your wages are rising along with the cost of living, it certainly hurts a lot less.

Unifor members at Resolute Pulp & Paper signed a pattern-setting agreement in May 2022, which will be the basic framework for much of the rest of the forestry sector. Those

union members won a 20–24 per cent pay increase, on average.

For Unifor members at WestJet, some workers at the bottom of the pay scale will be seeing 40 per cent pay increases over the life of their next contract.

Workers at the Molson brewery—members of the Teamsters—near Montreal won pay increases of between 40 and 50 per cent for the lowest-paid workers following a months-long strike.

Teamster school bus drivers at GD Paquette in Quebec just won a "spectacular" immediate wage increase of 33 per cent, followed by a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for every year of the rest of the contract, making sure that their wage increases are never lower than the rate of inflation.

In simple terms, a COLA increase means that every year at some designated time—let's say January 1—wage increases automatically occur at the most recent rate of year-over-year inflation. If the rate of inflation from January 2022 to January 2023 was 5.9 per cent, and COLA raises occur automatically in January, then everyone gets a 5.9 per cent raise starting on January 1.

The language of COLA increases is fairly straightforward. It should be tied to a specific measure of inflation (most often, the Consumer Price Index), triggered at a specific date, and applied universally within a bargaining unit, as best practice.

Of course, while the contract language is straightforward, actually winning that language is not. Employers often fight tooth

and nail to prevent workers from winning any type of wage increase—never mind one that is more unpredictable because it is tied to an external measure. The fight for inflation-busting wages isn't just a policy argument, it's an organizing one.

In Belgium—home of one of the world's strongest labour movements—over a million workers across many different industries saw their wages jump by nearly 12 per cent due to automatic COLA increases, guaranteed by the law. Those workers didn't get that raise because of some immutable charity in Belgian culture, but because they fought for it.

A lot of mainstream economists talk about the cost of living as if it were the weather—some naturally occurring phenomenon that we don't really have much control over and simply need to be subjected to. But workers do have the power to offset the most harmful effects of increased inflation. Like so many other things, the most powerful way for workers to make change is through their union contract. **M**

Jon Milton is a senior communications specialist with the CCPA National Office.

TOM SLEE AND THORBEN WIEDITZ

Gig work tensions are not going away soon

Uber workers are still getting the short end of the stick

IN APRIL 2022, Ontario passed the *Working for Workers Act 2022*, including the *Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act*, putting into place a right to minimum wage for Uber drivers and other gig workers.

This year, the Ontario government will publish regulations to fill out the meaning of the act and the B.C. government is holding its own consultations around gig work.

It may look like the end of a 10-year era in which Uber effectively wrote its own rules, but enshrining gig work into law as conceived does nothing to address the central problems that gig workers face and will not bring peace to this contentious and still-growing sector of the economy.

Gig work is piece-rate payment for tasks, coupled with free entry and exit, managed by a platform that assigns work and takes a commission on each task.

Uber drivers are paid for each trip and can sign in and out of the app at any time that suits them. Uber and others have used this model to wash their hands of the costs that gig work entails, including both the cost of car ownership and the time that drivers spend “on-call” waiting to be assigned a trip.

Some studies, especially those paid for by Uber, argue that since many Uber drivers are part-time or casual, the basic cost of car ownership should not be thought of as work expenses and some or all of the time spent “deadheading” without a passenger should not qualify as working hours.

But Uber drivers are diverse and minimum wage applies only to the lowest paid driver, not to the average driver. Our recent report, *High Emissions and Low Pay*:

Uber is still taking regulators for a ride, showed that full-time drivers provide more than one in three trips on the platform. For these drivers, at least, the car is a cost of work and on-call time is a necessary requirement for working for their employer.

Full-time Uber drivers in Toronto are a long way from earning minimum wage. Based on data from the City of Toronto, Uber's own financial reports and pricing data, and Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) data for the cost of car ownership, we showed that they are earning less than \$8 per hour—a number that matches a figure of US\$6.20 per hour for drivers in California.

Ontario's *Working for Workers Act* will not improve the pay of full-time Uber drivers. The act says that “minimum wage shall be paid for each work assignment performed by a worker” and the regulations will almost certainly interpret this to mean “minimum wage calculated while driving a passenger or *en route* to picking one up.”

So long as “free entry and exit” remains the norm for gig work, any increase in “pay while driving a passenger” will attract more drivers onto the roads. When there are more drivers, each individual driver spends less time with passengers and more unpaid time deadheading while on call. The increase in unpaid on-call time eats away all the benefits of extra pay during a trip.

We have built a computer simulation model of Uber traffic (a web version is available at <https://tomslee.github.io/ridehail/lab/>), which highlights how Ontario's changes will benefit Uber's bottom line, rather than that of gig workers.

According to the most recent data, from February 2020, Toronto drivers spent only 48 per cent of their time with passengers in the vehicle. Even if the demand for Uber trips increases, the model shows that this number will not grow beyond 60 per cent because the platform simply adds more drivers.

The model also illustrates that to shorten customer wait time by one minute, Uber must add an extra 1,500 drivers (out of an average of 6,000 in February 2020) to the roads, with all the congestion and pollution that entails.

In short, it is in Uber's business interests to keep as many drivers on the road as possible without compensation for on-call time. Any realistic attempt to improve driver pay must involve, in one way or another, a limit on the number of vehicles operating on the platform.

Ontario's *Working for Workers Act* and its *Digital Platform Rights Act* fail to address this crucial aspect of gig work. Unless upcoming regulations fill the gap, the new laws will leave full-time gig workers in this increasingly costly province to toil below minimum wage. **M**

Tom Slee is an independent researcher who works in the software industry and is the author of *What's Yours is Mine: Against the Sharing Economy*. Thorben Wieditz is an urban geographer and campaigner who works at the intersection of labour, community and big tech, and is one of the organizers of the Ridefair Coalition.

MAXIM BARU

Non-union workers in Canada deserve the right to collective action too

The United States has explicit protections for collective action in the workplace. Canada doesn't—but some creative legal challenges could bring it about.

TEN YEARS AGO, David Doorey, associate professor of Work Law at York University, concluded an article on unionism in retail by observing that “since the Collective Bargaining model we use in Canada was never designed to facilitate Collective Bargaining in the private sector, we should not expect Collective Bargaining to ever flourish in that sector.”

Nowhere has Doorey’s prediction that “different models are needed” been more quantitatively established than in Statistic Canada’s latest demonstration of a steadfast decline in private sector union density.

That decline has led unions, workers, and legal experts like Doorey to question what a different model might look like. One under-discussed option would be for legislators to introduce an analogue to the United States National Labor Relation Act’s (NLRA) seventh section which, in plain language, protects collective employee activism at work—including collective action from non-unionized workers. There is no equivalent protection for non-union workers in any jurisdiction of Canada’s labour legislation.

But while labour relations experts build the case for legislative reform, workers and unions can do more than sit idly by and wait. By creatively pressing sections of the labour code designed to prevent employers from retaliating against

workers in the course of unionizing, workers and unions can provoke a re-evaluation of the status of concerted activity.

Why does concerted activity matter?

In the absence of a collective agreement

Single-employer enterprises drew strength from the labour relations scheme in the 1940s, but not so for today’s service sector unions.

As Doorey illustrates, the Canadian labour relations model, which forces unions to follow a formal certification procedure and adhere to one of the world’s most regulated collective bargaining processes, has led to a market in which employers are able to prevent most efforts at improving conditions through a trade union.

