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WILL THE MOMENTUM LAST? /39

# MONITOR

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, May/June 2015

## TWENTY YEARS OF BRIGHT IDEAS

THE ALTERNATIVE FEDERAL BUDGET



# Your New Monitor

**P**AUL BROWNE, DUNCAN Cameron, Bruce Campbell, Ed Finn and Diane Touchette launched the *CCPA Monitor* on May 1, 1994. Coincidentally, that was the year Mosaic Communications Corporation started offering Netscape Navigator as a free download. The first generation web browser would define how people accessed and shared information online, but it would be a few years before the World Wide Web became our *primary* source of information (news, entertainment, travel planning, etc.) and, for many, the main medium for personal and professional interactions (email, file transfers, shopping and banking). At the turn of the millennium, less than half of Canadians were Internet users. Today it is closer to 85%.

In a similar way, but on a *slightly* smaller scale, the *Monitor* hoped to be a vital new medium for progressive ideas that would also grow the supporter base of the CCPA. As the mainstream media adopted the government-corporate consensus that there was no alternative to free-market globalization, opposing viewpoints were purged from much of the news. A bulletin “reporting on business, labour and government” from a progressive perspective filled a need for alternative viewpoints. Membership surged, and as the CCPA grew in stature and influence, the *Monitor* grew with it.

After more than two decades, and on this 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the CCPA, the *Monitor* is rebooting to adapt to new political opportunities and technological challenges. Neoliberalism produced great wealth at the cost of extreme inequality and existential pressure on the Earth’s ecosystems. It has put a drag on traditional growth everywhere while leaving millions in poverty. When even the International Monetary Fund recognizes this in global economic outlook reports, you know the space for dialogue has expanded. That is, there is a wider and more receptive audience for new solutions to the inter-related economic, social and environmental crises affecting Canada and the world today.

But to reach the broadest audience possible, in a post-Web 2.0 age, the *Monitor* needed to be much more than a bulletin. As Netscape’s guts live on in the more nimble Firefox browser, we will continue to cover inequality, climate change, trade and investment agreements, technology, labour and other issues, but with a much higher quotient of CCPA research and original feature articles you won’t find anywhere else. In-depth thematic issues bringing together a wide variety of perspectives will, we hope, both enhance and challenge our understanding of the world. And though we will print six issues per year compared to the previous 10, they will be longer and easier to read. This gives us more time to prepare, and you more time to read, each one.

Since making the *Monitor* free to download on the CCPA website in November, our online readership has grown by thousands. Many more choose to receive the magazine at home, possibly because it’s easier to read, or they like to share it with friends and colleagues, or out of a commitment to the CCPA and progressive causes. As we make the *Monitor* more attractive and accessible to new readers, we hope we can draw thousands more readers to its pages. Not all new online readers will become CCPA supporters, but some of them will. This is more than a facelift. It’s a chance to really show off what the CCPA has to offer in a format that we hope appeals to both current readers as well as those who never knew the world before the Internet.

We have lofty goals and they are the same as they were for the *Monitor*’s first editors: to reach new minds and expand popular support for sometimes modest, sometimes radical political and economic alternatives to the flagging neoliberal order. We couldn’t have gotten to this point without you. Your support is the only reason the *Monitor* continues to exist. And your guidance will be critical to making it continually better. **M**

May/June 2015

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## DELIVERING THE GOOD

A Special Feature on the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
Alternative Federal Budget

## ELECT US

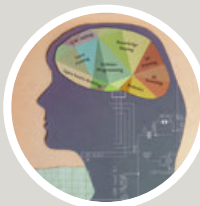
Values Politics, Branding,  
and the Federal Election

RICHARD NIMIJEAN



28

34



## PUTTING THE CRITICAL BACK INTO MAKERSPACES

LAURA ELIZABETH PINTO

## THE IRRESISTIBLE RISE OF PODEMOS

ASAD ISMI



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Asad Ismi is an award-winning journalist and radio documentary maker whose work focuses on U.S. and Canadian imperialism, and resistance to it, in the Global South. He covers international affairs for the *Monitor*.

**Christine Jones**  
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**Julius Stoller**  
is a retired surgeon in British Columbia.

**Amy Thompson**  
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Stuart Trew

# What Is C-51 For?

**THE HIGH-PROFILE DUFFY** trial is said to have put a spotlight on the inner workings of the federal government and notably the chain of command from the PMO downwards—the who-knew-what of the Nigel Wright cheque exchange, for example, if anyone still cares. So far, Duffy’s lawyers have hammered on the vagaries of Senate spending rules, with witness testimonies exposing how a supposedly non-partisan arm of government is used for political ends by Liberals and Conservatives alike. Omnibus anti-terrorism legislation still before Parliament offers a much better example of how this government in particular abuses our democratic institutions for political gain.

Bill C-51 has attracted special condemnation from the legal community and privacy watchdogs for its own vagaries. What are “terrorism offences in general?” Will the power to clandestinely disrupt potential security threats, including by draining bank accounts or shutting down websites, also permit CSIS to detain people without charge contra Charter rights? Why is the government ignoring the opinion of its privacy commissioner that the Security of Information Sharing Act, the first of five parts in C-51, “would potentially lead to disproportionately large amounts of personal information of ordinary, law-abiding citizens being collected and shared?” Who is going to oversee this consolidation and expansion of the government’s national security activities?

When these and other questions came up during marathon hearings of the parliamentary public safety committee, government MPs lectured some witnesses on why they were

wrong and suggested others had terrorist sympathies. At the end of the charade, the government majority on committee voted down all opposition amendments to C-51, but agreed to table four minor changes, no doubt handed to them by the PMO, that leave the bill’s most overreaching and threatening parts intact. We’ve come to expect a heavy-handed, borderline authoritarian approach to legislating by this government. Remember the Fair Elections Act, passed last year despite near unanimous opposition from the legal profession for how it will disenfranchise thousands of voters while making it no easier to prosecute electoral fraud. In the case of C-51, the stakes for democracy are possibly higher.

Civil liberties advocates, First Nations and environmental groups feel directly threatened. They worry the legislation will be used to harass and collect vast amounts of personal information on well-meaning activists and hapless innocents. Certainly the combination of new disruptive powers for CSIS, the information-sharing provisions in the bill, and its overly broad definition of what constitutes a threat to Canada could put a chill on free speech of all kinds. We know from internal memos the RCMP has been closely watching and in some cases infiltrating what it calls the “anti-Canada petroleum movement” since before Harper was an MP. (We should keep this in mind every time RCMP chief Bob Paulson complains about a lack of officers to handle terrorism cases.) This history suggests neither the RCMP nor CSIS needs C-51 to continue performing their shared role as subsidized private security for Canada’s oil, gas and mining sectors.

So what is C-51 for? A cynic might say it’s most useful for scoring a few more tough-on-crime votes in the next election. Probably, though, we should take the government for granted when it says the targets are young Muslims or recent converts, mostly men, who have been “radicalized” by conflicts in the Middle East and are spoiling for a fight, either as part of Islamic State or else here in Canada. Does this make the reforms in C-51 any more justified? Not at all. The government has not made a good case for why existing laws and practices are insufficient, and it has ignored recommendations that might ensure the proposed disruption and enforcement measures in C-51 will not be abused.

Craig Forcese and Kent Roach, law professors who worked with both the Arar and Air India commissions, have warned repeatedly that C-51 may actually undermine the successful prosecution of terrorism-related crimes while further obscuring the work of CSIS. Writing in *The Walrus*, they chillingly suggest this could be the point: “From what has been said on the record by government witnesses... we can infer that one government priority is to give CSIS the power to detain, if not formally arrest, suspects who are being investigated. Some government statements on the record also suggest that the bill could even facilitate foreign renditions.”

In a recent poll, only 14% of people felt the Senate should continue to exist in its current form. The Duffy trial clearly isn’t helping. For better or worse, we need our senators to step up on C-51—to live up to their constitutional role as a check on government overstep. What do they have to lose? **M**



# TELEPHONE TOWN HALL

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives hosted a second Telephone Town Hall on March 4 and would like to thank everyone who participated this year. Executive Director Bruce Campbell moderated a lively conversation between senior economists David McDonald and Armine Yalnizyan about the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary Alternative Federal Budget (see pages 14 through 27) and other topics of interest to CCPA supporters.

Throughout the call, participants were asked their opinion on the work of the CCPA, the format of the CCPA Monitor, and a number of other issues. Here's what they told us.

1 /

Which of the following issues is most important to you?

Alternative Budget, fiscal and economic policy



Climate change



Income inequality and poverty



Gender equality



Trade and investment



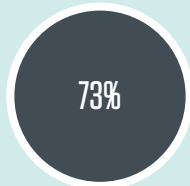
2 /

What is your main source for learning about the CCPA's work?

Letters from the CCPA



The CCPA Monitor



CCPA's Facebook page/ Twitter feed



CCPA's website



CCPA's blog Behind the Numbers



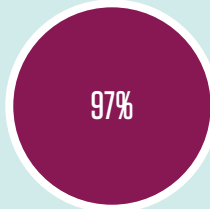
General media



3 /

Do you plan to make your voice heard in the next federal election?

Yes



No



I don't know



4 /

Do you read the CCPA Monitor?

Cover to cover



Many selected articles of interest



Only a few articles



I rarely read it



I choose not to receive it



5 /

Which of these changes to the Monitor do you most appreciate?

Use of more photos, graphs and illustrations



Table of contents



Increased coverage of CCPA research and opinion



Separation of commentary from features and longer pieces



# Feedback

## How to Undo a Nation

I am a Canadian who was born a Newfoundlander but whose parents voted by democratic means to become part of Canada. I would also like to believe that if there were a desire to undo that union, a democratic, peaceful process would be found. Canada has also experienced a peaceful, democratic attempt by Quebec to separate. Our Supreme Court has ruled that a province should be able to separate if a "clear majority" of its citizens indicate a desire to do so.

Canada should advocate for a United Nations-supervised vote on separation in any region of a country represented by its own legislative body (province, state, etc.). That legislature would request that the UN conduct and certify such a vote. A decision to separate should have some sort of supermajority such as we see in most constitutions throughout the world. My definition of a "clear majority" would be 50% of the citizens affected by the decision. If less than 50% vote to separate then two-thirds of those voting would also constitute a "clear majority."

We could expect sympatric support from the United Kingdom, which recently permitted an independence vote in Scotland. Czechoslovakia split some years ago into Czech Republic and Slovakia via a peaceful process. Other divisions that were not so peaceful have occurred in the former Yugoslavia and Sudan. The ethnic Russian-speaking citizens of Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk would desire ballots over bullets if given the opportunity.

Independence movements exist in many parts of the world and if the UN can present them with a peaceful, democratic means to achieve their ends, we can hope for a future world with less armed conflict.

**Barry Darby**, St. John's, NL

## Galapagos Tortoises Need Help

I was pleased to see the item in the Good News Page (April 2015) on the successful rat eradication on the Galapagos Islands and the re-introduction of giant tortoises, but I have to note the information is incorrect. This was not really the fault of the *Monitor*, since the reporting on the story was generally misleading.

First, the rat eradication happened on one tiny island, Pinzón. There have always been giant tortoises there, at least in living memory. Since the tortoises can live up to 150 years, it is indeed possible to have a number of adults there. The problem was

the presence of rats made it difficult for hatchlings to survive.

So, after a number of efforts over decades, the Galapagos National Park Directorate, the Galapagos Conservancy, and a number of other international conservancy groups and associated scientists undertook a poisoning program in 2012. They chose the most "targeted" kind of poison, did some careful testing then dropped the poison by helicopter on Pinzón (and other small islands similarly infested). Supplementary amounts of the tortoises' main food (*Opuntia* cactus pads) were brought in to help divert them from accidentally consuming the rat poison.

Recently, a three-day survey of Pinzón, led by the park wardens and scientist James Gibbs of SUNY's College of Environmental Science and Forestry, found six baby tortoise hatchlings. As Gibbs reports, the survey team "encountered over 300 tortoises, resulting in an overall population estimate well over 500, a near tripling of the population from the 100–200 very old individuals encountered on Pinzón when the Galapagos National Park was established in 1959." The change is that baby tortoises now can survive, at least safe from rats.

This is very good news indeed. But misleading reports about the finding give the false impression the Galapagos Islands no longer has a rat problem, that the tortoises are fine,

and, thus, there may be less need for supporting the whole range of research, monitoring and environmental protection (e.g., patrols against poaching, over-fishing, inappropriate tourism activities, etc.). The need for all these measures is still great, as it is in other parts of the world.

**Marylee Stephenson**, author of *Galapagos Islands: Exploring, Enjoying, & Understanding Darwin's Enchanted Islands*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Mountaineers Books (September 2015)

## A Socialist Takes Stock

Stephen Lewis was most impressive in your February issue ("A socialist takes stock"). His essay on democratic socialism would impress most Members of Parliament except the most rabid Tory bobble heads (those who just nod when Harper gives his instructions). I think it should be recast as a pamphlet and issued to every MP.

**N. Parker-Jervis**, Victoria, B.C.

Send us your feedback and thoughts: [monitor@policyalternatives.ca](mailto:monitor@policyalternatives.ca)

## New from the CCPA

### Making Ends Meet

Two working parents with two children need to each earn a minimum of \$18.52 an hour to get by in Toronto, says a new study by **CCPA-Ontario** economist **Kaylie Tiessen**. **Making Ends Meet** draws on a national methodology developed by researchers in Ontario and British Columbia—the National Living Wage Framework—to determine the living wage in Toronto in 2015.

“When you take into account what it actually costs to rent an apartment, pay hydro, own a vehicle, pay for a TTC [transit] pass, buy groceries and pay for child care, it means two working parents need to bring in a total of \$72,242 a year in order to make ends meet for their family of four,” says Tiessen. “There are 70,000 working poor in the city of Toronto, 113,000 in the overall region. A living wage would be a real game-changer for those workers.”

The report recommends that provincial and municipal governments, community social services, the broader public sector and even private sector employers should consider paying their workers a living wage to boost

health outcomes, reduce worker turnover, improve productivity (by lowering stress) and recognize the contribution workers make to the bottom line.

A new report from the **CCPA-BC** also looks at the minimum wage, debunking the myth that the economy cannot afford a hike to \$15 per hour. **David Green**, a professor and former chair of the Vancouver School of Economics at UBC and an International Fellow at the Institute for Fiscal Studies in London, did a thorough review of academic research on the economic impacts of minimum wages and found that bold increases make good economic sense.

“In reading and using that research, it is important to recognize that estimates showing job loss effects of minimum wage increases apply only to teenagers. Estimated effects for young adult and adult workers range from insignificant to non-existent,” he writes. “Focusing on teenage workers plays up an inaccurate stereotype about who earns very low wages in B.C. and leads to exaggerated claims about job losses. Only 26% of those currently making between \$10.25 and \$12 are teenagers, and only 5% of those making between \$12 and \$15 are teenagers.” /

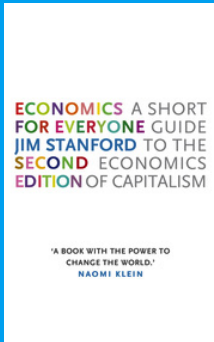
### Unions and Economic Stability

A new report by economist and CCPA research associate **Hugh Mackenzie** looks deeper into the source of growing income inequality in North America and

finds new connections to declining unionization. **The Union Card: A Ticket to Middle Class Stability** examines 30 years of unionization and income data, thin slicing unionized workers along the income spectrum by deciles (slices of 10%) to examine the impact of union decline on the mobility of Canada’s middle class. Mackenzie finds that unionization is not just about a wage premium; it affects workers’ location along the middle spectrum of the income ladder.

Comparing data from 1997 and 2011, the report shows that most of the decline in the share of unionized families took place at the higher end of the income spectrum. In 2011, 47% of families in deciles five through nine included at least one union member; 14 years earlier, in 1997, 56% of families in deciles five through nine had at least one union member. In other words, the hollowing out of Canada’s middle class, particularly its upper-middle class, is closely associated with the decline of unionization in Canada, especially in the private sector.

“We can expect the middle class to shrink, and upward mobility to stall, as long as union representation continues to decline,” writes Mackenzie. “Any policy discussion around middle class economics would rightly examine these startling trends and reconsider ways to facilitate the rise of collective bargaining in Canada’s future. The health of the middle class depends on it.” /



### Economics for Everyone

**Economics for Everyone**, the 2008 book by CCPA research associate and Unifor economist **Jim Stanford**, is being republished (June 2015) as an updated second edition. It is an antidote to the abstract and ideological way that economics is normally taught and reported. Key concepts such as finance, competition and wages are explored, and their importance to everyday life is revealed.

Do workers need capitalists? Why does capitalism harm the environment? What really happens on the stock market? Stanford answers these and other questions in his book, which provides non-specialist readers with all the information they need to understand how capitalism works (and how it doesn’t). Watch the CCPA website for purchasing details and book launches in or near your community. /

For more reports, commentary and infographics from the CCPA’s national and provincial offices, visit [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca)



# The Index

## John Baird's Dizzying Raise

Compiled by Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood

**/ February 3, 2015**

**DATE FORMER FOREIGN AFFAIRS** minister John Baird announced he was resigning from cabinet and will step down as MP for the riding of Ottawa West-Nepean.

**/ \$247,500**

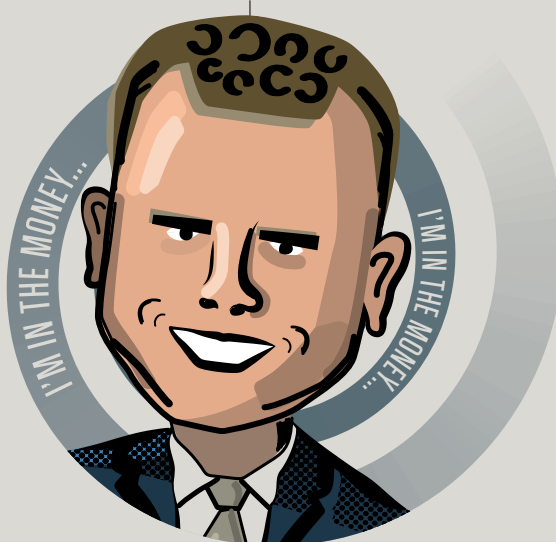
**SALARY OF A SITTING** government minister as of April 2015 (\$167,400 base salary+\$80,100 top-up).

**/ 3**

**NUMBER OF PRIVATE SECTOR** positions taken by Baird within two months of leaving public office: 1) member of the international advisory board to Barrick Gold; 2) board director for Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR); and 3) international advisor to Hong Kong billionaire Richard Li.

**/ 5**

**NUMBER OF RECORDED/** registered times Baird met with Barrick Gold and CPR lobbyists while in office.



**/ January 19, 2009**

**LAST RECORDED TIME** John Baird met with CPR lobbyists while serving as Minister of Transport.

**/ May 30, 2013**

**LAST RECORDED TIME** Baird met with Barrick Gold lobbyists while serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

**/ 1 Year**

**COOLING OFF PERIOD UNDER** the 2006 Conflict of Interest Act before a former cabinet minister can take a job with a company with which they had "direct and significant" dealings.

**/ \$235,000**

**JOHN BAIRD'S EXPECTED** annual compensation from Canadian Pacific.

**/ Unknown**

**BAIRD'S EXPECTED SALARY** at Barrick.

**/ \$1 million +**

**BRIAN MULRONEY'S PAY AS A** Barrick board member and advisor according to the most recent regulatory filings. The former prime minister, who sat on Barrick's board from 1993 to 2014, received \$2.5 million in 2013 when he took on a new role as chair of the company's International Advisory Board—the group Baird will be joining, according to Barrick's recently filed 2014 annual report.

**/ 58%**

**PROPORTION OF BARRICK** Gold's International Advisory Board who are former public office holders.

**/ \$499,445**

**CANADIAN GOVERNMENT'S** effective subsidy of a controversial 2012 Barrick Gold "corporate social responsibility" project in Peru while Baird was Minister of Foreign Affairs.

**/ \$9 million**

**CANADIAN GOVERNMENT'S** contribution in January 2015 to a project headed by the Munk School of Global Affairs, which was founded by Barrick Gold's 30-year former CEO Peter Munk.

**/ \$2.8 million**

**AMOUNT OF MONEY THE AUREA** Foundation, a charity established by Peter Munk and his wife Melanie, distributed to right-wing think tanks between 2006 and 2008. Major recipients of the nearly \$2 million doled out annually by Aurea, which "gives special attention to the study of issues relating to the political and economic foundations of freedom [and] the strengthening of the free market system," include the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, C.D. Howe Institute, Macdonald-Laurier Institute, and The Fraser Institute.

