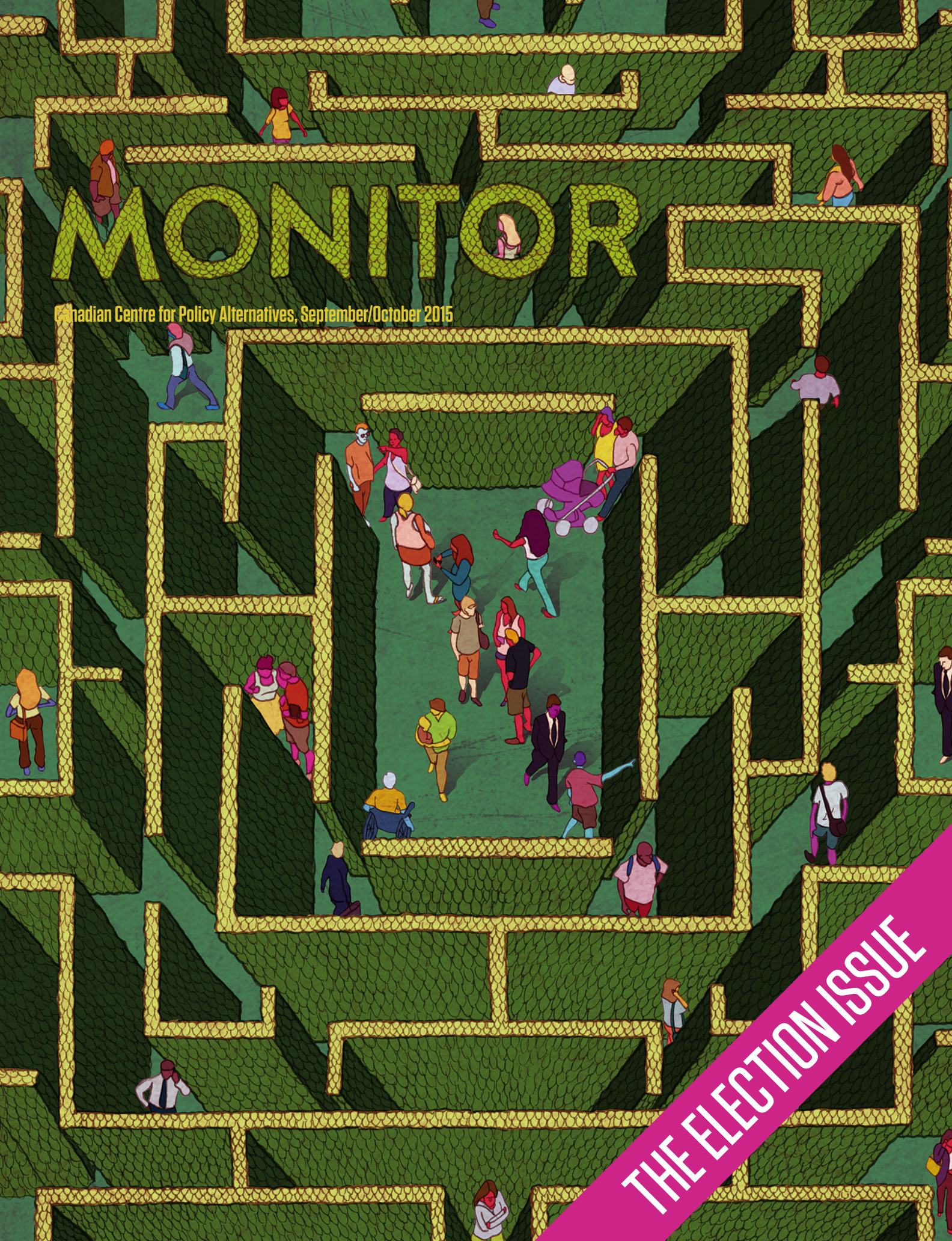
MONITOR
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, September/October 2015
THE ELECTION ISSUE

Nominations for the CCPA Members' Council

Every CCPA supporter is now eligible to nominate another individual supporter in good standing to sit on the CCPA's Members' Council for the two-year term 2016–18.

The four incumbents previously elected to represent individual CCPA supporters are Tony Clarke, Brigette DePape, Paula Mallea and Steve Staples.

In addition to the names of both nominator and nominee, your nomination form must also verify the willingness of the nominee to stand for election.

Ballots for the election will be mailed separately to all eligible CCPA contributors following receipt of the nomination forms. Results of the election will be reported in the December 2015/January 2016 issue of the *Monitor*.

The deadline for receiving nominations is October 15, 2015.

Please either mail, scan and email, or fax all nominations to:

Larry Brown, President, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
251 Bank Street, Suite 500, Ottawa ON K2P 1X3
Email: dianet@policyalternatives.ca
Fax: 613-233-1458

NAME OF NOMINEE _____

MUST BE A CCPA CONTRIBUTOR

Address _____

Telephone _____

E-mail address _____

CONSENT OF NOMINEE

Signature _____

☐ I hereby consent to allow my name to stand for election to the CCPA Board of Directors. I am familiar with and support the aims of the CCPA.

☐ I understand that I will forward to the CCPA a short (100 words maximum) biography for the benefit of my fellow voters, and that, if I choose to supply this information about myself, it will be attached to the ballot form.

NOMINATED BY _____

MUST BE A CCPA CONTRIBUTOR

Address _____

Telephone _____

E-mail address _____

September/October 2015

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Stuart Trew

Really real change. Know what I mean?

THE PODIUMS OF the three major federal parties tell us this election is a choice between ***LEADERSHIP***, **change** and **Real Change**. (Fonts are approximated, and I'll let you figure out who owns each slogan.) Obviously there will be more to the party platforms than this—and there is only so much space on a lawn sign or the side of a campaign bus—but considering the more interesting, more ideological debates driving electoral politics elsewhere, I can't help but feel Canada is being short-changed by a rather hollow continuity-versus-change dichotomy.

Electoral politics doesn't have to be so milquetoast. In the United States and United Kingdom, the Democrats and Labour Party are soul-searching for new leaders, with self-declared socialists posing credible challenges to the safer establishment candidates. Long-serving Vermont Democrat Bernie Sanders has more Facebook "likes," and regularly draws bigger and younger crowds, than the likelier presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton. Cornel West backed Sanders on CNN in August, calling him a "prophetic politician" for speaking "the truth about working poor people being afterthoughts" to a ruling U.S. oligarchy.

There is more than a little change in the Sanders platform: $1 trillion for "crumbling" infrastructure, with a promise of creating 13 million decent paying jobs; "reversing climate change" by transforming the energy system; taking subsidies away from corporations and giving them to worker-owned co-ops; legal reforms that will make it easier to unionize; pay equity for women; trade policies that demand U.S. corporations create jobs at home; making post-secondary education affordable; and breaking up Wall Street firms that "are too powerful to be reformed."