Section 7 of the American NLRA provides an alternative, allowing workers to circumvent the long, drawn-out process of certifying a union through an election and negotiating a collective bargaining agreement. Section 7 entitles any two or more workers to take action together to improve their working conditions—even without union certification and without a collective bargaining agreement.

If having to pass numerous bureaucratic hurdles to get “permission to bargain” produces ineffective unions, then directly engaging in the concerted activity

protected by Section 7, such as the right to strike, is part of the answer.

During the life of a contract

Even when workers succeed in jumping through the hoops to certify a union and conclude a collective agreement, the Canadian model offers one of the most highly circumscribed rights to strike in the Global North. The Canadian model prohibits unionized workers from exercising nearly any means to pressure their employers for the duration of a collective agreement. It is only during the period in between contracts that workers are legally allowed to take collective action.

If the right to strike enabled through our model of collective bargaining isn’t worth the effort it takes to get it, then the model will continue to wither—along with the working and living conditions of the working majority.

Legislative fixes to the Canadian labour relations system should, then, include protections on the right to collective action during the course of a collective agreement. This would include matching the United States in legalizing strikes motivated by, for example, an employer’s unfair labour practices, even if they take place during the period where a collective agreement is in effect.

As a factor of labour relations

As a consequence of the Canadian system, many unions fail to

adequately emphasize the kind of issues-centered concerted activity that builds and exercises the solidarity muscle among the base. This leaves a huge gap in membership preparedness when confronted with the realities of hard bargaining.

What we can see from south of the border is that when workers deliberately engage in a planned and persistent application of concerted activity in the process of forming a union, they have higher and more durable degrees of participation and support among members. Concerted activity in the union formation phase leads to these benefits by creating more frequent occasions for members to increase their sense of solidarity.

Jury-rigging Section 7 in Canada

Workers and unions may not have access to any formal Section 7 equivalent in Canada, but that doesn't mean the only option is to sit around and wait for legislative change or lobby for it. The rough and dirty way to jury-rig a Canadian equivalent of Section 7—one that would inevitably be different in important ways, but accomplish similar goals—is to creatively press the sections of the labour code designed to prevent employers from messing with people in the course of establishing trade unions and participating in their activities.

For instance, have a look at Quebec's labour code, sections 12–15. They include expressions such as the following (emphasis mine):

- No employer, or person acting for an employer or an association of employers, shall in any manner seek to dominate, hinder...the formation or the activities of any association of employees...
- No person shall use intimidation or threats to induce anyone to...refrain from becoming or cease to be a member of an association of employees or an employers' association.
- No employer nor any person acting for an employer or an employers' association may refuse to employ any person because that person exercises a right arising from this Code, or endeavour by intimidation, discrimination or reprisals, threat of dismissal or other threat, or by the imposition of a sanction or by any other means, to compel an employee to refrain from or to cease exercising a right arising from this Code.
- This section shall not have the effect of preventing an employer from suspending, dismissing or transferring an employee for a good and sufficient reason, proof whereof shall devolve upon the said employer.

This is broad, sweeping language that restricts employer action against people forming and participating in trade union activities. The burden of proof is on the employer to show sufficient evidence that an action against an employee was not retribution for actions

taken in the course of forming a trade union and participating in its activities.

By pushing those sections of the labour code to their broadest interpretations and creating legal precedents at labour boards, workers and unions could create a de facto protection for the right to collective action.

The question, which the legislation does not totally answer, is what constitutes protected activities in the course of forming an association. Say that workers who are in the process of forming a union but are not-yet certified make a deliberate and planned visit to the employer's office by workers off the shop floor to deliver a union message or a set of demands. This type of action is called a "march on the boss," and it's a tactic that workers engage in regularly. In the U.S., such an action would theoretically be protected by Section 7. If an employer retaliates against workers in the process of forming a union for such an action, would the labour board intervene on their behalf?

Unionization efforts at several Quebec enterprises, including Red Bee Media, and Keywords Studios, have shown that the labour board can be incited to step in when workers face retaliation for concerted activity in the union formation phase, up to and including ordering fired workers to be reinstated.

A recent ruling by the Quebec labour board signalled the door is open for this approach. At Zeppelin Bar and Grill, workers presented their boss with a list of demands to be met within 48 hours before walking off the job, but not before announcing they had chosen to unionize.

After the employer missed the deadline, the union—as yet uncertified—created a picket line. The employer responded by firing the workers, whereupon the union filed a complaint alleging a violation for sections 12–15 of the Quebec Labour Code.

In this case, the labour board ordered the employer to rescind the terminations and compensate the workers for lost wages.

Here is the sequence of steps:

- (1) Workers participate in some concerted activity
- (2) Employer takes an anti-worker action
- (3) File complaint about contravention of articles 12–15
- (4) Utilize aid of Board Agent to negotiate significant financial settlements or re-instatement causing
- (5) A discouraging effect on target employer, and signalling effect on other employers.

Utilizing the labour code in this manner will not yield results as far reaching as an overhaul of the overall framework, but the results are roughly equivalent—and in many cases more expedient—than those reached by workers using the American National Labor Relation Board.

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Inside Trade

STUART TREW

How Canada can stop a \$20 billion NAFTA lawsuit in its tracks

Here we go again. Months shy of a July 1 expiry date on NAFTA's investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) process, a U.S. fossil fuel company has launched a monster \$20-billion trade lawsuit against Canada. The firm claims it was wrongfully denied a permit to build a LNG facility in Saguenay, Quebec based on politically motivated provincial and federal environmental assessments.

Canada has lost outrageous cases like this in the past—fuelling domestic and international backlash to ISDS in trade and investment treaties. But in this case we may have an interesting way out. Canada might be able to cut the LNG lawsuit short by simply agreeing with a novel proposal from the U.S. in its defence against TC Energy's equally outrageous \$15-billion NAFTA suit against the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline.

To recap, ISDS is a ubiquitous feature of trade and investment treaties that lets investors—and only investors—settle disputes with governments before a private tribunal rather than in the courts like anyone else. Fossil fuel and mining companies launch a lot of ISDS cases, often to demand compensation for perfectly reasonable environmental measures.

In its NAFTA case, TC Energy says the Keystone XL cancellation was politically motivated and discriminatory, violating its treaty rights to national treatment and most-favoured-nation treatment, since other U.S. pipelines continue to operate or get approval. The Canadian company claims it was denied fair and equitable treatment, and that the cancellation's effect on profits was “tantamount to expropriation.”

The idea that fossil fuel companies should have compensable rights to generate revenue from actions that are killing the planet is, on its face, ludicrous. Europeans were shocked last year when an ISDS tribunal set up under the Energy Charter Treaty awarded British firm Rockhopper more than €250 million (\$360 million CAD) for the impact of Italy's offshore drilling ban on

projected profits. Half a dozen EU member states have since pulled out of the treaty on environmental grounds.

Though Canada and the U.S. removed ISDS from the renegotiated Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA), “legacy” investments made by U.S. companies in Canada and vice versa prior to July 2020 are supposed to be covered by NAFTA's investment chapter up to July 2023. In an interesting twist, the U.S. is now saying the “legacy” period was never intended to allow investor challenges to government actions taken *after* July 2020, when NAFTA ceased to exist.

This is not how most trade lawyers understand the situation. For the past year, law firms that offer counsel in ISDS cases have been encouraging companies to file last-minute NAFTA lawsuits against government measures introduced since July 2020. The new \$20-billion LNG case against Canada could be a result of this legal salesmanship.

Still, the U.S. interpretation is at least plausible and offers Canada and Mexico a way to neutralize the cost of defending a possible surge of new ISDS cases this spring.