SOURCES: ParInfo. Indemnity, Salaries and Allowances (April 1, 2015); Rachelle Younglai. "Barrick Gold hires John Baird, Newt Gingrich," *Globe and Mail* (March 25, 2015); Peter Koven. "Barrick co-chairman paid staggering US\$17-million in 2012, as company gets generous with executives," *Financial Post* (March 27, 2013); Barrick Gold Corporation Annual Report 2014 (March 27, 2015). Remarks by Allan Gottlieb, Executive Chair, Aurea Foundation at announcement of the formation of the Fraser Institute Global Centre for Mining Studies (March 4, 2008); Donald Gutstein. "Follow the money, Part 2—Barrick Gold's Peter Munk," from his blog (April 10, 2014)

# DEGREES OF SEPARATION

The shaky economy has prompted Canada's CEOs to pontificate on what steps should be—no, must be—taken to solve our economic woes as a nation. At the end of March, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE) released a paper titled *Career ready: Towards a national strategy for the mobilization of Canadian potential*. Canada's workforce challenges, it explains, are profound. But the reason we have not met them is simple: too much education for too many young people in too many areas that do not have a direct application to the needs of the job market.

The solution?

"Canada could dramatically improve the quality of university education by cutting enrolment as much as 25 to 30 per cent while maintaining budgets at roughly the same level. The young people who were not accepted would for the most part be those who are, in any event, unlikely to graduate. This selective approach would likely produce more graduates, or at least no fewer, who are better prepared for the world of work," explains author Ken Coates. (Emphasis added.)

So, less education targeted to fewer students. Because those who wouldn't qualify for this more elite system of higher education would probably have, you know, "limited skills." Or at the very least be motivationally challenged. Right?

The CCCE-commissioned report is refreshingly honest. (Glimpses of the unvarnished perspective of the corporate elite, particularly as it relates to the non-corporate non-elite, are rare.) It even comes with a generous dose of tough love: "The current generation of young people is defined by a sense of entitlement and an expectation that their lives will somehow un-

fold along a predetermined and positive trajectory."

As the report is intriguingly reference-free, what might Coates mean by "entitlement?" Today's "entitled" students pay an average \$6,600 a year in tuition and other compulsory fees (see our September 2014 CCPA report *Tier for Two* for a province-by-province breakdown). By the time they graduate (2017–18), these students will be paying \$7,000 a year (adjusted for inflation). That doesn't include books, transportation, food or other living expenses.

The average full-time market income for those "entitled" young people once they graduate: \$32,000 for someone under 25 with a bachelor's degree, according to StatsCan's 2010 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics. But if they received funding through the Canada Student Loans Program, graduates have an average \$28,500 of loan debt to pay off. The collective amount of student debt owed to the CSLP is estimated at over \$16 billion.

By way of comparison, CEOs who went to university in the early 1990s, and who are now in their mid-40s, would have paid average tuition and compulsory fees of \$3,300 a year (in today's dollars) in 1993–94. Last year, the lowest paid of Canada's 100 highest paid CEOs took home \$4.1 million, while the average salary was \$9.2 million, representing an average pay raise of 16% over the previous year.

And though student debt probably isn't as much of an issue at the top, we can't help but notice Corporate Canada's coffers are overflowing with \$630 billion in cash (Q1 2014)—enough to make college and universities free for everyone for 17 years (annual university and college expenditures were \$37 billion in 2009).

Remind us again who's feeling entitled?

Here's an idea—a fully referenced idea—for consideration. Canada has the ninth lowest corporate tax rate of 189 countries and the lowest of the G8 as ranked by PwC. Rather than reducing university enrollment by a third, the Alternative Federal Budget (AFB) recommends increasing Canada's corporate tax rate by the same proportion, from 15% to 22%. This would raise \$6 billion a year after the 7% investment tax credit the AFB would return on corporate profits invested in fixed assets in Canada in excess of depreciation.

What to do with all that newly liberated money? For \$2 billion annually, the AFB would reduce tuition fees to 1992 levels, which would be what a number of CEOs paid when they went to university. Alternately, we could go further and eliminate tuition fees altogether for \$3 billion a year.

Either option leaves plenty of room for Corporate Canada to reverse its steadily declining investments in workforce training and R&D, a disturbing trend that is insufficiently acknowledged in Coates' paper for the CCCE. Apparently it made more sense to repeat the tired refrain about "entitled" students and the need to reduce access to education instead, since "Canadian society will always tolerate and encourage considerable freedom of choice, but *there can be too much of a good thing.*" (Emphasis ours.)

In other words, a *little* entitlement is okay—so long as it comes with a CEO seal of approval.

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**Erika Shaker** is the director of the CCPA's Education Project. **David Macdonald** is a senior economist with the CCPA and co-ordinator of the Alternative Federal Budget. Follow them on Twitter @ErikaShaker and @DavidMacCdn.

# THE IMAGINARY DEFICIT

Since the last election, a fresh sense of creativity and imagination has set in to Quebec's political life. Not content with exaggerating the budget deficit by cooking the books, the Liberal government of Philippe Couillard has invented a so-called structural deficit between state expenditures and revenues.

The logic is quite simple: spending is growing faster than revenues. The problem is that it isn't true. For instance, between 2008 and 2012, the Quebec government's revenues grew 15.6% whereas its basic operating costs (health care, education, social services, interest payments, etc.) increased by 15.1%.

So what's going on in Quebec City? Faced with a government living in a world of imaginary deficits (\$3.2 billion last winter, \$5.8 billion by June 2014 and a \$7.3 billion peak in December), it's worth going over a few essential facts.

In recent history, let's say over the last 15 years, we can see the same trends repeated again and again. After eliminating the deficit in the late 1990s, what did Lucien Bouchard's Parti Québécois government do? Did it choose to reinvest in public services? Of course not!

The fiscal effort that enabled Quebec to return to budget surpluses around the year 2000 was not spent where one would expect. Indeed, it was not an out-of-control state apparatus that monopolized the surpluses, but populist tax-cutting policies.

As early as 2000, Bernard Landry, then finance minister, announced \$4.5 billion in tax cuts. Shortly afterwards,

Jean Charest was elected premier on his promise to reduce Quebecers' "tax burden" by \$1 billion each year over the course of his mandate. In 2007, the premier doubled down on his pledge by using a federal transfer to fund a \$950 million tax cut just in time for upcoming elections.

Every single time, those benefitting from the tax cuts are neither the poor nor the middle classes, but the wealthiest. For the majority of people, a tax cut means only a few dozen extra dollars in their pockets. The price we pay is in fact much higher than the benefit: decreasing service quality, longer waiting lists, service fee hikes, etc.

It would be much more relevant for Carlos Leitão, Quebec's current finance minister, to stop inventing deficits where there are none. If anyone is to blame for the current state of our public finances, it is the successive

governments that have held power since the year 2000. The culprit most responsible for the deficit, after the 2008 financial meltdown, is none other than the obsession of our elected officials with confusing tax cuts for social projects.

In 1852, describing the pathetic spectacle of French political life, Marx said "all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce." Will we have the opportunity to innovate the third time around, leaving behind the comical effect of the farce?

Philippe Hurteau is a researcher with IRIS, a Montreal-based progressive think-tank.



"We're not stupid." One of several Quebec rallies against the austerity policies of the Couillard government.

ForgetTheBox.net



# PARENTS LEAVING THE CAR AT HOME

There's a popular belief that parents chauffeur their young children everywhere. Certainly, parents have many reasons for preferring cars to other modes of transportation. Children get tired easily. Parents need to pack things like food, diapers, etc. Parents want to keep their children comfortable and safe. Parents have busy and complicated schedules, and taking the car can be quick and convenient.

However, research I published in April produced some surprising findings. In 2011–12, Sylvia Parusel and I conducted interviews with 52 parents with children under 12 in four diverse areas of Vancouver: Downtown, Dunbar-Southlands, Sunset and Grandview-Woodland. We wanted to know how parents use the car in their daily lives. We hear quite a bit about young adults shifting away from car use towards transit, car-sharing, biking and walking. But we don't know much about what's happening with people with children.

What surprised us with this research is that despite the many challenges of moving about with young children, many parents were trying to reduce their car use or did not own a car at

all. Instead, they regularly walked, cycled or took public transit with their kids. A few had chosen to live without a car, others could not afford to own one. In many cases, those who relied primarily on the car (not the majority) did so simply because they lacked viable alternatives.

The parents we spoke with were generally aware that over-reliance on cars contributes to problems like climate change, traffic congestion and poorer health. For example, a mother who relied primarily on the car said that she didn't like the environmental impact of driving. She didn't like the fact that the kids aren't getting places, "under their own speed. It's not as healthy a way of living."

Many parents really preferred the experience of walking, biking or taking transit with their children. Driving was often too stressful, especially when stuck in traffic with tired, hungry or bored kids. Parents found their children were happier, healthier and safer outside of the car. They often felt more connected to their neighbourhoods if they walked or biked locally. As one mother said, when you're walking with your child to school, you get to

know your community, "your feet are attached to it."

Parents did experience challenges with non-car travel. As much as they wanted to use alternative transportation, they sometimes gave up. For example, public transit was frustrating when boarding a crowded bus with a stroller or having to transfer buses with poor connections.

We also found that transportation options varied depending on where the parents lived and how much money they had. Many parents preferred the SkyTrain. It's more reliable, faster and easier with a stroller, and more fun for children compared with the bus and car. But the train is only available in a few parts of the city. Traffic is more dangerous in some areas than in others, which often forced parents to be very cautious with their children while walking or biking.

For low-income parents, the cost of transit fares could prevent them from reaching important destinations such as a doctor's appointment. For parents who own a car, the high fares are a disincentive to switch to transit.

Given parents' interest in finding alternatives to driving, we believe that policy-makers would be wise to make strategic investments to improve options for public transit, cycling and walking. We argue these investments should include family-friendly transportation as part of complete communities, where amenities are close enough to be reached by foot or on bike, public transit is more available and affordable, and streets are safer for children to walk and bike throughout the city.

**Arlene Tigar McLaren** is Professor Emerita in the department of sociology and anthropology at Simon Fraser University and the author of the CCPA-BC paper, *Moving Beyond the Car: Families and Transportation in Vancouver*.

RICHARD MASONER / CYCLELICIOUS



# ROAD TO RUIN

If you love the feeling of cruising down a brand new stretch of highway, the last few years have been full of good news for you. And if you're in the business of designing and overseeing the construction work on those highways, well, these are banner years indeed. If you're a taxpayer on the hook for the roadwork, however, the picture isn't quite as pretty.

While the drop in oil prices is sure to take its toll, road building in Saskatchewan has been booming lately. The Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure (MHI) had record high budgets in 2009 and 2010, and after dipping the following fiscal year they have gone up consistently in most years since. But to see truly astounding growth, you need to focus on the consulting side of the road building business.

MHI's spending on consultants skyrocketed over this same period, from \$12.1 million in 2009 to \$61.3 million in 2014 — an increase of 404%. Last year's payout accounted for over a tenth of the ministry's total budget. Those amounts, by the way, were obtained through a freedom of information request filed by the CCPA; they aren't otherwise publicly available.

So why is the cost of consultants growing at 33 times the rate of the budget itself?

The vast majority of those consultant fees go to transportation engineers, the experts who design, oversee and troubleshoot road-building projects. Until relatively recently, MHI had a sizable in-house team of transportation engineers and related staff. Following a government decision to outsource this work, the branch shrunk to about half its size between 2007 and 2012. Private consulting firms like AECOM and EBA have filled the gap, at a premium price.

Through another freedom of information request filed by the Saskatchewan

Government and General Employees' Union, the CCPA obtained 33 of MHI's engineering contracts. These contracts listed hourly rates for private workers, which were compared with the hourly rates from the collective agreement that covers MHI employees.

The results were striking. Even using the "fully-burdened" cost of public employees, which includes a premium to account for benefits, vacation pay and other costs outside wages, they were far less expensive than their private sector equivalents. The contrast is especially evident amongst the support staff that engineering firms supply.

In the reviewed contracts, engineering firms billed from \$64 to \$85 per hour for a draftsman. Costs for a public service draftsman ranged from \$21.91 to \$34.58 per hour. Private surveyors cost \$65 to \$90 per hour, while a public surveyor made an hourly rate of between \$20.67 and \$27.45. Rates for private administrative and clerical staff were \$62 to \$88 per hour; their public equivalents typically cost from \$20.67 to \$32.02 per hour.

Altogether, it was between 1.9 and 4.3 times more expensive to employ private workers in these three fields than their public equivalents.

Cost comparisons amongst higher-level engineering jobs are trickier. Since senior public engineers are out of scope, their hourly rates are not disclosed. And given the extremely wide array of private sector job titles, lining up exact public counterparts is often impossible. Still, there are a few telling examples.

One private engineering firm valued its interns and summer students at \$84 per hour. A ministry-employed assistant project manager — a high-skill position responsible for managing a worksite — cost a little over half

that much (\$45.19), assuming they had over five years' experience.

In another example, a ministry-employed senior project manager — a job restricted to experienced professional engineers — is out of scope, so only their current monthly rate is available: up to \$9,936 for full-time work (based on a public service job posting). The same amount would pay for just 55 to 70 hours of work by a private senior project manager, whose hourly rates were from \$140 to \$180.

Cost comparisons like these go a long way towards explaining the soaring consulting costs borne by the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure. They also suggest a clear course of action: restore transportation engineering to an in-house function of the ministry.

Until we do, it will be a rough road for the province's finances.

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Taylor Bendig is a researcher for the CCPA-Saskatchewan.



# NOVA SCOTIA CAN DO MORE

The Nova Scotia budget tabled on April 9 is without vision. It was constructed to deal primarily with the deficit. Undertaking “restructuring” and “right-sizing” of the public sector to balance the budget may well make things worse. In contrast, CCPA-NS projected that Nova Scotia’s fiscal health would continually improve if the government recognized its responsibility to invest in the economy.

The deficit exists because of a revenue shortfall. In order to stimulate economic growth and increase revenue, the government needed to invest now to create jobs. Public sector workers are not the problem: they provide needed services to Nova Scotians and have good jobs that provide important economic injections in communities across the province. Cutting those jobs — 163 since February, including 75 at the Department of Economic and Rural Development and Tourism, which has been eliminated to create a new Department of Business — will produce a fiscal drag, hurting rural Nova Scotia and women the most.

Rural Nova Scotia desperately needs investments in infrastructure, such as wastewater and transportation, and a focal point within government to make it happen. Economic development is about more than business competitiveness in natural resources and tourism: it is about investing in people and communities. Handing over more functions of economic development to business interests and unelected bodies like Nova Scotia Business Inc., which this budget does, removes important democratic checks and balances.

The 2015 budget also ignores the needs of the most vulnerable among us. Those living in the deepest poverty in our province will see no increase in income supports. The continued lack

of action on poverty reduction is morally repugnant and bad economics. We trap people in a system that robs them of their dignity, while sticking everyone with the higher health care costs and lost productivity that results.

The wasteful energy rebate is maintained at a cost of \$117 million. With oil prices the lowest they have been for a while, this was a missed opportunity to begin phasing out this rebate and designing a pollution price to help us act on climate change. Instead, the government made cuts to the environment department.

If youth attraction and retention is a government priority, as it claims, then deregulating tuition fees for out-of-province and graduate students at Nova Scotia universities sends the wrong message. Combined with inadequate increases to university operating grants, relying increasingly on tuition fees to fund higher education will make it more inaccessible and increase student debt even more.

There were very few tax changes in the budget. User fees were increased in some areas: a form of regressive taxation. The government also cut the Healthy Living Tax Credit because it was not achieving its objective of helping people with lower incomes access recreation and fitness programs. This makes sense, since the people using the credit were earning \$90,000-plus a year. However, the government should be investing more in these kinds of programs. For example, it could help municipalities provide these services at low or no cost.

The investments CCPA-NS prioritized in its pre-budget reports are based on a vision of a socially and economically just province that is environmentally sustainable. These investments would grow the economy and create good jobs. For example, if we increased

income supports for those living in poverty, more money would be spent in the community. Early learning and child care kicks back \$2.23 for every dollar invested.

But instead of a proactive budget, the government whipped up hysteria about the deficit and debt problems, and did not address the real problems we face as a province, including poverty, illiteracy, lack of affordable, quality child care and our worsening infrastructure deficit. With debt-to-GDP declining and interest rates at a historical low, this budget is a missed opportunity.

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**Christine Saulnier** is the director of the CCPA-Nova Scotia.

# PUBLIC SERVANTS THROWN UNDER THE BUS

If you just read the words, and didn't look at the numbers, Ontario's 2015 budget is a magical integration of the government's high-profile infrastructure and pension initiatives with the need to maintain public services.

The budget devotes page after page to trumpeting the government's commitments to elementary, secondary and post-secondary education, child care, health and poverty reduction while it highlights investments in infrastructure and the continued development of the Ontario Registered Pension Plan (ORPP). Unfortunately, when you do look at the numbers, it's clear that everything else—every other service that Ontarians depend on—has been thrown under the infrastructure bus.

Elementary and secondary education spending is going up at less than the rate of inflation, and that includes the remaining cost of implementing full-day kindergarten. Funding for post-secondary education will actually be dropping at a rate of 0.4% per year on the way to budget balance. Health care spending is to increase at less than the rate of inflation.

The budget makes reference to the government's poverty reduction strategy. But the only concrete measure is that social assistance benefits are being increased—by 1%, again less than the rate of inflation. The numbers say that social assistance benefits (both Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program) are still lower by 5% to 7%, after accounting for inflation, than they were when Conservative premier Mike Harris left office in 2002. On the way to budget balance, expenditures on children and social services will increase by less than one-third the rate of inflation.

There's not much that is new on the infrastructure front. Total investment increased from \$13.3 billion to \$13.5 billion between 2014–15 and 2015–16. But the priority has clearly shifted. None of the transit money in the pipeline is destined for the City of Toronto, which, it is now clear, has spent all of its transit infrastructure expansion money on the Scarborough subway extension.

Taking a step back from the detail, some critical gaps become clear. You'd never know from reading this budget there is a growing consensus that Ontario's fiscal problems are on the revenue side, not the expenditure side. There's nothing here to address either the current revenue gap or the prospect of federal health funding cuts that will make that gap even wider. Tax continues to be a four-letter word as far as the government is concerned.

The sheer volume of words aside, there are four clear messages in this year's budget:

1. The overriding priority is to balance the budget by 2017–18, regardless of what happens between now and then.
2. There will be no substantial action to address the revenue side of the gov-

ernment's finances despite widespread agreement this is the key fiscal problem the government faces.

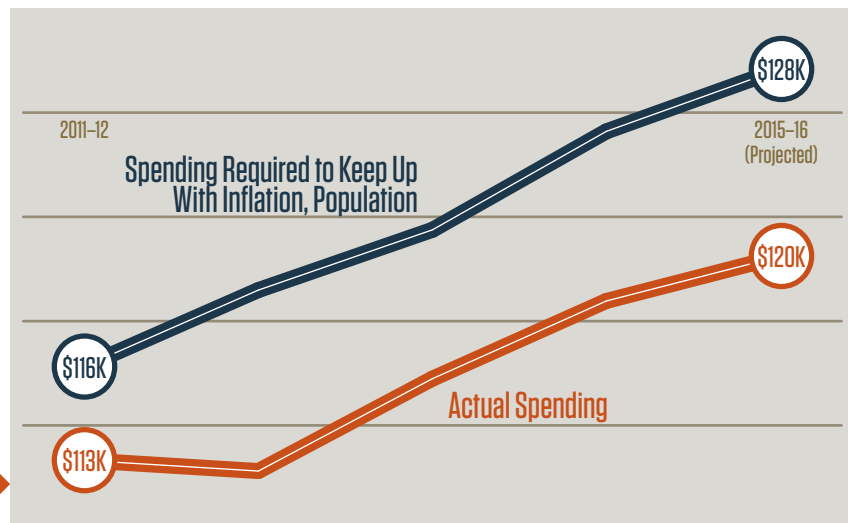
3. Infrastructure aside, every other public services gap in Ontario is being shoved to the sidelines.

4. The thousands of Ontarians who serve the province in the public sector are expected to bear the largest share of the burden imposed by the government's commitment to meeting its budget balance target.