In the U.K., where Labour will soon replace Ed Miliband, who resigned as leader after the party's disastrous showing in the May elections, the top contender is similarly widening the parameters of mainstream political debate. Jeremy Corbyn, an MP since 1983, was relatively unknown before he jumped into the Labour leadership race. Like Senator Sanders in the U.S., Corbyn has been drawing large crowds to hear him speak against war and austerity, and for nationalizing the banks. His slogan: "Prioritizing the needs of the poor and the human rights of all."

In comparison, Canadian federal politics is not just bland; it can feel almost detached from reality. We ask ourselves, through polls, is the economy doing well or is it heading for the rocks? The answers gauge the mood of the public and could determine how people vote in the next election. But how do we begin to understand where economic policy is failing us when our would-be leaders and a good part of the national media are satisfied with talking points about stability versus change?

Not all the blame lies with party strategists. Polls aren't bulletproof but they can be instructive. It's not entirely clear, for example, that people know what kind of change they're looking for. A recent Abacus Data survey showed that over half of most age groups think it's definitely time for a change in federal government, but that only 27% of so-called millennials (aged 18 to 29) think the country is headed in the wrong direction, and 59% think the economy's doing well.

If the future is precarious for Canada's younger workers—and most of the evidence suggests it is—they do not appear to be all that worried about it. (Though a recent CIBC survey found that half of university students worry they won't have enough money this year to cover tuition and living expenses.) Is it any wonder that instead of grand proposals for eliminating poverty and inequality we get sloganeering about who will do the most good for "working families" or the middle class? Electoral campaigns aimed solely at unseating the Conservatives play into this by painting all non-Conservative candidates as automatically progressive—another word, like "change," that should have more meaning than it does in the Canadian context.

The economy is not doing well, not here or anywhere. "Slow growth is on the menu for as far as the eye can see," writes CCPA economist Armine Yalnizyan in a recent article about how the Conservative government rode the commodity boom for too long, while Canada's non-resource sectors struggled or fell apart. "It's not enough for Harper to boast about his record, or his opponents to fret about it... The job situation is tenuous, even more so for our kids. What's the plan to deal with that?"

This is a long election campaign. Hopefully it is long enough to prove me wrong; that we will see the plans and they will offer substantive solutions to very serious social, economic and environmental problems. Sanders and Corbyn may not win their leadership bids, but they show us that people elsewhere are responding to—and are genuinely energized by—truly progressive politics. M

Letters

Insulted by Khadr article

As a member of the Canadian Armed Forces and veteran of the war in Afghanistan, I find it disturbing that the *Monitor* would spend the effort and resources to support a man, a terrorist, who could just as easily have killed me or one of my deployed brothers/sisters ("Reprieve for Omar Khadr," July-August 2015). His case is unique, and the facts and Supreme Court findings are important, but the issue needs to be approached with tact and respect. Printing an article that was clearly supportive of Mr. Khadr was neither tactful nor respectful, particularly to those of us who have had to deal with war and terrorism firsthand.

Even if you give Mr. Khadr the benefit of the doubt regarding accusations he threw the grenade that killed U.S. Army Sgt. Speers (which I do not), the fact remains he was an active member of al-Qaeda who conducted terrorist activities and operated as an unlawful combatant. The video found in the compound where he was captured is evidence, clearly showing a smiling Mr. Khadr assisting with the wiring and placing of an improvised explosive device.

Even Michael Welner, the forensic psychiatrist who interviewed Mr. Khadr for seven hours in 2010, found him to be unrepentant, self-serving, elusive and determined to "do and say whatever he believes he must in order to help his case." This is a man who has yet to denounce al-Qaeda, or show any true remorse for his actions. Those who support Mr. Khadr need to at least consider that they are having the wool pulled over their eyes, not only by him, but the whole Khadr family.

The Free Omar Khadr Now campaign would see fit to send him home to rejoin his family, the same family whose father was a high-level member of the al-Qaeda network and personal friend of Osama Bin Laden. The same family that used to live in the Bin Laden compound. They want to reunite poor Mr. Khadr with his mother, who has been openly supportive of the 9/11 attacks, or his sister, who has stated she wished her own children would be martyred, and who openly mourned the death of Osama Bin Laden on social media.

The *Monitor* article is an insult to all of us who serve and work hard for our country at home and abroad. Imagine returning home from a war, only to see a man who was a member of the group that was trying to kill you being treated as a celebrity. I only wish the *Monitor* would offer the same amount of respect and consideration for those of us who have volunteered to sacrifice our own lives, if necessary, in order to ensure that the *Monitor* can remain free to publish its reports, even if those reports are a slap in the face.

M. Elliott, Petawawa, Ont.

Canada needs an egalitarian Senate

Canada's entanglement in Senate reform is built on a set of premises that are arguably wrong. Canada can have Senators, elected by the people, without any Constitutional amendments; we can change the nature of the Senate without a veto from the Senate; and we do not need a Senate that is primarily a guard dog for provincial rights.

How? Instead of categorizing Canadians based on *where* they live, we need to think about *how* they live, which, for most Canadians, is the foremost aspect of their lives.

Basic to the study of political science are the socioeconomic groups that define the diversity of self-interests in a country. People self-define as First Nations, teachers, farmers, tradesmen and tradeswomen, youth, seniors, soldiers, scientists, etc. Why not arrange it so that such groups can seek like members from across Canada for the purpose of electing a Senator to represent them?

Instead of some blue ribbon "search committee," as recommended by Liberal leader Justin Trudeau, let the people of Canada serve that role. Instead of finding token Aboriginals, teachers, journalists, social workers and engineers, let the people find someone that will have legitimacy in speaking for them. And, as is the Canadian custom, let the group's Senator be recommended by the prime minister to the Governor General for admission to the Senate. Existing Senators cannot complain because that is exactly how they got appointed.

The benefits of Parliament tweaking the appointments process to automatically accept the representative of duly chartered Senate socioeconomic constituencies not only avoids opening the Constitution, but also assures better, democratically responsible, non-partisan Senators with a pan-Canadian (not provincial) point of view. Gender bias will be effectively eliminated. Canada needs to demonstrate some imagination, co-operate and create an egalitarian Senate.

B. Kerman, Brantford, Ont.

Digging the Monitor

Sitting in the Huntsville library enjoying the revamped CCPA *Monitor*, May/June 2015. An excellent transformation. Keep up the great work.

S. Austin, Huntsville, Ont.

Send us your letters to monitor@policyalternatives.ca.

