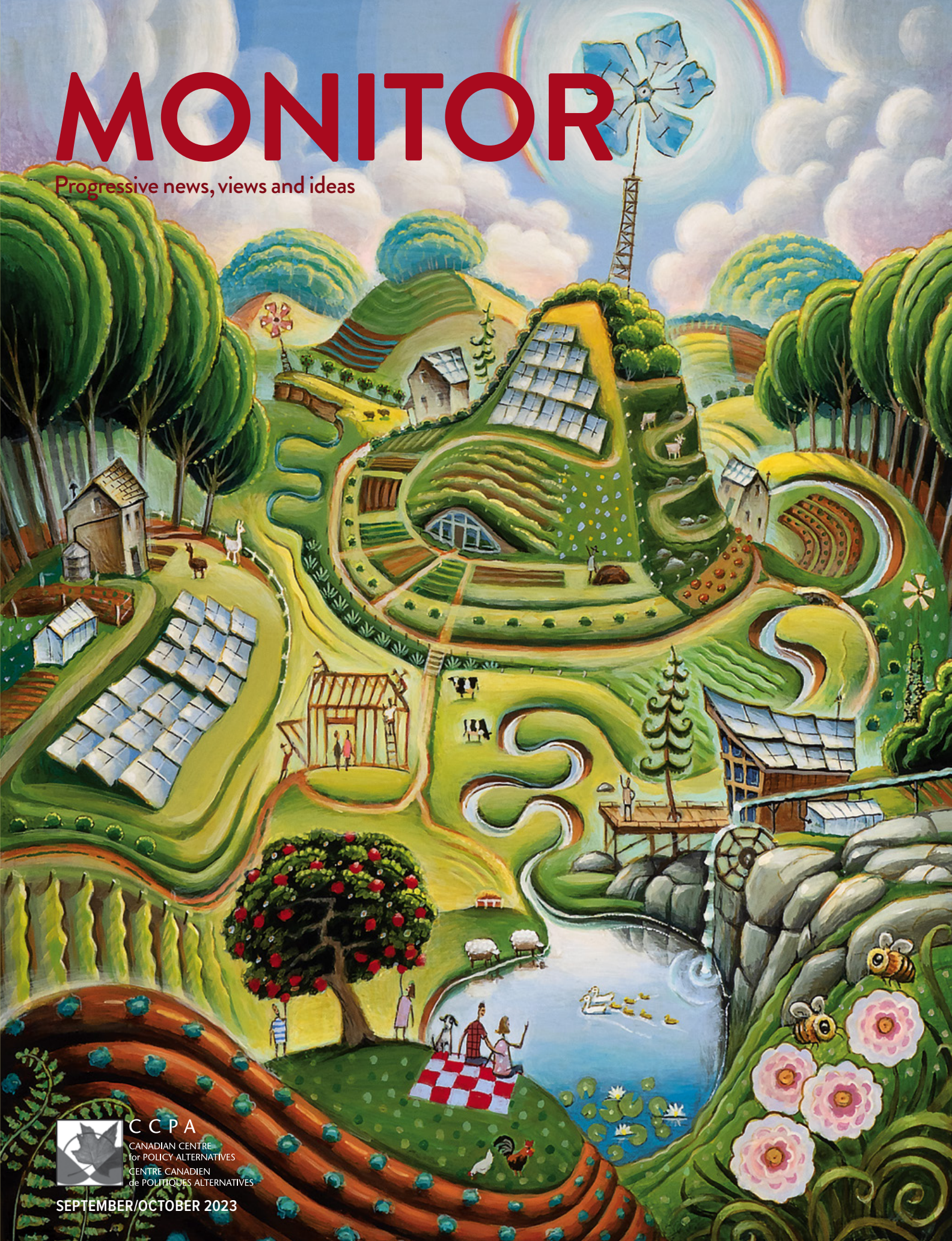


MONITOR

Progressive news, views and ideas



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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023

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Cover illustration by Tim Zeltner / Tim Zeltner lives in the countryside north of Grafton, Ontario. He utilizes a unique combination of layering paint, glazes and stains in his artwork and derives his award-winning folk style from personal experiences, visions, and primitive art from sources throughout the world. His work can be found in many private collections and seen internationally in advertising campaigns, corporate communications, and magazines.



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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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Editor: Trish Hennessy

Associate Editor: Jon Milton

Senior Designer: Tim Scarth

Layout: Susan Purtell

Editorial Board: Catherine Bryan,
Shannon Daub, Simon Enoch,
Sabreena Ghaffar-Siddiqui,
Jon Milton, Jason Moores,
Trish Hennessy, Erika Shaker

CCPA National Office

141 Laurier Avenue W, Suite 1000
Ottawa, ON K1P 5J3
613-563-1341
ccpa@policyalternatives.ca
www.policyalternatives.ca

CCPA BC Office

604-801-5121
ccpabc@policyalternatives.ca

CCPA Manitoba Office

204-927-3200
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

CCPA Nova Scotia Office

902-240-0926
ccpans@policyalternatives.ca

CCPA Ontario Office

ccpaon@policyalternatives.ca

CCPA Saskatchewan Office

306-924-3372
ccpasask@sasktel.net

TRISH HENNESSY

When governments fail us, we must do better

We won't let governments off the hook for climate change

DURING TIMES OF crisis, the public turns to governments to provide a steady hand—as the pandemic made clear. But when it comes to the climate crisis, governments at all levels are failing us.

Everything is too little, too late. Now the world's leading scientists at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have delivered their final warning. We are not doing nearly enough to curtail rising greenhouse gas emissions. We must act now.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres put it, this warning “is a clarion call to massively fast-track climate efforts by every country and every sector and on every timeframe. Our world needs climate action on all fronts: everything, everywhere, all at once.”

We see the effects of climate change all around us.

Dystopian summer skies fogged with smoke from raging wildfires.

Deadly heat waves that force us indoors, relying on air conditioning as life support, if we can afford it.

Recurring flooding in zones where insurance companies now refuse to insure.

A disturbing number of “100-year storms” that seem to happen every few months.

An ecosystem on the brink. We have not been good stewards of the lands. Our addiction to oil, gas, coal—in the name of economic growth—got us in this mess. Blame permissive governments, politicians who will do anything to get elected, greedy corporations.

And blame us. The cult of cheap goods. Consumerism delivered to you by the stroke of a keyboard. A passive acceptance that all economic growth is good, even with so much evidence to the contrary.

As the Canadian economy has grown, income inequality has become more extreme. We're one of the wealthiest countries on the planet but, somehow, policy-makers deem eliminating poverty is out of reach. And our reliance on economic growth, our procrastinating on a post-industrial strategy such as degrowth, comes with a heavy price tag—the health of mother earth.

The world's temperature is a feverish 1.1C above pre-industrial levels. There is no more time to waste. As Guterres says, “the climate timebomb is ticking.”

It falls to us to push governments harder, to jolt ourselves out of complacency, and to lead where others fail to.

This edition of the *Monitor* doesn't let governments off the hook, but it does provide real life examples of people who are taking the lead on climate activism in their own communities. They're setting the tone and creating a culture of change right where they live.

We all have a role to play in dealing with this crisis.

Some groups, like the Ecological Action Centre in Nova Scotia, have been going at it for decades. Other groups, like the Nanaimo Climate Action Hub, are just getting started but have already registered some wins: they convinced their city

council to adopt Kate Raworth's doughnut economics framework.

The doughnut is promoted by Raworth as “a compass for human prosperity in the 21st century.” It consists of two concentric circles: a social foundation to ensure everyone gets access to the essentials and an ecological ceiling to protect the earth's life-supporting systems.

Doughnut economics resists classical economists' prioritization of GDP growth at the expense of collective well-being and planetary health. It challenges us to aim to thrive rather than grow.

In the CCPA's report *Don't Wait for the State*, Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood and co-authors provide a framework to guide communities through the changes needed to combat climate change. It's a toolkit for activists, a road map to progress.

It doesn't let governments take a pass on the environment, but it does encourage people to be the change they wish to see in this world.

The Manitoba Climate and Environment Election Coalition is taking that framework to heart, using it to support a collaborative effort to hold politicians to account during election-time candidates' debates.

You can read about these real-life examples—and more—in this issue of the *Monitor*. It's an issue dedicated to empowering you and your community to take collaborative action while we still can. **M**

Together, we're fighting for a better future

2023 HAS BEEN a year of transition. The public health crisis is ongoing and we're certainly not "back to normal"....but I think that we have recovered enough to have the energy to take stock of what's changed and what still must change. We're now at a point where we can grapple with the possibility of a future of our own making.

My eldest preparing to go to university, and my youngest moving on to high school, have been two very tangible touch points for me in this time of transition. I'm watching them in real time draw on what they have learned, determining the best way to move forward, making new connections and contributions, and looking forward to new challenges.

Amidst this time of transition, one thing that hasn't changed is my profound sense of gratitude for the donors who continue to invest in the CCPA so that we can keep making a positive difference...who share that commitment to a future of our own making.

I've spoken with many of you to express my appreciation for your longtime investment in our work and our people, and I've been truly overwhelmed to hear about what the work of the CCPA means to you. I've loved hearing about how much you enjoy the *Monitor*—and how you've shared copies to family and friends or even made an additional donation so that they can have a subscription of their own. And I've had the pleasure of welcoming new donors who have chosen to support us after hearing about one of our reports in the media or discovering one of our op-eds in their community paper.

It is truly a privilege for me to be in this role, doing this work, and hearing from all of you who support



and encourage us to keep working on solutions to the pressing challenges that we face.

I've also been thanking a growing number of you who have reached out to tell us that your belief in our work is so strong that you have chosen to arrange a very special and transformative gift—a legacy gift, often in the form of a gift in your will.

There are a growing number of you who have included the CCPA in your will—and it's a truly humbling experience to be able to express my thanks to you directly, but also to let you know how this remarkable gift will help the CCPA continue to push for policies that will lead to a better world for future generations.

Your investment in the CCPA is a major reason behind our level of public recognition and the growing impact of our policy solutions. That so many of you—this year, and in previous years—have taken the significant step of arranging a gift

in your will or included the CCPA as a beneficiary in a life insurance policy or RRSP/RRIF, underscores your confidence in our work today and our shared understanding that a more just, equitable and sustainable world is truly possible. You can count on us at the CCPA to continue to press for those policies into the future. We don't give up easily.

Thank you to our new and current legacy donors for your continued confidence in our work now, and in the years to come. Our future will be the next generation's present and, thanks to you, we can help ensure it's a gift to them that we can all be proud to share.

My gratitude also goes out to those of you who have arranged a legacy gift to support the CCPA of the future, but have chosen to keep this decision to yourselves—we know you're out there and we appreciate you!

If you have made the decision to leave us a legacy gift in your will, please do think about reaching out to my colleague Katie Loftus at katie@policyalternatives.ca or 613-563-1341 ext. 318—we really would love to thank you! **M**

Erika Shaker is director of 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.



May/June 2023

Labour Power issue

As someone who’s been involved in labour since 1971 and who represents health care workers in Ontario for over 40 years, I was delighted with the labour focus in the *Monitor’s* May/June edition. I found the insights and proposals helpful and would like to build on them with additional thoughts and recommendations.

Laura Walton identified the importance of public sector workers creating alliances with recipients of

the services they deliver. This approach is transferable to long-term care for collaboration between unions and resident advocates. There are provisions in applicable law that can be harnessed to achieve results.

Adam King demonstrated that union organizing can be more successful if card certification is available. But even his data from British Columbia shows that organizing levels with card certification haven’t returned to the level of the 1990s. Other changes must be implemented in order to permit workers interested in unionization to effectively bring this about. For example, there is no reason to make workplace election rules more stringent than rules for election to public office.

Maxim Baru highlighted the availability of collective action protections for U.S. non-union workers and suggested how to extend this in Canada. Additional to using provisions of various labour relations statutes, it is worth considering a Charter challenge under Section 2(d). There is no reason why freedom of association should be limited to unionized workers. There is also the avenue of political strikes to press for legislative change.

Shalom Schachter
Toronto ON

I am writing to express my great appreciation of Gordon Laxers’ article “On foreign election meddling” in the May/June 2023 edition of the *Monitor*. Laxer hits the

nail on the head when he uncovers the shameful negligence (hypocrisy?) of the Canadian government in allowing U.S. climate-destroying corporations to dictate environmental and extraction policies to our compliant federal government (regardless of whether it is Conservative or Liberal) and Canada’s provincial governments to boot. The big theatricals over alleged Chinese interference completely ignores the real and ongoing destructive effects of the petrochemical industry. It is truly alarming how easily the mainstream press and media shut out any discussion of this reality and instead focus on the political games of Chinese government bashing.

Who stands on guard for thee? It appears to be Gordon Laxer and the environmental movement.
Gord Doctorow
Toronto, ON



July/August 2023

RE: “Democracy and Citizenship Education” (Our Schools|Our Selves)

Ontario teachers have a great “field day” opportunity to teach the students about how democracy works—or rather doesn’t work—on September 25 when the grassroots supported Charter Challenge

for Fair Voting (i.e. for voter equality and proportional representation) has a court date in Toronto.

On that same day, this “field trip” could also bring students just a few blocks north of that University Avenue courthouse to the massive rally that is planned at Ontario’s legislature against the Ford government’s Bill 60. This bill was passed by a government that won a false majority with only 40.8 per cent of votes (as was mentioned on pg 31 of that same issue of the *Monitor*).

The cost of not having voter equality and proportional representation, and the cost of not teaching students (and many others) about its crucial role will now be in full view: That Bill 60 threatens to massively and quickly erode our public health care system that so many Canadians struggled so hard to establish. (Learn more at CharterChallenge.ca, OntarioHealthCoalition.ca, FairVote.ca, MakeVotesEqual.ca).

Boyd Reimer
Toronto, ON

Thanks for this outstanding edition of the *Monitor*. I appreciated the metaphors of neoliberalism as both a zombie that won’t die as well as a virus that is killing us all. The evidence to support both claims was very well done, if enormously frustrating.

This may be the best edition I’ve seen. It should required reading.
Carol Schick
Regina, SK



New from the CCPA

CCPA National

New insights on what CERB recipients did with their time

Over a year ago, we started wondering what Canadians did with their Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) beyond paying basic bills. Did they use that time and income support to go back to school and learn new skills?

Working with the Future Skills Centre and Abacus Data, we found the answer: it was an emphatic yes! Our report *CERB: More than just an income program* by CCPA National Senior Researcher Katherine Scott and Senior Strategist (and *Monitor* editor) Trish Hennessy shows that the CERB gave recipients the space and time they needed to upskill, work toward a new job, and take the right job, not just the first job that came along as the economy re-opened.

As the federal government eyes reforms to Employment Insurance, this study should inform policy-makers' decisions around ensuring adequate income supports and opportunities for training and skills building.

Meanwhile, Stuart Trew and Kyla Tienhaara

submitted a briefing paper from the CCPA's Trade and Investment Research Project (TIRP) showing Canada's options for intervening in the Keystone XL CUSMA lawsuit.

CCPA Nova Scotia

Eastern Canada often left out of energy policy discussions

This summer, in partnership with the Corporate Mapping Project, we released *Mapping Fossil Fuel Lock-In and Contestation in Eastern Canada*, a groundbreaking report that maps both the extensive network of existing and proposed fossil fuel infrastructure in Eastern Canada as well as the key sites of ongoing resistance.