It is encouraging that the government is continuing to move forward with its pension plan and is clearly rethinking many of the limitations on the ORPP implied by its initial discussion paper. This investment in the long-term retirement income security of generations of Ontarians is a critical priority.

What is most disappointing, however, is the failure of the government to make use of its majority mandate to make some of the key difficult decisions that would put Ontario's public services and its public finances on a more secure footing for the future.

Hugh Mackenzie is a CCPA research associate. Follow him on Twitter @MackHugh.



Ontario spending on public services hasn't kept up

SPECIAL FEATURE ON THE  
2015 ALTERNATIVE FEDERAL BUDGET

# DELIVERING THE GOOD SINCE 1995



PHOTO AND COVER BY ANNE-MARIE BOUCHARD

IN 1994 THE CHOICES COALITION asked the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives if we would partner with them on an alternative federal budgeting exercise. The Winnipeg-based coalition for social justice had been experimenting with alternative budgets at the provincial, civil and school board level for a few years.

WITH THE EXPERT GUIDANCE of John Loxley, a professor of economics at the University of Manitoba, these exercises brought together volunteers from all walks of life (and a few economists, of course) to crack open the normally secretive government process of choosing where public money should be spent and where it would be removed as budget cuts. "The less people know the less they can challenge the prevailing political orthodoxy as expressed in the budget," Loxley would later write in a guidebook on how to organize an alternative budget. "Opening up the process enables people to see how budgets are put together, how trade offs are made and to appreciate the real versus imagined budgetary constraints that governments have to work within."

Participants in the first Alternative Federal Budget came from unions, churches and the women's equality movement, from environmental, anti-poverty and international development organizations. Students, teachers and farmers were represented, as were Aboriginal voices, policy think-tanks and others. Then, as now, the process was grounded in the progressive values these voices brought to the table: full employment and good jobs, the reduction of inequality, the eradication of poverty, economic equality between men and women, the protection of UN-mandated rights (civil, political, economic, social, cultural and labour), and the pursuance of peace, justice and sustainable development for all peoples. All acknowledged society's ills would not be reversed overnight, but rejected the idea, which congealed in Ottawa over the course of the 1990s, that we have reached the lim-

its of our tax and redistributive capacity, that technological change, capital mobility and global competition have severely reduced the scope for policy, and that, accordingly, we must lower our expectations of what government does.

This is an important year for the Alternative Federal Budget, not just because it turns 20 this year. The federal government has tabled its last budget before an expected October election. It has claimed a monopoly on sound fiscal management when in fact the small surplus announced on budget day was taken from public services, Employment Insurance and by draining the government's contingency fund, as Jim Stanford explains on the next page. Economic growth and labour force participation in Canada never fully recovered from the recent global economic crash. Kate McInturff tells us why a balanced budget in Ottawa comes at the expense of deficits elsewhere, while David Macdonald lists four Alternative Federal Budget fixes that would have done much more to kick-start sustainable job creation in this country.

Also in this section, we feature articles on immigration policy, defence spending and federal-First Nations relations that are adapted from the 2015 Alternative Federal Budget document. You'll see on page 31 how the totality of these alternative program spending and tax measures would positively improve the incomes and well-being of a large majority of people while only marginally increasing taxes for Canada's top earners. It proves that despite constraints—real and imagined, external and self-imposed—governments do have a wide range of choices about how they spend, tax, regulate and provide services.



Jim Stanford

# Five Outrageous Things About Budget 2015

AFB/20

**WITH A DOCUMENT** whose very timing, let alone content, was so transparently politicized and manipulative, it's hard to know where to start. But among the many galling, shortsighted and ultimately destructive components of this year's federal budget, five stand out.

## 1. Timing

By delaying the budget announcement several weeks, the government only heightened the economic uncertainty in Canada arising from a sharp decrease in oil prices and growing evidence of serious economic trouble. Contrary to what the finance minister told us, this delay had nothing to do with fluctuating oil prices. The government was just stalling until the fiscal year started so it could sell its shares in General Motors and use the net proceeds to help achieve the politically all-important "balance." It was a shameful and reckless gaming of the process (and content) of fiscal policy-making.

## 2. Selling the Silverware

The \$2.1 billion net proceeds from the sale of GM shares were essential to the government's declared, and we should add quite small, surplus of \$1.4 billion. The shares fetched \$3.3 billion, but the government had to deduct their "book value," which was artificially low due to the government's ultra-cautious accounting in 2009 when it helped bail-out the firm.

The bigger outrage is that the seat at the GM director's table was worth far more to Canada than the proceeds from the sale of shares, since it gave the government an indirect le-

ver with which to assure the company's continuing manufacturing presence here. The fire sale was widely interpreted in the automotive media as a sign that Canada was "giving up" on the industry, as another spate of articles tells of a new migration of auto investment to Mexico.

More fundamentally, selling an asset to balance a current budget makes the state poorer, not richer. Toby Sanger with the Canadian Union of Public Employees has argued that, based on consensus analyst forecasts, the government would have made an extra \$1 billion by hanging on to its shares for just one extra year. Of course, that would be too late to help the government contest another election with a phony surplus to wave around.

## 3. Phony Balance

The government's "balanced budget" is entirely dependent on fiscal sleight-of-hand. On top of siphoning off \$2.1 billion from the GM shares, the government diverted \$2 billion out of its normal \$3 billion contingency reserve. Apparently, things are so stable in the world economy these days

there's no need for so much symbolic protection.

But perhaps most offensively of all, they raided \$3.4 billion from the annual operating surplus of the Employment Insurance system. That EI surplus, by the way, is created because our system denies benefits to over 60% of unemployed Canadians. The appropriate fiscal response, especially with growing layoffs around the country, would be to fix that problem instead of raiding the EI cookie jar. It's the response recommended in this year's Alternative Federal Budget.

That makes a total of \$7.5 billion in shell-game transactions. Without those three fiscal tricks, the reported balance would be a \$6.1 billion deficit, not a \$1.4 billion surplus. The emphasis placed on achieving balance is misplaced anyway, as many economists of all stripes have pointed out. But to attain this inappropriate "victory" in such an underhanded and misleading way sets a new low for the politicization of fiscal policy.

## 4. Public Transit

The opposition parties have argued this is the moment for government to invest heavily in overdue infrastructure projects. This view is fully and loudly endorsed by economists around the world, who correctly identify secular stagnation (not public debt) as the greatest threat to prosperity and stability. The argument must be having some effect on public opinion: a recent poll indicated Canadians preferred infrastructure spending to tax cuts by more than two to one.

The government has responded to this pressure with some mostly token infrastructure initiatives in the 2015

The budget confirms the path of grinding, disguised austerity that has dominated fiscal policy under this government.



budget. The Public Transit Fund, for example, gets several pages of text in the budget plan. But you have to wade through many tables until you realize it doesn't get any money until the 2017–18 fiscal year, and then it's only \$250 million. Given the high cost of transit investments, and how desperately we need them (for economic, social and environmental reasons), this is offensive. I am amazed Joe Oliver could announce it with a straight face.

## 5. More Stealth Austerity

Even many critics of the government are describing the budget as full of tax cuts and other “election goodies.” This is a mischaracterization. Some of the tax cuts are new and, therefore, taking up air time. Combined with the Family Tax Cut announced last year they are also way too expensive, costing \$5 billion just this year. These cuts will have a perverse impact on equality, labour force participation and other variables, as some articles have pointed out. But the real thrust of the budget won't make the headlines because it's just “more of the same,” which isn't traditionally newsworthy.

The budget confirms the path of grinding, disguised austerity that has dominated fiscal policy under this government. Federal public administration employment has decreased by 50,000 positions since mid-2011. The government has imposed incremental, poorly understood spending cuts that cumulate to \$14 billion per year. It has underfunded veterans' offices, coast guard facilities, meat and railway inspectors, EI processing, and many other services that are essential to the quality and safety of our lives. The government will unilaterally reduce health transfers to the provinces beginning in 2017 by \$36 billion over a decade. It will force Canadians to work until age 67 to collect Old Age Security.

These painful and unnecessary measures are significantly undermining the quality and cohesion of Canadian society. Their silent confirmation in this budget is its dominant feature—not the pre-election goodies the government hopes we will talk about all summer. **M**

# ALL GOVERNMENTS TAX AND SPEND.

**It's what they do.** They raise money from the population and use it to fund government priorities, be it a national pharmacare plan or a war in the Middle East.

The question is not whether to “tax and spend,” but whom we will tax and what we should spend it on. Here are a few of the ways the 2015 AFB changes the calculus by closing tax loopholes and redistributing the tax burden to fund important new social programs to fill current public needs. \*Figures are for the 2015–16 fiscal year

TAX	SPEND
<b>CANCEL FAMILY INCOME SPLITTING</b> SAVES \$2 BILLION	<b>INTRODUCE POVERTY REDUCTION TRANSFER TO PROVINCES</b> COSTS \$2 BILLION
<b>REMOVE CAPITAL GAINS DEDUCTION FOR INDIVIDUALS</b> SAVES \$3.5 BILLION	<b>CREATE A NATIONAL PHARMACARE PROGRAM</b> COSTS \$3.4 BILLION
<b>INTRODUCE AN INHERITANCE TAX ON ESTATES OVER \$5 MILLION</b> COLLECTS \$2 BILLION	<b>REDUCE POST-SECONDARY TUITION FEES TO 1992 LEVELS</b> COSTS \$1.9 BILLION
<b>CANCEL STOCK OPTION DEDUCTION</b> SAVES \$600 MILLION	<b>CREATE NATIONAL PLAN TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN</b> COSTS \$500 MILLION
<b>REDUCE INEFFICIENT FOSSIL FUEL SUBSIDIES</b> SAVES \$375 MILLION	<b>INCREASE CANADA'S CONTRIBUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE INITIATIVES</b> COSTS \$400 MILLION
<b>REDUCE MILITARY SPENDING TO PRE-9/11 LEVELS</b> SAVES \$1 BILLION	<b>INCREASE FOREIGN AID TO MEET INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS</b> COSTS \$1.3 BILLION
<b>IMPLEMENT A TAX HAVENS WITHHOLDING TAX</b> COLLECTS \$2 BILLION	<b>INVEST IN AFFORDABLE AND SOCIAL HOUSING</b> COSTS \$2 BILLION
<b>ELIMINATE CORPORATE MEALS AND ENTERTAINMENT DEDUCTION</b> SAVES \$400 MILLION	<b>CREATE 140 NEW COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES</b> COSTS \$300 MILLION



Kate McInturff

## A Bachelor's Budget

How eliminating the deficit has diminished us all

ILLUSTRATION BY REMIE GEOFFROI

**C**ANADA'S FEDERAL government ran a deficit for nearly thirty years, from the late 1960s to the late 1990s. Successive Conservative and Liberal governments delivered programs, implemented economic and fiscal policies, and ran the country without balancing the budget. The sky did not fall. The fabric of Canadian society did not unravel. Nobody fell off a fiscal cliff.

Where did the obsessive concern with a balanced federal budget come from and how did it gain such currency in the popular imagination?

The ideological origins of this obsession lie in the drive to diminish the role of government to an ever-shrinking island unto itself, disentangled from economic and social relationships with its populace. Even with-

in this framework, the ties that bind the government to the economy are never quite cut in practice. Governments are still called upon to interfere to the extent that that interference is perceived as stabilizing (of

*No person, no government, is an island. As Donne reminds us, everyone is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.*

currencies, debt, and international relations).

The ideological inconsistency of this come-here-no-go-away approach to the role of government manages to sustain itself in no small part thanks to the social logic that underwrites it. When Shakespeare's Polonius advises his son that he should "neither a borrower nor a lender be," he is cautioning against indebtedness and dependence. Indebtedness is to be feared because it might circumscribe his son's ability to act in his own best self-interest, just as government interference in the marketplace is shunned by conservative economists for undermining the ability of consumers to decide for themselves what serves them best.

The willingness of the chief advocates of non-interference to accept government interference when it is in their interest is well documented. Consider bank bailouts, corporate tax cuts and industry-friendly legislation. In 2009, the government intervened to assist the hard-hit auto industry. Ironically, the federal budget will achieve balance this year because of that bit of government spending and lending—selling off the last of their shares in General Motors to make up for the shortfall in revenues resulting from the drop in oil prices.

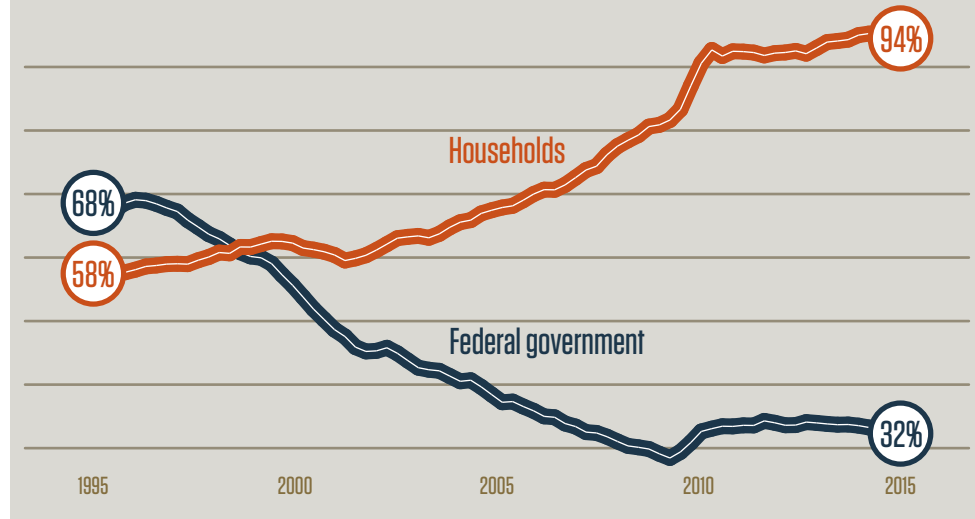
Now the government is proposing to formalize its financial isolation with a balanced budget bill. There is little support for such legislation from economists. Balanced budget bills have been, at best, ineffective—so widely open to interpretation that governments continue to accumulate debt, or not, as they wish. At worst, balanced budget bills tie the hands of legislators, forcing cutbacks in public services and restricting spending when it is needed. The “balance” in balanced budget legislation carries no requirement that the impact of those cuts be balanced or that the money that is spent be targeted at those most in need.

In practice no government, of any stripe, has put deficit and debt elimination above all else. Every ruling party has run deficits. Every ruling party has seen government debt increase at some point in its tenure. Everyone has been both a borrower and a lender.

Why, then, the obsessive reiteration of the balanced budget mantra?

In part, it boils down to messaging. Economies are complex things. So too are public budgets. Effective economic policies are precisely those that wade into the weeds—identifying and targeting the specific challenges faced by specific communities and sectors at a particular point in time. Child and family tax policies, for example, that target their benefits to low-income parents are more complex but also more effective than sending a check for the same amount to everyone (whether they need it or not).

But complexity doesn't fit in a tweet. It's not share-able or like-able.



Balance is. Balance has a nice consonance with reason, level-headedness and rationality. All qualities one might wish for in those managing the economy.

The conservative economic concentration on balancing public budgets, however, is also driven by something deeper. It is built on the model of human behaviour offered by Polonius to his son: independence, disentanglement from obligations to others, a bachelor's life. Strange advice coming from a father.

Therein lies the deeper contradiction.

No person, no government, is an island. As Donne reminds us, everyone is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. Fathers have sons who they wish to protect, governments have a populace whose needs they serve. Politicians are fond of reminding their audiences that the public purse is filled with the public's money. What is that, if not indebtedness? Why then repay that debt by withdrawing support from that public? Why cut services to veterans and the unemployed? Most puzzling of all, why have people supported economic policy that is so clearly not in their own best interest?

Here, too, lies a misunderstanding, both social and economic.

When polls show that Canadians are concerned with the economy, it is not a sign that every Canadian wants to be the next finance minister. It's a sign that Canadians are worried about their own economic security.

**Debt to GDP ratio: Over the past 20 years, household debt as a percentage of GDP has grown steadily as federal debt has fallen**

They want to know, will I have a job next year? Will I make enough to pay my bills? Can I afford to send my children to university or college?

A balanced government budget does not increase the chances that the answers to those worries will be a reassuring “yes.” Quite the opposite. As the federal budget comes into balance and federal debt diminishes, household debt increases. The past decade has seen household debt increase almost in direct proportion to the decrease in federal debt.

As budget cuts translate into diminished services and support for families, those families have picked up the tab. Why? Because they recognize their own interdependence. Because interdependence is what families and communities are made of. Parents re-mortgage their houses to send their children to school. Teachers spend their own money to buy school supplies for students who can't afford them. Families pitch in to pay for their aging parents' prescription drugs.

In the place of the slow withdrawal of government into isolation from its own citizens, it is time to ask our governments to reconsider their indebtedness to Canadians and our mutual interdependence. We're all a part of the main. Let's start acting like it. **M**

Avvy Go and Amy Casipullai

# A Land of Unequal Opportunity

Immigrants are the key to Canada's economic success

**W**ITH A FEDERAL election still probably a few months away, it's hard to pinpoint what the main issues will be. Some expect the new "war on terror" to become a wedge issue, others are convinced that Canada's general economic performance will dominate the campaigns. Yet for a large and growing segment of our society, the number one issue is, and has been for the last decade, the quest for a decent, well-paying job. We are talking about immigrants—virtually the backbone of Canada's economy.

By 2017, a fifth of Canadians will belong to a visible minority and nearly all labour market entrants will be immigrants, a great many of them from Asia, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. According to the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) and other Statistics Canada data, between 2007 and 2011, Canada's population grew by almost 6%, the highest increase among G8 countries. Immigration supplied two-thirds of this growth—and 75% of labour market expansion—over the past decade. Given the expected accelerated aging of the population between now and 2031, without sustained immigration or a substantial increase in the birth rate (1.61 children per woman in 2011), population growth could be close to zero in 20 years.

Despite the growing importance of new Canadians to the economy, by any measure (income, employment, housing conditions, health, etc.) immigrants and members of racialized communities are falling behind their Canadian-born and/or non-racialized neighbours. For example, in their 2011 report by for the Wellesley Institute and the Canadian Centre for Policy Al-

ternatives, *The Colour Coded Labour Market*, Sheila Block and Grace-Edward Galabuzi found the wages of racialized workers (both immigrant and Canadian-born) were in relative decline. Earnings by male visible-minority newcomers were just 68.7% of white male earnings.

Updating their findings in 2014, based on the 2011 NHS data, Block and Galabuzi noticed that while racialized Ontarians have slightly higher labour force participation, their unemployment rate (10.5%) was a full three percentage points higher, their earnings 16.7% lower, and their overall poverty rate (20%) more than 8% higher than the non-racialized average. The once steady but small gap between the labour market experience of established and recent immigrants, on the one hand, and the Canadian-born, on the other, widened by 2% to 2.5% during the Great Recession (2009–10). One 2014 Statistics Canada study showed the deterioration was sharpest among recent immigrants. Another pointed to a marked drop in the earnings advantage of a university education among new immigrants—from 59% above what a less-educated immigrant worker would expect 30 years ago to only 13% among those who came to Canada between 2004 and 2007. Immigrants who are university graduates are four times more likely to be unemployed than their Canadian counterparts.

While Canada's labour market is becoming more unequal, and it is getting harder for educated and skilled immigrants to translate their experience into fair earnings, the number of low-skilled temporary foreign workers continued to grow in 2014. The *Globe and Mail* reported last October that in the first three months of last

year, 14,216 workers entered Canada under the low-skilled stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), a 6% increase from 2013. This happened despite the government's announcement in April 2013 that workers would only be accepted where there were "acute skills shortages." The other three streams of the TFWP (agricultural workers, live-in caregivers and high-skilled occupations) have not seen the same kind of growth, though temporary workers in all four streams are just as likely to face abuse and exploitation, which can include unpaid overtime, exorbitant recruitment fees, unsafe work conditions and sub-standard housing. The problem is widespread, well documented by researchers (see Fay Farada's 2014 study *Profiting from the Precarious*) and migrant rights groups, and was finally recognized by Prime Minister Harper in January 2014.