TC Energy lashed out at the U.S. reading of CUSMA's “legacy” clause, saying the Biden administration is trying to “game the system” with a “*post hoc* rationalization” that isn't consistent with the ordinary meaning of the treaty text. If what the U.S. says is true, the company asks, why is there no corroborating public record in Canada or Mexico?

Canada could provide that proof now by intervening in the TC Energy case in support of the U.S. position. The tribunal is under no obligation to take such a letter seriously, but it might. And if it does, Canada's \$20-billion LNG case could be tossed as well.

Governments have a right and duty to take evasive actions to rapidly lower greenhouse gas emissions. It won't always be pretty but that's democratic politics for you. If Canada can support our positive public right to regulate, as we see fit, against the untenable, treaty-backed corporate right to profit from fossil fuel infrastructure, we should. **M**

Stuart Trew is the director of the CCPA's Trade and Investment Research Project. To sign up for his monthly TIRP bulletin, email stuart@policyalternatives.ca.

ASAD ISMI

Pakistan: An economy on the brink

FOLLOWING THE ECONOMIC collapse of Sri Lanka in mid-2022, Pakistan is close to sliding into the same disaster.

There is US\$3 billion remaining in the country's foreign currency reserves that can pay for only two weeks of imports.

Inflation is near 40 per cent.

The value of the national currency—the rupee—is in free fall.

Pakistan's debt is near default and has increased by 38 per cent in one year.

The average person cannot afford to buy bread or onions and the country is running out of fuel, cooking gas and wheat.

Factories are shutting down due to lack of spare parts, including those making life-saving medicines.

According to the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP), "5.1 million people in Pakistan are likely to be a step away from famine-levels of hunger by the end of March—an increase of 1.1 million people from the previous quarter." Chris Kaye, the Pakistan country director for the WFP warns: "that number is frightening."

Pakistan's negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a US\$1.1 billion loan proved unsuccessful in February. Since 1950, Pakistan has got 23 bailouts from the IMF. However, on February 17, Khwaja Asif, Pakistan's defence minister, stated that the country "has already defaulted and is bankrupt" and that "the IMF does not have the solution to Pakistan's problems."

Tariq Amin-Khan tells me that a mixture of military and feudal domination, combined with many years of crony capitalism, is to blame for Pakistan's economic debacle. He is an associate professor of politics and public administration

at Toronto Metropolitan University and is a Pakistani-Canadian.

Pakistan's powerful military has, directly or indirectly, ruled the country for almost all of its 76-year history. Currently, the army orchestrates a farcical political system, rigging elections to put its favoured political parties in power. The military has not let any civilian leader complete her or his term in office.

The military also dominates the country's economy (along with feudal landlords) by, as Khan puts it, "monopolizing" entire sectors and running a multi-billion dollar business empire that "contributes to the economic crisis by throttling competition and innovation."

Pakistan's largest business conglomerates, the Fauji Foundation and the Army Welfare Trust, are both military outfits.

Pakistan was carved out of India in 1947 by the British Empire as part of its divide-and-rule policy, which was meant to weaken sovereign states.

When I asked Khan to give examples of the economic sectors that the military monopolizes in Pakistan, he answered: "Almost any sector can be such an example, especially real estate, which is a huge one. Large Pakistani cities contain 'defence societies' where the most expensive land is owned by the army.

"The army even makes and sells foodstuffs, including cereal. They have a lock on corn flakes!

"Pakistan's economy is on life support while the military's web of industrial interests—banks, insurance companies, airline, housing and land development—seem to be thriving. These three factors: military capitalism, the feudal stranglehold on the rural economy and crony capitalism, in which a handful of business owners are favoured by politicians and bureaucrats, amount to a colossal mismanagement of the Pakistan economy which has brought on this economic crisis."

Land is still the main source of wealth in Pakistan and 63 per cent of the population lives in villages, according to Khan. Land is highly concentrated in Pakistan and this concentration is increasing, says Khan.

Two per cent of households own 30 per cent of total landholdings, which results in massive poverty and inhibits economic development.

"Feudal landlords have been blocking industrialization and other economic initiatives for 75 years in Pakistan," emphasizes Khan.

Pakistan's poverty rate stands at an astounding 78.3 per cent, according to the World Bank.

The third factor responsible for Pakistan's economic crisis is crony business capitalism, explains Khan. These business groups are the "weakest" part of the elite triad

(relative to the military and feudal landlords), says Khan, and became prominent after the corrupt privatization processes of the 1980s and '90s (and continuing today), when bureaucrats and politicians sold lucrative public enterprises to favoured business groups at fire sale prices for kickbacks.

So why is it that Pakistan keeps getting IMF bailouts? Because Pakistan, and especially its army, were created by Western imperialism.

The IMF and the World Bank are U.S.-dominated and Pakistan's military is not an independent actor; its domestic primacy has been ensured by the fact that it has served Western imperial aims, first British then American, for seven decades.

As Pakistan's founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, remarked: "If great countries such as Britain and the United States want Pakistan to exist then how can it not?"

Pakistan was carved out of India in 1947 by the British Empire as part of its divide-and-rule policy, which was meant to weaken sovereign states. The United States took over from Britain in 1948, giving \$400 million to set up the Pakistan army, which it wanted to use against India and the Soviet Union.

Under the Congress Party's rule, India was a close ally of the Soviet Union from 1947 to 1990. With the \$400 million from the U.S., "a security state that looked to the West for survival was born," as Pakistani economist Yousuf Nazar put it on February 5, 2023.

So the World Bank and IMF loans flowed to Pakistan despite the fact that it was, and remains, an economic basket case. As long as the Pakistan army served U.S. strategic aims, its looting of Pakistan and the consequent poverty of most Pakistanis did not matter to Washington.

First the Pakistan army got lots of American aid money due to the Cold War, then due to the U.S. War on Terror, as Pakistan borders Afghanistan, which the U.S. and NATO occupied for 20 years.

The Pakistan army was an instrument of Western colonialism, so it resorted to internal colonialism to enrich itself. However, this military parasitism has proven to be disastrous for the country, leading to its disintegration in 1971, when its eastern half—known as East Pakistan—broke off from West Pakistan and became the independent nation of Bangladesh.

From 1948 to 1971, the Pakistan army exploited East Pakistan's considerable jute resources to enrich itself while denying this province economic and political rights.

When the East Pakistanis, who were the majority of Pakistanis and were made up of largely one ethnic group, known as Bengalis, rebelled, the army massacred up to three million of them in the last eight months of 1971.

Having learnt nothing from its loss of half the country, the Pakistan army invaded the province of

Balochistan in 1973, where the Balochi ethnic group had launched a separatist insurgency against its domination and proceeded to kill thousands of Balochis; a massacre that continues today, with the disappearance and murder of up to 100,000 Balochis. However, the insurgency has only intensified, with constant attacks on army outposts and spectacular assaults on urban targets in the large cities of Karachi and Lahore.

Like East Pakistan, Balochistan is rich in resources and highly exploited by the army, with its people gaining little from their own wealth. Natural gas from Balochistan provides 40 per cent of Pakistan's energy needs but only six per cent of the Baloch get it.

The province also has considerable deposits of oil, coal, copper, gold, silver, platinum, aluminum and uranium. Balochistan makes up 43 per cent of Pakistan's land area.

"Pakistan is going to lose Balochistan the way it lost East Pakistan in 1971," says Naela Quadri Baloch, president of the World Baloch Women's Forum, who accuses the Pakistan army of committing genocide in Balochistan.