The Good News Page

Compiled by Elaine Hughes

Medicine Hat, Alberta claims to have eliminated homelessness, with some provincial assistance, as city council pledged to do in 2009. "It costs about $20,000 a year to house someone. If they're on the street, it can cost up to $100,000 a year," said Mayor Ted Clugston. "This is the cheapest and the most humane way to treat people." / **CBC News**

On an exceptionally windy day this summer, Denmark's wind turbines generated 116% of the country's electricity needs, and up to 140% as demand dropped into the night. Surplus electricity was sold to Germany, Norway and Sweden. Siemens Canada shipped its first wind turbine blades to Sweden in 2014. The company's Tillsonburg, Ontario plant that builds them employs 400 people who produce 18 49- and 55-metre high blades per week, with plans to ship to Quebec, Alberta and Saskatchewan. / **Guardian U.K., Green Energy Futures**

Since Gaza's only local power station was bombed last summer, most of the Palestinian territory's electricity now comes "rationed" from expensive Israeli or Egyptian diesel generators. EmpowerGAZA, an organization founded by three Canadian doctors—Dr. Benjamin Thomson, Dr. Tarek Loubani and Dr. Dalal Dahrouj—hopes to raise US$1.2 million ($1.57 million) over the next 18 months to help pay for clean, sustainable and uninterrupted solar energy for four of Gaza's five largest hospitals. / **Rabble.ca**

Toronto designer Yi Jiang has developed a 7kg foot pedal–powered washing machine the size of a water cooler that can wash and rinse a small load of laundry in about four minutes. The machine, called Drumi, costs under $200 and earned Jiang a Dyson Foundation award of $3,600. The designer hopes to sell them to people in smaller apartments or in areas where electricity is harder to come by. / **CBC News**

As if we didn't suspect it already, a nice walk and good night's sleep can do wonders for your health. A team led by Stanford University graduate student Gregory Bratman took 38 healthy city dwellers and sent half of them for a 90-minute walk in a quiet, park-like setting while the other half walked for 90 minutes near heavy traffic. Afterwards, both sets of walkers got brain scans to check blood flows, and answered identical questionnaires to gauge mood. Broodiness levels and blood flow to the brain decreased for the park strollers but stayed about the same for those in the city. According to Bratman, the results "strongly suggest that getting out into natural environments" could be an easy and almost immediate way to improve moods for city dwellers. Add a good night's rest to the mix, and you might even ward off Alzheimer's. Scientists have long suspected that sleep flushes harmful toxins from the brain. A team at UC Berkely, led by Dr. Matthew Walker, has found a definite link between the level of the sticky protein called beta-amyloid in the brain, uninterrupted sleep and memory loss, suggesting that poor sleep may indeed increase the risk of contracting the disease. / **New York Times, Associated Press**

Microbeads will soon be classified as a toxic substance under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. Millions of the tiny particles, found in cleansers, lotions and toothpaste, are daily flushed into waterways where they absorb pollutants such as PCBs and polycyclic aromatic carbons present in the marine environment. The beads—often measuring no more than one millimetre in diameter—are consumed by fish and birds, and eventually find their way into the human food chain. In praising the move, Devon Page, executive director of Ecojustice, cautioned: "Let's make sure we get this ban right the first time and ensure that we are banning all manner of microbeads—including so-called biodegradable ones—from entering Canada's rivers, lakes and streams." / **Ecojustice**

India and Bangladesh have exchanged more than 150 parcels of disputed land on their shared border after signing a 1974 Land Boundary Agreement. The move ends a border conflict in existence since the countries gained independence from Britain in 1947. As of August 1, some 50,000 stateless people will leave their respective enclaves and choose which country they want to live in. / **Associated Press**

Iran has reached a deal with the U.S. and five other nations that will see the country limit its nuclear activities in exchange for the end to damaging oil and financial sanctions. The deal, a legacy item for U.S. President Obama, is the product of 20 months of negotiating, but faces a rough ride in Congress this month. European governments are already scrambling to remove sanctions—to open up business opportunities for their companies in Iran. The result could be that even if the deal does not survive a vote in the U.S., international ties with Iran could still be normalized. / **New York Times, Guardian U.K.**

New from the CCPA

Strong treaties, uncertain investor protection

A new report by CCPA researcher **Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood** documents the 55 known cases of Canadian investors using investor-state arbitration to sue foreign governments in international trade tribunals.

A Losing Proposition: The Failure of Canadian ISDS Policy at Home and Abroad finds the investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) process is used most frequently by Canadian resource companies to challenge resource management and environmental protection measures in developing countries. The study comes out on the heels of an investor lawsuit filed by Canadian mining firm Gabriel Resources against approval delays for its extremely controversial Rosia Montana gold mine in Romania.

"ISDS is supposed to protect foreign investors from arbitrary government actions, but in practice it is being used by multinational corporations to bully democratic governments into backtracking on actions taken in the public interest," says Mertins-Kirkwood. "Canadian companies—particularly Canadian mining companies—are among the worst in the world when it comes to ISDS."

The topic of ISDS (see feature in the July-August 2015 issue of the *Monitor*) was high on the agenda of a meeting in Toronto this August between Reiner Hoffmann, head of Germany's Trade Union Confederation (DGB), and **Scott Sinclair**, director of the CCPA's Trade and Investment Research Project. Hoffman, Sinclair and Hassan Yussuff, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, discussed the pending Canada–European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), its ISDS process, and the deal's impacts on public services and labour rights.

The DGB has asked Sinclair to write a critical analysis of CETA, to be published prior to a mass demonstration against the deal and a similar agreement between the United States and EU—the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)—on October 10 in Berlin.

LNG will not help new climate action plan

B.C. Premier Christy Clark stated this summer that the Pacific NorthWest LNG project headed by Malaysian state-owned Petronas would create 4,500 jobs, and that the LNG industry as a whole would create 100,000 jobs. **Marc Lee**, senior economist with CCPA-BC, looked into those numbers and found them to be bloated.

"In its submission to B.C.'s environmental assessment process, Petronas estimates that about 3,500 workers would be required at 'peak construction,'" says Lee, author of the new CCPA-BC report ***LNG and Employment in British Columbia***. "After a short construction period, however, the plant will only employ 200 to 300 full-time permanent workers."

In any case, the choice should not be just about LNG. In August, Lee submitted proposals to B.C.'s Climate Leadership Team, appointed in May this year to help develop a new "climate action plan" for the government. The briefing note by the Climate Justice Project, which Lee heads, makes the case for "a new wave of bold climate action, including a reinvigorated carbon tax as a key driver of change, supported by more stringent regulations and standards, and public investments to reshape our communities.