In June 2014, the government introduced more changes to the TFWP, no doubt mostly in response to media reports that employers were turning away Canadian workers. The changes targeted low-skilled occupations, redefined as "low-wage," and included inspections, prosecutions and penalties for employers caught abusing the system; reforms to the labour market assessment process that employers must perform before hiring from outside Canada (e.g., increased application fees); new restrictions on the length of TFWP permits; and a cap on the number of positions that can be filled this way. In general, these reforms focused on enforcement. The only change addressing the vulnerability and exploitation of temporary workers was the production of a government pamphlet



on rights and responsibilities to be provided to migrant workers as they entered Canada. The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) was given new enforcement responsibilities and funding, but these also targeted violations of the program rules rather than of worker rights and entitlements.

Since the reforms were rolled out last year, exploitation has continued apace and now includes the downloading of increased program fees (\$1,000 per permit) by employers onto their workers. Enforcement by CBSA has been even harder on workers and includes stop-check operations in which migrants who have lost their TFWP status are identified—sometimes in unrelated traffic stops by local or provincial police—and deported. Compared to the severity of this kind of action, the government has gone easy on employers, who face little more than a suspension of their Labour Market Impact Assessment, a series of minor fines or, at worst, a ban on hiring temporary foreign workers. Even here it's the worker who suffers most—forced to either leave the country voluntarily or be deported when their employer breaks the rules.

Thousands of people were forced into this position when their four-year TFWP permits ran out April 1. The federal government introduced the term limit in 2011 and in June 2014 shortened it to two years for workers in the low-skilled stream. It only affects migrant workers in what was then known as the “low-skill pilot project” (now the low-wage stream of the TFWP). Many of the estimated 70,000 workers affected would prefer to continue working in Canada. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) says the feeling is mutual—further evidence that a number of these jobs are, in fact, not temporary at all. The CFIB has suggested that low-wage temporary foreign workers should be granted a pathway to permanent residence after two years of work. Some workers may have the opportunity to apply for permanent resident status, but this number is likely to be very small due to the complexity and con-

traditions of Canada's immigration system. More than 150 migrant construction workers are suing Ottawa because official language proficiency is required to stay permanently, but not to work temporarily.

Life has become more precarious for Canada's other temporary foreign workers as a result of additional recent changes. The removal of the mandatory live-in condition of the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP), which was part of a package of reforms announced in November, may answer a long-standing demand from caregivers and is a welcome change. But the program still lacks effective enforcement to make sure caregivers who live with their host employer (for economic and related reasons) do not continue to be exploited. A 2014 report by the Quebec-based Filipino women's organization Pinay, *Live-In Caregivers and Intimidation in the Workplace*, found that 18.5% of caregivers had reported some type of abuse ranging from working outside of the job description, low salaries, unpaid overtime and long hours to racial discrimination, verbal abuse, sexual harassment and “slave-like conditions.”

The pathway to permanent residency was also significantly narrowed in November with the introduction of tighter requirements, such as language tests and the need for professional credentials, and a national cap of roughly 5,000 principal applicant applications per year. This number is divided into two streams, with a limit of 2,750 spots for child care providers and 2,750 for caregivers for high medical needs (the high-skilled stream).

The LCP, while small in number, has been a steady feature of Canada's migrant worker programs, reflecting a need that is not satisfied by other government policies. Given the lack of a national child care strategy, and poor investment in home care for those that need it, Canadians will continue to rely on migrant workers for child care and elder care for the foreseeable future. It is highly problematic that these needed workers, the majority of whom are racialized women from countries in the Global

South, will be denied an opportunity for permanent residency in Canada.

## An Alternative Immigration Policy

With Canada's aging population and declining birth rate, immigration will continue to be fundamental to the health of the economy. Unfortunately, the federal government has done very little to ensure that new immigrants are employed in occupations commensurate with their experience. Individuals and families who have chosen Canada as their new home, and who want to contribute their skills through meaningful work, find themselves jumping through more and more hoops just to get a foot in the door. They then face sharp term limits (in the case of the TFWP), and systemic and overt discrimination that shuts them out of the labour force in far greater numbers than their non-racialized and Canadian-born neighbours.

There are options for the federal government that would create more opportunity in the jobs market. They include federal incentives for employers to practise employment equity, including tax incentives to hire, train, retain and promote workers from target groups. The government should also significantly limit the low-skilled stream of the TFWP and give all migrant workers the opportunity to pursue permanent residency and full citizenship. Furthermore, the federal government could put conditions on social transfer payments to the provinces to make sure immigrants are gainfully employed in their chosen fields.

Canada's labour unions have an important role to play in this discussion. With their large membership and influence, unions can counter the persistent myth, in Canada as elsewhere, that immigrants are “taking away” the jobs of Canadians. Unions would also do well to increase their promotion of settlement support and funding for newcomers while building solidarity with immigrant advocacy organizations to address structural inequities in the labour market and systemic discrimination in our immigration policy. ■



David Macdonald

# Four Things the 2015 Federal Budget Should Have Done (But Didn't)

AFB/20

**THE GOVERNMENT HAS** made a political choice to create an artificial surplus ahead of this year's federal election and by law must put all future surpluses toward debt repayment. This will almost certainly delay Canada's full economic recovery when there are policies within reach that would help create good jobs, provide valuable services for parents, reduce child poverty and begin to seriously take on climate change. Here are just four fully-costed options from the 2015 Alternative Federal Budget that did not find their way into the government's plans for the coming year.

## 1. Kick-Start the Job Market

At around 2%, economic growth in 2015 is going to be the weakest since the 2008–09 recession. This is due to the collapse of corporate investment, especially falling capital spending in the tar sands in response to the drop in oil prices. The definition of a recession is two-quarters of negative growth. Canada isn't there yet, but we're dangerously close.

Things are worse for the labour market, which has seen almost no recovery. The proportion of Canadians with a job is at its lowest point in a decade and virtually unchanged since 2009. The unemployment rate has dropped since then, but for a disturbing primary reason: many people have stopped looking for work out of frustration, often because they can't find a job. At the same time, there has been a marked drop in job quality. The Canadian Employment Quality Index is at 30-year lows, meaning more Canadians are taking part-time work instead of full-time jobs. High-paying full-time jobs are being created

more slowly, wage growth is slower and there are fewer raises in general. A higher proportion of Canadians also consider themselves as neither full-time nor part-time workers but self-employed—a notoriously unstable category of employment.

This situation is unlikely to correct itself. The federal government has the fiscal room to be much more proactive in an effort to kick-start good job creation. It could easily have announced \$10–\$20 billion more per year in spending and still see the debt-to-GDP ratio decline. There was some new infrastructure money announced but it does not kick in until 2019. In contrast, the 2015 Alternative Federal Budget recommends an immediate infusion of federal dollars to new transit construction, green infrastructure, improved services for the unemployed and veterans, and the hiring of more food and consumer product safety inspectors. Not only would this investment put more people to work and return high economic benefits to the Canadian economy, it would also improve the quality of services that many people rely on.

## 2. Lift 240,000 Kids Out of Poverty

The most recent statistics available (from 2012) show that 16.3% of children live below the Low Income Measure poverty line, putting Canada in the bottom half of OECD countries with data. For comparison, the rate of child poverty in Nordic countries is below 5%. There is no compelling reason why Canada should not be performing better. Transfer programs that target low-income families with children already exist, but they need to be properly funded. Doubling the National Child Benefit Sup-

plement (NCBS) from \$2,290 a year to \$4,580 a year for firstborn children would reduce the child poverty rate by a quarter.

## 3. Provide Affordable Childcare

Outside of Quebec, in Canada's bigger cities, it is normal for parents to pay between \$40 and \$60 a day in child care fees depending on the age of their child. That is more than a student can expect to pay for university tuition in many parts of Canada, and it consumes between a quarter and 33 cents of every dollar that a woman (generally the lower earner in a household) makes.

If the cost of child care is one big problem for young families, lack of options is the other. There are a million Canadian families with children under five where both parents work. However, there are only half a million regulated child care spaces out there. The gap is even wider when we consider the number of families in which one parent, usually the woman, is not working due to high fees in the first place.

The federal government recently introduced and is putting substantial resources into two new "child care" programs: family income splitting and the "enhanced" Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB). Unfortunately, neither is doing much to make child care more affordable for lower- and middle-income families.

Income splitting is heavily skewed toward higher-income households and provides no benefits at all for single-parent families. The after-tax monthly UCCB cheque, now worth \$100 but increasing to \$160 per child under six, pays for about three days' worth of child care. An additional

\$60 a month for families with children between six and 17, while possibly useful as extra pocket change, will go to families with no child care costs (since the kids will be in school full time at this point).

The total cost of income splitting, the new base UCCB and the additional cheque for older children will be \$7 billion a year. That is enough money to give all parents a \$7-a-day child care option, as exists in Quebec, if they need it. Truly affordable child care is right there for the taking. The spending is already in place, it is just so badly targeted that parents who actually use child care gain almost nothing from it.

#### 4. Get Serious About Climate Change

The effects of rising temperatures due to anthropogenic climate change are evident in the rapidly shrinking glaciers of British Columbia and Alberta, and globally in rising sea levels, more frequent droughts and generally more erratic weather. No one specific weather event can be directly attributed to climate change, but the general trends are unmistakable—and expensive. For instance, in 2011, Canadian insurers paid out record high damages related to extreme weather. A new record was set again in 2013.

The European economy has grown by 45% since 1990 while EU policy has helped lower carbon emissions—the chief cause of climate change—by 20%. In contrast, the federal government talks about making Canada's economy more sustainable, but it has not seriously addressed the climate crisis for fear of hurting economic growth, particularly in the oil and gas sector. (The term “climate change” did not appear once in the 2015 federal budget.)

The 2015 Alternative Federal Budget proposes a suite of measures to move Canada toward a low-carbon future. One of the most important steps is the implementation of a \$30-per-tonne carbon tax to mirror what is in place in B.C. A carbon tax refund would offset the regressive nature of such a tax, and excess revenue generated could be invested in green infrastructure to further reduce Canada's carbon footprint. **M**



## Shrinking the War Chest

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT has been criticized for not spending enough on Canada's military. The Alternative Federal Budget thinks the Department of National Defence gets about \$4 billion more than it needs each year and could be using its finances much more effectively.

#### Reduce Defence Spending Over Five Years

The Department of Defence was granted budget authority to spend up to \$20.1 billion in fiscal year 2014–15. Adjusted for inflation, this is just over \$2 billion less than its historic high in 2009–10. But the 2015 federal budget would provide \$11.8 billion over 10 years through an automatic 3% increase per year starting in 2017–18. The government also slated \$360 million for Canada's extended engagement against the Islamic State in Syria and the Levant (ISIL). In its first year, the Alternative Federal Budget would shrink the department to the size it was before September 11, 2001 (\$11.9 billion in 2000–01, or \$16.1 billion in 2014 dollars). As spending is projected to decline slightly in any event, the budget would be further reduced by \$1.5 billion by 2017–18.

#### Take Immediate Action for Veterans

In the weeks immediately preceding the federal budget, the government announced a series of initiatives including some new benefits and more staff to handle veterans services cases (e.g., mental health disability benefits) and process claims. However, given

the extraordinarily poor track record of the government in implementing current programs, the Alternative Federal Budget calls for immediate consultations with veterans groups on the mandate for an independent public inquiry into the department's systemic failure to adequately support Canada's most needy veterans.

#### Fully Review Canada's Defence Policy

These spending reductions are reasonable but will require hard choices about priorities, capabilities and affordable force structures. A “root and branch” defence policy review will identify and prioritize key defence tasks and roles and their funding envelopes. This would involve an established democratic practice almost entirely abandoned by the Harper government—the issuance of a Green Paper based on broad public and expert consultation, followed by a White Paper that establishes the government's new position in light of this input. This process would explore whether it is time to shift Canada's focus from NATO to United Nations–led peace and security initiatives, and take a hard look at the appropriate balance between military and criminal justice responses to the challenges posed by terrorism. This review, together with the recommended spending reductions, would provide urgently needed public dollars for other priorities, boost efficiency in national defence, and lay the foundation for a strong Canadian military that is better capable of protecting Canadians and supporting UN peace operations. **M**

# Meeting the Basic Needs of First Nations

**A** **FUNDAMENTAL** transformation of the fiscal relationship between First Nations and the Canadian government is urgently required. As a result of their historical and ongoing dispossession and marginalization, First Nation women, men and children fare worse than all other people in Canada on virtually every indicator of well-being. First Nation peoples face disproportionately high levels of poverty and lower levels of access to economic and educational opportunities. They are three times as likely to live in housing in need of major repairs, more likely to be without safe drinking water (see illustration), and First Nation women and girls continue to experience disproportionately high rates of violence.

Current transfers to First Nation governments are conditional, inflexible, inadequate, unpredictable and arbitrary. They are not based on the populations they serve, resulting in the denial of services adequate to meet First Nations needs or comparable to those provided to other people in Canada. While Canadians receive services from all levels of government, through direct federal transfers to provinces and territories at an average growth rate of 6% per year, Finance Canada has maintained a 2% cap on increases to First Nations funding since 1996. This barely keeps up with inflation, making no adjustments for booming population growth and the needs that come with it, and was imposed on already inadequate funding amounts. The removal of this cap on funding growth and an adjustment of transfers for need would reduce the disastrous current rate of poverty for First Nation children, now at 50%. To bring all First

Current transfers to First Nation governments are conditional, inflexible, inadequate, unpredictable and arbitrary. They are not based on the populations they serve.

Nation children in Canada up to the poverty line would cost \$580 million, or 11% of the annual budget of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

A new funding relationship is required that reflects the spirit and intent of treaties and inherent First Nations jurisdiction. New funding mechanisms based in partnership and recognition of rights are required in order to meet the needs of the communities, ensure parity between First Nation and non-First Nation communities, and account for the real costs to First Nation governments of delivering services. New mechanisms must ensure that every First Nation receives sustainable resources in accordance with their rights and the fiduciary obligations of the federal government. This is essential for First Nations to address their day-to-day needs and to raise the quality of life of every Nation.

Treaties, not the Indian Act, form the foundation of the relationship with the Crown. Treaty implementation is central to achieving change

across the entire spectrum of land, economic, education, and social issues. Recognition, rather than extinguishment, is the basis upon which First Nations must be able to exercise their inherent Aboriginal title and rights over their lands and resources. Canada's current policies and approaches to reconciling First Nations jurisdiction remain out of step with contemporary jurisprudence and international convention and standards including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Canada endorsed in 2010.

As treaty rights and title-holders, First Nations seek willing partners to create economic opportunities. However, due to the unique relationship between First Nations and the lands they occupy, careful and thorough consideration must be given to all projects that may result in adverse environmental and cultural impacts. Free, prior and informed consent is the foundation for successful economic partnerships, yet Canada actively works to prevent the implementation of this principle. At the recent UN World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, Canada was the only member state to object to the outcome document and its support of the UN Declaration on the grounds that free, prior and informed consent represented a veto on the part of Indigenous peoples.

## AFB 2015 Actions

**T**he Alternative Federal Budget will remove barriers to education and economic opportunities, better meet the health and social service needs, and enhance safety and security in First Nation communities.

▶ Invest \$470 million annually for the next 10 years in First Nations water treatment systems.

▶ Invest \$1 billion annually for the next 10 years to address the housing crisis in First Nation communities.

▶ Release the \$1.9 billion to support First Nations schools and address the urgent shortfall in First Nations education, while committing to engage First Nations in the development of a new First Nations education fiscal framework that reflects actual costs for First Nations education systems.

▶ Invest \$355 million in 2015–16 to address the existing gap in First Nations education funding, and implement equitable funding for First Nations education systems.

▶ Add \$108 million per year to First Nations Child and Family Services with a 3% annual escalator.

▶ Invest \$1.3 billion over five years in the Non-Insured Health Benefits program and implement a comprehensive approach to mental health and addictions programming.

▶ Provide new investments of \$500 million annually for First Nations skills training and employment.

▶ Double the current investment to \$60 million in emergency on-reserve shelters.

▶ Establish and fund a National Public Commission of Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, to be fully inclusive of families and communities.

▶ Establish and fully fund a National Action Plan to Ending Violence Against Women.

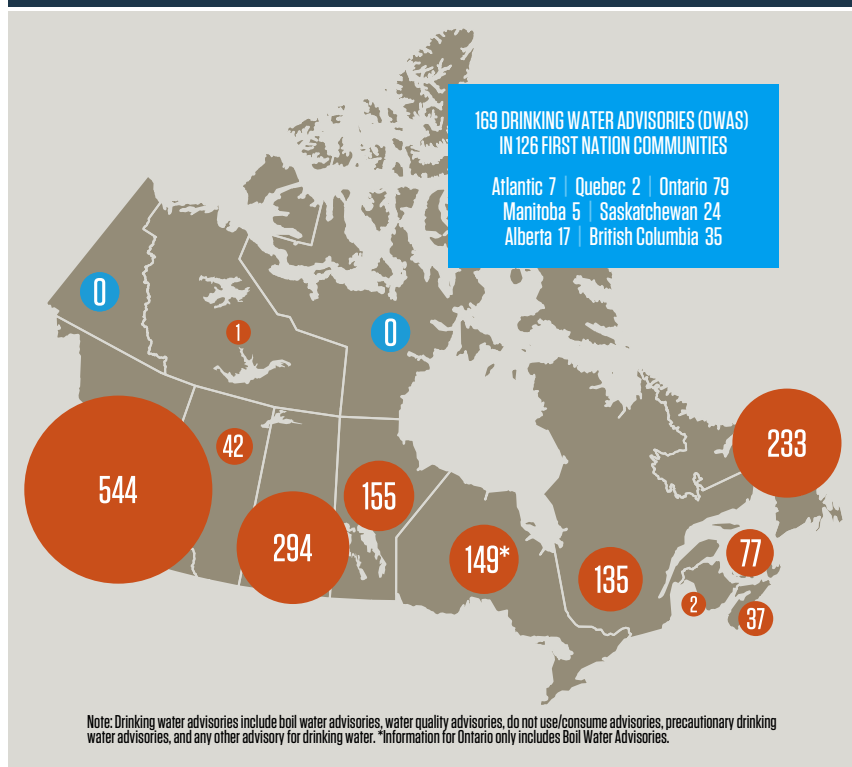
▶ Invest \$51.2 million annually to support community-based healing programs.

▶ Invest in First Nations justice systems and community-based justice programming.

▶ Invest in stable, predictable, sustainable and culturally appropriate First Nation policing services to enhance safety and security in First Nation communities. **M**

## DRINKING WATER ADVISORIES BY JURISDICTION

PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES: 1,669 | FIRST NATIONS: 169  
TOTAL: 1,838 DRINKING WATER ADVISORIES IN CANADA



**W**HILE THE PROVINCES and territories are responsible for municipalities' drinking water, the federal government is responsible for drinking water on First Nation reserves. As of January 2015, there were 169 drinking water advisories in effect in 126 First Nations communities. There are routinely more than 100 water advisories in effect, with more than half of the advisories in place for between five to 15 years. These advisories in First Nations communities are a black eye for the Canadian government, pointing to the long-standing and systemic failure to provide clean, safe drinking water to Indigenous communities.

While there are more than 20 federal departments and agencies with different responsibilities for freshwater, there is no national strategy to address urgent water issues and no federal leadership to conserve and protect our water. The Federal Water

Policy is more than 30 years old and badly outdated.

Canada urgently needs a National Water Policy based on the principles of water as a commons, a public trust, and a human right. The notion of the "commons" asserts that water is a common heritage to be shared, protected, managed and enjoyed by all. A commons framework requires a shift in water governance to prioritize the human right to water, public participation, and the inclusion of First Nations and other communities in decision-making processes. Public trust principles require governments to protect water sources for communities' reasonable use, and to make private use subservient to community rights.

Excerpt and illustration are from the report *On Notice for a Drinking Water Crisis in Canada* by Council of Canadians water campaigner Emma Lui. The report breaks down the threats to drinking water, including from energy and other industrial projects, by province and territory. Lui is the author of the AFB chapter on water policy.



Bruce Campbell

# 20 Years of Bright Ideas

The AFB influence on federal budgeting

AFB/20

**N**O FEDERAL GOVERNMENT has ever fully embraced the Alternative Federal Budget. Nevertheless, its recommendations have found their way into party platforms, successive governments have drawn from its proposals, and several retrograde policy initiatives were reversed because of our efforts.

Early on, the AFB took a strong stand against the government-supported high interest rate policies of the Bank of Canada. Though these were, strictly speaking, not a budget issue, we argued that expansionary monetary policy was critical to restoring economic prosperity and jobs. To its credit, the government eventually adopted that policy stance, which, with its impact on exchange rates, and strong U.S. demand for Canadian exports, produced solid growth, job creation and the rapid elimination of the deficit. Unfortunately, absent the adoption of other AFB proposals on taxes and redistribution, this period of fiscal success also produced widening income inequality.