"The Baloch insurgency has now become a national movement," Quadri Baloch explains, "and the guerrilla struggle has the support of the Baloch masses, which is the key to its success. Social movements of all kinds, including women's groups, students, human rights organizations, intellectuals and religious leaders back the call for an independent Balochistan."

The economic crisis is likely to weaken the Pakistan army's control over Balochistan. As Quadri Baloch points out, "already, the army is dismantling many of its outposts in Balochistan due to lack of fuel."

The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), which borders Afghanistan and is home to the Pakhtun ethnic group, is riven with terrorist violence carried out by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), known as the Pakistani Taliban. In January, the TTP killed 101 policemen in a single suicide bombing and injured another 180.

"The people of KPK are alienated from Pakistan and those of Balochistan even more so," Tariq Amin Khan says. "Unless Pakistan can break the stranglehold of the military and the feudal landlords on its economy and achieve real progress through land reform and the setting up of free health care and education systems for its people, the danger of its national disintegration is very real." **M**

Asad Ismi is a columnist for the *Monitor*, specializing in international politics. For his publications, visit www.asadismi.info.

GORDON LAXER

On foreign election meddling

HERE'S BEEN a lot of talk, even a bit of paranoia, about China's and Russia's meddling in elections in Canada and other democracies. While foreign political meddling is a serious issue, we have not focused enough on the most pervasive and influential foreign intervenors in Canada—foreign-owned corporations and their lobbyists.

Powerful, non-government foreign entities, including foreign-influenced corporations, regularly intervene in our elections.

After allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Ottawa passed the *Elections Modernization Act* to ban foreign interference in federal elections. Yet it left a mile-wide loophole through which the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) drove a gas-guzzling Hummer. Based in Calgary, CAPP is Big Foreign Oil's apex lobbyist.

The elections act states that third parties may not fund election activities “if the source of funds is a foreign entity.” That includes “corporations outside Canada.” But foreign-owned corporations are inexplicably exempt if they list their headquarters in Canada.

That makes no sense. Foreign-owned means foreign-funded and foreign-influenced.

Canada should follow the lead of U.S. Congressperson Jamie Raskin and Senator Elizabeth Warren to ban foreign-influenced corporations from election interference. Ellen Weintraub, former chair of the U.S. Federal Election Commission, wrote that individual foreigners are barred from spending to sway elections; it defies logic to allow groups of foreigners to fund political spending through corporations.

My research shows that the Canadian-ness of large oil corporations operating in Canada is an inch deep. None are majority Canadian-owned. Of the 48 corporations on CAPP's 2020 board, 30 were fully or majority foreign-owned. Seven more were very likely majority foreign-owned. That makes 37 of the 48 (77 per cent) CAPP's board members wholly or majority foreign-owned and influenced. CAPP gets approximately 97 per cent of its revenue from them.

Before the 2015 federal election, the American Petroleum Institute (API), the powerful U.S. oil lobby group, counselled CAPP on creating a Canadian version of the API's “Energy Citizens.” Funded by the API, Energy Citizens is an “Astroturf” pro-oil front group that masquerades as “grassroots” citizens and promotes Big Oil's interests and tries to sway voters. Astroturf is synthetic grass.

CAPP created and funded Canada's Energy Citizens (CEC), a copycat Astroturf group that just stuck “Canada” in front of the U.S. name. Mimicking the API's brand of American petro-nationalism, Canada's Energy Citizens trumpets a red-blooded version of Canadian petro-nationalism that portrays Canadian identity as inextricably linked to oil.

While insisting it's non-partisan, CAPP backed the Conservatives to champion its anti-climate action agenda. Shortly before the 2019 federal election, CAPP held a closed-door conference with the federal Conservatives to strategize on ousting Trudeau's Liberal government.

Topics included suing environmental groups to silence them, “rallying the base” using pro-oil front groups, getting support for

more pipelines, lowering corporate taxes, and reducing regulation. Tim McMillan, then CAPP's president, introduced a panel on “paths to federal election victory.”

Before the 2019 federal election, CAPP's CEC created a “Vote Energy” platform to counteract rising support for climate action. It urged supporters to vote for candidates who endorse oil industry expansion.

CAPP was allowed to register as a third-party advertiser in the 2019 federal election. As a registered third party, it could spend up to \$1.5 million and run ads supporting candidates and parties and advocate on issues.

Voters need access to accurate information. The Elections Act prohibits making false statements during elections. CAPP's Vote Energy platform asserted that “Canada's only credible path to meeting its Paris commitments is through increased exports of Canadian natural gas.”

It wanted government to “acknowledge that Canada's oil and natural gas sector is not subsidized.” Both statements are provably false.

Democracy is currently on trial in the court of Canadian public opinion. We need to close the loophole that allows political meddling by foreign-owned and foreign-influenced corporations operating in Canada. **M**

Gordon Laxer is author of the peer-reviewed report “Posing as Canadian. How Big Foreign Oil Captures Canadian energy and climate policy” co-published by the Council of Canadians and the CCPA-BC and the CCPA-SK. He is the founding director of Parkland Institute at the University of Alberta. www.gordonlaxer.com. A version of this article was initially published in the *Toronto Star*.

BILL LONGSTAFF

Are we on a path to sustainability?

HUMANITY'S BIGGEST challenge is sustainability. How does our avaricious species live within the natural constraints of the planet? Certain global trends suggest we may inadvertently be answering that question.

Start with population decline. The populations of many countries are declining, along with their fertility rates. And populations are aging as they decline.

Economists and others do not like these trends one bit. They see declining, aging populations as averse to growth. They see shrinking work forces of younger people unable or unwilling to bear the burden of caring for increasing numbers of older people.

But are their concerns justified?

Growth, the ever-increasing demand for consumer goods, is the great threat to sustainability. The planet is finite. We are already using up more resources than it can regenerate while discharging pollutants faster than it can assimilate them.

The Industrial Revolution brought a dilemma—relentlessly advancing technology. With advancing technology comes improved efficiencies. We have steadily been able to produce the same amount or more goods and services with fewer workers. But fewer workers leads to unemployment, and unemployed workers cannot buy much.

We have dealt with this in various ways. Most importantly, by producing more stuff, hence more jobs, i.e. by growth.

But eventually growth must stop and consumption retreat to a sustainable level.

Another way we have dealt with advancing technology and increasing efficiencies is by working less. Since the 19th century, the average

work week has declined by almost half.

Unfortunately, work times have plateaued since the 1960s. However, we may be correcting this lapse.

After a recent trial of a four-day 32-hour work week in Britain, an overwhelming majority of the 61 companies that participated will continue with shorter hours. Employers found that most employees were less stressed and had better work-life balance while revenues stayed the same or grew.

With increasing use of AI and automation, shorter work weeks should accelerate. These technologies are often viewed with trepidation as people see themselves being replaced by machines, but by replacing workers, they allow us to maintain productivity with shrinking workforces.

The trends fit together nicely. Population declines reduce consumer demand and aging populations reduce the workforce. At the same time, technology allows us to replace workers (or work hours) while increasing productivity. We are able to produce the same amount of goods per capita with fewer workers.

We can maintain our individual standard of living while reducing overall consumption. We can live comfortably within the constraints of our environment.

We have tended to look at these trends individually and become legitimately concerned. When we look at them collectively, however, a bigger picture emerges. They begin to complement each other as a path toward sustainability.

But can our goal be realized? Only if the trends are recognized for their potential and accepted, and then guided toward sustainability.