Research Associate Dr. Catherine Leviten-Reid released the latest blog, *Lack of affordable housing in Nova Scotia requires urgent action*, which looked at problems with current Nova Scotia rent supplement subsidies and urgently needed changes.

Early September sees the release of the 2023 Nova Scotia Living Wage report, updating the living wage rates for five regions in Nova Scotia.

And on September 20, we are excited to host a launch of Ricardo Tranjan's book, *The Tenant Class*—a book that details how the housing crisis is a housing market working as designed.

We are excited to announce that our 2023 Gala Dinner is set for November 3, with keynote speaker Chief Robert Gloade, Chief for Millbrook First Nation, who serves as co-chair

of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat. Tickets are on sale this month and can be purchased for in-person and virtual attendance; we hope to see you there.

CCPA Manitoba

Privatizing telecom services resulted in service decline and higher rates

For Whom the Bell Tolls: the privatization of Manitoba Telecom Services and its impacts, by Doug Smith, chronicles how MTS was once an engine of the Manitoba economy—delivering affordable rates across the province and offering good jobs to generations of Manitobans. Since privatization and the subsequent purchase by Bell, there has been significant job loss, poor rural and northern phone service and high rates.

Manitobans, like all Canadians, continue to pay some of the highest prices in the industrial world for telecommunications services as service declines. Economically, Manitoba has been a loser: jobs have been shipped out of the province to non-unionized subcontractors or even out of the country. Bell has also switched from local firms for various services, such as insurance, benefits, and legal services, to its preferred and usually Central Canadian suppliers. Last month Bell announced 1,300 more job cuts from across the company.

One province over, in Saskatchewan, a small, provincially owned Crown

corporation has been able to do all the things that the privatizers said MTS could not do.

When MTS was purchased by Bell in 2016, they promised to make Winnipeg the western Canadian headquarters. Not only has this promise not been realized, but the workforce is shrinking in Manitoba. From 2015 to today, well over 800 positions have been eliminated.

"Governments need to place more requirements on telecommunication companies to invest locally. In the absence of this, nationalization of the sector in the face of its growing monopolization is a logical policy alternative," says report author Doug Smith.

Manitoba government cuts undermine safety and justice

In response to a recent announcement of funding increases on crown prosecutors, as part of the Manitoba governments "tough on crime" approach, CCPA Manitoba Research Associates Elizabeth Comack and Amelia Curran had an oped published in the *Winnipeg Free Press* outlining how austerity has cut key programs and services used by those criminalized by the justice system. The following is an excerpt:

"The Manitoba government been bent on implementing austerity measures designed to reduce expenditures and shrink the public service. Community supports—health care, housing, social services—have suffered

under these cuts, creating the conditions for rising crime rates.

“Indeed, 95 per cent of the 182 justice workers who participated in a survey examining provincial government austerity noted that their work has been negatively impacted by the government’s austerity measures; 75 per cent of respondents also believed that expenditure cuts and restraints have worsened public safety.

“Public safety requires government investment, resources, and support. Reliance on incarceration is reduced only when community supports are robustly available. Rather than quick fixes that have little social and financial value over time, the focus should be on the long-term cost savings that come with crime reduction.

“Increasing the budget to Prosecution Services may alleviate some pressures on staff, but it does not address the negative effects that austerity measures have had on crime rates more broadly.”

To read the complete op ed visit <https://policyfix.ca/2023/07/06/manitoba-government-cuts-undermine-safety-and-justice/>.

CCPA Ontario

A rising tide does not lift all boats

Ontario’s job market in 2022 was not the same job market it was in 2019.

In the wake of pandemic shutdowns, some industries grew; others shrank. For example, the number of professional, scientific

and technical jobs grew by 78,000 jobs (an 18 per cent increase); at the same time, accommodation and food services lost 45,000 jobs (a nine per cent decrease).

In general, the shift in employment was from lower-wage industries to higher-wage ones. This rising tide should have been good for all workers, regardless of race. But, as detailed in a new report by CCPA Ontario Senior Economist Sheila Block and co-author Grace-Edward Galabuzi, the employment gap between Black and white workers in Ontario actually worsened: Black workers were more likely to work in low-wage occupations that lost jobs.

“Black workers continue to bear a disproportionate burden of employment inequality,” Galabuzi noted. “These data demonstrate the need for continued policy efforts to combat anti-Black racism in the workplace.”

Some racialized workers did see progress during the recovery. Racialized workers, including South Asian and Chinese workers, were well-represented in industries and occupations that saw fast growth in employment and wages. Nonetheless, wage gaps persist: on a weekly basis, for every dollar earned by a white man in 2022, racialized men earned 90 cents; white women earned 80 cents; Black men earned 77 cents; Racialized women earned 71 cents; and Black women earned 68 cents.

To read *A Rising Tide Does Not Lift All Boats: Canada’s colour-coded*

labour market recovery, please visit policyalternatives.ca.

CCPA Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan has the biggest child care desert in Canada

David Macdonald and Martha Friendly’s report on child care deserts, *Not Done Yet: \$10 a day child care requires addressing Canada’s child care deserts*, made a big impact in Saskatchewan.

Writing in the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, CCPA SK Director Simon Enoch likened Saskatchewan’s child care deserts to the Sahara. With 92 per cent of younger children in Saskatchewan living in a

child care desert versus 48 per cent for the country as a whole, Saskatchewan has some of the poorest access to child care in the country.

The report even made its way into the Saskatchewan legislature, with NDP child care opposition critic and child care advocates citing the report as proof that the government needs to do much more to assure child care access in the province.

“Failure to do so will result in a growing divide of have and have-nots,” writes Simon Enoch, “as families in some regions of the province can access the promise of affordable child care, while others simply cannot.” **M**

There’s more Monitor online.

Our researchers and economists publish new analysis online every week.

Find the latest at MonitorMag.ca/more



The UK’s Accession to the CPTPP is a threat to Indigenous Rights in Canada

By Risa Schwartz



Alex Hemingway
BC Office

New B.C. law could break housing gridlock

As the housing crisis continues apace, the B.C. government is moving ahead with implementation of the *Housing Supply Act*, passed in November. This is good news because the housing shortage in this province is as severe as ever. Ultra-low vacancy rates have taken hold in the province's most expensive regions like Vancouver and Victoria, forcing renters to vie for the same scarce apartments at sky-high rents in a competition akin to the Hunger Games.

The legislation—one component of the Eby government's pivot on

housing policy—is designed to address chronic municipal-level roadblocks to new housing, including exclusionary zoning policies and expensive multi-year re-zoning and permitting processes. Under the legislation, the province will work with municipalities to assess local housing needs and create binding targets for building homes more rapidly. If cities fail to make clear progress towards meeting the targets, the province has the power to intervene directly, including by approving housing projects and amending zoning bylaws.

The B.C. government recently announced the first cohort of 10 cities in this effort: Abbotsford, Delta, Kamloops, North Vancouver, Oak Bay, Port Moody, Saanich, Vancouver, Victoria and West Vancouver. In selecting these municipalities, the government used a range of indicators to create an index reflecting “the urgency of local housing needs, the availability of the right housing supply, including land availability and unrealized potential for more homes,

and housing affordability.” Many more cities will be selected in the future including another eight to 10 of them later this year.

The province will finalize preliminary housing targets to the first 10 cities after a period of dialogue with those cities. According to Minister of Housing Ravi Kahlon, specific targets for below-market housing will be included.

Implementation details will be key. In particular, the housing needs assessments for each city must be ambitious. Municipalities left to their own devices have typically underestimated the need for new housing. For example, some have relied too heavily on population trends to estimate housing needs, failing to recognize that existing shortages constrain population growth and suppress household formation (for example, by forcing more young people to live with parents longer into adulthood).

The legislation does have teeth, but the province will have to show it's willing to use them.

Six months after the targets are set, Minister Kahlon says the province will evaluate progress and step in if municipalities are not demonstrating real progress. First, this will involve appointing an independent advisor who will “review the processes of municipalities that struggle... help the provincial government better understand unique challenges of the municipality and provide recommendations for actions the municipality or the province could take to ensure housing targets are met.” If needed, the provincial government may then begin approving important housing projects and revising zoning rules.

As I argued in a recent report, there is a strong case for strengthening the role of the province in land-use decisions that are currently left to municipalities. Municipal politics don't give voice to those renters and prospective owners who have already been priced out and excluded from a city but would like to live there. Nor do they account for broader society or economy-wide

ramifications of a housing shortage, driven in part by the accumulation of many highly localized decisions about land use.

A flurry of senior governments in other countries have begun to increase their involvement in land-use decisions, including at the national level in New Zealand and at the state level in California, Washington State and Montana. In Japan, land-use decisions have long been made at the national level.

As it stands, exclusionary local zoning policies in B.C. continue to effectively ban apartments on most residential land in our cities. This drives up the price of the scarce parcels where multi-family housing is allowed and makes the construction of new homes more difficult and expensive for public, non-profit and private rental developers alike. In a step that could partly address this, the provincial government has said it will bring forward new minimum standards for zoning in urban areas this fall. This is expected to allow three to four units on single-family lots “with additional density permitted in areas well-served by transit,” shifting the default land use to include options other than detached houses.

Here, again, the details will be crucial. Recent municipal “missing middle” housing policies in cities like

Victoria and Vancouver have fallen far short of the mark. While these policies and proposals would allow buildings in previously single-family zoned areas to be divided into multiplexes, the actual additional housing floor space permitted is far too little (a paltry 16 per cent increase in square footage in the proposed Vancouver policy, for example). The forthcoming provincial policy must avoid repeating this mistake.

In a recent report, my colleague Marc Lee set out a far more robust agenda for how to meaningfully upzone the Metro Vancouver region, which offers a range of options for missing-middle housing, allowing two to three times the current floor space maximums punctuated by larger apartment buildings with higher densities. This provides a good benchmark for what should be on the table in both provincial and local upzoning policy discussions, as does another recent analysis outlining an ambitious multiplex policy.

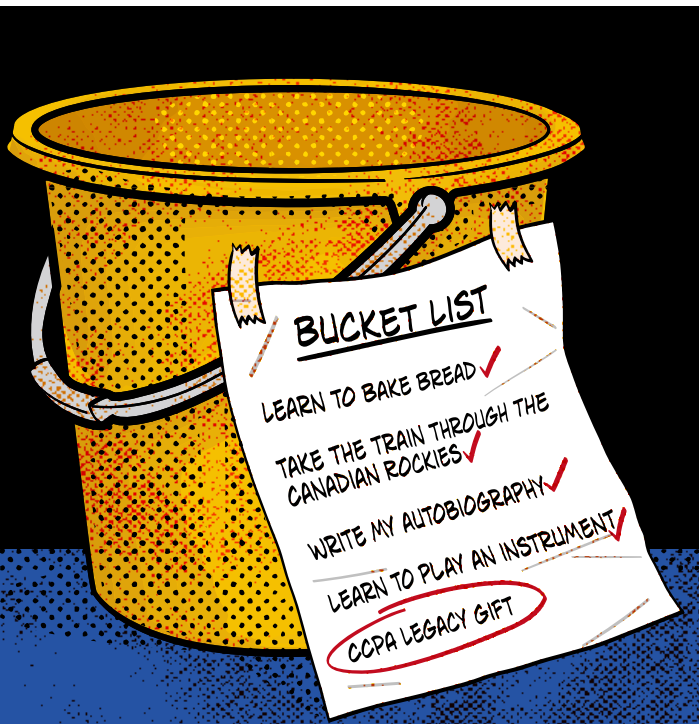
An encouraging example is the significant city-wide upzoning of Auckland, New Zealand in 2016, which included single-family areas and increased the overall zoned capacity for housing by 50 per cent. The results are impressive: a rapid and substantial increase in housing supply and lower, inflation-adjusted rents.

Absent the upzoning, new research suggests Auckland rents would have been 14-35 per cent higher. This shows it’s possible to meaningfully move the needle on housing supply and rents in a relatively short time.

Back home in B.C., one complaint from municipalities has been about the cost of infrastructure needed alongside new housing, such as sewers, water, public transportation, community centres or schools. The provincial government has signaled that more infrastructure investment will be a “carrot” provided to cities that succeed in meeting their housing targets, alongside the “sticks” described above.

Indeed, it’s important that the province step up to the plate to increase public infrastructure funding. But opposition to new housing based on infrastructure costs is misguided. When we don’t build enough new housing in our high-demand, low-vacancy centres, people still have to live somewhere. Many have to make do with overcrowded or substandard housing, while others move into outlying areas with expanding boundaries where infrastructure still has to be built but alongside low-density housing.

Often overlooked is the fact that infrastructure to support this type



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If you’d like to learn more about including the CCPA in your will, call Katie Loftus at 1-844-563-1341 or 613-563-1341 extension 318, or send an email to katie@policyalternatives.ca.

of suburban sprawl development costs much more per person than infrastructure to support denser urban housing.

The housing crisis is complex and no single policy can fix it. One of the most important complementary measures the B.C. government can take is to massively expand investment in public and non-profit housing—a key focus of CCPA’s research agenda. Also needed are progressive taxes to help fund deeply affordable housing, tamp down on speculation and tackle huge inequalities in land wealth.

But make no mistake: the overall shortage of housing supply is an important part of the crisis and ending exclusionary zoning is critical to any ambitious public housing agenda. With robust implementation, the *Housing Supply Act* and broader provincial upzoning measures can play a big role. ●

Alex Hemingway is a senior economist and public finance policy analyst at the CCPA BC office.



Ricardo Tranjan
Ontario Office

While tenants call rent strikes, parties rehash stale planks

A new study shows that if you are a minimum-wage worker looking for a place to rent, you’re out of luck. Pretty much anywhere in Canada.

The report, by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, of which I’m a co-author, calculated the “rental wage” for cities across the country. The rental wage is how much per hour workers need to earn to afford a rental unit without spending more than 30 per cent of their total income on housing—the standard affordability threshold.

In every province, rental wages for one- and two-bedroom units are higher than the minimum wage. That’s also the case in 34 out of 37 urban centres.

In Vancouver and Toronto, even the combined income of two minimum-wage workers falls short of the one-bedroom rental wage.

But tenants are not passively taking it on the chin. These past weeks brought news of three rent strikes in Toronto.

In the Weston neighbourhood, tenants in two separate buildings are standing up against what they consider excessive rent increases, despite financial statements showing that 50 per cent of their landlord’s rental revenue is profit. The landlord in question is Dream Impact, an arm of Dream Unlimited, who owns properties across Canada.

To support the rent strike, some community groups that receive funding from Dream Impact are refusing donations, demanding that the firm live up to its stated community-focused and environment-friendly values.

In a recent rally at Weston, labour unions, community associations, and other neighbourhood residents joined with the striking tenants.

In the Thorncliffe Park neighbourhood, tenants in three buildings have been on a rent strike since May 1. These buildings are owned by PSP Investments—the federal public sector pension fund—and managed by Starlight Investments. Both corporations refused to negotiate. Eviction notices were issued, but striking tenants haven’t budged.

Recently, the Ontario region of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) expressed support of Thorncliffe Park tenants. PSAC represents the federal public servants whose pension funds PSP Investments manages.

While organized tenants are taking action, political leaders continue to promise that more housing supply—somehow, someday—will set us free.

Worth repeating

“Do efforts to expand fossil fuel production at a time of climate emergency constitute a crime against humanity? Does this ever cross the line into genocide and should those responsible face future consequences?”