The AFB gained credibility within policy circles and the media not only for its sophisticated fiscal framework, but also for its accurate predictions of emerging budgetary surpluses between 1999 and 2004. Year after year our forecasts were much more accurate than those released by the Department of Finance, which tried to hide the surplus—money that could have been put back into social programs (federal and provincial) still straining from the 1995 cuts. A longstanding AFB call for the creation of an independent parliamentary budget office was partially adopted by the

Conservative government in its 2006 accountability agenda.

AFB policies helped stop the introduction of a complicated targeted seniors benefit proposed in 1995 to replace Canada's Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement programs. They led to the introduction and enhancement of the child benefit in the late 1990s and the working income tax credit in 2007. They inspired inflation indexing of personal income tax brackets in 2000.

The closing of an array of tax loopholes for the wealthy, the restoration of health transfers to the provinces in 2004, the enhancement of maternity and parental leave benefits under Employment Insurance, funding for new infrastructure, the introduction of scholarships for students in need, and expanded Aboriginal transfers were all policies whose genesis can be linked to the AFB.

During the 2008 financial crisis, the AFB branched out, producing a fiscal stimulus plan that played an

important role as a model for stimulus spending in Canada. In January 2014, an AFB technical paper exposed the regressivity of the government's family income splitting tax plan, which led to a partial reining in of the still inequitable policy. Another recent AFB innovation, which continues this year, is the calculation of the distributional impact of our tax and program measures and their impact on poverty reduction and job creation. We have also been at the forefront of gender-based budgetary analysis. No government, federal or provincial, has applied such a thorough assessment of the impact of their budgets on inequality, poverty and job creation, which they claim to be priorities. This pioneering innovation should be adopted as a standard feature of government budgets.

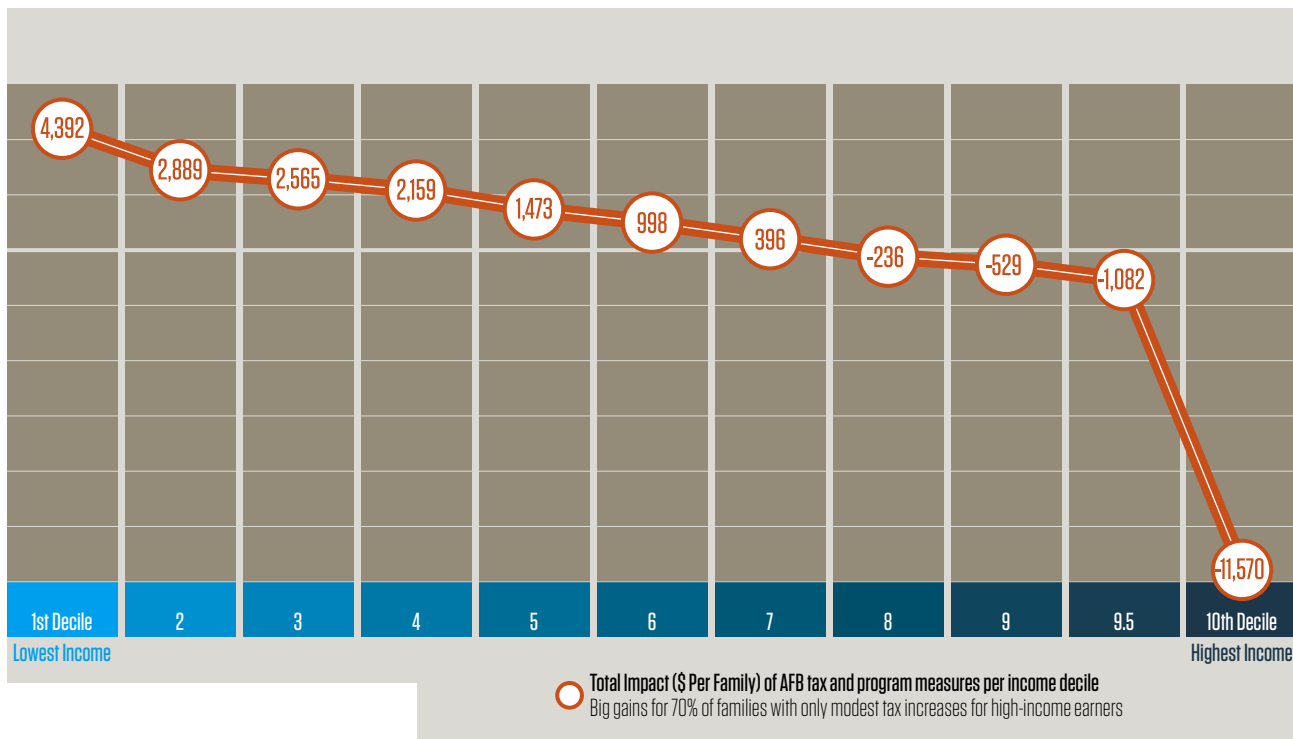
The AFB has, over time, served multiple purposes. It is an exercise in economic literacy, in holding governments to account and speaking truth to power. It is a meeting place of ideas and an instrument for building progressive policy consensus. It is a resource to help empower citizens and fuel popular mobilization. Organizers of a recent international conference in Berlin called our alternative budget the leading example of its kind in the world. Former parliamentary budget officer Kevin Page has praised it, as have many other economists and academics.

The AFB provides a benchmark for what is possible, given the political will. It puts forward the fiscal dimensions of a broad progressive public policy agenda consistent with the values of large segments of Canadian society. **M**

*Bruce Campbell is the executive director of the CCPA.*

The AFB is an exercise in economic literacy, in holding governments to account and speaking truth to power. It is a meeting place of ideas and an instrument for building progressive policy consensus.

## The Alternative Federal Budget turns 20



## How the AFB Benefits You

**LAST YEAR'S ALTERNATIVE** Federal Budget was the first to calculate the poverty and distributional impacts of its proposed tax and transfer changes. This year, we also include the distributional impacts of program spending — a first for the AFB and a new tool for analyzing budgets by any Canadian government. It allows us to visualize how smart budgeting can be used to reduce income inequality in the process.

The figure on this page illustrates the impact of the 2015 AFB on families by income decile. The net income gain in the bottom half of the income distribution reflects how families in these deciles receive more from transfers than is withdrawn in taxes. This is due primarily to the AFB proposals on increasing the Guaranteed Income Supplement, as proposed in the chapter on seniors and retirement security, and doubling both the National Child Benefit Supplement and GST tax credit, both proposals from the

chapter on income inequality, poverty and wealth. The top 50% of Canadian families would see an increase in taxes (although this largely affects those in the top 5% through a new personal tax bracket above \$250,000, the full inclusion of capital gains, and the cancellation of both family and pension income splitting.

Once program spending is included, we can see the AFB significantly benefits 70% of the population, although there is something for everyone in these programs, no matter where they fall on the income spectrum. Those families whose income places them in the sixth and seventh deciles will see taxes go up slightly, but these are more than offset by increased program spending (e.g., on health care, education and child care). The ninth decile pays about \$1,000 more annually, even after program spending is included, while Canada's richest 5% of families will pay \$12,000 more a year in taxes.

Keep in mind this largest hike in taxes affects those with gross aver-

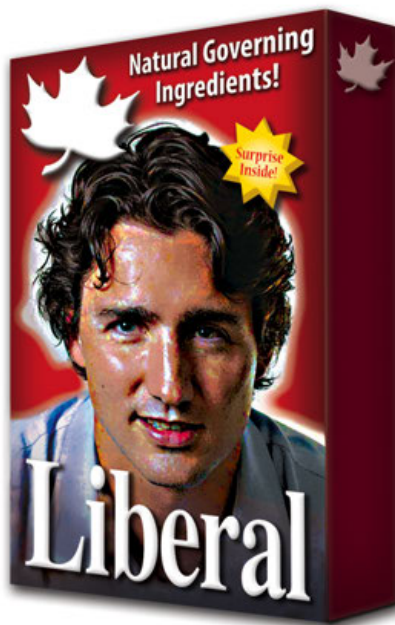
age incomes of \$380,000 and that the earnings of the top 5% have increased 70% since 1990 (adjusting for inflation). Put another way, the \$12,000 in additional taxes represents only 3% of gross income for Canada's top earners. The AFB programs that most benefit those in the lower-income deciles are spending on poverty reduction plans and tuition grants to low-income students. Wealthier Canadians will benefit from new national pharmacare and medical care programs, and the lowering of tuition and child care fees.

The CCPA encourages other governments (provinces, territories and even municipalities) to examine the distributional impacts of their proposed changes in taxation, transfers and program spending. Gaining a better understanding of the effect of budgeting on poverty reduction, and income and gender inequality, gives us all a way to hold governments accountable for the choices they make on budget day. **M**

# Elect Us™

*Values Politics, Branding,  
and the 2015 Federal Election Campaign*

Story by Richard Nimijean, Illustrations by Nancy Reid



**SINCE ASSUMING POWER**, the Harper government has consistently sought to convince Canadians that Conservative values and Canadian values are one and the same. The *Globe and Mail* journalist John Ibbitson recently agreed with that assessment, noting in a column this February that Harper is the most conservative prime minister this country has ever seen and that contemporary Canada reflects his values. The proof, according to Ibbitson, was that the two major opposition parties have essentially adopted his platform. “Like it or not, Stephen Harper’s Canada is everyone’s Canada now,” he wrote.

The government’s critics and political opponents maintain it is Harper who is out of touch with Canadians, arguing that the prime minister has radically transformed Canada (or is trying to), though not for the better. They are clear: Harper is outside the Canadian value set. Indeed, recent books by Michael Harris (see my review of his *Party of One* in the March 2015 *Monitor*), Donald Gutstein, Karl Nerenberg and Mark Bourrie have sounded the alarm as the 2015 federal election nears. This arguably plays to the prime minister’s advantage. Current debates about Bill C-51, extending Canada’s mission against ISIL, public safety and security, getting tough on crime and defending Canada and Canadians against those that wish to do us harm, all framed around the question of who has Canada’s best interests at heart, allow Harper to define the debate—and Canada—on his terms.

This pole position is fuelled by recent debates over the right of new Canadians to wear the niqab at citizenship ceremonies. Canada’s courts have declared the Conservative-imposed guidelines outlawing this option for women inconsistent with actual legislation. In response, Prime Minister Harper stated, “Why would Canadians, *contrary to our own values*, embrace a practice at that time

that is not transparent, that is not open and, frankly, is rooted in a culture that is anti-women?” (emphasis added). Conservative backbencher Larry Miller was forced to apologize when that same week he said on live radio such women should “stay the hell where they came from.”

That these views are inconsistent with broadly accepted notions of diversity in multicultural Canada, a country that also accepts and promotes freedom of religion, goes without saying. Philosopher Charles Taylor told CBC’s *Power and Politics* it was “dumb” to claim wearing a niqab was anti-women, since it could make it easier for terrorist recruiters to attract disaffected Canadians to their cause. Indeed, the prime minister’s statement on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination clearly contradicted his views on the niqab. “We are proud of Canada’s diversity and inclusiveness,” Harper said. “The promotion of these values has helped to build our great country where pluralism thrives.”

So why would the prime minister make such statements? Clearly, short-term political interests are involved. A discussion about “values” places the opposition parties on the defensive given broad public support for the prime minister’s position. It also distracts from a meaningful debate—a debate Canadians want to have—about the public policy record of the government, which on the economy in particular is less than stellar. Since the Great Recession of 2008, the reality is that employment gains have not been substantial (and are dropping for manufacturing), economic inequality is growing, and the collapse of oil prices will have a devastating effect on western provinces. Harper’s claim that Canada was an emerging clean energy superpower has not proven to be true.

The Canadian public is fundamentally anxious about the country’s economic prospects, as reflected in

a number of polls over the last few months putting the economy and jobs as *the* major issues for the next election. For example:

▶ Abacus Data finds a significant and growing number of people believe that economic conditions will worsen and feel they have fallen behind financially over the past year.

▶ Consequently, Canadians are the most pessimistic they have been about the economy since 2009, and are feeling “tapped out,” according to a poll by Toronto advertising firm Bensimon Byrne, with two out of three people saying we need a new perspective on the economy.

▶ Thus, while Canadians are concerned about security, a survey conducted for CBC News found they feel overwhelmingly that the top priorities for federal politicians should be unemployment, the economy and health care.

▶ And now, Canadian business executives have become more pessimistic about the prospects for economic growth given current economic conditions, with nearly 40% anticipating economic *decline* in the next year. Of note here, the governor of the Bank of Canada, Stephen Poloz, called Canada’s first-quarter economic results “atrocious.”

Frank Graves of EKOS summed up the zeitgeist well when he said: “Canadians may be parking the smugness they felt about how our economy performed immediately following the 2008 market meltdown. They’ve been watching the U.S. economy growing at double the rate of Canada’s, while enjoying significantly lower unemployment. They’ve started feeling the slide in the Canadian dollar in produce prices and the cost of travel.”

Yet there was Finance Minister Joe Oliver recently proclaiming that while election campaigns normally focus on economic issues, this one would also



focus on security. It's an interesting strategy. Harper usually tops polls on the question of which leader would make the best economic manager. So why change the channel?

Clearly there is some concern that, in the end, Canadians are more likely to vote out of economic fear — of job loss, economic insecurity and higher prices — than exaggerated fears of jihad on Canadian soil. Keeping the major opposition parties on the defensive, by focusing on terrorism and the niqab, and questioning the patriotism of anybody who challenges this approach, leaves the remote firmly in Harper's hands. Thus, Foreign Affairs Minister Rob Nicholson stated in the House on March 26, "ISIL has declared war on Canada by name and seeks to wage its jihad against our people. No matter how these facts are communicated, Canadians know that the leaders of the opposition parties will dismiss them and with that are dismissing Canadian values."

### Shrinking Terrain

Progressive Canadians interested not simply in a debate about "Canadian values," but also in economic fairness, full (and meaningful) employment, and a return to the mixed economy (if not more) face a tough decision: who should get their support in the next election. For as much as there is some space between the three major parties on the question of defining Canadian values, there is less of a gap than meets the eye on economic issues, reflecting the persistent neoliberal consensus, and the rise of values politics in Canada and most western countries over the past few decades. Both the NDP and the Liberals are treading carefully, trying not to minimize security concerns while also convincing the public they can form a majority government. For each, though, the stakes are different.

The meteoric rise of the NDP and the stunning collapse of the Liberals in the 2011 federal election, along with the emergence of the Green Party and the implosion of the Bloc Québécois, led some to believe that a fundamental realignment was underway in Canadian politics. This has influenced

how each party is acting in the lead-up to the 2015 election. The resurgent Liberals under Justin Trudeau are trying to reclaim their label as Canada's "natural governing party." Trudeau has framed the Liberal economic message around helping the middle class, pointing to growing income inequality as a Harper problem. However, he has been short of specifics, perhaps fearful that laying out policy options too early will allow the Conservatives and the NDP to gang up. Most importantly, he ignores the fact that economic inequality increased during the Chrétien years, as CCPA economist Armine Yalinzyan began exploring in 1998 with the first Grown ing Gap report.

Tom Mulcair's NDP is trying to prove that the 2011 election results were not a fluke, that the NDP is in fact the natural alternative to Harper's Conservatives. It has been courting the middle class vote by speaking of pragmatic economic policy that is *progressive*. The party has announced that, if elected, it would introduce small business tax cuts, innovation tax credits and an extension of the accelerated capital cost allowance for manufacturing equipment. Following the Quebec model, the NDP made a pledge to introduce \$15/day child care, and it has proposed a \$15/hour federal minimum wage. All of this would be accomplished with a balanced budget and no tax increases save for reversing corporate tax cuts and cancelling the proposed income splitting scheme. Most recently, Mulcair announced that funds to combat child poverty would be raised by making Canadians pay taxes on all stock option benefits.

These proposals build on earlier NDP discussions about issues dear to consumers, such as high ATM fees, credit card rates and gas prices. Mulcair is continuing the NDP's recent efforts to mainstream their policy agenda, and to present themselves to Canadians as credible economic managers who can relate to the concerns of "average" Canadians and consumers — a long-time weak spot for the party. In this, they are distinguishing themselves from the Liberals by offering a fairly detailed plan that

would serve as the basis of a new government.

There was little discussion of fundamental economic issues in the 2011 election, nor was there much articulation of distinct approaches to the economy. Discussions on raising the corporate tax rate were an exception, though in the big picture this would produce limited new revenue in a multi-billion-dollar economy. This time around, the Conservative proposal for income splitting serves as a proxy for party positions on the economy. Whereas Harper frames these measures as sound social policy that also provides relief for taxpayers, the Liberals and NDP condemn the tax cuts as wasteful or beneficial to only a few — 15% of households, according to Parliamentary Budget Office estimates.

Ironically, perhaps, both opposition parties are challenging Harper (on taxes and other issues) through values politics and the appeal to Canada's "middle class," which, in their view, seems to embody and define Canadian values. Why this emphasis? Because again, in many ways, their economic strategies are not radically different from the governing Conservatives, nor for that matter the Chrétien Liberals or Mulroney Progressive Conservatives of earlier times.

While Mulcair's child care and federal minimum wage measures begin to flesh out an activist plan much of what has been discussed so far involves cancelling cuts announced or implemented by the Tories (e.g., to the CBC, Old Age Security, etc.). The NDP leader seems committed to fiscal orthodoxy, at least rhetorically. Unifor economist Jim Stanford, for example, has proposed a massive \$30 billion infrastructure program, but worries the NDP might be hesitant to implement it because it would involve a deficit. The reluctance of the government and opposition parties to promote deficit spending to stimulate the economy is odder still when both mainstream and labour economists are now agreed it would be very helpful.

For another example of something approaching economic consensus, where the Conservatives are also

driving the debate, look at tax policy generally. To those on the left who express concern about Harper's stewardship of the economy, arguably the biggest damage came from the two-point cut to the GST, which has reduced the federal government's ability to spend dramatically — by an estimated \$14 billion annually. By point of comparison, Mulcair's plan to tax stock options would only raise \$600 million to \$1 billion annually. So far, no opposition party is prepared to talk of returning the GST to 7%.

Though the loss of revenues from Harper's tax cuts are significant, those outside partisan circles would do well to remember similar measures brought in by the Chrétien and Martin Liberal governments. Between fiscal years 2000–01 and 2004–05, the federal government's revenue-raising capacity dropped by \$31.1 billion in 2004 dollars (\$37.68 billion when inflation is factored in). This occurred in a period of large federal surpluses, 90% of which were put onto Canada's debt when Martin had promised to put 50% into new social spending. A survey of commissioned by the Broadbent Institute in 2012 found that 23% of Canadians were "very willing" and 41% "somewhat willing" to pay slightly higher taxes to pay for social programs such as health care, education and pensions. Yet this year the NDP announced it would further lower small business taxes if elected, a move adopted by the Conservatives in the 2015 budget that will disproportionately benefit higher-income Canadians with uncertain impacts on job creation.

Not surprisingly, many analysts recognize that rhetoric aside there is not much difference between the major parties. Kelly McParland of the *National Post* wrote in January that since NDP plans help the rich, and the Liberals have quietly adopted major elements of the Conservative economic agenda, the opposition parties are left talking about how they are different without actually being so. Campbell Clark of the *Globe and Mail* has similarly argued that Mulcair's economic plan sounds like Harper's. This is why leaders focus so

much on values: it distracts from the fact that economic policy differences are not as great as they are often presumed to be. This leads to an emphasis on leaders as brands.

Looking at a recent study by Abacus Data we can understand why the parties would adopt this strategy. Mulcair is seen as "competent" and a "good guy," although with tired and old-fashioned ideas. Trudeau is seen as modern and likable, but inexperienced. Harper is seen as serious and competent, but self-centred and not trustworthy. John Geddes of *Maclean's* explained Canada's electoral decision this way: "Harper as the safe choice, Mulcair as an ordinary guy, and Trudeau as a restorer of balance."

### When Ideas Mattered

It was not so long ago that Canadian election campaigns were marked by vigorous debates about Canada's future, centred mainly, though not exclusively, on economic visions. While the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives never differed radically on broad ideological grounds, they occasionally adopted fundamentally different approaches to economic issues and challenges. For example, the parties took opposing stances on free trade with the United States in the elections of 1911 and 1988, and they have differently embraced (and later scaled back) Canada's mixed social welfare state. The ability of the more centrist Liberals to veer left or right of centre, depending on where political pressures lay, reflected the real but minimal impact of the CCF and early NDP, which offered a social-democratic alternative vision of the Canadian political economy.