"Rather than being a burden, climate action should be seen as a new economic agenda and industrial strategy," writes Lee in his submission. "Shifting to a zero-carbon B.C. is both technologically possible and will create far more employment opportunities than expansion of fossil fuel production."

Best and worst places to be a woman

"The reality is Canada has a gender gap. When it comes to pay, jobs, and safety, men and women still don't get equal treatment in Canada," says **Kate McInturff**, CCPA senior researcher and author of the new study ***The Best and Worst Places to be a Woman in Canada 2015***. "We need to take stock of the gaps so we can close them."

The study, which attracted considerable public and media attention this summer, ranks Canada's 25 largest metropolitan areas based on a comparison of how men and women are faring in five areas: economic security, leadership, health, personal security, and education. It is intended to provide an annual measure of the gaps that exist between men and women in communities across Canada and serve as a reminder that, with the right choices and policies, these gaps can be closed.

The study includes examples of local initiatives underway in each city (with a special focus this year on Saskatoon) to help close the gender gap, from a group of food servers in Edmonton who got tired of being asked to wear miniskirts at work, to an organization in Quebec City that ensures that Deaf women have access to perinatal care.

"Looking at which city fares the worst and best in terms of gender equality isn't about winning the cup, it's about identifying what works in one community and bringing it home to another—so that every city in Canada is a good place to be a woman," says McInturff.

Income risks for retirement

Two recent and widely quoted studies—from McKinsey & Company and the C.D. Howe Institute—strongly suggest that no major policy changes are needed to better ensure Canadians have adequate retirement income in the future. But are they right? Not according to **Michael Wolfson**, a Canada Research Chair and former assistant chief statistician at Statistics Canada.

Wolfson's CCPA-Ontario report, ***What, Me Worry? Income Risks for Retiring Canadians***, is a must-read for policy makers and anyone else trying to understand the vital role public policy should play in securing our retirement future. It includes a sharp critique of Statistics Canada's decision to stop funding the LifePaths database that is ideal for predicting pension needs in future.

LifePaths data shows that "a large proportion of middle-income Canadians (possibly 50%) will likely face a significant reduction in their living standards in retirement—a drop of 25% or more in their net income replacement rate by age 70," according to Wolfson's report. "This evidence strongly supports some form of expansion of CPP/QPP or, in the absence of federal leadership, the development of provincial initiatives, such as the Ontario Retirement Pension Plan process unfolding in the province of Ontario."

Wealth gap starts young

Did you know that the wealthiest Canadian families in their twenties have an average net worth of over $500,000—more than middle class families manage to save over a lifetime? If these millionaire babies stay at the top, they'll spend the rest of their lifetime accumulating even greater wealth, leaving their middle class contemporaries behind in their gold dust.

CCPA Senior Economist **David Macdonald** explores the role this head start plays in growing inequality in his report ***The Wealth Advantage: The Growing Wealth Gap Between Canada's Affluent and the Middle Class***. "It seems unlikely that the tremendously well-educated middle class youth of today could overcome the half-a-million dollar head start the wealthiest Canadian families enjoy in their twenties," he concludes. "It is time to re-examine measures like the 50% lower tax rate on capital gains that may, in some small measure, slow this growing gap."

A child care plan that works for everyone

The summer issue of **Our Schools/Our Selves** comes at an opportune moment, taking stock of where we are in the child care debates (and where we need to be) in the lead-up to a national election that is very much about how we care for our children. Researchers, activists and analysts provide a thoughtful overview of the key issues in the effort to build an affordable, inclusive, anti-oppressive, accountable and high-quality national child care program that meets the needs of kids from coast to coast to coast. *Our Schools/Our Selves* is a quarterly journal on education available in the online CCPA bookstore for $15.

Smarter, affordable defence

Most of Canada's major military hardware is old, degraded, unreliable and often unavailable. With a federal election looming, this crisis in defence procurement presents both a challenge and an opportunity for Canada's next government—to rebuild the military from the ground up and to do so in a way that addresses the country's actual needs.

A new CCPA report by **Michael Byers**, ***Smart Defence: Plan for Rebuilding Canada's Military***, calls for a more objective and reasoned approach to defence procurement, outlining 23 recommendations that would save billions in spending on military equipment, increase capabilities on most fronts, and maintain jobs in the Canadian defence, aerospace and shipbuilding industries.

"There are two big problems with defence procurement in Canada," says Byers. "One is mismanagement, including new layers of bureaucracy introduced by the Harper government. The other is overreach, which occurs when officials grasp at the latest, unproven technologies, such as the F-35 Strike Fighter, which carry huge cost risks and uncertainties."

Saskatchewan's roadworks problem

A new report from the CCPA-Saskatchewan raises serious concerns about how the province builds roads. ***Blank Spaces: The Accountability and Oversight Gap in Saskatchewan's Contract Roadbuilding System*** by Taylor Bendig identifies systemic neglect and carelessness within the ministry's contracts with private roadbuilders. Bendig's review of over 250 ministry contracts shows a pervasive pattern of negligence, as basic accountability measures such as price breakdowns, contract completion dates, late penalties and performance deposits are used sporadically if at all.

The report also finds that vague and open-ended highway construction contracts leave the government particularly vulnerable to paying for work "that is unsatisfactory or excessively expensive." Among Bendig's recommendations are that the ministry should enhance its internal data gathering and organization systems, and implement a proactive disclosure regime.

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

ARMINE YALNIZYAN

RELYING ON THE PERMANENTLY TEMPORARY

It's only been a few weeks since Disney, that most iconic of American companies, moved to displace all its homegrown techies with low-cost foreign temporary workers. But the company had to beat a hasty retreat in the face of an outpouring of criticism.

Amid the deluge of commentary this story triggered about where America is headed, blogger and finance professor Noah Smith turned his eyes north and gave Canada a mighty shout-out in a column for *Bloomberg* he titled "Canada: Tomorrow's Superpower."

Smith rightly pointed out that immigration policy is one of the fundamental Canadian strengths that bode well for our future. But in his haste to explain what's right about our policies, he skipped over the part of the story where we've begun to ape something that's wrong about the American way: a growing reliance by business on temporary "guest" workers.

Canada's immigration reforms have pivoted from family reunification to economic immigration, with a focus on new permanent residents who have high educational skills and/or high net worth.

Most people don't realize that our intake of foreign workers has almost doubled since 2006—right through the recession, amid rising unemployment rates and with no recovery for young workers. Almost all of our net new immigration growth is driven by the escalating use of temporary foreign workers, rather than permanent economic migrants. Canadian businesses have turned to these workers for a variety of reasons, including legitimate shortages in certain pockets of the labour market, inadequate workplace training and a desire to cut costs.