—CCPA BC Senior Economist Marc Lee, *Twitter, July 6, 2023*

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre posted a video on social media where a worker says his rent is going up from \$750 to \$1,300 this month. The man asked, “What about putting something in for landlords that they can’t jack up the rent that much?” Mr. Poilievre replied that rents will only stabilize when Canada builds more homes.

The alternative answer—one that would work immediately—is called rent control.

The Liberal government’s National Housing Strategy has focused chiefly on providing incentives for developers to increase supply, with requirements that a small share of new units be rented at a discounted price for a limited time. Funding for non-market housing has been piecemeal. And the federal strategy has no measures to curb rent hikes.

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh also talks about delivering the market-based initiatives the Liberals proposed, like GST and HST rebates to speed construction of affordable homes. And while his more recent idea of a National Acquisition Fund to increase the stock of non-market housing is a good one, unless it is part of a comprehensive housing nationalization program, it can be yet another boutique program.

Increasing supply of rental housing is necessary, but not sufficient to lower rents. Building and acquiring non-market rental housing is an effective solution, but it takes time.

What would immediately help priced out workers and striking tenants is strict rent controls. Provinces can implement them anytime. The federal government has done it in the past.

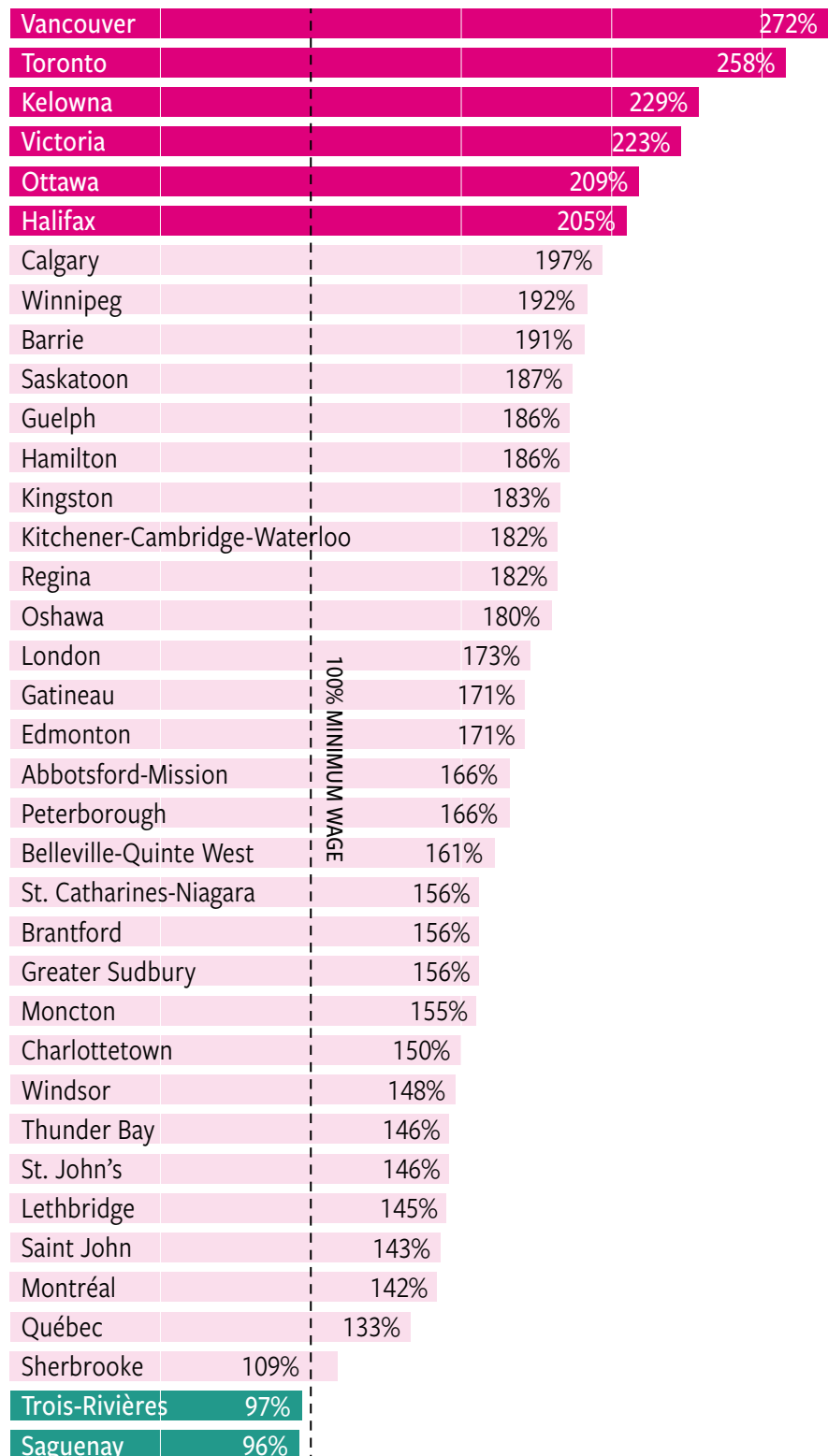
But enacting strict rent controls would require parties to take the side of tenants against landlords—and that we didn’t see in these past weeks, or past many years. ●

Ricardo Tranjan is a political economist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and author of *The Tenant Class*. This article originally appeared in *Troy Media*.

Rental wage by urban area

What percentage of the minimum wage do you need to earn to rent a two-bedroom without spending more than 30% of income on rent?

Green is less than minimum wage, **red** is more than twice that wage.



Source: CMHC, Rental Market Survey Data Tables; ESDC, Minimum Wage Database; authors’ calculations.

25%

7.6 million people collected CERB, a quarter of all adults

60%

Sixty per cent said it allowed them to take care of ill family members

50%

Half said it helped them re-enter the job market

37%

37 per cent used the time to further their education

>30%

35 per cent changed employers, 31 per cent changed job position or job title, and 30 per cent changed industry

~50%

Almost half said their current job is a better skills match, with better job satisfaction, better job security, and better income than before the pandemic



CERB helped Canadians get better jobs after the pandemic shutdown

**Katherine Scott
and Trish Hennessy**
National Office

We're having the wrong conversation about the CERB

The pandemic income support played a huge role in helping people get better jobs

Of all the headlines about how much the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) cost and questions about who received it, there's a buried headline: CERB helped Canadians get better jobs after the pandemic shutdown.

Working with the Future Skills Centre and Abacus Data, we surveyed 1,500 Canadians who received the CERB during the COVID-19 shutdown.

Overwhelmingly, they said CERB was a positive experience. It provided stability during a global crisis: 70 per cent of respondents said CERB had a positive impact on their household financial situation.

But CERB was more than just an income support.

Two thirds of respondents said it helped them deal with the stress of the pandemic.

Sixty per cent said it allowed them to take care of ill family members. Half of them said it helped them re-enter the job market.

And here's the real news: CERB provided the space and financial resources for many survey respondents to improve their skills.

While many Canadians hunkered down during the pandemic

lockdowns binge-watching Ted Lasso and learning how to make sourdough bread, 37 per cent of CERB recipients in our survey said they used the time to further their education.

CERB was a big incentive. Close to three-quarters of respondents who pursued education while on CERB said they would not have done so without income support.

The sudden and sharp shutdown of Canada's labour market at the start of the pandemic was traumatic for many of us. The uncertainty gnawed at us. As governments re-opened the economy, transitioning from lockdown mode to re-entering the workforce wasn't easy for everyone.

Our survey shows that CERB played a key role in easing the transition: two thirds of respondents who returned to the workforce said CERB allowed them to re-enter the job market in a way that worked best for them. Sixty two per cent said it gave them time to think about the career or job they wanted. Aim higher!

And it worked: 35 per cent of respondents changed employers, 31 per cent changed their job position or got a new job title, and 30 per

Of all the headlines about how much the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) cost and questions about who received it, there's a buried headline: CERB helped Canadians get better jobs after the pandemic shutdown.

cent shifted into a new industry. These numbers are up to 10 percentage points higher for those who chose to upgrade their skills while on CERB.

We see those results in Canada's shifting labour market, where many workers went from low-wage jobs before the pandemic to higher-paying jobs today. In fact, almost half of survey respondents said their current job is a better skills match, they have better job satisfaction, better job security, and better income.

So why aren't we talking about the positive benefits the CERB program had on hundreds of thousands of Canadians during one of the gloomiest periods in our history?

Receiving CERB income gave many Canadians the time and space to look for the right job, not just the first job that came along—especially young people.

This is a good news story. But there's a caveat: the majority of survey respondents said that while CERB helped them pay the bills and think about their work life in new ways, it wasn't enough for most people to afford to go back to school.

Much is made about the \$500 weekly benefit, but it was still a bare minimum income support.

A total of 7.6 million people collected CERB—a quarter of all adults. Canada's short-term emergency benefit programs successfully served as a financial bridge for millions to get back to employment.

As the federal government looks at Employment Insurance (EI) reform, it should not lose sight of the lessons from CERB. A better income support for the jobless should consider building a bridge between unemployment and training opportunities. That would amount to a win-win situation. ●

Katherine Scott is a senior researcher and Trish Hennessy is a senior strategist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' national office. An original version of this ran as a *Troy Media* oped.



Dr. Catherine Leviten-Reid
Nova Scotia Office

It's time to step up for tenants in Nova Scotia

Real solutions to a growing housing problem

Nova Scotians urgently need the government to do more to address our province's lack of affordable housing.

Based on the last census, at least 48,000 Nova Scotian renters reported paying 30 per cent or more of their income on shelter, leaving them vulnerable to losing their housing. That represents 35 per cent of tenants. That number is likely higher today.

Rent supplements are one way the government supports renters. However, the province needs to address the problems with these subsidies, particularly given their expanded use, recent changes to

program eligibility, and the clear demand for them.

The rent subsidy amount is calculated only to bridge the gap between 30 per cent of a tenant's income and Average Market Rent (AMR) (and 95 per cent of AMR for those ages 58 and over). This calculation does not consider the actual cost of rent. The AMR figures are updated infrequently and don't do a good job of capturing the cost of accessible units or vacant units. Anything above the AMR (or 95 per cent of AMR for older renters) is the tenant's responsibility, making housing affordability a moving target for those most in need.

Two, the cost of utilities is not factored into subsidy calculations, even though utility costs are typically not all included in rent. Data on rentals from CBRM show that 77 per cent don't include lights, 58 per cent don't include heat, and nine per cent don't even include water. It's important to highlight here that affordable housing means you are spending no more than 30 per cent of your household income on shelter costs—meaning *both* rent and utilities.

Three, those in arrears with public housing but now living in market rentals either have to pay the amount they owe in full or make arrangements to pay this debt before being

considered eligible for the supplement. Arrears might be for unpaid rent while they lived in public housing or due to a fee charged by public housing if they left some of their belongings in their unit. This policy excludes some of the most marginalized tenants in the province from benefiting from the supplement.

Four, except for cases where housing support workers are involved in helping clients find a place to live and do inspections of units, housing conditions are not a consideration for whether a rental subsidy is provided to tenants. Providing a government subsidy to a tenant living in housing needing major repairs without mechanisms to ensure that landlords address those repairs is hugely problematic.

Nova Scotia has a higher percentage of housing needing major repairs than the rest of the country and limited oversight of housing conditions. Moreover, a rent subsidy is supposed to support tenants to remain housed, but tenants report fears of eviction for reasons including requesting repairs. In older rent supplement programs, units were inspected and the agreement between the housing authority and

the landlord included acceptable standards for the housing provided. Why is that no longer the case?

Five, there's a lack of clarity about who is eligible to receive these supplements, depending on immigration status, including whether refugee claimants are eligible to receive the supplement.

Six, although new supplements were announced in the budget, they are still limited to 8,000 households. Limiting subsidies to those spending at least 50 per cent of their income on rent (which isn't even based on actual rent paid but on AMR) also leaves thousands without access.

Re-design the rent supplement

It is possible to address some of the problems with the rent supplement through better design, namely:

- Monthly financial support should be provided for utilities, as is done in the rent supplement program in the U.S.
- Those in arrears with public housing should immediately become eligible to receive the subsidy: options include forgiving what is owed, or paying back arrears incrementally through small deductions in the rent supplement provided.
- The AMR cap should be removed so that it is consistent with public, rent-gear-to-income housing, with research showing, not surprisingly, that more generous housing subsidies reduce rent burdens.
- The supplement should be made available to all renters living in unaffordable housing, not just those paying 50 per cent of their income on rent.
- This supplement should be available to everyone, regardless of their immigration status.

Housing is a human right

Beyond re-designing the rent supplement, there are other critical policies the government should be implementing, as outlined in the CCPA Nova Scotia's *Housing for All* report.

- Legislating vacancy control (rent control tied to the unit) would be a structural mechanism to address affordability challenges experienced by tenants, instead of just continuing to subsidize landlords with rent supplements.

- Implementing a province-wide program of landlord licensing and inspections would prevent rental housing needing significant repair from being rented in the first place.

- Strengthening tenant protections in Nova Scotia would also bolster renters' security of tenure.

The chronic lack of affordable units results in constrained choices for tenants or no choice at all. Responding to the chronic shortage of affordable housing primarily through rent supplements will not succeed without substantial investment in supply-side responses that generate affordable rentals. Beyond low vacancies, we know tenants face discrimination based on income source, interactions with the justice system, family type, and ethnicity, among other characteristics, again highlighting the need for greater tenant protection.

Changes to rent supplement design and the rental market are needed, as is a massive investment in public and non-profit and cooperative rental housing stock. This investment must include scaling up the protection of existing affordable units by purchasing rental buildings for sale and facilitating ownership by non-market providers. The status quo level of investment is unacceptable, with more Nova Scotians finding themselves without a secure roof over their heads.

A short-sighted vision that relies primarily on the market to ensure everyone has access to housing underestimates this issue's tremendous rippling impact, which erodes efforts to build a healthy, growing, more inclusive province. ●

Dr. Catherine Leviten-Reid is a CCPA-NS research associate and an associate professor in the MBA in Community Economic Development program at Cape Breton University.

Worth repeating

“Targeted income support, as a tool for supporting displaced workers, does work. It was, after all, telling that a significant number of CERB recipients chose to pursue training and education on their own accord while they received the benefit.

—*Katherine Scott,*
Globe and Mail, June 13, 2023

“The era
of global warming
has ended...”

**WHY CANADA NEEDS
GRASSROOTS
CLIMATE ORGANIZING**

By Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood

The era
of global boiling
has arrived.”

—United Nations Secretary General **Antonio Guterres**

THE CLIMATE CRISIS is a problem too big for anyone to solve on their own.

No individual, region or even nation state can reduce greenhouse gas emissions far enough to save the rest of us. And no one person or government can, on their own, build a better global economy—one that values sustainability and inclusion over profit and extraction.

Some will tell you we shouldn't even try. Why must Canada reduce emissions if China produces so many more? Why must we invest in green, public infrastructure instead of letting the market run its course?

These and other such refrains are common enough, disingenuous as they may be. Yet the solution to grand collective problems like climate change is not to give up, but rather for everyone to do their damndest to turn things around.

At the CCPA, our focus has historically been on the federal and provincial governments. States and their subdivisions can, and should, be doing much more to tackle the intertwined crises of climate and inequality. Our federal government, in particular, has a vast, untapped potential to redirect the Canadian economy toward nobler goals, as we have long argued.

Were Canada and every other nation to begin pulling its weight, we could move quickly and seriously to address the global climate crisis.

But for many communities across the country, that promise of far-flung, high-level action is disconnected from their day-to-day reality. Choked by wildfire smoke, drowning in floodwaters and anxious about an uncertain economic future, many feel abandoned by their governments, at all levels.