Indeed, the 1988 "free trade election" might have been the last gasp for this type of ideological politics. As the two major parties brawled over the Canada-U.S. FTA, on the cusp of a new era of globalization and ascendant neoliberalism, the NDP was criticized for not engaging fully with the issue — of effectively ceding the anti-free trade position to the party that once advocated for it. Dreaming of power and hoping that the demise of the Liber-

als would lead to a classic left-right divide in Canadian politics, the NDP had become "liberals in a hurry" in more ways than one.

In 1987, *Maclean's* magazine featured NDP leader Ed Broadbent on the cover with the heading "On the March." Teasers promised to explore the NDP's "quest for power" and "how they would govern." The NDP's approach to the 1988 election foreshadowed the emerging trend in Canadian politics: a new emphasis on tactics and strategy in order to "win." The mantra of speaking for "ordinary Canadians" emphasized val-



ues that connected parties to voters, rather than seeing the party as an institution that represented a relatively coherent set of ideological principles and associated policy proposals. Alas, overlooking the major issue of the election (free trade) in order to appeal to "average Canadians" did not help the NDP, as the party descended into near-oblivion for almost two decades.

By 1993, Canadians seemed to have had enough of Mulroney's neoliberal continentalism — the prime minister used the FTA as a leaping off point for the North American Free Trade Agree-

ment—and supported, in three elections, Jean Chrétien’s Liberals, with their promise of restoring hope and economic prosperity to the country. However, as I have argued elsewhere, the Liberals were adept at framing neoliberal messages within a value set that the public, or at least that portion of it living in vote-rich Central Canada, identified with. This explains why the Liberals and NDP are currently fighting over the middle class and whose policies best reflect their interests, and why, given the nature of Conservative attack ads, both parties are reluctant to offer a radically



different economic platform to that of the current government.

Advances in technology have contributed to this phenomenon. New communications technologies like the Internet, mobile communications (telephony and computing), powerful computing hardware and software, and the advent of social media have changed the game for political parties. It is that much easier to reach political “consumers” when you have reams of personal information sitting in searchable databases, as Susan Delacourt shows us in her book *Shopping for Votes*. At the same time,

parties are less responsive to the demands of citizens. In our parliamentary democracy, it is only necessary to get roughly 40% of the popular vote to form a majority government. Parties often campaign and even govern as if all voters mattered, but the reality is that they target a much smaller body of movable voters through increasingly sophisticated techniques. The ongoing emphasis on wedge politics, in tandem with the “permanent campaign,” has contributed to the dilution of party differences on ideological grounds. We emphasize tactics. Pundits play up strategy. We rarely debate policy.

In a transformation that is tied up with the triumph of neoliberalism, party differentiation now has a symbolic versus ideological basis. The rise of “brand politics,” in which parties emphasize values, not ideas, reflects the post-ideological nature of Canadian politics. Just as branded products develop long-lasting loyalty via intense relationships with consumers, parties hope that by narrowcasting messages to strategic constituencies voters can develop the same emotional relationship with a leader and party as they do their car, mobile phone, running shoe, etc. Ironically, as this narrows the real choices (over policy) voters have at the polls, it has further blurred the lines between parties that all claim to embody “Canadian values,” specifically those held by the middle class.

Corporate branding of products and services succeeds not by duping consumers. Branding is the art of offering high-quality goods embodying specific values to consumers willing to pay a premium for being a part of it all. That is why the “Think Different” philosophy of Apple ultimately made it the world’s most valued corporation. Political brands, be they a leader or party, aim to have the same effect on voters. The appeal to values is the new form of political competition in an era of low faith in the political system and the ability of politicians to deliver change. Hence the mantra “they are all the same” is perhaps less cynical than representative of a real systemic blandness in party politics. It explains how many vot-

ers can choose Conservative one election and NDP the next. The choice is not about ideology, but about trust, belief and efficacy. It is emotional, which is the foundation of all brand relationships.

But it is also not only a matter of finding the right brand: your marketing strategy needs to work, too, even if the rhetoric often does not match the reality behind it. Although consumers will often stay loyal to a product as long as it is high quality, allowing the corporation to grow, as the case of Apple shows, they will rapidly abandon it for something new if the emotional trust is severed. We saw this when the Coca-Cola Corporation introduced New Coke in the 1980s. In politics, as we know, trust is at record lows, which is intensified by a short-term focus on the next election versus, say, the long-term vision of corporations trying to develop a lasting market. Much like the consumer willing to give new brands a shot if they are disappointed in what they’re buying now, voters can tire of their favourite party for reasons unrelated to policy.

### What Are They Selling?

So if we are staking out political brands, with relatively minor differences, what do Canada’s political parties have to offer? We can think of Harper as a “steady at the till” leader, the man to keep us safe; Mulcair as a “progressive” guy whose heart is in the right place; and Trudeau as the modern man who “gets” contemporary Canadian values. The dilemma voters face as the election nears is that we are not always sure what these brands embody—what they have to offer beyond the marketing pitch.

For Harper, there is clearly a short-term political advantage in trying to carve out distinct positions on terrorism and values consistent with his political strategy of presenting Canada as a muscular power that acts in principled ways. This isolates and undermines his opponents politically. The tough posture is part of his brand, though critics quickly point out that he is very selective when upholding the principles underlying his foreign



policy. Still, it is much better for Harper to stay on the defensive on his own terms than to have to contest the next election on terms set by the opposition, whatever they may be when the writ drops.

I may be criticized for downplaying party differences. To be fair, they can differ notably on social policy, crime, the environment and foreign policy. However, concern over wedge politics and the permanent campaign often dilute those differences, in Canada as elsewhere. (The U.K. elections offer a beautiful example of sameness on the part of all three major parties.) And it is important to remember that current Harper positions, in a wider historical context, often look familiar, having been introduced or embraced in some form at some point by the opposition.

For example, on the environment, the Harper government has undermined programs and regulation, but Canada's poor environmental record has roots in Liberal governance. Take the Cabinet Directive on Streamlining Regulation, which increased industry involvement in the regulatory process and further shifted the basis of federal health and safety measures from precaution to the evidence of risk. Though introduced by the new Conservative government in 2007, the directive was only the end result of four years of work by the Chretien and Martin Liberals. Moreover, the Liberals are endorsing new tar sands pipelines and calling for a rather decentralized approach to carbon taxes.

On security, Liberal support for Bill C-51, the Anti-Terrorism Act 2015, despite modest calls for more oversight, probably reflects the party's complex experience drafting very similar anti-terrorism legislation, on a similarly expedited timeframe, in the post-9/11 era. And while Harper is tilting Canadian foreign policy in the Middle East to favour Israel, in other areas he is hardly more radical (or self-interested) than the Liberals were in power. In 1995, Chretien's foreign policy was framed in terms of how it would benefit Canada economically, and the 2005 Martin vision suggested moving aid to countries where Canada could be seen to be making a difference. The

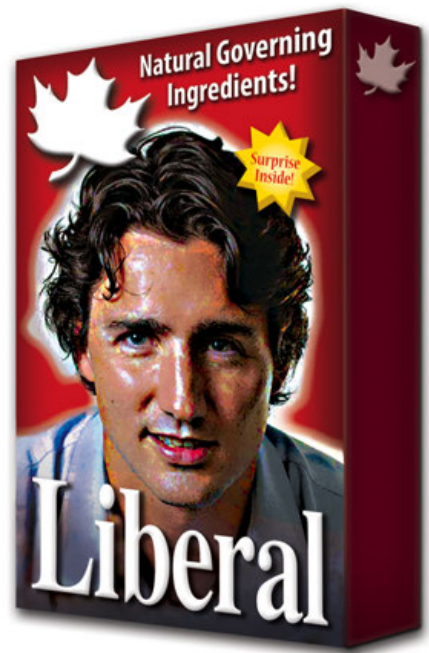
dramatic decline of foreign aid and peacekeeping occurred largely under the Liberals. The Liberals often spoke of internationalism, but they acted as if not quite committed to its principles.

It remains to be seen if Harper's campaign of fear, flag-waving and defending Canadian interests and values, under the banner of "strong Conservative leadership," will beat out the increasingly pragmatic politics of the NDP and the Liberals. The recent Ontario provincial election suggests the opposition will need something more, since it reminds us that voters will respond to starkly different economic visions and are open to an active government role in the economy.

Andrea Horwath's political gambit—the Ontario NDP leader was accused by Rick Salutin of campaigning from the Progressive Conservative's right flank—should be a caution to the federal NDP. In the quest for power, does abandoning traditional economic positions help or hurt a party? Can the NDP articulate a broader vision and policy platform that appeals to both centrist and left voters? Or has it abandoned the latter? Similarly, Trudeau may want to take note that Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne won by pitting her proposal for interventionist government (and deficit spending if necessary) against the austere federal and provincial PC model—this after her predecessor, like Martin in Ottawa, took billions out of provincial revenues in corporate tax cuts.

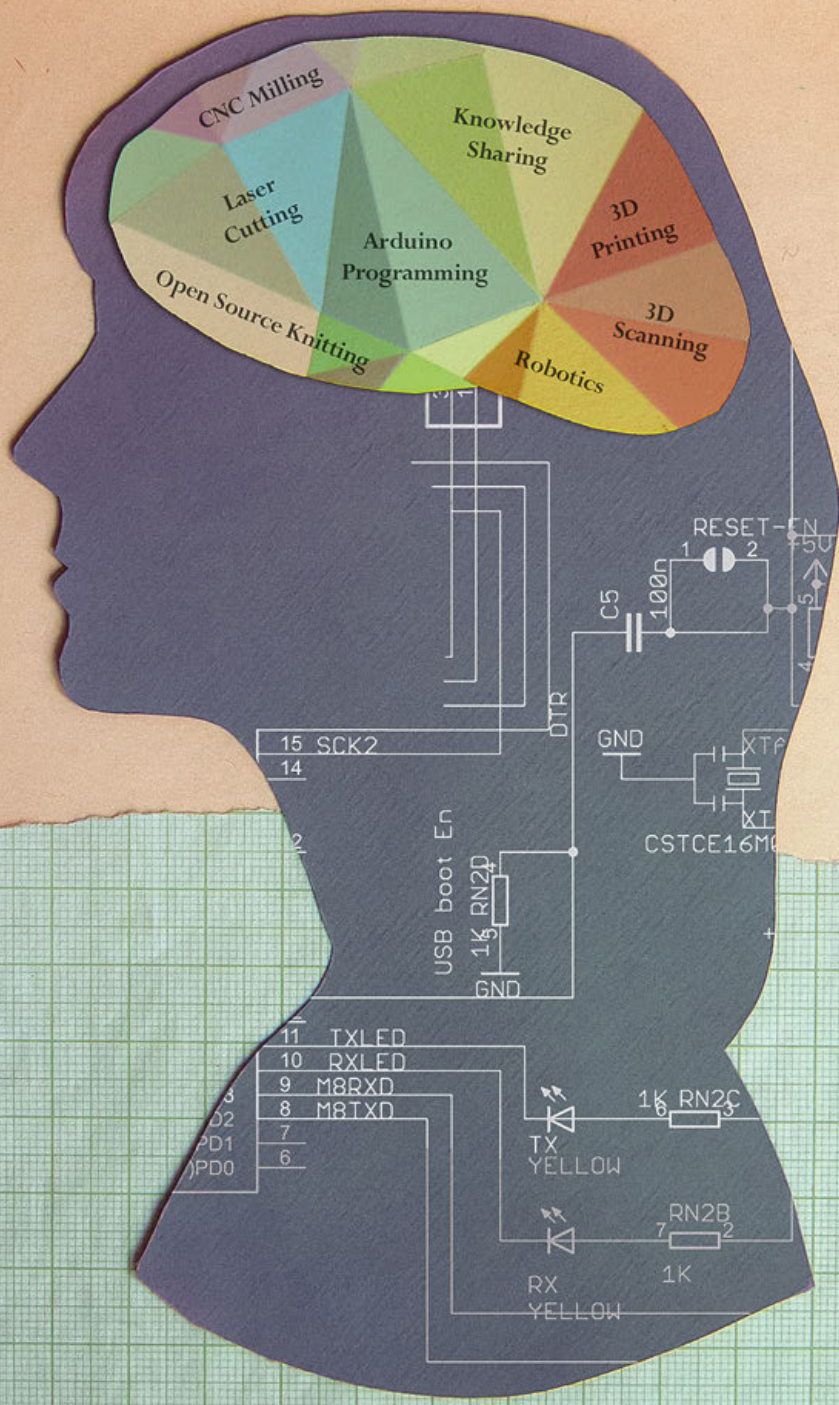
There is potentially more room for the NDP federally on the idea of progressive governance. Harper's national vision is ultimately restricted to reducing the role of government and, to a lesser extent, returning to a more classic sense of Canadian federalism. Here the Conservatives are hardly out of step with the Liberals. But the NDP has been shy about making the case for *bigger* government—a sign of the poverty of a strategy that vaguely declares the primacy of middle class values. Both opposition parties are ignoring the instruments and institutions of public policy that historically shaped the values Mulcair and Trudeau harken to.

Despite the drama of recent months (the ISIL mission, C-51, the limits of multiculturalism), the polls indicate the three major parties are very close, with support for the Bloc Québécois and Green Party increasing. While the former is probably linked to debates, much hotter in Quebec, about the niqab, the doubling in Green support since the last election points to a thirst for innovative public policies that *reflect* the values of many Canadians. We are reminded of this with each new poll showing the importance of the economy to voters over almost all other



concerns. On April 1, the *Globe and Mail* reported that 90% of respondents to a Nanos poll it conducted think "the party or leader with the best plan for the Canadian economy will be more important in determining who wins than the party with the best plan to fight terrorists." In contrast, only 4% in the *Globe* poll said fighting terrorism is more important than the economy. The question is: can one of the other parties take hold of the remote and flip the channel from jihadi terrorism to something most of us would prefer to watch? **M**





A1744

# MAKER SPACES

PUTTING THE CRITICAL BACK INTO

Story by Laura Elizabeth Pinto, Illustration by Amy Thompson

**W**ALK INTO HACKFORGE at the Windsor Public Library and you'll find a shared space where people come together and make things. You'll find various electronic parts, a motion control developer's kit, soldering irons and a lathe, a milling machine, a dual-trace oscilloscope, a 3D printer, a treadle-powered sewing machine and much more. Anyone can use the community space at no cost—so long as they commit a few hours of their time and knowledge each month.

Current Hackforge president and founding member Doug Sartori describes the process of bringing Hackforge into being as “making stone soup: we started with walls provided by the Windsor Public Library, then people from the community started bringing stuff in, which made Hackforge grow.” Sartori and other founding members envisioned a community space where people could “do” technology without corporate involvement. They wanted Hackforge to provide tools and human resources to fill gaps in what the local college and university could offer. “It's about bringing in people without formal education, and empowering them to do something that they want to do.”

As part of the global “maker movement,” spaces like Windsor's Hackforge have gained international popularity and attention. Known as makerspaces, though sometimes called digital innovation hubs or hackerspaces, these sites provide communi-

ty access to equipment that would be unaffordable or impractical to have at home. Equipment varies depending on the makerspace's size and focus—anything from workstations and other hardware to circuit boards and 3D printers. Other makerspaces focus on tactile media such as wood-working equipment and textile production (looms, knitting or sewing machines). Some include equipment for the creation of print media, such as the Espresso Book Machine's on-demand paperbacks.

Usually, makerspaces include learning components in the form of workshops, courses, or peer tutoring and collaboration to help community members use the equipment and media. Ideally, members freely exchange resources and ideas in order to make things by combining artisanal technique and experimental play. The education sector has embraced the trend, with more and more schools creating their own makerspaces or tapping into those already in the community. In Canada, makerspaces have been mainstreamed in the form of school-based and community-based venues housed in universities (like SparqLab at Queen's University or MLab at the University of Victoria), public and university libraries, for example the Toronto Reference Library's digital media lab, and independent venues such as Hamilton, Ontario's IdealHaus. In 2013, the mobile DHMakerBus was established in London, Ontario, using Indiegogo crowdfunding, to travel southwestern Ontario with the pur-

pose of helping teachers and students engage in digitally focused making.

But as with any promising critical movement, this one has seen its share of co-optation. Grassroots, often anti-consumerist community spaces like Hackforge have spawned corporatized venues designed mainly to increase sales. Despite this almost inevitable turn in the evolution and aims of the makerspace, the potential exists for communities and educators to demand more critical approaches to these spaces of creative growth.

## The Birth of the Maker Movement

**T**oday's “making” has its roots in the ancient Greek conceptions of human activity and was identified by Aristotle as one of three basic human activities, the others being *theōria*, or contemplation, and *praxis*, or doing. The word *poiesis*, the root of our modern word “poetry,” is derived from the ancient Greek *ποιέω*, literally “to make.” In this classic sense, making is an action that transforms but also continues the world. Given its central importance to human life, it is hardly surprising the concept of making (against merely consuming) has made a comeback.

The rise of popular making is evident in O'Reilly Media's 2005 launch of *Make Magazine*, a quarterly publication that boasts 7.8 million monthly page views and a readership of about 300,000. The magazine claims to “bring the do-it-yourself mindset to all the technology in your life.” But



the maker movement can be traced further back, to the DIY (do-it-yourself) activist movement (or DIY ethic) established with the lofty goal of getting “off the grid,” by recycling, repairing, gardening, sewing, building, making music and preserving food as an act of anti-consumerism. DIY in this form began to emerge in North America in the late 1960s and early 1970s, grounded in social and environmental movements of the day. Rather than buying new things, the DIY ethic dictates that individuals should create, repair and fix for sustainability, and to lessen, or even eliminate, their reliance on corporations.

The first incarnations of the maker movement shared the subversive ethos of DIY. For example, its “hacktivism” component arose from concern about labour exploitation and digital monopolies. In this context, “hacking” refers to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) definition — to take an object designed to

do one thing and make it do something else. This productive conception of hacking is a far cry from its more ominous definition associated with cybercrime. DIY and makers also share the principle that, according to the *Makerspace Playbook*, “everyone is a maker... We share what we make, and help each other make what we share.” But there is an important distinction in that while DIY implies independent creation (think of a person noodling around in their garage to create something through trial and error or self study), the maker movement emphasizes collaboration for social learning. Thus the makerspace as a term to describe locations in which individuals come together to create.

Among educators, “making” has become a vogue term. The recent wave of makerspaces, however, has shifted away from the original maker movement’s roots. Rather than a stance against consumerism, making has emerged with a new purpose articulated by the Maker Education Initiative: “a strategy to engage youth in science, technology, engineering, math, arts, and learning as a whole.” So, instead of making as an interdisciplinary means of personal and community self-reliance, many newer projects see it as a way to engage students in subject-specific learning. This is not necessarily at odds with an anti-consumerist stance. But, as some of the examples to come illustrate, the philosophy of the early makers has been lost or ignored in many emerging makerspaces.

### Formalizing Makerspaces and Maker Faires

Hackforge is one of many community makerspaces in Canada. Toronto’s Hacklab is another example of a digital makerspace. Unlike Hackforge’s volunteer model, Hacklab members contribute \$50 a month in dues for collectively owned 3D printers, laser cutters and hand tools. This makerspace is “motivated by a sense of curiosity and play,” as the *Toronto Star* suggested in a 2013 profile. For example, one member bought, reverse-engineered and fixed a small computer and discarded, broken TTC LED dis-

play, then hung it above the staircase. When Hacklab members swipe their cards on entry, their names flash across the sign. Windsor’s Hackforge features a community-made 3D printer crafted, somewhat ironically, out of parts from a VCR. These examples illustrate the ways in which community members engage in innovative play to repurpose items that might otherwise be discarded. Sartori is working to establish closer ties between the local art and tech communities through projects like these at Hackforge.

Other maker communities are grounded in a strictly anti-consumerist, pro-environmentalist ethos. An example is Repair Café Toronto, launched in 2013, which organizes monthly gatherings in public spaces where volunteer “fixers” help visitors learn how to repair for free in order to build a more sustainable society and counter the throwaway mindset.

“We throw away vast amounts of stuff. Even things with almost nothing wrong, and which could get a new lease on life after a simple repair. The trouble is, lots of people have forgotten that they can repair things themselves or they no longer know how,” states the café’s website. “Knowing how to make repairs is a skill quickly lost. Society doesn’t always show much appreciation for the people who still have this practical knowledge, and against their will they are often left standing on the sidelines. Their experience is never used, or hardly ever.”