Gaining that recognition will be a challenge. It doesn't fit neatly into conventional economic theory and political objectives. And countries are working against the trends.

Aside from economic concerns, declines in population are often feared as a threat to political power or ethnic strength. Few countries are inclined to accept the need to end growth.

But people finally accepted the reality of global warming, so maybe they will, hopefully before it's too late, accept the threat of endless growth and the need for sustainability. Or, given the difficulty they are having increasing fertility rates, the trends may force them to.

Many countries continue to grow their populations with fertility rates above 2.1. This allows for ample immigration but doesn't help to reduce total global consumption. Fortunately, we know how to reduce fertility rates. We raise living standards. Improving education and employment opportunities for women, providing family planning, improving child health, and increasing social prosperity generally all tend to reduce fertility rates.

We all have a stake in making things better for all of us. Even more than we may have thought. **M**

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

PHILIP RESNICK

Should Canada become a republic?

ON MAY 6, 2023, Charles III will officially be crowned King of the United Kingdom in a coronation ceremony at Westminster Abbey.

As King, Charles is also the head of state of 14 other Commonwealth countries, including Canada. The coronation raises an important question for Canada and the other countries: should we retain a British monarch as our official head of state?

Several Commonwealth countries have already removed the British monarch as their head of state, opting to become republics. Others are considering making a similar change.

In 2021, Barbados became the latest Commonwealth country to cut ties with the British royal family, opting to make Sandra Mason, the country's governor-general, its first president.

Australia recently announced that King Charles will not be appearing on their \$5 banknote. This may prove the opening gambit in what could lead to a second Australian referendum on whether to become a republic. Australia's current Labor government has announced its intention to hold such a referendum if it is re-elected to a second term.

Canadians of a certain age will remember the heated debate back in 1965 when the Pearson government moved to replace the Red Ensign, with its Union Jack in the corner, with the Maple Leaf flag.

John Diefenbaker and other Tories huffed and puffed about the terrible break with tradition this would represent. But who in Canada today would want to return to the Red Ensign?

The Crown has had an important place in Canadian history. It was a symbol of the British connection

and of the country's tie to the British Empire at the time of Confederation and for many decades thereafter.

While a clear majority of the country's English-speaking population was of British origin for much of the country's history, this has been much less the case since the Second World War. Immigrants from around the world have made Canada a much more diverse country. Nor do those Canadians with British ancestry necessarily identify with Great Britain as the mother country in the way previous generations might have done.

Constitutional monarchy is a perfectly legitimate option for liberal democracies. It has worked well in Scandinavia and the Benelux countries, and reasonably well in the U.K., Spain and Japan.

The problem for countries like Canada or Australia is that ours is a borrowed crown. The Royal Family is British and no attempt to Canadianize the crown can disguise the fact that our head of state is not and cannot be a Canadian, as long as this last vestige of the colonial tie is retained.

We need to have a proper debate in this country about the monarchy. The House of Windsor has had its share of problems, and the current royals do not enjoy the same level of popularity that Queen Elizabeth may have had. Nor is it clear why the Canada of today would want to retain its ties with an institution steeped in aristocratic and feudal privilege.

It would be helpful if our political parties, beginning with the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party, were prepared to open a debate on the subject. But it needs to go well beyond their ranks and include society at large. What is at

stake is the symbolism associated with having a British monarch as our head of state a century and a half after confederation.

Some might argue that replacing King Charles would open up a constitutional can of worms. A key question is how a future Canadian head of state might be designated. Clearly, we would not be replacing a parliamentary system with a presidential system of the American or French variety.

One model that comes to mind for a federal state like Canada is Germany. Their president is elected to a five-year term (renewable once) by a Federal Convention made up of all the members of the Bundestag (the lower house of parliament), and an equal number, proportionate to their respective populations, elected by the legislatures of the 16 Länder (provinces).

The system has functioned well until now. Germany, like Canada, remains a parliamentary democracy. Effective political power rests with the chancellor, as it does with the prime minister in this country.

Were Canada to go the republican route, we would need to do so through a long constitutional process. The Canadian constitution states that there must be unanimity of the provinces for changing the head of state. In addition, treaties between First Nations and the crown would have to be carried forward into a Canadian republic.

However, where there is a will there is a way. And Canadians should no longer shirk the question: does the British monarchy reflect how we see ourselves in the 21st century? **M**

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YOUR CCPA

Get to know Jon Milton

OFFICE: **NATIONAL**

POSITION: **SENIOR COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST**

YEARS WITH THE CCPA:
LESS THAN A YEAR

You're new to the CCPA. What drew you to us? I have been following the CCPA's work for many years, in my work as a journalist and an organizer. The CCPA provides a really essential service to social movements—that is, to outline *specifically* what is wrong with the existing economic and political system, and what it would look like to build a better one. Organizations like the CCPA remind us that another world is possible.

One of the key tasks of our movements is to raise people's expectations about what they deserve in life. Working people deserve a life of dignity and security, but we live under a ruling order that tells us, every day, that we don't have those rights—that it's normal for our wages to fall behind on inflation, for us to struggle to keep up with housing costs, for the health-care system to be falling apart. It is an honour to be able to work for an organization that says loudly and clearly that there is a better way.

You started out in Québec's student movement. What lessons did you learn there that you take elsewhere? I was brought into organizing by the 2012 student strike in Quebec, in which students—organized into democratic and combative unions—managed to defeat a plan by a recalcitrant provincial government to increase tuition by nearly 80 per cent. Not only did it defeat the plan, but the movement also brought down the government of Jean



Charest, who had been in power for nearly a decade.

There is no better way to turn someone into a lifelong organizer than to win. The feeling of victory, of people-power defeating the organized forces of the ruling class, is intoxicating, and I return to it often. We aren't just fighting a rearguard struggle that is destined for failure—David can defeat Goliath. I learned that from the student movement.

You've helped shape this issue of the Monitor and you clearly have a passion for labour issues. What drives your passion? Working people make the world turn. We built the cities that we live in, we grew the food that we eat, we piloted the ships that transport goods across the globe. That economic position means that we have an enormous amount of power.

Building a better world, as the CCPA has always advocated for, is not just about having good ideas—it's about power. We can have great and clear ideas about how to address climate change, stop

the rise of fascism, democratize the economy, and so on—but it doesn't matter if we aren't able to take on the small but powerful ruling class that benefits from the status quo. Only the working class has the power to do that.

What gives you hope right now? On the question of hope, I will defer to the words of the irreplaceable Mike Davis, a historian of social movements who passed away in 2022:

For someone my age, who was in the civil rights movement and in other struggles of the 1960s, I've seen miracles happen. I've seen ordinary people do the most heroic things. When you've had the privilege of knowing so many great fighters and resisters, you can't lay down the sword, even if things seem objectively hopeless.

I've always been influenced by the poems Brecht wrote in the late '30s, during the Second World War—after everything had been incinerated, all the dreams and values of an entire generation destroyed. And Brecht said, well, it's a new dark ages...how do people resist in the dark ages?

What keeps us going, ultimately, is our love for each other, and our refusal to bow our heads, to accept the verdict—however all-powerful it seems. It's what ordinary people have to do. You have to love each other. You have to defend each other. You have to fight.

Meet Judy Klang, Vancouver B.C., CCPA donor

Tell us about someone you find particularly inspiring right now. I'm inspired by the Canadian violinist James Ehnes. There's so much emotional expression in his playing, that I just love to hear it. There's something about great artists who live their truth that's very moving for me. When people do their best in ways we can see, it brings out the best in us as well.