What is a community to do when the state is not moving quickly or forcefully enough to address the greatest crisis of our lives?

That is precisely the question that drove Max Cohen, Isabella Pojuner, Avi Lewis and me to write *Don't Wait for the State*, a report co-published by the CCPA and the University of British Columbia's Department of Geography. In it, we argue that grassroots climate organizing—citizen-led efforts to unite communities and advance shared visions for a better future—can play an integral role in advancing people-focused local climate action in Canada.

In the same way that the contributions of each nation state comprise the totality of global climate action, the energy and ideas of individual communities comprise Canada's efforts to tackle and respond to the climate crisis.

We need community-level transition roadmaps for every place in Canada—concrete plans for transitioning

away from fossil fuels and building a more inclusive, sustainable and prosperous economy for all.

It is no simple task. But the good news for Canadian communities is that they need not start from scratch.

In our research, we discovered dozens of cases of communities taking the lead on climate action, including in Australia, Ireland, Mexico, the U.S. and here at home. From those cases, we identified a common set of principles that make for effective organizing, including the importance of reckoning with historical injustices, of employing democratic processes, and of building movement capacity with training and leadership development.

Based on those principles, we propose a five-step template for action called the "5D" framework for grassroots climate organizing.

- First, *define* the community in question. Who is the movement working for?
- Second, *design* inclusive and democratic organizing processes. Who speaks for the community?
- Third, *dream* up a greener future through a collective visioning process. What are we trying to achieve?
- Fourth, *determine* the constraints standing in the way of the dream. What obstacles must be overcome?
- Finally, *deliver* real alternatives for the community, however humble they may be, to show that organizing is about more than words. What can we do for our community today?

In the following pages, you will meet courageous climate organizers from across Canada and beyond who are already delivering for their communities. From coast to coast to coast, there is no shortage of energy or ideas for building a better future.

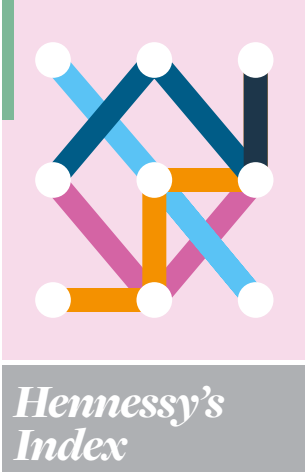
But not every community is so far along. Many parts of the country feel trapped by oil and gas interests. Or discouraged by dismissive, denialist leaders.

Our hope is that more citizens, inspired by their peers and equipped with tools like the 5D framework, take up the torch and begin the difficult but necessary work of grassroots climate organizing in their communities.

Ultimately, the climate crisis and the various social and economic dislocations that it entails are coming, whether we like it or not. The choice for Canadian communities is not whether to adapt, but how.

And where the state fails to lead, it falls to brave and compassionate citizens to pick up the slack. **M**

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



The climate crisis

By Trish Hennessy

0.08°C

The earth's temperature has risen by an average of 0.08° Celsius/0.14° Fahrenheit per decade since 1880—that's about 1°C/2°F in total.

0.18°C

The rate of warming since 1981 is more than twice as fast as before: 0.18°C/0.32°F per decade.

2022

That's the sixth warmest year on record (1880-2022), based on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) earth temperature data.

10

According to the 2022 Global Climate Report from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information, every month of 2022 ranked among the 10 warmest for that month, despite the cooling influence from the La Niña climate pattern in the tropical Pacific.

0.75°C

The "coolest" month in 2022 was November, which was 0.75°C/1.35°F warmer than average.

10

The 10 warmest years on record have all occurred since 2010.

June 2023

The earth just had its hottest June in the global climate 174-year record.

1.05°C

The average land and ocean temperature in June 2023 was 1.05 degrees C/1.89 degrees F above average.

0.13°C

June 2023 was 0.13 of a degree C/0.23 of a degree F warmer than the previous record set in June 2020.

47

June 2023 also marked the 47th consecutive June and the 532nd consecutive month with temperatures above the 20th century average.

76,000 sq. km

This year's wildfire season is the worst on record in Canada: 76,000 sq. km (29,000 sq. miles) burned—generating nearly 160 m tonnes of carbon.

8

The Atlantic basin saw three tropical storms in June 2023, which ties eight other years for the most storms in June.

9

Nine named tropical storms occurred across the globe in June 2023. Four of the storms reached tropical cyclone strength (winds of 119 km h/74 mph or higher) with one of those reaching major tropical cyclone strength (winds of 178 km h/111 mph or higher)—above 1991-2020 averages for June.

11 billion

Today, burning fossil fuels and clearing forests add about 11 billion metric tonnes of carbon (equivalent to a little over 40 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide) to the atmosphere each year. Because that is more carbon than natural processes can remove, atmospheric carbon dioxide increases each year.

5.9°-10.2°

At this rate of yearly emissions, models project that by the end of this century, global temperature will be at least 5 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than the 1901-1960 average, and possibly as much as 10.2 degrees Fahrenheit warmer.

2.4°

If annual emissions increase more slowly and begin to decline significantly by 2050, models project temperatures would still be at least 2.4 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than the first half of the 20th century, and possibly up to 5.9 degrees Fahrenheit warmer.

"We are always late to the history in which we live."

—ALEKSANDAR HEMON, *THE WORLD AND ALL THAT IT HOLDS*.

330,000

Globally, June 2023 saw the lowest sea ice coverage (extent) for any June on record. This primarily was a result of the record-low sea ice in the Antarctic that occurred for the second consecutive month. Earth's global sea ice extent (total region with at least 15 percent sea ice cover) in June 2023 was 330,000 square miles less than the previous record low from June 2019.

Re-radicalizing a just transition

THE CONCEPT OF a “just transition” has emerged as the progressive alternative to a chaotic, market-led shift in the energy system.

The term originated in the organized labour movement specifically to protect unionized workers displaced due to environmental policies.

Tony Mazzocchi, the U.S. labour organizer who is widely credited with popularizing the idea, first made the case in 1993 for “an ambitious, imaginative program of support and re-education... [to] guarantee full wages and benefits to employees who lose their jobs due to environmental regulations.”

The term “just transition” itself appears to have been coined in Canada by the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union in 1996.

To the labour movement, just transition includes policies, such as income supports and retraining programs, to ensure workers’ livelihoods are protected as they transition to new jobs in other industries.

In 2015, the International Labour Organization (ILO) encapsulated the movement’s priorities in its *Guidelines for a Just Transition Towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All*, which emphasized social dialogue, decent work and labour rights.

The labour movement has been key to winning recognition for the principles of a just transition in international law, including in the Paris Agreement.

More recently, the concept has been interpreted by a range of progressive actors, including in environmental and social justice movements, to capture a broader agenda of societal change in response to the climate emergency.

Under this more expansive definition, just transition includes

foregrounding the voices and demands of historically marginalized communities, expansive universal public services, an emphasis on the low-carbon care economy, public spending on economic alternatives, and a green industrial strategy to fast track new industries and make good on a green jobs guarantee.

Advocates move beyond instrumental employment concerns to embrace issues of energy democracy and public power. While there is overlap with the ILO priorities, groups like the Climate Justice Alliance emphasize self-determination, redistribution, and economic transformation in their definition of a just transition.

Some Indigenous communities have also adopted just transition language to centre issues of reconciliation and historical justice in the climate discourse.

As just transition has moved from the advocacy space into the policy space, it has taken on new meanings.

Governments that employ the term have occasionally used it to rebrand traditional and inadequate workforce transition programs, which has led to significant worker distrust of the term—from coal workers in Appalachia and New Brunswick to oil workers in Alberta to forestry workers in British Columbia.

The U.S.-based Just Transition Listening Project, which engages with communities that are undergoing or have undergone economic transitions, has found that these communities are, in general, deeply skeptical of just transition policies.

Where just transition policies are more genuine, critics argue that the term nevertheless risks being used as a “disciplining device that steers local activists towards approaches

that are compatible with government policy directions.”

For its part, the Canadian government has watered down the concept to mean a focus on community consultations and “inclusive economic opportunities” in place of the more radical concepts of self-determination and direct job creation.

Many Canadian workers and communities have understandably come to view just transition as an exercise in government greenwashing. That may explain, at least in part, the federal government’s recent preference for the phrase “sustainable jobs,” which has fewer pre-existing connotations.

The Just Transition Research Collaborative, a group of international academics and experts, has attempted to map these various understandings of a just transition along two axes. First, on a spectrum from “exclusive” (i.e., benefitting a specific group) to “inclusive” (i.e., benefitting society as a whole). Second, on a spectrum from “no harm done” (i.e., preserving the status quo) to “new vision” (i.e., transforming the existing political and economic system).

There is both a need and an opportunity, then, to re-radicalize the political narrative around a just transition to achieve its transformative potential. Given the “failure of elected officials to deliver just transition policies,” as the Just Transition Listening Project concludes, it falls to organizers to recapture the promise of a just transition and advance a concrete, progressive alternative. **M**

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood is a senior researcher with the CCPA’s National Office. Max Cohen is a PhD candidate in Geography at the University of British Columbia. Isabella Pojuner researches the politics of land ownership in England. Avi Lewis is a documentary filmmaker and associate professor at the University of British Columbia.

KATHRYN-JANE HAZEL

How organizing led Nanaimo to adopt the doughnut economics framework

They started during the worst of the pandemic—and won.

THE NANAIMO Climate Action Hub (NCAH) was established on November 21, 2020, during the worst period of the pandemic—not the best time for starting a climate action group, you may think.

But within three weeks of its formation, NCAH had its first successful action, persuading Nanaimo city council to vote in favour of three climate initiatives after it received a deluge of emails from our members and supporters.

As a result, Nanaimo adopted the doughnut economics framework, one of the first cities in North America to do so. It approved funding for a manager of sustainability. It extended a bicycle lane from the Vancouver Island University campus to downtown.

Now with 82 active members, 371 supporters, and 10 community partner groups, NCAH has continued to educate about and advocate for the climate emergency to the municipal, regional district and school district boards in Nanaimo and area as well as the larger community.

Membership is straightforward: individuals and groups must agree with our statement of principles posted on our website, nanaimoclimateaction.org.

There is no membership fee—we are funded by donations—and anyone who is a member can become a director on our board. Our directors have ranged in age from teens to octogenarians—from those just beginning climate activism to those with decades of experience.

Key to our success has been the inclusive leadership style of our chair, Heather Baitz, clear strategies, focused actions, community and partner engagement, a commitment to developing good relationships with the community, and, most importantly, never giving up!

A good example of how this works has been NCAH's campaign in support of a low-carbon energy systems (LCES) bylaw.

In April of 2021, members of NCAH, the Council of Canadians Mid-Island Chapter, and the Environmental Justice Committee of the Nanaimo Unitarians made a presentation to Nanaimo's mayor and council in favour of a low-carbon energy systems (LCES) bylaw.

More than 60 people sent emails urging council to regulate cleaner heating systems in new construction. Our presenters followed up with council members over the next few weeks to provide detailed information and have further discussions about the advantages of such a bylaw.

On May 9, 2021, the Governance and Priorities Committee (GPC) passed a motion from councillor Ben Geselbracht to add this policy statement into the green buildings section of the new city plan: "support, prioritize and advocate for low carbon energy systems in all new construction." This policy meant that staff would be directed to work on a LCES bylaw once the plan was finalized.

The subject of LCES was scheduled to come before the GPC again

in July and, in preparation, NCAH began a campaign in mid-June opposing the building of new houses with gas and asking that council adopt the Zero Carbon Step Code at the zero carbon level, as Victoria and Saanich had already done. More than 50 emails were sent from NCAH members and supporters to the mayor and council, and a presentation was drafted, with speakers lined up and ready to go.

This is just one of NCAH's many activities, past and present, including: a speaker series on topics from walkable cities to better buildings, an open letter to the president of Vancouver Island University asking for action on the climate crisis, signed by 135 individuals and 15 organizations, meetings with MLAS and city councilors, workshops for municipal candidates on environmental issues, collation of candidate policy platforms on climate, support for the Nanaimo-Ladysmith School Board's Environmental Stewardship Action Plan, a campaign to make heat pumps more affordable—and much more.

NCAH never stands still. Our goal is to advance solutions that reflect the urgency of the climate emergency, and we will continue to do that for as long as it takes. **M**

Kathryn-Jane Hazel is a community activist, former journalist and retired media studies instructor who lives in Nanaimo.



CLAIRE CALDERWOOD

Fostering an inclusive cycling environment in Nova Scotia

ESTABLISHED IN 1971, the Ecology Action Centre (EAC) is the oldest environmental organization in Nova Scotia.

The EAC's transportation team—one of its seven areas of focus—has long demonstrated how grassroots organizations can grow and adapt to meet the changing needs of the communities they serve. Here, we'll explore four initiatives that have been promoting equitable access to cycling for the past 25 years.

Bike Again

In the late 1990s, the vast majority of Halifax cyclists relied on for-profit bike shops. For many, the ever-rising cost of parts, tools and repairs made purchasing and maintaining a bike unaffordable. Through engagement and discussions with concerned citizens, the EAC recognized the importance

of fostering an inclusive cycling environment in the city. As a result, in the summer of 2000, the EAC piloted Bike Again, the community's very own do-it-yourself (D.I.Y.) bicycle repair space.

Bike Again offers the public free access to repair stations, tools, and used bike parts. When visitors enter the shop, they are encouraged to perform their own tune-ups while being supported by Bike Again volunteers.

In addition to helping cyclists fix their bikes, the shop also repairs donated bikes which are then sold to the public at an affordable price.

Since 2000, Bike Again has continually adapted to meet community needs, fixing thousands of bikes in the process. Its success can be attributed to the shop's volunteers who possess a wealth of knowledge and demonstrate great care for the space.

Welcoming Wheels

During the Syrian refugee crisis, Halifax witnessed an influx of newcomers. Among the many challenges they face, access to adequate transportation has proven to be a substantial barrier.

Newcomers cannot typically afford a personal vehicle when they first arrive in a new city, and navigating new roadways or public transportation systems can be extremely overwhelming.

To help mitigate these challenges, in 2015 EAC's transportation team launched Welcoming Wheels, a program that offers newcomers the opportunity to access and enjoy the benefits of cycling.

Originally operating out of a donated community recreation centre, Welcoming Wheels now calls the Bike Again space home. The EAC partners with the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia

(ISANS) and the Halifax Refugee Clinic (HRC) to best reach newcomer communities and select appropriate program participants.

At Bike Again, participants are offered a space to repair a donated bike, with the support of Welcoming Wheels volunteers and staff.

Once the bicycle has been refurbished, participants are required to participate in safe cycling education and are provided with free safety equipment, such as lights and a helmet. This helps ensure that participants feel confident to safely ride their bike on local roads, allowing them to travel across the city in order to reach the services and resources vital for their everyday life.

Since its inception, Welcoming Wheels has repaired 590 bikes.

Despite the success of Welcoming Wheels, the program brought to light additional gaps in Nova Scotia's cycling equity. Those who had received a bike through Welcoming Wheels expressed difficulty maintaining and repairing their bikes due to a lack of easy access to shops and tools.

The majority of Nova Scotia's bike repair shops are for-profit and concentrated in the city centre while a high proportion of newcomers and other equity-deserving groups live in underserved or rural areas. Therefore, a large section of Nova Scotia's population (including newcomers) lack access to affordable bike repair or tools.