Repair Café Toronto embodies the ethics of a sharing economy where people with repair skills are valued. Various events outside of the makerspace also provide recognition for these skills, to showcase the fruits of makers’ labours. The Maker Faire is perhaps the most well known. *Make Magazine*, which originated (and heavily brands) the event, describes it this way:

Part science fair, part county fair, and part something entirely new, Maker Faire is an all-ages gathering of tech enthusiasts, crafters, educators, tinkerers, hobbyists, engineers, science clubs,

### PRINCIPLES OF MAKERSPACES IDENTIFIED IN THE MAKERSPACE PLAYBOOK

- ▶ Everyone is a Maker.
- ▶ Our world is what we make it.
- ▶ If you can imagine it, you can make it.
- ▶ If you can’t open it, you don’t own it.
- ▶ We share what we make, and help each other make what we share.
- ▶ We see ourselves as more than consumers—we are productive; we are creative.
- ▶ Makers ask, “What can I do with what I know?”
- ▶ Makers seek out opportunities to learn to do new things, especially through hands-on, DIY interactions.
- ▶ The divisions between subjects like math and art and science dissolve when you are making things. Making is an interdisciplinary endeavor.
- ▶ It’s all right if you fail, as long as you use it as an opportunity to learn and to make something better.
- ▶ We’re not about winners and losers. We’re about everyone making things better.



authors, artists, students, and commercial exhibitors. All of these “makers” come to Maker Faire to show what they have made and to share what they have learned.

The first Maker Faire took place in California in 2006. *Make Magazine* reports that 98 independently produced mini and featured Maker Faires occurred in 2013, including events in the United States, Canada, Japan (Tokyo), and throughout South America and Europe. As the ultimate sign of how mainstream these events have become, the White House even hosted a Maker Faire in 2014. Organizers, at the smallest scale or presidential, must apply in advance to host an event and, if approved, sign a licensing agreement in exchange for use of the Maker Faire brand. Locally, schools have participated in past Toronto Maker Faires alongside commercial enterprises and entrepreneurs selling their wares. In this way, Maker Faires reflect the shift from making’s grassroots, DIY beginnings to a more corporatized reality.

While members of community makerspaces can (and often do) participate in Maker Faires, not all makers support them. Hackforge, as Sartori explains, holds its own public events, like December’s Art in Tech / Tech in Art gathering in Windsor, to showcase the achievements and innovations of community members at which “no money needs to change hands.”

### From Anti- to Complicit-Consumerism

The commercial turn of the maker movement in recent years has taken many forms. User fees and membership costs are more common, and some makerspaces advertised online and elsewhere appear to be for-profit businesses. A number of Toronto makerspaces are strictly based on workshops that people must pay to attend, others are run as corporate events billed as “team building” activities. For example, Toronto’s The Shop has provided space to corporate events for Shiseido, Shopify, Grolsch and Capital One, to “promote creative

MORE THAN DIY,  
MORE THAN MAKERSPACE,

## CRITICAL MAKERS KEEP IT REAL

### DIY

**Learning:** Individual

**Making:** Individual. Making orientation highly variable, from “off the grid” to commercial. Can be for-profit (e.g., tuition).

**Contributing:** No obligation to contribute: learners can be passive consumers of knowledge.

### CONVENTIONAL MAKERSPACE

**Learning:** Collective

**Making:** Collective assistance, usually (but not always) anti-commercial/ consumerist, though has been co-opted by corporate interests.

**Contributing:** Sometimes requires participation and helping others to learn.

collaboration amongst co-workers.” This seems to be contrary to the original “community learning” model, and it contrasts with Repair Café Toronto and Windsor’s Hackforge, which are both run by volunteers.

Some emerging makerspace initiatives have nothing to do with “making” in the productive sense implied by *poiesis* nor do they embrace the original values of the DIY and maker movements. Rather, in these mainstreamed (and arguably superficial) forms, users participate in crafting in order to produce objects such as toys or clothes—things that will ultimately wind up in a landfill. A review of the websites of several Ontario makerspaces reveals that participating children are merely producing objects in tandem using various technologies, but following very prescriptive instructions such that the output by each student was identical. This model falls prey to consumer-

### CRITICAL MAKERSPACE

**Learning:** Situated (collective and social justice oriented). Has a concern for inclusion of groups typically under-represented.

**Making:** Anti-commercial/anti-consumerist, with a social purpose beyond making for the sake of making, and values making for the sake of critiquing democracy or avoiding consumer activity.

Sustainability emphasized (e.g., not a craft that will be discarded).

**Contributing:** Requires participation and giving back. Varied forms of exchange for learning (“take some, leave some” model) such as:

- ▶ Mandatory sharing of tips or ideas (e.g., in exchange for facility use, leave a tip sheet, video or lesson plan).
- ▶ Mandatory volunteer “tutor” time to work with those new to the space.
- ▶ Mandatory contribution to lab’s accomplishments (e.g., photo or description of item made).

ism, since the crafters use consumer materials—either the sort one procures from a retailer like Michael’s, or printer filaments from an office supply store—rather than repairing and repurposing (upcycling) materials. Unlike making, crafting on spec, while potentially an important learning tool, lacks a sense of innovation and uniqueness achieved by way of ingenuity. Otherwise, the output of crafters would not be identical.

One of the more popular fixtures of many makerspaces is the now somewhat controversial 3D printer. If the hype is to be believed, 3D printers have the potential to tame consumerism by democratizing manufacturing. The idea is that with a 3D printer, and some open source code, people can manufacture anything they need or want, from almost anywhere, without having to rely on corporations. If a component in your washing machine breaks, for example, rather than hav-

```
D SETUP
R (INT THIS
+) {
INMODE(COL
INMODE(ROW
DIGITALWRIT
R (INT X = 0;
OR (INT Y = 0
PIXELS[X][Y]
D READSENS
KELS[X][Y] =
7 - MAP(AN
MAP(ANALC
KELS[X][Y] =
```



ing to order the part, you could print it with filament in your own home, and make the repair yourself.

The dominant printer model, the MakerBot, is common in educational makerspaces because of its affordability and availability at big box retailers. Originally developed and sold exclusively as an open source item, MakerBot users could get code online that would print a particular item. In 2013, the MakerBot manufacturers eliminated its open source capabilities, requiring users to purchase code for objects to print. A great many of those objects are toys: monochromatic trinkets of a single colour that strongly resemble the surprise inside a Kinder Egg. There has also been environmental backlash to the inefficiency of 3D printing (it can take hours or days to produce an object), their excessive energy use, and the filament waste created as a byproduct. On top of dwindling open source options and these negative environmental impacts, inexpensive 3D printers do not result in less expensive production. They follow a razors-and-blades business model: you're not just buying the printer; you're stuck spending a fortune on the raw material (filament) to keep it going.

"The ability to give students meaningful agency in a limited time is a problem," says Sartori, acknowledging the challenges of using 3D printing as a one-time educational opportunity. The Toronto Reference Library (TRL) opened a digital media lab in 2014 at a cost of \$44,000. The lab contains 3D scanners, Arduino (circuit board) kits, Raspberry Pi computers, high-definition video cameras, and audio mixers. The Torontoist reported on the lab last winter, describing how elementary students watched a 3D printer layer filament to make a chess piece. Other children used 3D printers to create a fine-tooth comb and key fobs with the library's logo. There is no making or even learning here. The students do not appear to be engaged in creativity or innovation; they are mere spectators of the production of crafts using state-of-the-art technology. This is obviously a long way from the anti-consumerist or envi-

ronmentally conscious early days of the maker movement.

Given the mainstream popularity of makerspaces, it is no surprise that corporate interests would want to co-opt the concept for the purpose of selling goods and making profits. There are GE Garages, to "reinvigorate America's interest in invention, innovation, and manufacturing." Women's clothing and lifestyle retailer Anthropologie hosts pop-up craft nights at its stores. These are sponsored by Free People, a popular (and very expensive) designer clothing company whose denim, purchasable right at the store, provides the crafting material. Big box stores like Home Depot, Lowe's and Michaels routinely offer DIY workshops tied to the sale of their merchandise. While not billed as makerspaces, DIY workshops offered by retailers further devalue the cultural currency of the DIY and maker movements because they are part of a broader push to "teach" in order "sell" product.

### **Bring Back the Critical Makerspace**

Originally developed in the spirit of anti-consumerism, hands-on production and hacktivism, the maker movement has mutated into diverse branches, including the corporatized makerspace. Critical making, on the other hand, can take us back to these roots, concerned as it is with the relationship between technologies and social life, with an emphasis on the emancipatory potential of the making process; of the transformation that occurs between the maker and the making. In this classical sense of *poiesis*, making is a vehicle for deep learning through digital technology and community interaction.

Among the more vocal proponents of critical making are Matt Ratto of the University of Toronto and Yasmin Kafai of the University of Pennsylvania. Both situate critical making with constructionism: the idea that learning is most effective when people are active in making tangible objects in the real world, and through this process construct new relationships. Unlike instructionist learning, where the learners receive pre-packaged knowl-

edge from teachers, constructionist learning encourages the learners to create new knowledge based on active engagement with raw material, including virtual material in the case of digital technologies. These lofty aims and substantive processes are meant to contribute to deeper learning than would be possible with superficial crafting, but also to encourage makers to think about—and do something about—social and environmental problems they may be able to fix.

To fulfil its collective and democratic ethos, the critical makerspace must engage the learner as a whole person who fully participates, not a passive receiver of official knowledge held by the "teacher." The complexity of making demands a community of practice in which people develop identity in context. Learning in this way becomes far more than a mere how-to demonstration or passive transmission through a YouTube video produced by an "expert." Within maker communities, learning must involve a meaningful dialogue and "figuring out," to arrive at unique and creative solutions to problems identified by individual members of the maker community. If you're just solving problems from a teacher with ready-made solutions, you're doing it wrong.

Critical making brings to mind Neil Postman's 1996 work, *The End of Education*, in which he advocated abandoning conservative and conventional canons of education, worried about our reliance on textbook learning. While it was published nearly two decades ago, the central themes resonate with current educational debates. Postman used stories to explore how students might be enriched by real-world experience with authentic projects, tasks and problems within the local community. Critical making is this kind of learning, a transformational education where the teacher is "inventing ways to engage students in the care of their own schools, neighborhoods and towns." Reflecting on Postman's work offers a fresh perspective on how educators might put the "critical" back into makerspaces in schools and beyond. **M**



Asad Ismi

## The Irresistible Rise of Podemos

**R**ARELY HAS A political party become so popular so quickly. Driven by the economic and political crisis gripping Spain, Podemos (“we can” in English), the country’s anti-austerity leftist party, is topping opinion polls only 15 months after its formation, 11 months since taking five seats in the European Parliament, and fresh from winning 15 seats in the Andalusian provincial parliament during elections this March. Were a national election to be held in Spain today, Podemos, with its impressive 350,000 members, would almost certainly form the government.

That test, however, will have to wait until November, though many look to the recent victory of the Syriza party in Greece as a foreshadowing of what’s to come for Podemos. Spain’s economy is the fourth largest in the euro zone. A victory for the anti-establishment left there, even more so than in Greece, would present a seri-

ous challenge to the neoliberal austerity policies imposed on the continent by the European Union, its central bank and commission.

According to a recent poll, had the Spanish national election been held on March 30, Podemos would have taken first place with 22% of the popular vote. It would not have been a landslide: in second place was the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) with 20%, then the ruling right-wing Partido Popular (PP) at 19%, and finally 18% for the new right-wing Ciudadanos party. Since 1982, Spain has been ruled alternately by the PSOE and PP, both of them firmly neoliberal, with the former socialist in name only.

The Spanish elite, including the banks and upper-middle class, exercises power in both the main parties thereby consolidating rule by a corrupt oligarchy. The country has been run by this group for 40 years, since the death of the fascist dictator General Francisco Franco. Both the PSOE

and PP have been enmeshed in corruption scandals reaching up to the prime minister in the case of the PP, and due to such machinations Spain’s biggest corporations hardly pay any taxes.

Podemos has pledged to break the stranglehold on Spain of what it calls “the Caste,” restructure the public debt, establish true participatory democracy, make corporations pay taxes, and end the austerity regime imposed on the country by the EU and the two establishment parties since the 2007 economic crisis. Unemployment in Spain stands at an all-time high of 26%, but it has skyrocketed for youth, reaching 56% in 2013.

The PP government of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has subjected Spain to the largest cuts in public spending since 1978, dismantling an already underfunded welfare state and increasing poverty to the point that 44% of families are now in an economically precarious position. More than

400,000 families have been evicted from their homes (2014 saw nearly 100 foreclosures carried out per day). Highly regressive labour reforms that make it easier for employers to fire workers have resulted in a 10% drop in wages. Spanish public debt reached 100% of GDP in late 2014, or about a trillion euros (\$1.46 trillion).

Jaime Pastor, a professor of political science at Spain's Public Open University and member of the Autonomous Citizen Council of Podemos in Madrid, told me the popularity of Podemos stems from the fact that its leaders, and especially Secretary General Pablo Iglesias, have created a new discourse that is very critical of the elite. This "won the sympathy of many people" after the eruption of the 15M movement, also known as the Indignados, which rose in 2007 in reaction to the poverty created by official austerity measures. "Podemos is not anti-capitalist, but it is against the current regime and the austerity policies of the EU," said Pastor.

Despite an impressive showing in the recent Greek elections, Syriza is struggling with a belligerent EU on a mutually acceptable package of reforms in exchange for bailout money to ease the economic crisis. Podemos, if elected, would face a similar situation, and like Syriza the party has no intention of leaving the euro zone. "It will be very hard to end austerity measures inside the EU," said Pastor, "but the Spanish economy is bigger than Greece and that can lead to some divisions inside the EU. A Podemos government that wants to make the EU restructure Spanish debt will need an alliance with the Syriza government in Greece and will also need to mobilize the Spanish people in a major way and encourage their self-organization."

Cristina Flesher Fominaya, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and author of the book *Social Movements and Globalization: How Protests, Occupations and Uprisings are Changing the World*, is also following the rise of Podemos. She told me the party represents "a historic opportunity to break the hold of a two-party system and to try to regenerate Spanish

democracy." Podemos is doing this "by offering an alternative political party model...that is not beholden to private capitalist interests but is instead crowdfunded through small donations [and] that seeks to maintain contact with social movements and with grassroots party activists," she said. The party is also offering a change to voters with respect to transparency and accountability in how decisions are made, including party financing.

Podemos' major accomplishment has been to transform the 15M movement into an amazingly popular political party in a very short time—something the North American Occupy movement failed to achieve. Party leadership was very important in this respect. Iglesias, Podemos campaign director Iñigo Errejón Galván and Juan Carlos Monedero are "very media savvy, charismatic, and committed, and they also have a lot of political credibility within Spanish social movements," explained Fominaya. "They have important organizing and communication knowledge from years of social movement organizing."

Iglesias frequently appears on political talk shows where a mass audience can watch him calmly take on his main critics. This has broadened the appeal and credibility of Podemos beyond traditional left-wing circles. In fact, the party claims to be neither left nor right, but against "the Caste," a strategy that is all the more successful for how utterly discredited the "mainstream socialism" (essentially neoliberalism) of the PSOE has been.

"Socialist and social democratic parties in Europe have destroyed the rich socialist tradition. These parties have made the label 'socialist' meaningless by compromising with neoliberalism," said Carles Muntaner, a professor of nursing and public health at the University of Toronto, in a recent conversation. The Spanish-Catalonian travels frequently to Spain where he works with the Indignados movement. "In this sense the Podemos strategy of downplaying the socialist label is a good one."

However, there may be limits to this strategy. Podemos has shifted toward the political centre under the domi-

nance of a small, some say too controlling party leadership. This arguably detracts from its appeal, especially on the left. It will also not be enough to shout down the "Caste" come election time, given the rising popularity of Ciudadanos, a kind of right-wing version of Podemos that is also positioning itself as an antidote to the establishment parties.

Podemos' partial retreat from radicalism has included the repudiation by its leaders of the influence of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution on the party. Monedero, Podemos' 52-year-old spokesperson, received \$500,000 from the Chavez government for his political advice, money that helped start the new party. The citizen circles Podemos set up across Spain were inspired by the Bolivarian circles and communal councils that ensured grassroots public participation in the Venezuelan Revolution and therefore its massive popularity and success.

These connections are glommed onto by the right-wing political establishment and media in Spain to justify exaggerated claims that Podemos is a puppet of the Venezuelan regime. Instead of defending Chavez, Iglesias and his group have distanced themselves from both him and the current government of Nicolás Maduro, saying they have nothing to do with Venezuela—a country they once held up as doing more than all others to help fix underdevelopment in the Global South.

"Rather than standing with Venezuela, they treat it in a neocolonial and paternalistic manner which I find very unfortunate," said Muntaner. "No amount of need for political support in Spain can justify such an attitude. With these kinds of opportunistic leaders, and in spite of an excellent team of advisors, I am skeptical about Podemos being able to bring about substantial change in Spain."

In spite of these shortcomings, Podemos has successfully interrupted a corrupt two-party rule, brought hundreds of thousands of mainly young people into politics and put Spain's elite on the defensive. The party's grassroots must now ensure Podemos lives up to its radical promise. **M**



Chandra Siddan

# Subaltern Englishness

**EARLIER THIS YEAR**, a full-page ad in the *Guardian U.K.* supported a petition started by Matthew Breen, editor of the gay magazine *The Advocate*, demanding a pardon from the British government for 49,000 men convicted under the country's former "gross indecency" law. The ad was paid for by the producers of *The Imitation Game*, the petition signed by Norwegian director Morten Tyldum and his British lead actor Benedict Cumberbatch.

It was a promotional effort, perhaps, but also much more, highlighting as it did the posthumous pardon granted in 2013 to the film's subject, Alan Turing, the mathematician acknowledged to have created the first computer and cracked the German army's Enigma code during the Second World War. Turing, as the film portrays, was persecuted and given experimental "chemical castration" after being convicted for homosexual activity in 1952. He committed suicide soon after. With *The Imitation Game*'s late-2014 popular release, Turing's pardon has become the thin end of a political wedge.

The film itself is a well-calculated balancing act. Its main plot depicts Turing's sometimes prickly leadership of the cryptanalysis team at Bletchley Park as it attempts to understand Germany's coded communications, and thus its war strategy. But it is the non-linear aspects of the protagonist's necessarily secret sexual life that form the key narrative. In the flashback to Turing's childhood, when he absorbs, stoned-faced, the news that his first love has died, we see the price paid by those marked by difference: a constantly maintained mask filtering the life force away.

Loosely based on the biography *Alan Turing: The Enigma* by Andrew Hodges, the film is bare and slapdash in its rendering of the Second World War, refusing to pander to the conventional British jingoism about the era. Despite some a-ha moments, the film offers very little glory or payoff even for those who contributed the most, including the Bletchley Park team, which remained a secret long after the war.

In a refreshing moment of candid pub chatter, Joan Clarke (Keira Knightley) defends her professional friendliness to Turing (Cumberbatch), her socially inept boss: "Being a woman doing a man's job I do not have the luxury of being an ass." It is this aspect of the film, what you might call its intersectionality, which makes it politically contemporane-

ous. Even with the criticism of its historical inaccuracies, absence of gay sex and the downplaying of the collaborative effort of building the first code-breaking machine, *The Imitation Game* is a success despite (if not because of) the artistic liberties taken.

In his film '71, Yann Demange uses the war thriller genre in a similar way to Tyldum, in this case to present the British army foot soldier as a subaltern who finds more kindness from the enemy than the side he is fighting for. Set in Belfast at the beginning of the Troubles, the film shows us one night in the life of Gary Hook (Jack

Cumberbatch as Turing: Persecuting difference







**Lost in his backyard:  
Jack O'Connell as the young British  
soldier in Northern Ireland**

O'Connell), a young soldier posted to Northern Ireland with an ill-equipped platoon. During their very first mission, to search for weapons on the Catholic side, the fresh-faced soldier is separated from his unit and begins a difficult journey through the mayhem of Belfast in 1971.