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

My mother was one of my important influences and role models. She was widowed at only 32, with three young children to care for, and her life was not easy. Yet she always had a feeling of responsibility as a citizen. She volunteered as an election scrutineer, for example. My mother had an optimism about what Canada could contribute, and she saw the world in a positive way. I have carried those attitudes throughout my life.

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

The recent book *How To Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* by journalist and author Michael Pollan



has made a big impact on me. It's a book that discusses the potential of human beings to overcome our limited viewpoints and see possibilities that we haven't seen before.

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

The CCPA's writing about the problem of income inequality (as exemplified in outsized CEO pay) is a good example of what makes its work so powerful. CCPA Researchers like David Macdonald spell out so clearly and convincingly why advocating for greater fairness in how wealth is distributed is important and how this can be achieved through changes to government policy. By making the case for greater income equality in

Canada, the CCPA is saying that the country's wealth belongs to all of us and that as citizens we all need to contribute to the well-being of the society. This viewpoint expresses a generous, responsible way of acting in the world.

Could you tell us why you decided to support the CCPA as a monthly donor?

As an individual, it's difficult to have an impact on the world. By supporting the CCPA, I feel that I have an involvement in something larger than myself and am contributing to things I believe in. The CCPA represents an intelligent voice and encourages pride in the potential that Canada and Canadian citizens have. The organization is not unaware of the flaws that exist but is even-handed in acknowledging that change is needed and in offering a means to realize it. I feel encouraged for the future when I see how often the CCPA's work is referred to in the media and how much its perspectives are respected in the wider society.

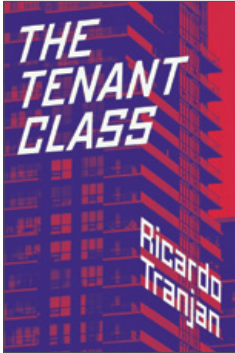
What is your hope for the future?

Beyond pushing for greater income equality, supporting women is something I think we need to do more of as a society. When Canada's provinces provide universally affordable daycare in practice—and not just as an intention—that will change a lot for women, for families and for the whole society.

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.

SAHAR RAZA

This is a class struggle, not a housing crisis— and it's time to pick a side



THE TENANT CLASS RICARDO TRANJAN

Between the Lines, May 2023

WHAT IF THERE is no housing crisis, but a housing market working exactly as designed?

Ricardo Tranjan's *The Tenant Class* rests on this premise, effortlessly dismantling apolitical narratives of Canada's housing system to reveal an intentionally obscured class struggle between exploited tenants and extractive landlords—most of whom wouldn't have it any other way.

In this timely and refreshing manifesto, Tranjan takes aim at Canada's structurally inequitable and increasingly deregulated rental market, which prevents, rather than promotes, housing security, affordability, and adequacy among tenants.

He draws parallels between exploitative labour relations and the exploitative rental market to describe how property-owning landlords amass wealth on the backs of tenants—all thanks to government

complicity dating back to the dispossession of Indigenous lands and creation of property rights.

He then uses historical and contemporary tenant organizing stories—alongside his own professional and lived experiences as a political economist, policy researcher, and child of turbulent 1980s Brazil—to argue that the only solution is a struggle: the tenant class must organize to build political power and demand a more equitable, regulated, and largely non-market housing system.

To create the conditions for social change, Tranjan also calls on progressive researchers and allies to practically feed and support on-the-ground movements. After all, “it takes political power to go up against the landlord class and force governments to rein in markets,” and part of building that power involves addressing the cultural marginalization of the tenant class.

But more than that, it requires that the rest of society see and name the class struggle within Canada's housing system for what it is. To this end, Tranjan advances a simple and unsettling provocation in the last chapter, reminding readers of their own agency: “now the question is...where you stand.”

The message is clear: it's time to pick a side in this class struggle. There is no neutrality in the face of injustice, disinformation, and exploitation.

The Tenant Class practices what it preaches, systematically busting harmful myths about tenants and “struggling landlords” while offering compelling and research-backed

arguments, stories, and quips, which can be mobilized by organizers and advocates to push for housing justice. And though it may not be politically palatable to the roughly two-thirds of the population who benefit from the status quo (namely, property owners), Tranjan's clear and incisive class-based analysis extricates itself from the endless housing “policy merry-go-round” in important and radical ways.

For one, Tranjan decisively names the power-holders that feed, constitute, and enable the elite landlord class in its mission to extract more and more income from tenants. From homeowners to industry players, landlords, real estate investment firms, pension funds, developers, banks, and other mortgage providers, he makes apparent that a huge segment of the population benefits from a housing market in which rents rise faster and faster, untethered from income, inflation rates, and vacancy rates (not to mention human rights standards).

This doesn't happen in a vacuum, however—government laws and policies (or lack thereof), institutions like landlord and tenant boards, and mainstream moral standards permit and legitimize this wealth accumulation. Meanwhile, disproportionately racialized, low-income, and already marginalized peoples in, or in need of, rental housing face deepening intergenerational poverty at the hands of the property-owning elite—a fact that is conveniently obscured in our mainstream news media and consciousness.

Tranjan thus argues that mainstream narratives that frame the “housing crisis” as an apolitical, complex, or new issue that requires technical or win-win solutions only serve the interests of the elite. In fact, these elites pour money and resources into making these narratives appear to be common sense or the way of the world, particularly through their influence over news media and government. They even co-opt progressive language (like the language of human rights, equity, and “affordable housing”) or use disinformation to undermine criticism, disguise their exploitative policies and practices, and maintain the status quo.

“Supply-side” arguments constitute one such narrative, suggesting that we simply need to build more housing faster to make housing affordable—a solution that conveniently involves sweetening the deal for developers and landlords through financial incentives. And, as Tranjan notes, our governments reproduce, pander to, and invest in these narratives.

Take Canada’s National Housing Strategy, for example. Steeped in supply-side logic, the strategy funnels billions of dollars to for-profit developers who produce housing that, more often than not, ends up contributing to, rather than addressing, the root causes of unaffordability, homelessness, and housing inequity. Yet, insidiously, the strategy uses the language of human rights and affordability to disguise these extractive practices.

In the context of my own work to implement the human right to adequate housing via federal policy, I see these dynamics first hand. Well-intentioned and progressive housing policy professionals too often become trapped in cycles of consultation, make-work, and self-censorship with governments, only to have their research and solutions shelved time and time again.

Government and sector leaders engage in the endless “merry-go-round” of debating policy tweaks or band-aid solutions to homelessness and inadequate housing rather than meaningful, structural, and human rights-based change. And all the while, our political and policy leaders (many of whom are part of the elite class) manage to evade naming and regulating the profiteers and beneficiaries of housing injustice.

This reality is what makes *The Tenant Class* so powerful, timely, and necessary. It resists the cyclical dynamics of the housing discourse and reminds readers of what tenant movements have known for decades: the problem is political, not technical. And importantly, profit doesn’t have to be part of the housing equation.

Drawing from inspirational stories of defiant tenant movements, resistance, and power, Tranjan places our contemporary “housing crisis” within a century-long history of class-based struggles—struggles that are ongoing.

The book reminds tenants of their agency and allies of the need to centre and support those tenants, all

The Tenant Class resists the cyclical dynamics of the housing discourse and reminds readers of what tenant movements have known.

while recognizing that “the challenge for the tenant class is not to *find solutions* for the so-called housing crisis, but to *enact* the solutions we know work”: namely, moving as much housing as possible outside of the private market (i.e., to increase non-market housing); tightly regulating private market housing (i.e., via tenant protections, rent and vacancy controls, etc.); and keeping tenants organized to ensure ongoing political pressure and access to adequate, affordable, and secure housing.