As a result, regular wear and tear—as simple as a flat tire—might prevent people from riding their bike. And so, the EAC's cycling programs evolved once again!

The Pop-Up Bike Hub

In March 2020, the EAC piloted the Pop-Up Bike Hub (PUBH). The PUBH is a 100-square-foot mobile trailer containing a variety of bike tools, replacement parts and four adaptable bike stands. Every summer, the PUBH travels to underserved communities across Nova Scotia, where staff offer basic bike repair services for free.

The EAC partners with Mi'kmaq and Municipal Physical Activity Leaders (MPALs) to identify the resources and locations best suited for each community. The trailer is typically stationed beside a local school, park, library or community centre.

One of the EAC's many trips has been to Eskasoni, the Maritimes' largest Mi'kmaq community. The EAC reached out to the community following a CBC report on the Eskasoni Summer Bike Rodeo.

Although Eskasoni has long exhibited a vibrant cycling culture, community repairs have been restricted by access to tools. "The closest bike shop is in Sydney, and that's about 45 minutes away," notes Wekatesk Augustine, adolescent education/accreditation coordinator with the Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counseling Association.

The PUBH's first trip to Eskasoni had an amazing turnout, with 150 bikes repaired over three days.

In addition to bike maintenance, partnering communities are often gifted tools, second-hand bikes and/or safe cycling education.

"At its heart, the PUBH is a community space on wheels, a place for people to connect and learn," says Simone Mutabazi, community cycling activation coordinator with the EAC. "Just being present in that space with people is the part I enjoy the most."

Over the last three years, the PUBH has collaborated with 29 communities across Nova Scotia, helping over 1,200 dormant bikes get safely rolling again. In 2023 alone, the PUBH plans to reach 17 communities.

The Pop-Up Bike Hub Mini

In the summer of 2022, the EAC piloted the PUBH Mini. The PUBH Mini is an electric cargo bike loaded with tools and supplies needed for simple bike repairs.

Inspired by the community connections that the PUBH sparked, the Mini commutes to underserved Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) communities within a 45-minute ride of the EAC's office.

Just like its larger predecessor, the PUBH Mini offers simple repairs aimed at getting bikes safely rolling and stopping in order to increase accessibility to cycling in the province.

The EAC's transportation team chose an electric bike because it involves fewer physical constraints and produces far fewer greenhouse gas emissions than a vehicle.

Though just over a year old, the program has already greatly increased the number of communities that the EAC reaches each summer. In the 2023 summer season, the Mini will complete weekly drop-ins at five partner locations and assist in the completion of safe cycling education at schools and summer camps.

Furthermore, the PUBH Mini has partnered with the Wonderneath Art Bikers, a local program that delivers art programming via bikes. Together, the two teams aim to foster a culture of care, creativity, and cycling.

The Ecology Action Centre's impact

At present, all four programs remain operational. Together, their stories exemplify the need for similar community programs to be continually adapted in order to fill gaps identified by the communities they serve.

The programs have helped to improve community resilience by using low-carbon and active transportation solutions. They have been designed to not only reduce gaps in infrastructure but to simultaneously address cultural and socio-economic barriers.

Moving forward, the EAC will continue to strive for change and make Nova Scotia a place where people have equitable access to the resources they need to make cycling a part of their lives. **M**

Claire Calderwood is the sustainable transportation coordinator at the Ecology Action Centre in Nova Scotia.

ADRIAN WERNER

Candidate forums can foster a collaborative climate movement

PLANNING CANDIDATE FORUMS at election time is a tried-and-true way for organizations to engage the public and politicians on important issues such as climate change.

It provides a dedicated avenue for politicians to discuss their platform and answer questions on community priorities.

However, inviting a candidate to a forum does not guarantee their attendance. Therefore, the forum planning process is crucial to securing attendance and providing the opportunity for community-led discussion toward a climate transition the candidates would ultimately administer.

The Manitoba Climate and Environment Election Coalition (MCEEC) exemplifies how this process can foster a collaborative climate movement.

The group includes nearly 50 people who participate either as individuals or as members of over 35 organizations that engage based on their current capacity and the campaigns they are working on.

Successfully planning candidate forums can be understood using the 5D framework outlined in the CCPA's recent *Don't Wait for the State: A blueprint for grassroots climate transitions in Canada*.

Planning forums begins by **defining community**. We rely on reports from organizations involved in the collaboration, such as Manitoba's Climate Action Team's *Road to Resilience* reports, to answer guiding questions like: Who holds power? Who is at the greatest risk? What are the most carbon-intensive activities? These questions remind us of power dynamics within elections and the goals we

should focus on throughout the process.

We begin the planning early, at least 10 months before an election, with an invitation to other organizations to participate and an outline of the campaign. Our **design process** is revisited frequently during this time, allowing flexibility to adapt to new connections with organizations, key election issues, and the level of government. Ample time also gives an opportunity to revisit whether the coalition is inclusive enough to represent the community's interests and identify potential allies who have not yet been invited.

This year, we prioritized engaging more with youth by forging stronger connections with student groups.

Bringing together larger groups to reach a common goal can be challenging. Therefore, we must collectively **dream up a greener future** to ensure a mutual understanding of purpose and goals. There are always more ideas than we can accommodate. Without a collective vision to unify the collaborators, conflict can arise. We intentionally avoid asking questions that pit organizations' priorities against each other and instead work iteratively on determining what issues we highlight, the question format, and how many we ask.

Determining constraints has been a prominent part of planning for the 2023 Manitoba provincial election because climate is unlikely to be a significant election issue. To maximize the likelihood that party leaders will attend, we meticulously choose the forum's location, format, method of invitation, how the audience participates, and who is moderating in the hopes these

will incentivize attendance and demonstrate that all candidates are welcome.

The underlying motivation for planning forums is to **deliver alternatives** to the status quo in Manitoba. Questions create opportunities for candidates to paint possible futures and organizations to get specific answers about their policy asks. Giving leaders space to discuss their campaign promises also offers insights into their priorities. Perhaps most crucially, the forum becomes the basis of an awareness campaign built around candidate responses.

Not only is the 5D framework reflected in forum planning work that we do with MCEEC, it also lends further inspiration and direction to increase our success. The framework pushes the collaboration to view our events as opportunities to develop clearer dreams for a greener future and alternatives to the climate crisis.

It urges us to reflect upon our community and engagement process—to broaden the coalition beyond groups whose sole mandate is climate and environmental work.

It asks us to identify potential barriers to success and how to overcome them.

I have seen first-hand how working together on a common goal fosters collaboration and the capacity to mobilize around other campaigns. We will continue to live by and be guided by the 5D framework as the coalition continues to organize election forums that showcase what a better future could be. **M**

Adrian Werner is the regional engagement coordinator for the Prairies with Climate Reality Project Canada.

ISABELLA POJUNER

After the flood, they mapped land ownership

REMEMBER THE FLOODS of 2019.

Climate strikes, flooding the streets of London every Friday.

Greta Thunberg, flooding my social media feeds every morning.

Statistics about the climate and biodiversity crises, saturating my mind as an undergraduate student. The water was clear, but the horizon for just transition policy was nowhere in sight. I needed to find land.

Metaphors aside, I sort of did, because that same year I came across an investigation called *Who Owns England*. Unlike in Canada, land ownership data in England is behind a paywall, but this small team of independent researchers and citizens were mapping it, bit by bit.

Two years later, the Right to Roam campaign started to use this data to challenge land injustice, particularly the finding that just eight per cent of land in England and Wales is accessible to the public. The Labour Party has now committed to a *Right to Roam Act* to extend this right to access land and a national poll found 62 per cent of the public support this move.

Participatory data projects such as these offer more than just the data itself. They help unite people across ideological, socioeconomic, and strategic differences. They position campaigners as experts with unified and evolving narratives. Who owns land and, therefore, who governs surface and mineral rights matters in our efforts to create just transitions around the world.

As floods hit Kentucky in summer 2022, they also wracked the border of Kentucky and West Virginia in 1977. At the time, the federal government failed to provide temporary housing for thousands of displaced, and outraged citizens formed the

Appalachian Alliance. They recognized that they had to map land ownership data to understand why the region was so unprepared for severe floods.

This team of 60 activists and academics examined tax records, registered deeds and leased books in each of the 13 Appalachian states to determine land ownership, location and property valuation.

They found that across 20 million acres, just one per cent of the population held control over 53 per cent of the total land surface while 40 per cent of surface land rights and 70 per cent of mineral rights were held by corporations.

It represented a clear inequality that had created the conditions for unstable ground, inappropriate planning policies, and the inevitable floods that would destroy homes.

When the regional commission refused to publish their results, this new Task Force on Appalachian Land Ownership worked with newspapers, independent publishers, academic presses and churches of multiple denominations to distribute the findings and policy recommendations to the public.

The task force is considered a model for participatory research, but, notably, it was a fertile foundation for environmental and economic justice campaigns across the region.

This offers a critical lesson for emergent just transition campaigns.

Between 2011 and 2017, 71 per cent of all U.S. coal mining jobs lost in the United States were in Appalachia—but the region is also home to 27 per cent of U.S. energy justice programs.

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth is the most active

organization in a sea of interconnected, grassroots civil society groups working towards just transition and economic transformation. Born from the Task Force on Appalachian Land Ownership, at 45 years old it remains a bastion of hope for long-term just transition organizing.

Since the 1977 floods, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth has won campaigns at the federal, regional, and local level.

They helped abolish the broad-form mineral feed, which allowed mineral rights owners to establish strip mines without the consent of the surface land owner.

They offered powerful and strategic critiques of federal programs like POWER to fund energy transition activities in the region, taking it into their own hands to empower former coal workers with leadership development programs to lobby at the federal level.

In response to partisan stasis in the legislature over the EPA's Clean Power Plan in 2017, it launched the Empower Kentucky initiative in 2017—a “people's energy plan,” which plans to invest \$400 million in a just transition, reduce average bills by 10 per cent and cut carbon dioxide pollution from Kentucky's energy sector by 40 per cent.

In a sea of statistics communicating the biodiversity collapse and climate crisis, movements are beginning to ground their politics and organizational structures in a political economy of land. Who owns it, who works it, who uses it matters—not only in building a narrative of environmental injustice, but in how we move forward with a just transition. **M**

Isabella Pojuner researches the politics of land ownership in England.

JOHN CARTWRIGHT

The invisible workforce and climate justice

HERE IS a memorable scene in Ken Loach's film *Bread and Roses*, set in the epic Justice for Janitors struggle in Los Angeles in the late 1990s.

Two immigrant janitors are cleaning the floor in front of a bank of elevators as a group of high-priced lawyers bustle past, nearly stepping over the cleaners in their rush to get to their destination.

After they have left, one of the pair says to his newly hired helper: "You see these uniforms we wear. They make you invisible."

When most of us think of transforming the economy into true sustainability, the images that come to mind are of solar panels being installed or electric vehicles replacing diesel and gasoline.

Perhaps we have read about low-carbon building design.

But few of us know about the vital role that is played by the people who run these buildings. We take for granted that this "just happens."

Whether they work as apartment superintendents, school custodians, or building operators—this is still a largely invisible workforce.

Initiatives to reduce our carbon footprint look at greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, buildings, energy production and waste. In major cities, the largest portion of CO₂ comes from the heating, cooling and operation of buildings—it gets higher depending on the source of electricity. So reducing building energy use is a key factor in the efforts of cities across the world.

One of the three top-level recommendations in the Toronto TransformTO program's first report in 2017 was to develop the workforce for high-performance buildings.

That includes skilled trades, such as electricians and HVAC mechanics, as well as those designing green buildings or energy retrofits. Toronto was a global leader in retrofitting through the Better Buildings Partnership, launched in the mid-1990s.

But the thing about a retrofit is that once it's complete, everything relies on the skills of the people running the building and its systems. If they are not properly trained, you quickly lose the efficiencies that were in the original design. Because big buildings are actually pretty complex systems.

The largest concentration of high-rise buildings in this continent sits in New York City. It's also a place with a remarkable level of unionization of building custodians and operators.

Their union, SEIU 32BJ, has been a political powerhouse for decades, combining a culture of relentless organizing with political mobilization. City regulations help anchor the standards for building operators and a joint labour-management training fund is supported by a wide range of property owners.

Starting in 2005, that training fund set out to incorporate new skills for greening New York City's massive building stock. In 2010, with federal funding under the *American Recovery Act*, it launched an ambitious goal of training over a thousand building operators—called the Green Supers Program—to achieve a comprehensive approach to sustainable and energy efficient building operation.

Participants in the program combine classroom sessions with hands-on field exercises that cover building science and envelope, lighting, heating, ventilation and air conditioning, indoor environmental

quality, water conservation and energy benchmarking.

It didn't take long for the program to prove a success—some 1,600 SEIU members graduated in the first two years.

In a review, program graduates stated that they benefited not only from an expanded skill set, but also from an increased capacity to communicate energy efficiency issues to building decision-makers, leading to the successful implementation of a range of efficiency measures.

Since then, it has been replicated in a number of U.S. cities where SEIU has strong industrial relations with property owners.

In New York, the impact of Hurricane Sandy—where hundreds of buildings were flooded in 2012—further reinforced the union's commitment to climate action.

Are there lessons for Canada from this example? Absolutely.

The new federal *Sustainable Jobs Act* outlines a number of measures, including workforce training. That could reach farther than construction and industrial trades and be much more comprehensive.

While there may not be the kind of extensive bargaining relationships in commercial or multi-residential sectors that exists in New York or Los Angeles, there are tens of thousands of buildings in the public sector and broader public sector that could make a difference.

It doesn't matter if it's a hospital, school, library or transit garage—a serious commitment to empowering workers who run our buildings would help achieve the net-zero goals we all believe in. **M**

John Cartwright is a labour climate justice advocate and chairperson of the Council of Canadians.



Colour-coded Justice

ANTHONY N. MORGAN

Canada's troubled bid for a United Nations Human Rights Council seat

“THE STONE THE builders rejected has become the cornerstone”

This biblical metaphor occurred to me most recently when, in May 2023, Canada officially announced its candidacy for a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for the 2028 to 2030 term.

For several weeks leading up to Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly's announcement, Canadian media featured a steady stream of reporting on findings from a years-long policy grievance proceeding conducted by the Canadian government's human resources agency, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBCS).

At the end of the proceeding, the TBCS ruled that “Black and racialized employees at the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) face systemic anti-Black racism, sexism and systemic discrimination.”

Following the March 2023 release of the TBCS' ruling, seemingly every couple of weeks Canadians could find a new story featuring added details about the different and demoralizing ways in which Black and racialized staff at the CHRC experienced racism at the hands of the very institution legislatively entrusted to recognize, promote and protect the human rights of all Canadians, including the right to equality and non-discrimination.

As the reporting continued, it became clear that the CHRC's anti-Blackness was not reserved to its staff, but also flowed systemically into how the CHRC handled the human rights complaints that it is mandated to receive from members of the public for the purposes of screening which ones merit adjudication by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. Specifically, media reporting revealed that the CHRC was dismissing and deciding not to refer race-based complaints to the tribunal at a higher rate and frequency than complaints submitted to the CHRC on other grounds, including disability, sex, gender and language.

The seriousness and repetitiveness of these revelations, coupled with the public dialogue they generated, led the Senate of Canada to launch a set of hearings to probe complaints of racism at the CHRC.

As if the troubling irony of Canada's national human rights institution being found to be engaging in systemic racism wasn't enough, Minister Joly's announcement about Canada's drive to obtain a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council occurred on the same week that the senate's hearings into racism at the CHRC were due to begin.