Along the way, Hook will meet the conflict's major players: the old guard Irish Republican Army at odds with a younger and more violent "provisional" IRA, and the Irish-Protestant Ulster Volunteer Force in cahoots with the covert counter-insurgency unit of the British Army, the Military Reaction Force. The film offers an indictment of the notorious plainclothes MRF "death squads" that knowingly broke the army's rules of engagement and did so with impunity, given the support of higher-ups determined to crush the Republican cause. This is a rare view of bloody war against the shocking backdrop of 1970s white English-speaking society, similar situations in non-white environments being all too familiar.

When he is rescued by a young Protestant Irish boy, Hook is brought to a pub where he recognizes members of the MRF, first seen in the barracks, who are now planning a bomb attack. But the pub explodes, killing the boy and putting Hook on the run. The MRF wants to silence him (he knows too much), the "provisional" IRA want to kill him, while the British army seeks his rescue. After an operation performed without anaesthetic by a Catholic doctor, a wounded Hook drags himself around the stairs and hallways of the Divis Flats housing projects, a high-conflict zone during the Troubles that has since been demolished.

What he learns of war in one night leaves Hook grateful (for his survival) but embittered at the plight of the Irish and in particular his young benefactors, who remind him of the kid brother he left behind when he was posted to Belfast. His experience casts even more doubt on the British presence in Northern Ireland than if the film had taken an obvious political side. When the wounded soldier is dismissed with a perfunctory assurance that the British army looks after its own, while rejecting his version of events, the irony is thick. '71 is a rare combination of art house and

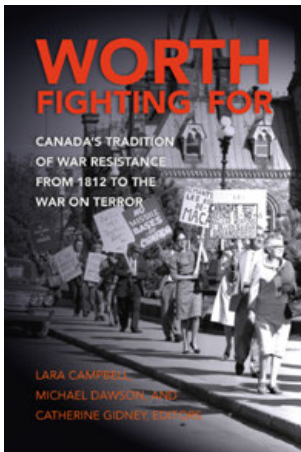
thriller, capturing the visceral experience of someone caught in a war he does not understand.

Both Tyldum and Demange worked with very strong screenplays that honour outsider-hood and vulnerability in a dangerous environment. *The Imitation Game*, written by Graham Moore, topped the legendary Hollywood Black List of best unproduced screenplays in 2011; three years later it took the Oscar for best adapted screenplay. Demange, a successful TV director who made his feature film debut with '71, is of Algerian-French background, raised by his mother in a London working class milieu on a diet of French New Wave cinema. He was writing a film about an orphan in the Algerian civil war when the screenplay by Scottish playwright Gregory Burke appeared.

In their own ways, these two films question the politics of heroism and winning. They present a subaltern history — a history told from below — based on the perspective of groups excluded from established power structures, groups that are fearful and wounded. They remind us of the personal and political truths that are suppressed, even on the "good" side, when history is written by the winners. **M**

Reviewed by Christine Jones

# Textbook Resistance



## WORTH FIGHTING FOR: CANADA'S TRADITION OF WAR RESISTANCE FROM 1812 TO THE WAR ON TERROR

EDITED BY LARA CAMPBELL,  
MICHAEL DAWSON AND CATHERINE  
GIDNEY

Between The Lines (March 2015), \$34.95

**WE ARE EXPOSED** in this country to seemingly endless volleys of pro-war, pro-military messaging and myth-as-fact storytelling. Some of it is subtle, as when the prime minister refers to the War of 1812, impossibly, as a Canadian victory, or expresses his opinion that “Canada as a truly independent country was forged in the fires of the Western Front.” Other times it is in your face: the air force flyover or army celebration before a CFL kick-off or NHL face-off. In all cases the goal is to entrench the notion, on the international stage and in our collective and individual psyches, that Canada was, is and will always be a warrior nation.

The collection *Worth Fighting For* reminds us that from well before Canada was, well, Canada, we were as much a nation of war resisters. Conceived, according to the editors, “in part as a response to the current acceleration of military commemoration,” the book’s 17 chapters aim to “help recalibrate our understanding of Canadian history by documenting Canada’s long tradition of war resistance.” More than that, these are really good stories. What could have been an overly academic exercise was, for this reader, actually very hard to put down.

Some but not all of that interest stems from my history with what we can alternately call the current anti-war, peace or war resistance movement. I found it hard to separate my experiences with those of the people and groups that opposed the Boer, First and Second World Wars, and found myself constantly comparing organizational methods and campaign tactics. I was particularly drawn to those chapters covering the period between 1812 and the 1940s, in part

It will probably surprise few readers that students, teachers and Canada’s schools broadly speaking played a strong role in the history of war resistance.

because these stories tell of our earliest dissenting predecessors, but also because they are the years our current government holds in such (obsessively) high esteem.

Two things became clear to me in the reading: the Canadian state really hasn’t appreciated, and obviously still doesn’t like, people who say “No!” to it; and the best way to say “No!” is through collective action. It was both exciting and at times smirk-worthy to see the history of this resistance, with its perennial organizational and movement debates, so neatly laid out on the continuum of successful people’s challenges to the state (in all its incarnations). The resistance isn’t confined to organizations, though. By telling their respective stories, the authors bring to us the ways that individuals have, in their personal and public spheres, sought to break the constant barrage of propaganda used by the government and supportive non-state actors to convince us that Canada the Good is supported by the co-dependent pillars of war and security.

These histories show that to do war resistance is to put yourself out there knowing you will likely be mocked, ridiculed or worse. “The military craze has been carried to such an extent, that those who did not bow down as hero-worshippers were looked upon as disloyal,” writes Amy Shaw in her chapter, “Dissent in Canada against the Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902,” which details early instances in the tradition of humiliating and shaming anti-war activists. Dissenters in this era were attacked by “average people,” something made much more likely when the government was publically casting spurious charges against those who disagreed with it.

In that way, we can see these public attacks on anti-war protesters as an early instance (an event on the continuum) of the criminalization of dissent. In almost every case since, as explored in other chapters, when the state has been unable to win hearts and minds through mythmaking it has resorted to slander, scapegoating and more serious forms of persecution. The strategy is not limited to wars. Today's environmentalists, First Nations and other critics of the government are labelled as foreign-funded threats to security, terrorists even. Abuse spreads from there onto social media and into government-friendly news media. I expect that if *Worth Fighting For* is ever reprinted there will be a chapter about Bill C-51, the Anti-Terrorism Act 2015.

It will probably surprise few readers that students, teachers and Canada's schools broadly speaking played a strong role in the history of war resistance. Rose Fine-Meyer's chapter, "A Good Teacher is a Revolutionary," provides a rich overview of the role of educators in opening the classroom to alternative views of war and peace between 1960 and 1990. Teachers have never shied from committing sociology, so to speak. As Fine-Meyer points out, through this period there was a growing body of materials and resources for those who sought to bring into the classroom issues such as women's rights, human rights, poverty, and "antiwar narratives and peace education." History and social science departments were once well staffed, committed to understanding and hopefully solving the contradictions of human coexistence on planet earth. Since the 1990s these programs have typically been the first to go when the cuts come down.

It was fascinating to read how our inner struggles to build movements are never altogether new. Ian McKay, in his chapter "Margaret Ells Russell, Women Strike for Peace, and the Global Politics of Intelligent Compassion," highlights how many of the leaders of the WSP (Women Strike for Peace) also sought to address the "perils and potential of combining grassroots spontaneity with international diplomacy." Likewise, throughout

other chapters, we learn of the debates on strategy and tactics, messaging and mobilizing, and how our peace predecessors sought to understand how to transform an idea into action. This should give the current peace movement some solace, and a renewed interest in learning how it can move more adroitly through these perennial debates. The book helps us realize that no matter our differences, the organizing will continue.

If the collection falls down anywhere it's in failing to define what "movement" means from the perspective of either the editors or authors. The term is used constantly throughout the book (and I use it here, rather shamelessly), yet without parameters. What is a movement? How is it different from resistance, and what is its correlation with solidarity? At what point does resistance become a movement? Is it a matter of constancy or quantity, as in number of boots on the ground? Importantly, who gets to answer these questions? Who decides when a thing becomes a movement?

For myself and others who believe we are involved in a movement (or several) these are deeply personal questions. Another — Where's the peace movement now? — has come up frequently over the past few years. It's clear the people asking the question are usually thinking back to the enormous response, in Canada and globally, to the second Iraq war. Until the recent C-51 protests, February 15, 2003 saw the greatest numbers of people in the streets and through a variety of other methods to say "No!" to war. And though Canada did have some military personnel in Iraq, the government of the day sided with the massive No to War response. So where is the peace movement today as Canadian bombs are being dropped on Iraq and Syria?

I would argue it is doing what the peace movement has done since we first started naming it as such, which is to be a grand space for solidarity between many movements for social change. For several years now, the Canadian Peace Alliance's member groups have committed to a central campaign of "Peace and Prosper-

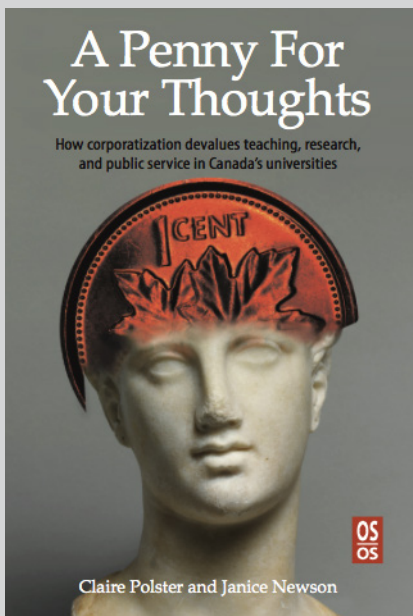
ity not War and Austerity." Their constituent members, and people who don't think of themselves as anti-war activists but who disagree with Canada's recent and current wars, can be found almost everywhere: in the trade union movement, environmental/climate movement, student movement, anti-poverty movement, anti-mining/extractives movement, and the list does go on. As war affects all, the correlation for a vast majority of anti-war advocates around the world is most vividly felt in the resistance to global austerity — the further retreat of the social state to make way for a meaner security state. Austerity is about control. The laws and policy that dismantle economic and social equalizers in the name of balanced budgets are the administrative equivalent of the bombs hitting the ground.

*Worth Fighting For* should be required movement reading in a time when our government (and perhaps those in waiting, too) feel it's okay to toss aside the narratives and experiences and lives lived of those who disagree with their party lines. To know the long history of those who said "No!" will make us stronger as we continue to resist militarism and war. David Tough, in his chapter "A Better Truth: The Democratic Legacy of Resistance to Conscription, 1917–1921," summarizes this idea in a sentence: "There is a democratic legacy to the First World War, but it is the resistance to conscription, not the war itself that is its source." We can take that idea one step further. Resistance to war is one of the most effective ways of ensuring a democratic legacy in Canada. **M**



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Julius Stoller

# Nurse Practitioners Would Reduce the Pressure on Wait Times

**M**ANY PEOPLE REPORT difficulty finding a new family physician after relocating within Canada or when their existing health provider retires. It is an all too frequent topic of conversation and I can attest to its relevance from my own recent experience.

On the same theme, it can be extremely difficult to secure a same-day consultation from many family physicians. This leads to higher attendance at hospital emergency departments. Although some of these trips will be for medical emergencies, a great many are for self-limiting illnesses—illnesses that will abate spontaneously, without medical intervention—or conditions, such as a simple virus infection, minor trauma or allergic response to soaps or plants, that could be treated with over-the-counter medications. Ask any physician if they would request a same-day consultation, for themselves or their family, for such minor illnesses. Inappropriate attendance at hospital emergency departments is a major contributing factor driving up costs to our medical system.

The daily press often writes about “timely” access to care. But definitions of timeliness are often vague or the report does not take into account the variation in severity and acuteness of the illness being discussed. Sometimes care is needed within minutes or hours, while at other times waiting a day or two, or even longer, would not be harmful. Thus, it is wise to be skeptical about sweeping criticisms of our health care system based on so-called timely access statistics. Other agendas are almost certainly in play.

With this caveat in mind, a recent international survey on access to care,

reported in the *Globe and Mail* on January 30, revealed that more than 59% of Canadians over 55 waited two days to see a primary care provider, and over 30% waited more than six days. Canada ranked last among several countries in achieving “timely” (that word again) access to health care.

Jeremy Veillard, vice president of research and analysis at the Canadian Institute for Health Information, which released the survey, told the *Globe* “access to primary care and to specialists remains a challenge in this country and it has not improved since 2007...despite substantial investment in the health care system.” Unfortunately, no statistics were given on the effects of the survey findings on final health outcomes. Lack of data on this key point makes criticisms of Canadian health care hard to interpret and accept.

The number of doctors in Canada has increased substantially, but according to Dr. Chris Simpson, president of the Canadian Medical Association, they are working fewer hours than their predecessors. “The days when doctors worked 90 to 100 hours a week and were on call 24/7, well that’s just not a healthy way for somebody to practise,” he said in the same article. “Work-life balance has been a little bit different for younger physicians.”

So it would seem there is a problem with access to primary care health professionals, though it is unclear if it is significantly affecting health outcomes for the Canadian public. In seeking a solution to this problem, an economist might ask if this was a supply-side shortcoming or a matter of overactive demand. Certainly, growing demand for care from an ageing population is a factor. However, it is likely that 20% to 40% of requests

for same-day consultations are for self-limiting illnesses. These numbers will vary from rural to urban locations and also with the demographics of particular family practices. It is impossible to acquire hard data on this point, but as we’ve ascertained already, such patients do not need to consult a highly trained physician.

Those who favour point-of-access payment in order to cut demand do not address the negative health impact their proposals would have. The financially disadvantaged in our society, which many studies have shown to bear the brunt of illness, would obviously be inhibited from seeking care and advice if they had to pay for it up front. Even if one allows that some increase in the supply of first-response primary care providers is warranted, must they all be physicians, as the CMA president obliquely suggests? If not, there is actually a huge untapped pool of health professionals who could fulfil a role in same-day care and ease the heavy burden on our physicians.

Trained nurse practitioners (NPs) have been an important part of health care systems in Canada and many other industrialized countries for several decades, but they are woefully underused here. NPs can be trained in less than half the time it takes to qualify a family physician and are thus cheaper to produce and maintain. But can they provide first-contact same-day care without reducing health outcomes or endangering the consulting public? Studies dating back over 20 years have shown they can.

In one U.K. study from 1995, about 1,300 patients asking for same-day access were divided into two groups and followed over a six-month period. One group saw fully trained phy-

sicians, the other visited NPs. Roughly 50% of the patients in each group required advice and self-care. Only 21% in both groups came back for a second visit, and only 10% of patients in the NP group were referred immediately to an on-site physician. Thus, about 80% of patients were dealt with after one visit in both groups, and the NP group reported satisfaction that their problems had been dealt with. No serious errors were noted in either group.

Similar results have been confirmed in Canada and other locations. Interestingly, data shows that NPs spend more time at each consultation, often in educating the patient about their current illness and overall problems. Ask anyone who has had recent contact with the medical profession and you will hear that time is in short supply for overloaded physicians. This is likely a function of the fee-for-service or piecemeal style of practice still most common for family doctors.

NPs will certainly make mistakes from time to time, but so do physicians. Notwithstanding major advances in technology over the last few decades, the practise of medicine remains an art. If this circum-

stance is to change, it will be slowly and over many decades. Currently, primary care by NPs is well accepted by patients and should be encouraged, provided certain caveats are in place. These could include the following:

- ▶ NPs cannot practice without physician backup on site. Instant referral must be available when there is uncertainty, or recognition of a more complex or serious illness.

- ▶ To properly fulfil this role, NPs need on-site access to simple X-ray and ultrasound imaging, electrocardiograms and other laboratory studies.

- ▶ Other health care professionals should also be on site, including nurses, dietitians, physiotherapists, dentists, podiatrists and possibly others.

- ▶ There should be simple surgical facilities for minor wounds and so that physicians and NPs can perform simple therapeutic and/or diagnostic procedures.

Co-operative clinics of this kind need to be set up and suitably funded; a fee-for-service payment method is not appropriate. This would dove-

tail nicely with the change in attitude to workloads, lifestyle and compensation expectations among today's physicians. It would be more professionally satisfying by facilitating the productive use of skills and scientific knowledge they spent so many years acquiring.

There are such clinics in Canada and they are successful. But they form a minority of practice settings. I believe they should be the norm, certainly in urban and suburban locations.

So we do indeed have a supply-side problem, as the economist would say. But relying on the production of vast numbers of new physicians is too expensive for the public purse and would not satisfy the need for enough practitioners. In 1986, there were 173 physicians per 100,000 Canadians, according to the CMA. In 2013, the number rose to 220, but still complaints roll in about a creaking system.

In conclusion, I contend the solution to more timely access to care involves graduating a limited increase in the number of new physicians, but much more importantly by the widespread deployment of nurse practitioners as a first-contact resource. **M**



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# The Good News Page

Compiled by  
Elaine Hughes

Claiming “somewhat of a mood shift among our consumers,” the Ringling Brothers circus plans to retire their 43 performing elephants by 2018, though, given accusations of physical abuse and unhealthy living conditions, animal rights activists claim this is still too long to wait. Circus president Kenneth Feld said his tour is complicated by municipal and national bans on the use of elephants for entertainment. When they are retired, the animals will be moved to a conservation centre in Florida. / BBC

On March 26, as a result of protests from environmental and Indigenous groups, New Brunswick joined Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia in prohibiting hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for oil and gas while the impacts are studied. “It is responsible and prudent to do our due diligence and get more information,” said Energy and Mines Minister Donald Arseneault. / The Maritime Executive

On March 2, after some 125 actions by the Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT), PNC Financial (the

seventh largest bank in America) announced it will no longer finance mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia. The technique has destroyed an estimated 500 Appalachian mountains in the past five years, increasing cancer and birth defect rates in nearby communities due to air and water pollution. “We chose our target believing everyone needs to take responsibility for their role in the unfolding disaster of climate change, including banks whose financial decisions have enormous consequences compared with most individuals and groups,” wrote George Lakey shortly after the bank announced it would be divesting. / Truthout, New York Times

Latin America (population 500 million), led by Chile, Mexico and Brazil, increased solar energy production by 370% in 2014, surpassing the entire European solar market growth rate of 60% between 2007 and 2011. The U.S. Department of Energy predicts the rapidly growing production of wind power by utility-scale wind plants in 39 states now provides 4.5% of the country’s electricity. The Obama administration has stated that increasing production to all 50 states by 2050 would reduce emissions, support more than 600,000 jobs and possibly provide 35% of the country’s electricity. According to a recent United Nations report, investment in global green energy increased to US\$270.2 billion last year,

a 17% increase from 2013 but a few billion short of what it was in 2011. Half of the world’s total new investment in solar power (US\$74.9 billion) happened in China and Japan, while investment in Europe in offshore wind power totalled US\$16.2 billion of a global total of US\$18.6 billion. / Truthout, Common Dreams, Planet Ark

The world may be getting hotter, it is also getting greener. Analysis of 20 years of satellite data has revealed that, since 2003, global vegetation has expanded thanks to tree planting in China, forest growth in former Soviet states and more rainfall in some areas, increasing the amount of carbon absorbed by above-ground plants to four billion tonnes—an admittedly small amount compared to the 60 billion tonnes of carbon emitted into the atmosphere over the same period. “Hopefully this (study) will lead to greater efforts to stop tropical forest loss and to promote sustainable use of ecosystems in ways that preserve enough of the carbon absorption function as we continue to pump CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere through fossil fuel burning,” said Louis Verchat, a research director at the Indonesia-based Center for International Forestry Research. / Reuters

In 1982, Rajendra Singh and local villagers began de-silting traditional surface level rainwater storage facilities (*johads*) in Rajasthan, the driest district in India. Once

rain began to fill them, people in neighbouring villages took up the work and over 8,000 *johads* have now been renovated. Rajendra, known as the “Water Man of India” for his untiring efforts in water conservation, has been awarded the 2015 Stockholm Water Prize, and said of the future: “My immediate plans are to take up a global-level campaign on water conservation and peace.” He will be leading the global water walk in the U.K. in August. / The Daily Climate

Portland, Oregon has banned the use of neonicotinoid pesticides on city property. The Portland City Commission voted unanimously on the ban despite protests from farmers who say the insecticide is crucial for crop production, bringing to eight the number of U.S. municipalities to ban the use neonicotinoids, which are suspected to be an important factor in the recent decline of honey bee populations. At the end of March, Ecojustice congratulated Ontario for new regulations restricting the use of neonic pesticides to cases where farmers can prove their soya and corn crops are threatened by pests, but the group called on the province to apply the same test across the board. / Planet Ark, Ecojustice.ca

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