The Disney affair that so riled Americans is almost a perfect mirror image of a 2013 story that alarmed Canadians about practices at the Royal Bank of Canada and other big banks. We've since learned that the hiring of temporary foreign workers is routine in the finance sector and beyond.

The distinction between policies that encourage permanent or temporary newcomers is critical to Canada's future and the future of a world dogged by aging populations.

All the advanced industrialized nations are aging. Japan is first, but South Korea, China and virtually all of Europe are close behind. Canada is among the most rapidly aging societies because of our postwar baby boom. Our labour shortages are currently limited to booming pockets of the economy, but they will become endemic as boomers begin to retire in droves, which will happen long before the robots take over. In the meantime, economic migrants are becoming the tail that wags the dog of economic development and the evolution of nations.

Almost all of our net new immigration growth is driven by the escalating use of temporary foreign workers.

Recently, the United Nations Refugee Agency noted that 59 million people were displaced in 2014 by violence and persecution, the highest number of displacements on record and the fastest single year of growth. These numbers do not include the displacement of peoples because of climate change, which is a growing phenomenon as well. Nor do they include rising numbers of international students and professionals who go abroad to seek greater opportunity.

Pushed or pulled, human beings are on the move as never before. So is capital.

For the past three decades, nations have tried to become magnets for money in the hopes of drawing investments that create growth and jobs. For the next three decades, nations with aging populations will need to be magnets for both capital and labour, just to maintain standards of living.

The stakes are high. We are establishing the terms of the game for decades to come, for migrant workers and citizens alike. There is perhaps no more fundamental test of policy success or failure than how labour force needs will be met in the coming years. Will newcomers be invited in as guest workers or as citizens in the making? This is a new issue for Canada, and an increasingly contentious one.

Numerous policy announcements meant to quell concerns have done little to change the trends. No one has answered the core question: Why are temporary foreign workers good enough to work, but not good enough to stay?

Professor Smith is right—Canada has the potential to become a superpower, a country the world regards with respect and envy for its economic, social and political strength. But it won't get there by relying on the permanently temporary.

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SUZANNE SMYTHE

WHERE IS CANADA'S DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY?

When Alex first arrives at the drop-in computer class at his local neighbourhood house, he's never used a keyboard or surfed the Internet before. But he's determined to learn so he can apply for government services he needs as a recently unemployed person with disabilities.

Alex (not his real name) attends the weekly drop-in classes faithfully, working with a volunteer tutor who patiently walks him through the complex process of applying for disability benefits online. Maggie (also not her real name) is another regular at the class. She was referred by a provincial employment office for help applying for jobs. Maggie has no Internet connection at home and needs hours of one-to-one support to be able to fill out the online job application systems some employers use. Sometimes she misses a response from an employer because she can't get into her email account.

These everyday experiences of digital access parallel those of many other low income Canadians who are being kept (or pushed) offline by unaffordable high-speed Internet fees, low speed targets, and data capping, as well as cuts to adult and community literacy programs that were once hubs of digital learning. The irony is that amid these struggles, the federal government has announced intentions to take ever more government services online.

The complexities of access experienced by people like Alex and Maggie are lost in this Digital Canada 150 strategy, released in 2014, which narrowly defines digital access as the availability of an Internet connection (note that availability does not include affordability). The strategy relies on the hope that a competitive telecommunications market will result in competitive Internet rates and incentives to provide services to rural and remote communities.

The digital policies of other federal parties are only slightly more ambitious. The NDP's proposals for "bridging the digital divide" call for widespread availability of high speed Internet and the auction of wireless spectrum, the invisible but limited airways that transmit data, to subsidize affordable Internet access for rural and remote communities. The Liberals are calling for improvements in the accessibility of government services and better privacy and security. But all this is rather piecemeal.

In other jurisdictions we find more comprehensive digital strategies that link local and federal policies based on seven principles of access: availability, affordability, design and usability, public access, relevance, digital literacy and consumer safety. These principles form a comprehensive digital inclusion framework developed in 2010 by the ICMA, the Institute for Museum and Library Services, and the Technology & Social Change Group at the University of Washington, with the understanding that a digital inclusion framework is as necessary for infrastructure development as transit, housing or an economic development plan.

When Alex moved to a cheaper apartment, he qualified for a six-month "new Internet subscriber" rate of $30 a month. A friend lent him a very old but functioning laptop computer and with support from the neighbourhood house tutors he got an email and Facebook account.

Alex was connected! At least for a time. He read local and international news, reconnected with family and friends, practised his writing and typing skills, learned about health issues and made medical appointments. But when he opened a spam email and his computer crashed he had nowhere to go for help, and he missed an email message to attend a long-awaited medical appointment.

Women learn computer skills
Photo by Spark Creative Ltd

A digital inclusion framework is as necessary as transit, housing or an economic development plan.

The lower Internet rate expired and Alex faced a $58 monthly bill he could not afford. He cut back in other areas of his small budget to keep his connection, as many other Canadians must do. Alex's experience suggests that being "connected" is not a one-off event. Digital access is an ongoing effort that requires a comprehensive vision and an integration of the seven principles of access, oriented to the needs of lower income, less-educated Canadians.

A coalition of anti-poverty and advocacy groups is calling attention to this, arguing that the Internet is not a luxury, but a right. These groups are asking the CRTC, in its current consultation on basic communication services, to subsidize Internet access for low-income Canadians, similar to a policy U.S. President Obama recently announced.

When federal parties put forward more developed digital strategies in the election season (and let's hope they will!) they should take into account that these everyday digital exclusions affect our economy and our social fabric, too.

How does Alex manage his health care if he can't afford an Internet connection? How does Maggie find work if she does not know how to use the online job application systems and can't afford a computer? Designing digital strategies that address these problems will take us further down the road to a connected Canada.

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IGLIKA IVANOVA

B.C. CAN AFFORD $10/DAY

This July, British Columbia's premier recalled the legislature from its regular summer break to pass special laws paving the way for a potential liquefied natural gas (LNG) project. Imagine if the provincial government put as much energy and effort into solving the child care crisis.

If we take the evidence for granted (and there is a lot of compelling evidence), a focus on child care would yield a number of social and economic benefits. High quality early childhood education promotes healthy child development and increases educational achievement for all children, with particular benefits to the most vulnerable. It also promotes social inclusion, advances gender equality by allowing mothers to return to work, and strengthens the economy.

Yet B.C. and Canada are laggards by international standards, investing far less than what is required to ensure all children can thrive. Small enhancements to the status quo (like B.C.'s Early Years Strategy) are just not cutting it—we need a change in priorities.

The call for public investment in a national child care program is not new and is supported by a diverse group of organizations, from child care advocates to physicians organizations, early childhood development experts, business groups and economists. Two and a half years ago, TD Bank's chief economist argued child care should be a top spending priority for governments after deficits are eliminated.