In other words, the timing of Minister Joly's announcement meant that Canada would be seeking a position of leadership on the world's pre-eminent international human rights governance body, the UNHRC, at the same time that the legitimacy of its own national human rights organization, the CHRC, was collapsing under the pressure of findings of anti-Black racism in its practices.

It's in the context of these twisted turns of events that the biblical metaphor of a builder retrieving a previously discarded stone to make it a cornerstone originally came to mind. In my opinion, this metaphor remains pertinent.

Canadian officials have to appreciate that the viability and ultimate success of Canada's candidacy for a seat on the UNHRC will be determined, at least in part, by how well it responds to the urgent need to rebuild trust and confidence in the CHRC, particularly in relation to its ability and effectiveness to address anti-Black racism in its internal operations and public functions.

In fact, I take it further and argue that Canada's UNHRC candidacy is not only contingent on how well it remedies the CHRC controversy, but also how it well it can credibly demonstrate to the international community a sincere commitment to leadership, resolve and results in addressing anti-Black racism in various areas of law, policy, programming and governance—both within Canada and at the international level.

I believe this to be the case because there's a strong indication that addressing anti-Black racism is becoming a growing priority within the United Nations human rights system.

After decades of considerable neglect within the United Nations human rights system, issues of racial discrimination towards Black people (collectively referred to as 'People of African Descent' within that system) are emerging as a primary focus of the United Nations.

This becomes most evident when we consider some of the most recent activities being driven by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which coordinates human rights activities throughout the United Nations system and serves as the secretariat of the UNHRC.

First, there's the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), which I've referenced many times before within this column. Managed out of the OHCHR, the decade has served as a global framework of



education and action to advance the human rights and well-being of Black communities across the world. Under the banner of the decade, Canada launched many initiatives, such as Canada's Black Justice Strategy, the Black Entrepreneurship Program, and the Black-led Philanthropic Endowment Fund, which is dedicated to supporting Black charities and social purpose organizations.

Secondly, since August 2021, the OHCHR has been responsible for the operationalization of the newly established Permanent Forum on People of African Descent. The permanent forum serves as a consultative mechanism for people of African descent and as a platform for advancing their rights and interests, as well as an advisory body to the Human Rights Council. Importantly, the permanent forum is tasked with the development of a new UN declaration, which will be a first step towards the elaboration of a new, legally binding instrument on the promotion and full respect of the rights of people of African descent.

Finally, in 2021 the OHCHR adopted a robust four-point agenda to end systemic racism and human rights violations by law enforcement against Africans and people of African descent. Along with this, the UN Human Rights Council established the International Independent Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in the context of law enforcement to address anti-Black racism in policing activities and outcomes across the globe.

Each of these initiatives are major undertakings and commitments that will take up much of the focus and attention of the UN human rights system for at least the next decade or two. It is difficult to imagine Canada's candidacy for a seat on the UNHRC being supported or taken seriously by other member states without Canada demonstrating enthusiastic support and devoting sizeable resources to these global developments to enhance the international system of protection and promotion of the human rights of People of African Descent.

The chronic disadvantages that Canada's Black communities continually experience in such areas as education, employment, housing, health, as well as the criminal legal system, reveals that the interests and concerns of Black people in Canada are often an afterthought of Canada's major institutions, partially evidenced through the outcomes still being uncovered at the Canadian Human Rights Commission. However, significant new developments within the United Nations' human rights system signal that this will have to change dramatically.

Indeed, for the sake of Canada's campaign for a UNHRC seat, it seems that the issue of anti-Black racism will have to move quickly, from being regarded as a rock in the shoe of Canadian progress to a major stepping stone in the country's pursuit of leadership within the international human rights governance system. **M**

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



Inside Trade

STUART TREW

Canadian trade deal with Ecuador hangs on August election

Earlier this year, Canada announced it was considering free trade negotiations with Ecuador under the right-wing administration of embattled President Guillermo Lasso. Canadian Trade Minister Mary Ng met virtually with her Ecuadorian counterpart Julio José Prado in June to discuss next steps. Given political events in the country it's not clear there will be any. This would be a positive thing, given what we know about both countries' objectives in a potential trade deal.

Monitor readers following the situation in Ecuador will be aware that Lasso has been running the country by decree since dissolving the opposition-dominated national assembly in May—a response to efforts to impeach him on corruption charges.

In his first term, Lasso positioned himself as a friend of investors, notably foreign mining firms, which did not go over well at home. His public approval rating fell from 34 per cent in March 2022 to a low of 13 per cent in February this year, according to Statista. He will not seek re-election in August.

In July, the frontrunner to replace Lasso as president was Luisa Gonzalez, a leftist legislator backed by former president Rafael Correa, whose Citizen Revolution is Ecuador's most popular party. She was expected to face a strong challenge from conservative Jan Topic, a French citizen running on a public order platform. But Gonzalez was also challenged from the left by Indigenous rights activist Yaku Pérez, leader of the Of Course We Can coalition of socialist parties that opposes new oil and mining projects.

The results of August's elections in Ecuador may be known by the time you read this. While the attitude of the incoming government to future trade negotiations with Canada will not be top of mind, a good showing for either Gonzalez or Pérez could frustrate Canada's objectives in a good way. The reason comes down to mining—the main source of Canadian foreign investment in Ecuador.

From media reports in early 2023, we know the Lasso government would like a Canadian free trade agreement to include strong investment protections and an investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) process to enforce them. According to Ecuadorian Ambassador to Canada Carlos Játiva, speaking to the *Hill Times*, the extra-legal protections for foreign investors provided for by ISDS would attract more Canadian investment to Ecuador's mining and infrastructure sectors.

In a submission to the federal government's consultations on a potential Ecuador deal, the CCPA urged the government to reject this request and take additional steps to remove Canada from trade deals and investment treaties that include ISDS. What little credibility there is left in the international investment arbitration regime has been fundamentally eroded by global concerns about the incompatibility of ISDS with the achievement of human rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and urgent commitments to lower greenhouse gas emissions under the Paris Agreement.

According to a July 2021 report of the UN Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises:

Most international investment agreements protect investors and their rights to the exclusion of the rights of individuals and communities. They also constrain the regulatory ability of States to act robustly to discharge their international human rights obligations. Moreover, they offer investors a special privilege to enforce their rights through binding international arbitration, but do not provide a similar right to rights holders affected by investment-related projects.

Writing in the *Monitor* online (monitormag.ca) in June, international trade lawyer Risa Schwartz highlighted the threats that treaties containing ISDS pose for the achievement of Indigenous rights. Schwartz quotes the former Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, who found that the

The CCPA urged the government to reject this request and take additional steps to remove Canada from trade deals and investment treaties that include ISDS.



non-discrimination and expropriation clauses in typical investment treaties have “significant potential to undermine the protection of indigenous peoples’ land rights and the strongly associated cultural rights.”

Latin American countries are regular targets of contentious and extremely costly ISDS claims from oil, gas, and mining firms—many of them based in Canada. These ISDS cases have challenged policies to defend human rights, including Indigenous rights, protect the environment, and uphold national laws with respect to taxation or contracts. Mining bans affecting domestic and international investors equally, and stricter regulation or appropriate taxation of mining and energy projects, are frequently attacked by Canadian companies under investment treaties and free trade agreements with Latin American countries.

Having lost a massive \$2 billion (USD) investor-state claim to Occidental Petroleum Corporation in 2012, the Correa government terminated its investment treaties and withdrew Ecuador from the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) Convention. While sunset clauses in many of Ecuador’s now dead treaties—including a Foreign Investment

Protection Agreement (FIPA) with Canada—ensure investors will be able to bring ISDS cases forward for many years to come, the country’s coordinated exit from the ISDS regime—a moment of clarity—continues to inspire.

Unfortunately, the Lasso government re-ratified the ICSID Convention in August 2021 and is seeking to include ISDS in new trade and investment treaties, putting the country at continued risk of illegitimate and expensive claims from mining firms. Given Canada’s dogged pursuit of bilateral investment treaties and free trade agreements containing ISDS (e.g., with ASEAN, Indonesia, and Taiwan), it is almost certain that Canada’s federal government will want to reanimate the defunct FIPA protections for Canadian miners in any new free trade deal with Ecuador.

Recent updates to Canada’s investment treaty language do not adequately address imbalances in the ISDS regime that favour the profits of foreign investors over other governmental priorities and to the detriment of reasonable discretion in policy-making. For example, the environmental exception in the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement proved useless to Colombia in its highly troubling loss to Canadian

mining firm Eco Oro over constitutionally enacted environmental protections in the country’s sensitive páramos ecosystem.

Canada’s 2021 Model Foreign Investment Protection Agreement—the basis for any new Canadian investment treaty and free trade agreement negotiations—claims to claw back some governmental sovereignty in investor-state disputes. But it does so through a meek “right to regulate” clause taken from the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and through other clarifications, of dubious value, with respect to the kinds of state action that would breach an investor’s broad and vague right to “fair and equitable treatment.”

These untested reforms to investment treaty language, far from fixing the democratic deficit in ISDS, ultimately sustain a system in which investors get special rights—outside domestic law—to challenge government decisions they don’t like.

It is telling that Koch Industries, in its current ISDS dispute against Ontario’s cancellation of cap-and-trade, cites the 2021 model FIPA language on fair and equitable treatment as proof of Canada’s acceptance of a very broad, rather than clawed-back, standard of protection.

Canada and Ecuador must radically break from the ISDS regime: to uphold human rights, including Indigenous rights and the rights of nature; to hold multinational companies accountable for human rights violations and environmental crimes; to create the necessary policy space for governments to tackle the climate emergency; and so that increased two-way trade and investment can truly benefit the widest number of people possible. With luck, the Ecuadorian government may elect a new government that believes these priorities surpass the private profit interests of Canadian mining firms. **M**

Stuart Trew is the director of the CCPA’s Trade and Investment Research Project (TIRP).

YOUR CCPA

Get to know **Andy Zubac**

OFFICE: **NATIONAL**

POSITION: **KATE MCINTURFF INTERN**

YEARS WITH THE CCPA: **SPRING,
SUMMER 2023**

What drew you to the CCPA?

I completed a master's in mathematics in spring 2020, but as I looked for work during that first year of the pandemic, I realized the scientific career I had planned for wasn't what I wanted. Following a desire to live more authentically and leverage my scientific training towards helping people, I made three big decisions: 1) I finally came out of the closet as trans non-binary, 2) I started therapy, leading to an understanding of myself as neurodivergent and disabled, and 3) I went back to school for sociology, hoping to find a career contributing to the fight for social justice for marginalized folks like me.

Two years later, when I saw the posting for the Kate McInturff Fellowship, it seemed too good to be true! Not only would I get to learn about policy research and local non-profits, but I would also have a chance to offer my perspective as a trans disabled researcher. I'm overjoyed to have been selected for this fellowship and to be able to bring a disability lens to the Beyond Recovery project, thinking about the gendered economic effects of the pandemic on disabled folk. With my own experience of the pandemic's effect on my career and identity as disabled, I couldn't have hoped for a better way to start a career in social research.

What are the most interesting things you get to do with this internship?

Having never studied public policy before, the



most interesting thing about this internship has been seeing how my perspective on social issues can change from increased understanding of the larger policy context. Learning about progressive policy research as part of such a passionate team is way better than any intro public policy course I could have taken at university!

You're going back to university this fall—what are you studying?

With the coursework for my master's in quantitative sociology done, I'll be starting my thesis project this fall. Coming from a mathematical background, I'm looking forward to this chance to learn more about qualitative research. I'm hoping to conduct a small study investigating the radical imaginations of people involved in the neurodiversity movement.

When you're not working or studying, what do you do to decompress?

My favourite way to decompress is in a canoe. Whether it's a multi-day backcountry trip or an afternoon paddling on the Rideau Canal, I feel disconnected from technology whenever I'm on the water and it's a great way to spend quality time with friends.

What are you reading these days?

I like to read a ridiculous number of books at once to keep things interesting, but the one I've chosen to highlight here is *This is How You Lose the Time War*, an award-winning queer sci-fi novella co-authored by Ottawa local Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone. I'm currently reading this book for the second time, listening to the audiobook this go-around and enjoying how the lyrical writing style sounds read aloud.

What gives you hope right now?

My involvement in local community organizations gives me hope. It's a bleak moment for queer and disabled folk like me in many ways, but when I spend time focused on building community, it doesn't feel so bleak. Progressive policy change often feels slow or out of reach to me, but treating each other well and looking for opportunities to connect with people are decisions we can make every day.

THE CCPA'S WORK IS POWERED BY PEOPLE LIKE YOU

Meet Diana Birkenheier, Toronto, Ontario, CCPA donor

How did you find out about the CCPA? More like the CCPA found me! I cannot remember exactly when but somewhere in there amongst my long ago activities with The Voice of Women, Planned Parenthood, various protests and marches supporting anti-war groups, labour rights, social justice etc., the CCPA became a vital go to.

What makes the CCPA special and why do you donate to it? The work the CCPA does is essential for us citizens on many fronts—well-researched essays, articles, interviews by a whole range of thoughtful people really helps one to focus on reason and reality. The high quality of information can be a counter to disinformation, obfuscation, shallow, self-serving policies and destructive use of power. High-quality, evidence-based information can be a guide to refuting authoritarianism, nationalism, racism, hate-fuelled violence, economic and social inequality—too many nefarious afflictions to name. Mixed up in all of this is a huge need to have empathy and understanding of how and why we doom ourselves with often avoidable, time-wasting suffering. We need to think rationally and realistically, not just emotionally.

What are your early influences? My parents were decent and hard-working immigrants, loving and kind. I think I was a kind of mystery to them but they were



fantastic in their acceptance of me and let me be myself. They indulged my love of alone time for hours of reading, supplied me with art materials, piano lessons and gave me responsibilities too. There was talk sometimes in my house of injustices and the importance of being honest. Now I see they were my heroes.

All this made me kind of independent-minded towards finding interests and other influences. I skipped school a lot to go home and read Dostoyevsky and other great writers, found an interest in underground music and theatre, rebelled against suburbia, dropped out and went out on my own after a few years of commercial art school. This was adventurous but not easy to do. Still, I was fortunate in having some security with my parents if I was in crisis.

What are you reading and what are your inspiration and activities? I just read a memoir by Ai Weiwei, he being a courageous, inspiring

conceptual artist. Its title is from an old Chinese poem, *One Thousand Years of Joys and Sorrows*. It's about his love of China and its history and art, about the serious debilitating totalitarian oppression that he and his poet father experienced. The committed and moving art he produces is fascinating, monumental and clearly written about.

I curate a film group for my artist colleagues. We meet at my place, have dinner, watch a film and have lively discussions over dessert. Film, food and Filmistas...love it! I also really love reading novels, essays, film and art journals, the *London Review of Books*, which has brilliant contributors that I admire enormously. I am enamoured with architecture and make wonky models and floor plans. I am still producing art works—many of them expressing my social justice and political concerns and observations, like street images, monuments juxtaposed with contemporary life, issues like white supremacy, economics, etc. I feel that everything, more or less, is connected to everything.

What one issue must government prioritize today to make peoples lives better? The big issue of 1.5 degrees and please not going higher. We need smart economic alternatives to our endless consumption of everything. Let's get out of that box before we consume ourselves. **M**

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.