In this way, *The Tenant Class* stands apart from the mainstream housing paradigm and gets to the heart of Canada’s so-called “housing crisis” with precision and conviction. Weaving together history, data, and stories with thoughtful ease that makes the complex feel accessible, it serves as fuel for social change and vividly demonstrates the power of collective action. It paints a vision of a housing system that decentres profit in favour of justice, democracy, and human rights—one in which everyone has access to safe, affordable, and dignified housing.

And, most importantly, it makes social change feel possible so long as readers confront the reality of our class-based housing system head on.

This book is, therefore, a must-read for tenants, housing advocates, policy professionals, or “anyone else interested in rental housing.”

To tenants, it says: join or start a tenant union—you have the power to fight back.

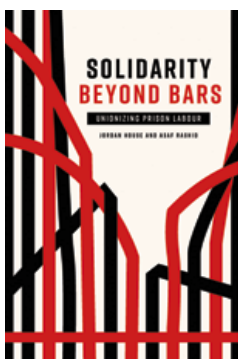
To housing advocates and policy wonks, it says: now is the time to organize, build political pressure, and link arms with tenant movements who have been doing this work all along.

And to everyone else, it says: pick a side. Do you stand in solidarity with the rising tenant class, or will you uphold the exploitative status quo?

Tranjan doesn’t let anyone off the hook in this compelling piece, asserting that it is up to all of us to take up the mantle of tenant organizing, to support those on the front lines of the struggle, and to demand a world in which adequate housing is truly for everyone. **M**

Sahar Raza is director of policy and communications at the National Right to Housing Network and member of Oxfam Canada’s Board of Directors.

What prison justice could look like



SOLIDARITY BEYOND BARS: UNIONIZING PRISON LABOUR

JORDAN HOUSE AND ASAF RASHID

Fernwood Publishing, November 2022

PRISONERS IN CANADA’S federal, provincial, and territorial correctional institutions perform an assortment of jobs necessary for the day-to-day functioning of the facilities in which they are incarcerated. Prisoners cook, clean and perform clerical and trades work. Some also work in revenue-generating prison industries producing a wide variety of goods—like license plates and furniture—as well as services such as printing, laundry, and snow removal. As such, prison labour represents a significant subsidy for correctional systems.

Prisoners no longer work *as punishment*. Instead, according to correctional law and policy, prison labour is understood to be rehabilitative. But as “participants in rehabilitative programming,” prisoners are denied basic employment, occupational safety, and labour rights. The denial of these basic rights does nothing to enhance public safety—indeed, it likely has the opposite effect. Prisoners deserve full employment and labour protections—including the right to join and form unions.

A key argument of prison justice advocates and abolitionists is to reduce or eliminate funding to prisons so the injustices of prison, including the exploitation and dehumanization of prisoners, is not supported with public monies. In January 2021, a number of organizations across Canada favouring defunding of prisons released the following statement in light of increasing covid-19 numbers across Canada, noting an opportunity to decarcerate:

STOP investing more public or private money into policing and prison infrastructure.

STOP increasing budgets to hire more police and prison officers.

STOP building new police stations, detachments and headquarters, courthouses, jails, prisons, penitentiaries and immigration detention centres.

COMMIT to dramatically cutting municipal, provincial and federal funding for carceral infrastructures.

Following this line of thinking, defunding would first stop the expansion of the carceral system and then slowly starve prisons out of existence. Money diverted from the carceral system would be invested into community services and alternatives to incarceration. However, the argument to defund is, unfortunately, not necessarily consistent with demands for improving working conditions and wages for prisoners. Clearly, improvements to wages and working conditions would require an increase in government funding or private investment for those specific purposes.

As far apart as these views appear on the surface, in our view there is substantial common ground. We do not support the thickening of prison bars and fattening of prisons as a whole, but the opposite. We support prisoners in their fight for

better conditions, including working conditions and pay. There is a major difference between supporting prisons and supporting prisoners, especially when it comes to supporting prisoners’ efforts to unionize. Through unionization, prisoners would gain more power than they would through other means to realize demands for improvements. This includes ensuring any work they do actually prepares them for timely release. A union would give prisoners an independent organization through which to assert themselves politically.

The idea of making any improvements to prison working conditions through unionization was criticized by former US federal prisoner and prison justice organizer James Kilgore:

Unionization is one frequently proposed solution to the plight of incarcerated workers. In considering unions, the question becomes: do we put resources into improving prison working conditions or do we fight to get people out of prison? Suddenly raising people’s pay rate from ten cents an hour to a living wage would require massive increases in corrections budgets or, in the absence of large-scale decarceration, a huge reduction in employment inside prisons. Moreover, since many non-prisoners are also part of the marginalized sector of the working class who don’t earn a living wage or belong to unions, unionizing prison workers could essentially be creating a situation where prison offered economic advantages over the labor market on the street.

Kilgore raises important points that have to be dealt with to make a case for why unionization is good for prisoners.

First, “Do we put resources into improving prison working

conditions or do we fight to get people out of prison?" At this point, it should be clear we are suggesting there is no doubt that unionization represents a clear strategic choice to improve the working lives of prisoners. The question creates a false dichotomy. Resources should be put into place to improve the working conditions of prisoners, consistent with a strategy to get more prisoners out of jail faster and prevent recidivism. If prisoners are unionized, they are entitled to good faith bargaining with their employers. They can assert their demands for jobs that are more useful for their release; for increased wages and reduced costs of phone services and canteen items to ensure they have more resources available for survival upon release; to gain skills in negotiating and other administrative duties required for any union local that can assist in improving their rehabilitative scores; and many other advantages that will actually assist prisoners to get out and stay out. This was a key assertion of the Canadian Prisoners Labour Confederation, which initiated an (ultimately unsuccessful) effort to unionize federal prisoners in 2011. Paired with other strategies to reduce prison populations—such as the expansion of parole eligibility and sentencing reform—a prisoners' union could be a key tool in reducing the prison population. Indeed a prisoners' union could be a key player in campaigns for decarceration.

Second, "Suddenly raising people's pay rate from ten cents an hour to a living wage would require massive increases in corrections budgets or, in the absence of large-scale decarceration, a huge reduction in employment inside prisons." This point is based on an assumption of what a union would be focused upon: raising wages. It is a fair point; a big part of what unions do is fight for improved wages. But that has never been the crux of the organized working class's demands.

Unions give workers power. This power can—and should be—used to win higher wages, and prisoners' wages should certainly be increased. However, if prisoners unionized, it is likely their focus would largely be on the usefulness of their work for their release, power disparity between them and their institutional bosses, having the institution pay a greater share of the costs of phone and others services, as well as control and discipline issues. In fact, in 1983 when prisoners at the Stony Mountain Institution in Winnipeg sought the assistance of the Canadian Labour Congress, it was not primarily to seek higher wages but to gain the support of the labour movement to assist prisoners in early release.

In the case of any unionized workplace, including public sector ones, workers must be cognizant of the economic position of their employer, lest they bargain themselves out of a job. However, in the big picture, CSC cannot actually get rid of prisoner workers. Prison work cannot be offshored—and there are real limits to strategies that other public sector employers may deploy to reduce costs, such as sub-contracting. Prisoners are essential to the functioning of the correction system in both material and ideological terms. The labour of prisoners reproduces the prison and its programming day after day and serves as activity that can be labelled "rehabilitative." This means prisoners could potentially be in a good position to win higher compensation, which could translate into increased pressure on correctional budgets. This gets to the crux of the issue: a prisoners' union could be a means to challenge *how* public monies are spent on corrections, not just how much money is spent. **M**

This excerpt has been edited for length and clarity.