Guess what? B.C. returned to surplus in 2013–14. And during the most recent provincial budget consultation, a bipartisan committee of 15 MLAs unanimously recommended that B.C. "provide funding and support for the development and implementation of a child care plan" (see recommendation 40 in the report). Unfortunately, the idea was ignored in the final 2015 budget.

Child care experts in B.C. have developed a plan that would transform the existing patchwork of programs into a universal, high quality, affordable child care system that integrates early learning and care. It would reduce fees to $10 a day, create enough spaces for all families who want them, and increase the quality of care. This $10-a-day child care plan has gathered support across the province, from businesses, local governments and academics.

When B.C.'s political leaders are asked about $10-a-day child care, they wring their hands and tell us we simply can't afford it. How could this be true when B.C. is one of the richest provinces in one of the world's richest countries, and when we have been running budget surpluses for over two years?

In a recently published CCPA study, I show that the $10-a-day child care plan is entirely affordable either as a federal-provincial partnership or as a B.C.-only program like the one in place in Quebec since the 1990s. Drawing on research from the Quebec experience, I find that in B.C. $10-a-day child care would be largely self-financing through the considerable boost to provincial and federal government revenues that putting more women into the workforce would deliver.

I propose small, affordable increases in personal and business taxes to raise the additional revenues B.C. would need to provide quality early education and child care for all children in B.C. For the vast majority of people, these changes would mean paying between $20 and $80 more per year in taxes. This is a bargain for what we'd get with universal, quality child care: healthy child development, improved social inclusion, more gender and income equality and economic prosperity.

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SCOTT SINCLAIR AND STUART TREW

TPP SHAKEDOWN IN MAUI

A shakedown is defined as extortion by means of force, threats or intimidation. That's a pretty accurate description of what's happening to Canadian negotiators at the hands of their U.S. counterparts in these possibly final weeks of controversial Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) talks.

Predictably, the Canadian big business community is urging the federal government to do whatever it takes—including cutting the throats of dairy and poultry farmers who work hard for an honest living—to make the TPP happen. Beyond public sympathy for the plight of those farmers, most Canadians have almost no idea what's going on.

We should be honest about what the TPP is and isn't, what it promises and what it can deliver.

For the Obama administration, the TPP is about power and influence in Asia as a counterweight to China's growth. They want U.S. corporations to dominate supply chains in the region, and so the TPP is about creating binding rules—on regulatory policy, drug patents and copyright, how state-owned enterprises can and cannot operate, etc.—that will make that scenario more likely.

While Canada is peripheral to these geopolitical goals, distinctive Canadian policies that impede U.S. interests (e.g., supply management, domestic copyright and privacy laws, etc.) must go.

Canada has its own interests in the region, but they do not depend on the TPP. For example, Canada already does a lot of trade with the Pacific Rim, and will continue to do so whether there's a TPP or not (or whether our country is inside the TPP or not).

Trade liberalization under the TPP would hurt some Canadian industries including autos and electronics and help others like beef and pork. But with the notable exception of the supply-managed sectors (dairy, poultry, eggs), the impacts on exports and growth will likely be pretty small. Even pro-TPP studies, which make sketchy assumptions to boost their results, predict only a tiny change in GDP for Canada.

That's because, with a few exceptions, tariffs are already so low. Canadian import tariffs average just 3%. TPP member countries with which Canada does not already have a free trade agreement make up only 3% of total exports and 5% of imports. Outside of NAFTA—Mexico is also part of the TPP—the bulk of this trade is with Japan, where trade-weighted tariffs average just 2%.

What's more, Canada has a trade deficit with these non-FTA countries of $5–8 billion annually; 80% of Canada's top exports to these countries are raw or semi-processed goods, while 85% of imports are of higher value-added goods. We can therefore expect tariff removal through the TPP to worsen the erosion of the Canadian manufacturing sector underway since NAFTA. Canada will also find it harder, under the TPP, to implement policies to add value to natural resources prior to export, as evident from Japan's pressure on B.C. to eliminate its controls on raw log exports.

But the far greater part of the TPP's 30-odd chapters has little to do with tariffs or international trade as most would understand it. Because of unusually tight secrecy, the text of the agreement is still hidden from public view and might not surface before the election. But what we know from sparse leaks is already cause for concern.

For example, leading North American oncologists recently called out pharmaceutical companies on the prohibitive cost of cancer drugs, which routinely exceed US$100,000 a year. Connecting the dots, one of the chief underlying reasons brand name drug companies can charge such exorbitant prices is that international trade agreements already require long periods of monopoly protection. The TPP's intellectual property rights chapter would further interfere with cost-saving reforms, delaying the availability of cheaper generic medicines and boosting drug costs.

The TPP deal may penalize Canada for its highly praised "notice-and-notice" system governing copyright infringement. These regulations, in ef-

Anti-TPP protesters outside the July negotiating round in Hawaii
Photo by SumOfUs

fect since the first of the year, strike a balance between curbing online piracy and the rights of Internet users, who in the U.S. face tougher penalties for non-commercial infringement of copyright.

The U.S. is also insisting on rules to prohibit countries from requiring that personal information be safeguarded on national databases. Privacy regulations in B.C. and Nova Scotia have been targeted by U.S. negotiators. As Edward Snowden's revelations about NSA spying make clear, there are good reasons why Canadian governments might require tax, health care or financial data to be stored locally.

In some areas Canada didn't need shaking down. For example, the federal government has joined with the U.S. to press TPP countries for strict controls on state-owned enterprises, so that they act according to "free market principles" (i.e., are profit-oriented) only. If not for another TPP leak from Wikileaks during the Maui negotiating round this summer, no one would have been publicly discussing what impacts these restrictions might have on Canadian Crown corporations such as the CBC or Canada Post.

> Canada has its own interests in the region, but they do not depend on the TPP.

Leaked text also confirms the TPP includes an investor–state dispute settlement (ISDS) mechanism modelled on NAFTA chapter 11. As *Monitor* readers will know, Canada is already the most-sued developed country in the world under this quasi-judicial system of corporate rights. Extending the ISDS regime to the TPP region, we can look forward to more surprises like the recent Bilcon case, where a U.S. company successfully challenged an environmental assessment that ruled against a massive quarry and marine terminal on the Bay of Fundy, or the ongoing challenge to the ban on oil and gas fracking in Quebec.

Pro-TPP business groups, many of them with exclusive access to the TPP texts and a direct line to Canadian negotiators, know these issues will be contentious in Canada, so they are happy to beat around the supply management bush. It makes it appear the only thing in the way of an allegedly fantastic trade deal is a handful of self-interested dairy and chicken farmers.