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ERIKA SHAKER

Parental choice is a dog whistle

THE “PARENTAL CHOICE” movement is increasingly organized and networked across borders. Understanding the ways it weaponizes both legitimate and illegitimate grievances with institutional power structures is crucial towards defending public education.

What we have been seeing in Canada, over the past three decades in particular, is corporatization of the public system. Corporatization has many manifestations—public money redirected (often as vouchers) to pay for or support private sector educational services, private schools or private-lite schools (charter schools); an increased corporate presence in public schools and classrooms or the contracting out of education services and materials to private entities, including curriculum design and provision or public-private partnerships.

This corporatization is the tip of a privatization iceberg that the far right (and the people who court them) tells us isn’t privatization at all. It’s about choice, they say. Who could disagree with that? But here “choice” is a dangerous fig leaf that is being leveraged to redirect money away from a universal public system towards an exclusionary private one.

These attacks on equity impact the most marginalized kids—kids who are poor, racialized, differently abled, queer, and more—who have no options outside of an increasingly underfunded public system. And we see how this agenda isn’t about success or fairness or excellence at all—it’s about profit and ideology.

To understand the implications of the ‘parental choice’ movement in the current education debates, we need to understand four concepts—privilege, privatization, populism, and patriarchy—and how they are connected.

Privilege

Choice doesn’t happen in a vacuum, whether at the supermarket, in real estate or in schools. Not everyone has access to the same choices, or lives with the choices they make—or others make on their behalf—in the same manner.

Education ‘choice’ can take multiple forms, but parents generally justify it using the language of “for my kid.” And who could argue with a parent just looking out for what’s best for their child—even if it’s somewhat fuzzy about whether this is about what’s *best* for the child vs. the control that a parent asserts over their child. There’s a world of difference between advocating for down time and water fountain trips and insisting on being informed if their child has joined a Genders and Sexuality Alliance (GSA).

Whose choices get prioritized at the school council meeting? Drama kids or science class for gifted students? Of course, some parents can, and do, advocate much more effectively than others—as a result of opportunities not everyone has or access to networks and resources that may charge a price for admission.

This normalizes the move away from collective approaches that recognize the need for flexibility for learning needs and interests, that move towards a model that is based on per-student funding, and whose needs get prioritized, within the steel trap of scarce resources. This is where parental “choice” leverages not just an individualized frame, but a privatized one. And it rarely stops at school council meetings.

Privatization

Many boutique programs or special magnet schools are still nominally public. They can’t discriminate, but they can use coded expressions

like “good fit” during the selection process. They may also come with a fee, but the assurance that no one will be turned away for financial reasons. The choice to self-disclose often has its own challenges—and not all parents have the funds or social caché to keep pressing refresh while the registration website reloads or to stay up all night in lineups, let alone paying for the coaching required to help ensure their child’s successful application.

These are the allowances that have been made to keep discriminating parents happy with the public system, so long as there’s just enough specialization to benefit their kid’s interests and needs, without going full private.

Carried one step further, it’s the charter model, where public dollars pay for schools that look very private. But just because charter schools aren’t in Canada, other than Alberta, it doesn’t mean the same mindset isn’t at work. It’s merely one step further along the privatization continuum.

The final—at least for now—step on the privatization scale is the voucher or tax credit model, where private parental choice is funded by public dollars. Currently, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and, to some extent, Nova Scotia have pursued this model. It has also been fully embraced by Alberta and Quebec, with severe equity implications.

There are nascent initiatives in other provinces too, like Ontario, where the government implemented “catch up” payments of \$200-\$250 per child to offset extra education-related costs incurred during COVID—such as tutors, whose market share exploded—rather than comprehensive investment in public education for all kids.

Individualized handouts provide a fraction of the benefit that collective pooling of resources would. But that would require a pro-public, universal approach to the programs from which we all benefit, rather than an individualized approach that provides a public subsidy for parents who can afford private choices, while further depleting reserves through tax cuts that benefit the wealthiest, and ensuring ongoing underfunding of the public infrastructure.

Populism

Populism is a political frame that focuses on ordinary people rather than the elites. What makes it regressive or progressive, of course, is who defines what it is to be ordinary, what it means to be elite, and who benefits or is hurt by the solutions being proposed (or demands being made).

Public education is a ready-made target for populist campaigns. It's community-focused, it's about kids, and everyone has an opinion about it. These elements make organizing around public education very powerful.

There is no question that public schools are being scapegoated in the culture wars. This was abundantly clear in the last round of school board elections that saw a social media and organizing campaign targeting progressives and scapegoating trans kids in particular.

It's not just an election issue, although it's certainly been mobilized by politicians, including by Pierre Poilievre during his leadership campaign. And while there may be some variation, the general narrative is as follows: parents are the boss, educators are intent on circumventing that authority, and schools are training children to become subversive progressives who can't add. And you, the taxpayer, is forced to pay for all of these things without having any say.

The push for a narrower, more "rigorous," less arts-focused, more market-responsive public school system is not new. These zombies keep being resuscitated, and they will always have an audience of stalwart public education critics. But now they're layered on top of decades of insufficient funding, where frustration with leaky roofs and growing class sizes and fewer extracurricular activities and insufficient acknowledgment of system oppression and more standardized tests is increasing—all of which disproportionately hurts already marginalized kids and communities, and all of which was made worse with COVID. And parents who can afford to look elsewhere—in the public system, as private "extra," or in the private system—just may, especially if there's financial incentive to do so.

Patriarchy

In the eyes of public education's opponents, it's an archetypal power struggle: the traditional family holding off the full force of a government institution that thinks it knows better than actual people. Father (figure) knows best vs. a feminized workforce intent

on controlling the children and reshaping the future for nefarious ends.

This false narrative resonates with certain segments of the population who are resentful at the perceived erosion of their authority and privilege—those who yearn for schools that don't question parental authority or won't raise difficult questions about sexual health and consent, gender identity, residential schools, or Canada's own racism.

Consequently, this narrative has been extraordinarily effective at mobilizing troops in the culture wars, in increasingly volatile ways, maliciously targeting educators who dare to talk about diversity and safe spaces and perversely labeling marginalized and vulnerable kids and communities as elites.

It's also been instrumental in fuelling privatization initiatives in education, where provincial governments use public money to leverage private selection of schools that more closely resemble a certain set of principles and beliefs. Sometimes it's overtly religious, sometimes it's about other forms of control. Ultimately, it's about dismantling public education—a movement away from publicly provided to publicly funded, from publicly accountable to privately determined and consumed.

It's no longer about wanting something better for our kids than we had for ourselves—it's about wanting for our kids a reproduction of the structures that we find familiar, no questions asked. It's about fitting into predetermined and prescribed roles—whether about class, or race, or gender. These days, especially gender. And it's the ongoing pushback against any form of progress.

Defending public schools

Public schools becoming ground zero of right-wing campaigns that are anti-equity in nature and focus, and hierarchical in structure, is the logical conclusion of the road we've been on for some time.

But resistance cannot be a return to a pro-public school status quo. As with all public institutions, there is an urgent need to do better, particularly for marginalized kids and communities who have been frustrated and failed by what's currently in place.

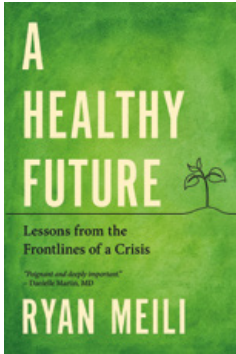
We cannot afford the luxury of defensiveness. Because this is what helps feed right-wing populist movements predicated on grievances not being heard; on the narrative that public institutions are impersonal, faceless, wasteful, taxpayer funded bureaucracies that erode parental authority and hurt kids—whether with masks or by talking about gender identity.

We know better—but that also means we are responsible for *doing* better. **M**

Erika Shaker is director of the CCPA's National office.

RYAN MEILI

Pandemic lessons learned— and unlearned



A HEALTHY FUTURE: LESSONS FROM THE FRONTLINES OF A CRISIS RYAN MEILI

UBC Press/Purich Books 2023

THE MOST INFORMATIVE moment of the COVID-19 pandemic in Saskatchewan—the most revealing statement in hundreds of hours of Zoom meetings, press conferences, and livestreams—came down to twenty seconds of silence.

From the beginning of the pandemic, Saskatchewan's chief medical health officer, Dr. Saqib Shahab, was the face and voice of the provincial COVID response. He stands out for how he framed the early days, for occasional statements that clashed with downplaying by his political masters, and for long absences from the public eye that revealed as much about the government's intentions as the initial daily press conferences. That most striking moment, however, came at the peak of the fourth—or "Delta"—wave, when Saskatchewan's ICUs were overwhelmed to the point that we had to ship patients out of province and ship Armed Forces medical staff in to assist with the local disaster.

During a press conference in which he outlined how intensive care admissions would increase in the weeks ahead, Shahab said, "We've gone so far. We just have to pull along for the next few weeks or months. It is distressing to see what is happening in our ICU and hospitals. And I'm sorry." He stopped for a moment, then choked out, "It's a very challenging time." *Saskatoon Star Phoenix* health reporter Zak Vescera then asked an unusual question: "This wasn't the question I was planning on asking, but Dr. Shahab, are you okay?"

What followed was hard to hear, even though nothing was said. Something about that moment, that particular question, broke through Shahab's renowned composure. For just over twenty seconds, Saskatchewan's chief medical health officer choked back tears and struggled to find his voice. He was not okay, and there was no way to hide it.

Many of us have been there, stoically bearing a burden, able to keep pushing through as long as you're serving the needs of others. Then, when someone does you the kindness of asking you about yourself, the exhaustion hits home and emotions and tears you didn't know were there spring to the surface. In that moment, Dr. Shahab was expressing, against his will, how frustrated and sad he was.

Once he could speak again, Shahab said, "All the evidence is out there. And it's very distressing to see unvaccinated, young, healthy people ending up in ICU and dying.. To see young lives lost through a vaccine-preventable disease—how can we accept this in a country where we've had vaccines available for everyone ever since July?"

Along with the reality that people in a wealthy, developed country were refusing a safe, free, effective vaccine, what other frustrations went unspoken, whether it was government interference, health system limitations, or his own fatigue and burnout after a year and a half of spotlights and sleepless nights?

Dr. Shahab's moment of emotional honesty made international headlines. The *Guardian* reported, "Top Saskatchewan health official moved to tears by unchecked COVID spread." Whatever specific blend was troubling him, on that day Shahab channelled what people everywhere were feeling. In his silence, we could hear the exhaustion of health care workers burning out with no help in sight and the grief of people mourning loved ones or afraid for their own health. His despair gave voice to all those wondering how the worst of our politics had won out when we'd had a chance to make people's well-being a priority again. The experience in our small corner of the country was a model of the challenges playing out around the world.

Moving upstream

There's a classic public health parable that imagines child after child floating helplessly in a river and people realizing that they need to do more than fish them out. They need to head upstream and find out who keeps chucking the kids in the water in the first place. The story of the babies in the river is not a new one, it's a stitch in time, an ounce of prevention, a fence at the top of the cliff rather than an ambulance at the bottom. Folk wisdom and empirical evidence agree: keeping people healthy is much less expensive and

much more effective than treating the sick. When we address the root causes of illness, we relieve the stress and pressure on the systems of reaction, the emergency rooms and surgical suites, the shelters and food banks, and we move our city, province, or nation further away from illness and despair.

Usually, when we talk about upstream investments paying off in life expectancy, it's a ten-, twenty-, or forty-year payoff. The return on investment is enormous, but the realization is long. With COVID-19, the risk-and-reward, call-and-response curve went from decades to weeks or even days. Choices about public health measures like masks and vaccines could mean the difference between life and death, between inconvenience and disruption and a completely overwhelmed health care system. A mask mandate on Monday decreased transmissions in a week, hospitalizations in two, and deaths in four. A new variant ignored in June overwhelmed hospitals in September. The river was flowing so fast.

We learned so much, so quickly, and then seemed to unlearn it even faster.

Like no other time in our collective memory, COVID-19 laid bare just how much health matters. When our health is threatened, everything else grinds to a halt. We know this in our own lives, whether it's staying home when sick or shifting our priorities completely

when a loved one is seriously ill. In 2020 we saw this on a grand scale as the entire world went on sick leave. And just as how well you can take care of yourself and your family is determined by what kind of supports you have at work and at home, how well countries were able to care for their people said a lot about their resources and priorities. COVID followed that same distribution, affecting those living in poverty or without social support much more, or leaving those with stable housing and a good education less at risk.

The trouble with normal

By the end of 2022, nearly 50,000 people had died from COVID across Canada, with nearly 2,000 of those in Saskatchewan. The latter number may not seem so high, but in a province of 1.2 million, it put us at the third-highest death rate in the country, well above the national average. It also means nearly everyone in the province knows someone who died, was hospitalized with a serious illness, or lost someone they loved to COVID. Canada was hit far worse than necessary, and Saskatchewan was far from unscathed, with among the worst second, third, and fourth waves in the country.

Variants and vaccines changed the game. People have lost the masks, ditched the distance, and moved on. You'll notice I don't say "got back to normal," because so much of normal wasn't great, and that's been revealed by the havoc the pandemic played with our lives. COVID didn't cause the problems in our emergency rooms, our ICUs, our long-term care homes, our homeless shelters, our schools, our town squares. It revealed those problems, exacerbated them, made them—at least for a time—impossible to ignore. "At least for a time" is the operative phrase here. "Brain fog" is one of the symptoms described post-COVID, but there is also a time fog that has affected us all. Things are moving so quickly that we have a hard time remembering the present, let alone the past few chaotic years.

We need to peer back through that fog to understand what happened if we are to learn and apply the lessons of this age-defining period. Stories from the frontlines of the COVID crisis—from those whose lives were on the line to those charged with leading us through troubled times—help us learn lessons we can't live without as we face an increasingly uncertain future.

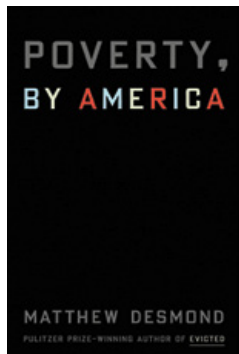
COVID-19 has been devastating, disruptive, tragic, and confusing. There's nothing we can do to undo the trauma of this disease or bring back the lives claimed. We can honour them by insisting we take the time to learn from the loss. Our great task now is to refuse the temptation to turn it all off and move on as quickly as we can, and to instead dig into what went wrong, what went right, and how can we use what this moment taught us to do better. Our task is, as always, to build a healthy future. **M**

Ryan Meili is a family doctor in Saskatoon, former leader of the Saskatchewan NDP, and lifelong advocate for healthy public policy.



JIM SILVER

A call for poverty abolitionists to build a mass movement



POVERTY, BY AMERICA
MATTHEW DESMOND

Random House, 2023

POVERTY IS NOT a natural phenomenon that is inevitable, nor is it caused by the poor themselves—although that remains the dominant belief.

Rather, poverty is caused by individuals and organizations that exploit those with little power and benefit from their poverty. That is the central argument of Matthew Desmond's *Poverty, by America*.

Poverty is not just a shortage of money, Desmond argues: "Poverty is about money, of course, but it is also a relentless piling on of problems."

But even with regards to money, many of America's poor are in deep poverty.

"The deep poverty line in 2020 was \$6,380 annually for a single person and \$13,100 for a family of four," Desmond writes. Almost 18 million people were surviving on these paltry incomes.

This deep poverty, in turn, causes multiple, complex problems: "It's a tight knot of social maladies. It is connected to every social problem we care about—crime, health, education, housing."