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The good news page

ELAINE HUGHES

Ozone layer recovery is on track

According to the UN Scientific Assessment Panel's report, the phase-out of nearly 99 per cent of banned ozone-depleting substances has been confirmed and, if current policies remain in place, the ozone layer is expected to recover to 1980 values by 2040. UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that the restoration of the ozone layer was "an encouraging example of what the world can achieve when we work together." / [UN Climate and Environment](#), January 9, 2023.

Monarch butterflies on the rebound

After a precipitous drop in 2020, the population of western monarch butterflies wintering along the California coast has rebounded for a second year in a row. Western monarch butterflies head south from the Pacific Northwest to California each winter, returning to the same places, and even the same trees, where they cluster to keep warm. On the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains, another

monarch population travels from southern Canada and the northeastern United States across thousands of miles to spend the winter in central Mexico.

/ [The Associated Press](#), January 31, 2023.

29 species no longer endangered

Australia's *Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* currently lists 446 species of animals in genuine need of protection, but a large research project has recently tallied 29 of those are no longer in need: 15 mammals, eight birds, four frogs, a reptile, and a fish. Among these critters are the golden, Western barred, and Eastern barred bandicoots, Western quoll, sooty albatross, waterfall frog, Flinder's Range worm-lizard, yellow-footed rock wallabies, greater bilby, humpback whale, growing grass frog, Murray's cod, and others. / [Good News Network](#), February 28, 2023.

How a country embraced the river it feared

When the Waal River floods near the Netherlands' border with Germany, the overflow inundates the Millingerwaard nature reserve, swamping meadows, glades and trails. Beavers move up into the trees and build temporary homes. The current reshapes the landscape, eroding gullies and leaving new ponds in its wake. This isn't disaster, it's design. / [Reasons To Be Cheerful](#), January 2, 2023.

Homeless man receives Queen's Jubilee Award

Ernest McPherson, a 54-year-old homeless man in the small northern city of Meadow Lake, SK, feels honoured to receive the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal for his extraordinary efforts to help keep himself and other homeless people from freezing to death. Every night, McPherson searches back alleys, vehicles and old buildings for homeless people who may have fallen asleep in the cold. He said a "guardian angel" who kicked him awake in freezing temperatures last winter saved his life and he's trying to pay it forward. Recently, a coalition received a major grant from Métis Nation-Saskatchewan to start a transitional housing program and other community organizations are working at getting shelters in place. / [CBC News](#), February 28, 2023.

Regular visits to green spaces linked to lower use of certain prescriptions

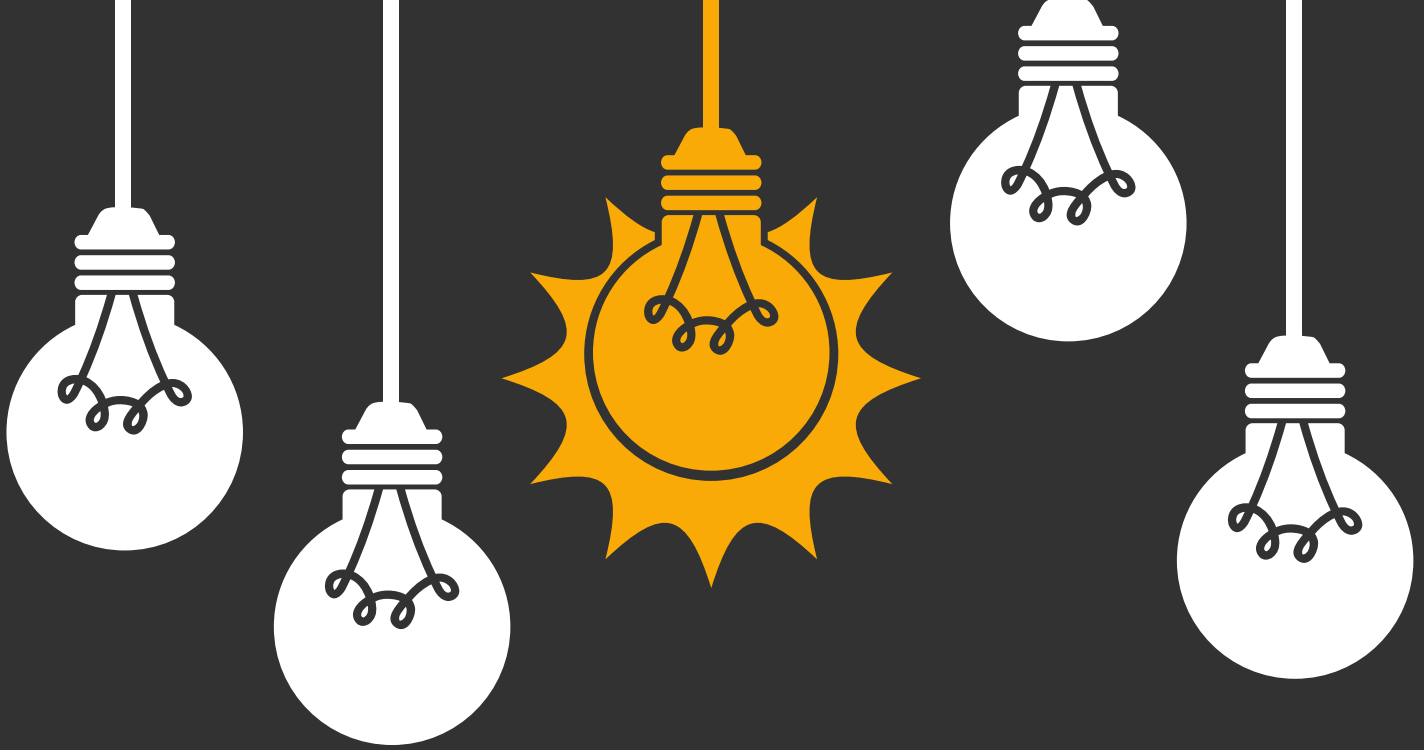
According to research in Finland, actual visits to green spaces in cities such as parks and community gardens may be linked to lower use of certain prescription meds. The observed connections between such visits and lower use of drugs for depression, anxiety, insomnia, high blood pressure, and asthma were not dependent on people's educational and income level. / [The Jerusalem Post](#), January 18, 2023.

Why these flights made unscheduled loops in the sky

Travelers on at least two flights in March got a welcome diversion when their planes looped around to give everyone a good view of the northern lights. Also known as the Aurora Borealis, a natural phenomenon produced by powerful electromagnetic waves during geomagnetic storms, is something travelers often make pricey trips to high latitudes just to witness. Those on easyJet flight 1806 from Reykjavik to Manchester and Finnair flight 488 from Kuusamo to Helsinki all got a light show for the price of their airfare. / [CNN](#), March 1, 2023.

Indigenous artist featured at Super Bowl for first time

For the first time, an Indigenous artist's works were featured at the Super Bowl, gracing game tickets, displays, and a massive Super Bowl mural in downtown Phoenix with images that reflect her multicultural roots. Phoenix-based artist, Lucinda Hinojos—who is Mexican-American as well as Pascua Yaqui, Chiricahua Apache, White Mountain Apache and Pima—was chosen by the National Football League as the marquee artist of Super Bowl LVII, which was played on February 12 at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona. / [Indian Country Today](#), January 21, 2023.



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