This line arguably helps the federal government, which would normally be reluctant to bring an unsavoury deal to the electorate on the eve of a federal election. That's because it lets the government avoid an awkward question: If Canada does not need the TPP to prosper, why would Canada allow itself to be shaken down so badly just so President Obama can have his "pivot to Asia?"

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HUGH MACKENZIE

FRASER INSTITUTE MISSES THE MARK ON RETIREMENT SECURITY

The best measure of the political saliency of expanding public pensions might be the progression of conservative think-tank studies purporting to show that there is no need for an expanded Canada Pension Plan (CPP) or for the new Ontario Retirement Pension Plan.In the past few months, we have heard:

- CPP expansion is a bad idea because the required contributions would result in a near-equivalent reduction in other retirement saving (Fraser Institute, July 2015).
- We should stop worrying about retirement income because the average senior in Canada is able to maintain a reasonable standard of living in retirement (Malcolm Hamilton, C.D. Howe Institute, May 2015)
- Only about 17% of Canadians are financially unprepared for retirement (McKinsey, February 2015).

These studies suffer from significant methodological weaknesses and inconsistencies, and massively oversell their results.

Michael Wolfson clearly analyzed the limitations of the McKinsey and Hamilton studies in a CCPA-Ontario report earlier this month (*What, Me Worry? Income Risks for Retiring Canadians*, available at www.policyalternatives.ca).

The Fraser Institute study's main conclusion—that CPP premium increases largely replace private retirement savings—is fundamentally irrelevant to the pension debate, even if it is true. It is irrelevant because the pension debate is about retirement income adequacy, not contribution rates.

However, the Fraser Institute study doesn't even establish that past CPP premium increases have replaced private savings. It relies on a statistical model of retirement savings whose results fall far short of any reasonable standard of statistical significance. The authors themselves warn readers that their results, "must be interpreted cautiously. CPP changes between 1996 and 2004 did not occur in a vacuum; they coincided with many factors that may have affected the savings behaviour of households in unpredictable ways."

That may be the only understatement in the paper. The best result from their primary model of retirement savings explains only 25.9% of the variation in savings rates; depending on the age group, the statistical power of their study ranges from 21% to 25.9% of the savings variation. Their alternative model's explanatory power peaks at 5.3% for the youngest age group, and is even lower for other age groups.

As noted above, the most troubling aspect of the Fraser Institute study is its explicit assumption that savings in the form of CPP contributions are equivalent to private RRSP savings. In making that critical assumption, the Fraser study inadvertently highlights the fundamental reason why CPP expansion is a better deal for Canadians.

RRSP contributions are not equivalent to retirement savings through contributions to a universal, defined benefit pension plan like the CPP. CPP contributions are significantly more effective in generating retirement income than RRSP contributions.

The CPP advantage is attributable to four key factors: investment returns, fees, longevity risk, and inflation protection.

Investment returns

A large fund like the CPP is able to take advantage of investment opportunities simply not available to individuals investing privately through mutual funds. A study in the United States comparing the investment returns of large defined contribution funds (401(k) plans) with those of Individual Retirement Accounts (the American equivalent to RRSPs) have found that large fund returns exceed those of IRAs by 1.8% annually. That might not sound like a big difference. But over a working lifetime the same savings rate results in over 47% larger investments in the large funds than in individual funds.

Fees

The corrosive effect of investment management fees on retirement savings was recently highlighted as an issue by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. The significantly higher mutual fund fees paid by Canadians make their impact on retirement savings an even bigger issue in this country. In a 2014 CCPA report, I estimated that 36% of a Canadian's savings over their working lifetime would be soaked up by mutual fund managers' fees.

The inefficiency disadvantage for the RRSP option versus a pension is staggering.

Longevity risk

A pension plan is better positioned to manage longevity risk—the risk that you will outlive your retirement savings—in two respects. The most obvious advantage is that it is far more expensive for an individual to guarantee a retirement income than it is for a pension plan. It is far more cost effective to pool longevity risk over a large population than to protect against that risk as an individual. In my 2014 CCPA report, I estimated that even to reduce the probability of running out of retirement savings to 25% would require 18% more retirement savings.

The other longevity risk management advantage for pension plans is more subtle, but equally significant. In general, prudent investment management requires that the closer you are to retirement the more conservative your investment portfolio should be. As they age, investors trade higher returns for greater certainty. Because a pension plan pools the retirement savings of people at all different life stages, pension plans age on average very slowly, if at all. As a consequence, pension plans can take advantage of the benefits of investment risk pooling to seek higher investment returns.

A recent analysis by the Canadian pension performance measurement organization CEM found that large defined benefit plans earned 1.5% annually more than large defined contribution plans, and that most of that difference (about 1.3%) was attributable to differences in asset mix, or investment portfolio risk.

Inflation protection

In addition to these advantages, in the current Canadian annuity market it is not possible to replicate through individual savings the inflation protection provided through the Canada Pension Plan. Indexed annuities are simply too expensive. These key advantages for the CPP, and by extension the ORPP, relative to individual retirement savings are additive: each contributes separately and independently to a massive efficiency advantage for the CPP/ORPP.

In my 2014 report, I compared the cost of a given level of retirement income through a defined benefit pension plan with the cost of providing the same income through RRSPs. The cost advantage for the pension plan is dramatic. The percentage of pay required as a contribution to fund the RRSP option would be between 2.4 times and 2.5 times the percentage of pay required to fund the pension option.

This is a conservative estimate of the advantage, given that the comparison was biased in favour of the RRSP option. The RRSP option took no account of the inflation protection cost advantage for the pension option and was based on a 25% probability of outliving retirement savings, not the 0% probability provided through the pension option.

The inefficiency disadvantage for the RRSP option is staggering and begs for an explanation as to why we are having this debate at all. The answer clearly lies in a conservative ideological opposition to public policy responses when a private alternative is available.

As a look behind the Fraser Institute study's casual assumption that private savings and CPP contributions are equivalent in generating retirement income demonstrates, ideological preference comes at an extremely high cost to individual retirement savers and to Ontarians and Canadians generally.

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SIMON ENOCH

SASKATCHEWAN'S CLIMATE CHANGE CRUCIBLE

Saskatchewan's summer has been a snapshot of our climate future.

Massive wildfires exploded across the north of the province, forcing the evacuation of over 13,000 people—dubbed by some as Saskatchewan's first "climate change refugees." Smoke from the fires was so intense it caused air quality warnings in Saskatoon and Regina, choking residents with smoke as far south as Minnesota.