Desmond identifies many whose actions create, and who benefit from, poverty.

For example, corporations use strategies—contracting out, gig jobs, anti-union firms—to drive down wages, so that "the United States now offers some of the lowest wages in the industrialized world," resulting in dramatic growth in the ranks of the working poor.

Profits are maximized, benefiting wealthy shareholders. But pension plans and, thus, many pensioners also benefit, as do the many consumers in demand of cheaper goods—"poverty wages allow rock-bottom prices."

Slum landlords create and benefit from poverty. "There exists a long history of slum exploitation in America," writes Desmond. Landlords' profits per unit are greater in

Programs for the poor are poor programs. We should go big: no more nudges, no more tinkering, no more underfunding an initiative and then asking why it didn't work.

poor than in rich neighbourhoods; some landlords "milk dilapidated housing for all it's worth and move on, gutting cities along the way."

Meanwhile, those in well-off neighbourhoods strive to keep the poor out.

Fringe banks and payday loan companies are similarly predatory and exploitative of the poor.

"Payday lenders do not charge high fees because lending to the poor is risky—even after multiple extensions, most borrowers pay up. Lenders extort because they can," writes Desmond.

Meanwhile, government benefits accrue disproportionately to those who are not poor. Many poor people do not take up benefits to which they are entitled, for a host of understandable reasons, while high-income earners benefited from \$1.8 trillion in tax breaks in 2021, and "the richest American families receive almost 40 percent more in government subsidies than the poorest American families."

Desmond's solution is to introduce policies that are social democratic in character, although he does not use that term.

Increase the minimum wage. Evidence shows doing so does not produce adverse employment effects and "when poor workers receive a pay raise, their health improves dramatically."

Make it easier to form unions, which contribute significantly to higher wages and better benefits.

Reform the tax system. "Since 1962, the effective tax rate for poor, working-class, and middle-class Americans has increased, while it has decreased for the top 10 percent of income earners, and particularly for the richest among

us.... Meanwhile, at 21 percent, the corporate tax rate in America is the lowest it's been in more than eighty years." Reverse these trends.

Such policies, aggressively pursued, will drive down poverty. For example, 10 years after Lyndon B. Johnson's (LBJ) war on poverty, which featured nearly 200 pieces of legislation in his first five years in office, "the share of Americans living in poverty was half what it was in 1960."

None of this is new, but the important truth, too often forgotten, is that poverty persists because those many who benefit from it choose it to be so and because most blame poverty on the poor.

Desmond calls for universal programs, not narrow "anti-poverty" programs. "Programs for the poor are poor programs," he rightly argues. "We should go big: no more nudges, no more tinkering, no more underfunding an initiative and then asking why it didn't work."

He calls upon "poverty abolitionists" to build a mass movement to this end.

What Desmond does *not* do is to address the need for a political party prepared to act boldly and courageously in going big to defeat poverty—boldness and courage because opposition from the rich and powerful and the many who benefit from poverty will be enormous.

The place to start is to remove the multiple tax breaks that benefit the rich and wealthy as well as to increase their marginal and corporate tax rates.

As Desmond puts it, "I'm calling for the rich to pay their taxes." Requiring the rich to pay their taxes and investing the proceeds in public goods that benefit us all can earn the broad public support that narrowly targeted "anti-poverty" programs cannot. This is the way to begin to solve poverty. **M**

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

RICARDO TRANJAN

A personal look at class struggle

ON CLASS

DEBORAH DUNDAS

Biblioasis, May 2023

ON CLASS IS a gentle excursion into a tough terrain. Let's be frank: most Canadians squint a bit at books with the word class in their title.

That's probably less true for *Monitor* readers, but still, as a society, we generally avoid going there. And whenever we do go there, political economist types like me kick that door open, draw a line on the ground, and urge readers to take a side. Books on class are often about class struggle.

In contrast, Deborah Dundas writes about lives that traverse class lines. Like her own.

Her book is structured around personal experiences. Chapter themes include: privilege and expectations, fitting in, voice, and community. Dundas intersperses bits of her own story with accounts from interviewees who, like her, have come a long way to blend in to the middle class.

In each chapter, the reader learns more about Dundas, her real-life characters, and the day-to-day dynamics of class.

For some readers, the transcribed accounts will offer a peek into an unfamiliar world of material deprivation and social exclusion. Other readers will take a trip down memory lane. Inevitably, readers will experience *On Class* differently, just as they experience class differently. I would dare to suggest that that is part of the author's intent.

I related to many of the feelings evoked in the book, even if it is set mostly in Toronto, whereas I grew up in Sao Paulo. Class travels well, after all.

In one passage, Dundas tells the story of a neighbour who, out of the blue, gifted her a dense book about race, class, and spirituality: "It was the first time I'd been given such an adult book by a person who assumed I was smart enough to get it, or at least be interested enough to read it."

I, too, remember that day, that person, that book, that feeling of being seen. Those moments stick with us.

But *On Class* is not only about individual stories. Dundas draws on those stories to touch on critical issues like the persistence of social problems; the nefarious impact of negative assumptions about children in low-income families; and the fact that some stories are never told, at least not from the perspective of those who have lived them.

The final chapter takes aim at the "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" narrative—which is "part of the DNA of Canada and the United States."

The notion that everyone can achieve whatever they want if only they try hard enough is not only untrue, but unhelpful. The stories Dundas tell plainly show that where we start and where we end is determined, in large part, by chance. Individual effort is important, but no more important than the collective ways in which we pull each other up. So why does our society put so much emphasis on individual achievements and pay so little attention to collective ones?

On Class doesn't offer answers to these critical issues and questions—a task beyond any one volume—but it does offer a pleasing invitation to reflect upon them. **M**

Ricardo Tranjan is a senior researcher with the CCPA Ontario office and author of the book *The Tenant Class*.

JASON FOSTER

Precarious work doesn't need to be a permanent feature of Canada's labour market



GIGS, HUSTLES AND TEMPS: PROFIT, PRECARIETY AND THE DEGRADATION OF WORK JASON FOSTER

James Lorimer and Company Publishing, May 2023

WE ALL KNOW precarious work when we see it, even if we cannot define it. It is the Uber driver waiting for a rider. It is the barista juggling two jobs and part-time studies. It is the migrant farm worker living under the constant threat of deportation.

It is also the substitute teacher waiting by the phone to learn if they work that day. It is the government worker who can only get serial temporary contracts. It is the IT tech whose job just got outsourced and is now doing the same job but for less money.

Precarious work is about jobs lacking security and stability, which lead to increased vulnerability. Research has found it has profoundly negative consequences for workers' economic and social wellbeing and even their physical and mental health. It contributes to growing inequality and drags down productivity.

Yet, precarious work has become pervasive in the Canadian economy. One in three workers is a precarious worker, and another 25 per cent work in a job that lacks at least one aspect of a stable job. It has become so ubiquitous that we have come to see it as an inevitable part of the 21st century economy.

But it isn't. Precarious work is not some benevolent modernization guided by the invisible hand of the market. It is the systematic and intentional degradation of work by the forces of profit. This degradation is part of the larger project of neo-liberalism to reduce wages, weaken employment protections, and make workers more vulnerable.

Precarious work is the consequence of three decades of growing capital mobility and market financialization and of governments undoing protections for workers constructed in the post-war period. Employers have gleefully rushed

We have a roadmap from workers and citizens of the immediate post-war period for how to push back against neoliberalism.

through the resulting gaps in the social safety net, degrading the quality of work for millions of Canadians. The neoliberal project is seeking to rollback the gains made by most workers in the post-war period. Precarious work is really a case of everything old is new-again.

That could be a depressing observation. But I choose to take hope in that reality. Proponents of the new digital gig economy and other precarious work apologists like to frame themselves as innovative pioneers or "disrupters," insinuating they are constructing a brave new world of work. Instead, I see the apologists as nostalgists pining for an earlier age when employers were unfettered and workers knew their place.

This matters for two reasons. First, we have a roadmap from workers and citizens of the immediate post-war period for how to push back against neoliberalism. If workers successfully fought for a fairer share of the pie before, they can do it again.

Second, and maybe more importantly, if the apologists are not the innovators, that means we could become the innovators. That requires creative thinking, paired with steely determination, backed by worker action.

That path is not easy. In the past it meant strikes, protests, campaigns, and other coordinated actions. It meant standing up to the elites. Today the tactics might look different, but the same mettle will be required. **M**

Jason Foster is director of the Parkland Institute and the author of *Gigs, Hustles and Temps: Profit, Precarity and the Degradation of Work*.



The good news page

ELAINE HUGHES

Investment in solar power to outstrip oil for first time, says IEA

The International Energy Agency has recently stated that, with solar projects expected to outpace outlays on oil production for the first time, investment in clean energy will extend its lead over spending on fossil fuels in 2023. In 2023, solar power spending is due to hit more than \$1 billion a day or around \$380 billion on a yearly basis. / **CNN, May 25, 2023.**

Switzerland voters back carbon cuts as glaciers melt

Voters in Switzerland have backed a new climate bill designed to cut fossil fuel use and reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. As glaciers rapidly melt in the Swiss Alps, the government says the country needs to protect its energy security and the environment, and the law will require a move away from dependence on imported oil and gas towards the use of renewable sources. / **BBC News, June 19, 2023.**

Maya civilization: Archaeologists find ancient city in jungle

Archaeologists in Mexico have discovered the remains of an ancient Maya city deep in the jungle of the Yucatan Peninsula. Experts found several pyramid-like structures measuring more than 15 m (50 ft.) in height. Pottery unearthed at the site appears to indicate it was inhabited between 600 and 800 AD, a period known as Late Classic. Archaeologists have named the site Ocomtun (Mayan for stone column). / **BBC News, June 21, 2023.**

UN members adopt first-ever treaty to protect marine life in the high seas

Recently, with the United Nation's (UN) chief hailing the historic agreement as giving the ocean 'a fighting chance', 193 members of the UN adopted the first-ever treaty to protect marine life in the high seas. Presiding over the negotiations, Rena Lee, Singapore's ambassador on ocean issues, received a sustained standing ovation when she banged her gavel after hearing no objections to the treaty's approval. / **AP NEWS, June 19, 2023.**

Monarch butterfly's spots help it migrate

Research suggests that, for a monarch butterfly, the more white spots you have, the better your migratory chances. Researchers from the University of

Georgia [United States] studied nearly 400 wings of monarchs at different stages in their famed journey south from Canada and the northern United States to Mexico. Successful monarchs had three per cent less black and three per cent more white on their wings. / **BBC News, June 24, 2023.**

Fish make music! It could be the key to healing degraded coral reefs

As part of a study of damaged coral reefs, scientists at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Falmouth, Massachusetts, have set up underwater speakers to broadcast their recordings of the old, healthy reef from 2013 in hopes of luring back the coral larvae to damaged reefs. / **National Public Radio (NPR), June 15, 2023.**

5,400-year-old Great Grandfather cypress tree may be oldest in world

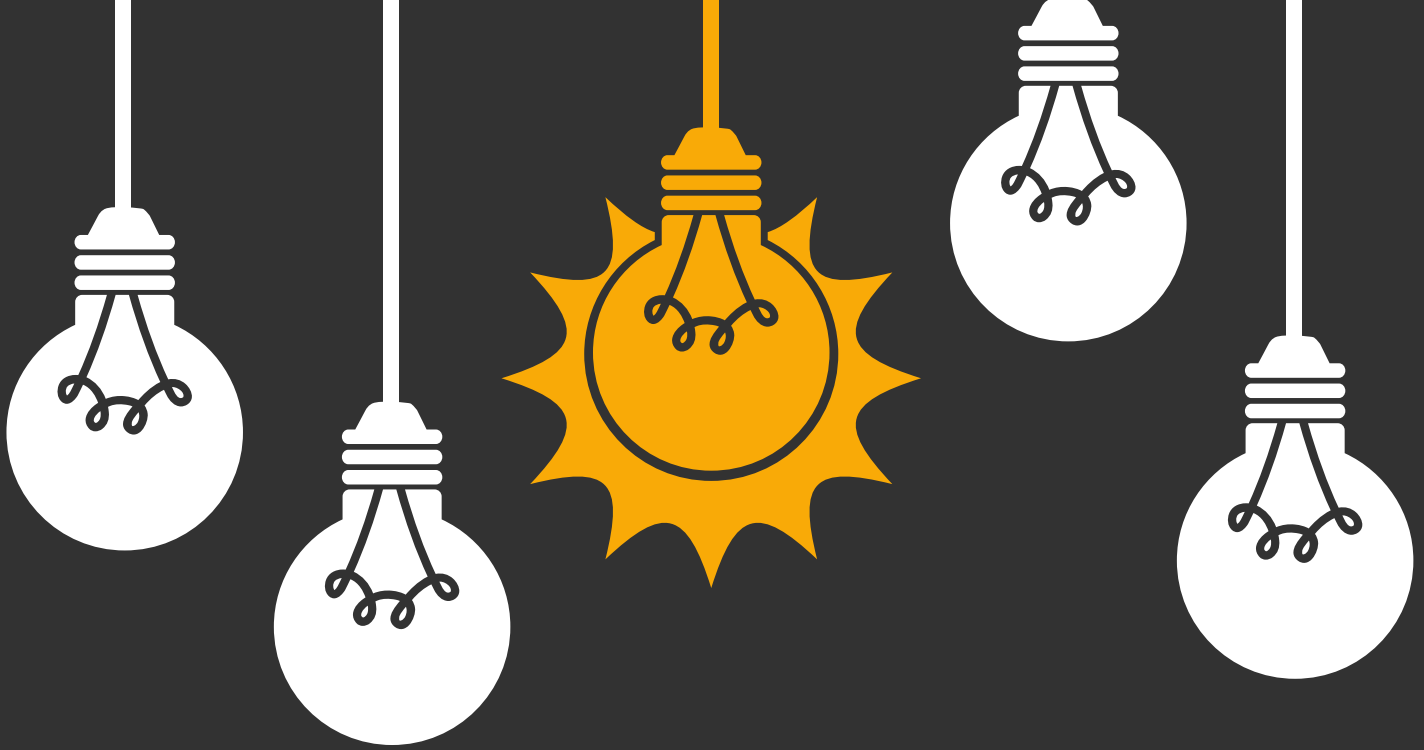
Deep in the Chilean forest, 500 miles south of Santiago, scientists recently discovered a Patagonia cypress tree in Chile known as Great Grandfather or Alerce Milenario. The giant 92-foot tree is 13 feet in diameter and, in counting the 2,400 growth rings the team estimates the tree to be 5,484 years old, likely taking the award for the oldest living tree. / **My Modern Met, May 12, 2023.**

Bird brains can sense magnetic fields with the flick of a switch

Researchers from the University of Western Ontario and Bowling Green State University in the U.S. have found migratory birds can literally switch off their neurological navigation aid when no longer in need of it. The research looked at white-throated sparrows (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) and found that they were able to activate a particular part of their brain when they needed to migrate and put it back into a dormant mode while resting at stopover points. / **Science Alert, June 13, 2023.**

Indigenous Peoples Day toonie features message of hope

On June 21, the Royal Canadian Mint unveiled a commemorative toonie to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day. The collaborative artwork on the coin was created by three Indigenous women: Megan Currie, a Dene woman from English River First Nation in Saskatchewan who lives in Regina, Jennine Krauchi, a Winnipeg Métis artist, and Myrna Pokiak, who is Inuvialuk from Tuktoyaktuk, N.W.T. / **CBC News, June 22, 2023.**



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