The fires were stoked by intense heat and drought across the Prairies. In Saskatchewan, the persistent drought has seen river levels drop to dangerous lows, while the province is set to record its worst harvest in years. Hydrologists warn this might become routine, as run-off from the snow-pack in the Rockies diminishes to a trickle due to the effects of global climate change.

> With per capita emissions three times the Canadian average, we urgently need to take responsibility for our contribution to climate change.

Despite the ferocity of these events, Saskatchewan's premier has avoided connecting the fires with climate change, insisting they are discrete one-offs rather than the start of a "new normal." Perhaps this isn't surprising, given the premier's long record of downplaying Canada's contribution to climate change, his steadfast opposition to hard greenhouse gas emission targets and his unrepentant boosterism for oil, gas and coal.

With Saskatchewan's annual per capita greenhouse gas emissions well over three times the Canadian average, and almost 10 times higher than the world average, it is urgent that we begin to take responsibility for our own contribution to climate change. In order to do this, we will need strong leadership at the federal level.

Saskatchewan is highly dependent on coal for electricity: half of the province's generation comes from coal-fired plants, which make up the bulk of the electricity sector's GHG emissions. Rather than transition away from coal and try to match renewable energy leaders like Iowa and South Dakota, which currently generate 28.5% and 25.3% of their power from wind respectively, Saskatchewan has hitched its wagon to the promise of "clean coal."

The provincial and federal governments have sunk close to $1.5 billion into SaskPower's carbon capture and storage (CCS) project, which will take the carbon from one coal-fired plant and sell it to assist in the extraction of unconventional oil deposits. As Mark Bigland-Pritchard and Brian Banks outline in their study of the project, the one million tonnes of CO2 captured amounts to only about 7% of all GHGs created by SaskPower's coal-fired generation, and less than 2% of the province's total emissions.

Moreover, for each tonne of carbon dioxide used to recover oil, about 2.7 tonnes are eventually emitted from combustion of the extra oil recovered. As a climate change strategy, CCS is a bust.

Saskatchewan is actually well positioned to take advantage of the transition to renewable energy technologies. With the best solar profile in the country, and some of the highest on-shore wind speeds, the province could be a renewable energy leader. What we need is a federal government that can put in place the right framework and incentives to make pursuing such a strategy politically and economically viable.

Ending subsidies to fossil fuels, a national price on carbon, improvements to the national electrical grid to facilitate hydro-sharing, and a federal cost-sharing program for green energy are just some of the policies that could help move fossil-fuel dependent provinces like Saskatchewan into the green energy future.

Sustainable Canada Dialogues, a group of over 60 scientists, engineers and economists, estimates that Canada has the potential to shift entirely to renewable sources of electricity by 2035 and eliminate 80% of its greenhouse gas emissions by mid-century if we put the right federal policies in place. The group concludes the most significant barrier to achieving this shift is not technical or economic, but the absence of federal leadership and lack of political will.

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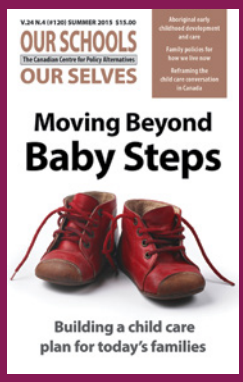

Our Schools/ Our Selves

Summer issue available now in the CCPA bookstore

ILLUSTRATION BY JESSICA FORTNER

Navigating the 2015 Election

The *Monitor* looks beyond parties and policy to assess the state of Canada's democracy on the eve of the vote.

Election special

Dylan Penner

Why vote?

"IF VOTING CHANGED anything, they'd make it illegal."

This sentiment, ascribed to Emma Goldman, captures the essence of why many people do not vote. For those who agree with it, consider the very real efforts governments take to suppress the vote, even in Canada. Clearly someone thinks elections matter enough to keep the wrong people from the polls. It therefore seems reasonable that increasing voter turnout should affect both the outcome of elections and the political possibilities afterward.

In the last election, 6,201 votes across 14 ridings meant the difference between a majority and minority government for Harper's Conservatives. In 2011, over 9.4 million eligible Canadian voters did not cast a ballot, including two out of three young people.

There are two main deterrents to voting: a lack of motivation and access barriers.

In the first case, it's not about apathy, but about issues. Many don't see elections as relevant to their daily lives. Younger voters especially tune out when they don't see the issues that matter to them reflected in the political discussion. These motivational barriers to voting can be summed up by the view that the political parties are "all the same"—an understandable reaction to a narrowing of the political spectrum on several issues.

The second deterrent related to access is more straightforward. Voter turnout has been in decline for decades, but the current government has contributed directly by taking voter suppression to a whole other level.

In 2011, an orchestrated "robocall" campaign across hundreds of ridings attempted to mislead people about the location of their polling stations in order to prevent them from voting. The people who received the calls were more likely to vote for parties other than the Conservatives, and the source of the information used for these calls was the Conservative Party database. Rather than assist authorities in finding the ringleaders of this election fraud, the Conservative Party has refused to disclose who had access to the database, leaving the perpetrators still at large.

The 2011 election fraud was then used as a pretext to introduce the so-called Fair Elections Act, which makes it more difficult to vote and to prosecute potential electoral misdeeds. The Council of Canadians, Canadian Federation of Students and several voters continue to challenge the electoral reforms in court. Unfortunately, our request for an injunction—which would permit voters to use the Elections Canada–issued Voter Information Card as proof of ID in October—was denied. The full Charter challenge to the Fair Elections Act will be heard after the election.

So how do you counteract low motivation and active voter suppression? Several groups, the Council of Canadians, labour unions and environmental organizations included, have put extra energy and resources into door-to-door campaigns on the importance of voting. Our goal is to get tens of thousands more voters to the polls this year than in 2011.

Anti-poverty organizations are rallying people on low incomes to vote for change. Anti-austerity campaigns are gaining steam, particularly the effort to save at-home mail delivery, which is turning the issue into a ballot box question in multiple ridings. Health care advocates are knocking on doors to let people know how medicare is endangered by the end of the Health Accord. Veterans groups are out in numbers, too.

Indigenous-led groups are likewise encouraging people to vote this year, holding voter ID clinics and voter registration drives (see the article by Lisa Forbes in this issue). The Canadian Muslim Vote, a relatively new group, has been doing significant organizing, all the more important given two-thirds of Muslim Canadians didn't vote in the 2011 election. Black Votes Matter, drawing inspiration from the Black Lives Matter movement, aims to mobilize African-Canadians as an expression of community power.

The Council of Canadians is canvassing in a number of ridings, encouraging people to take a Voters' Pledge—a promise to not only vote, but to bring at least two other first-time voters with you to the polling station.

This is only a fraction of all the election activity happening, but like a Venn diagram, the priorities of each of these campaigns converge on getting more people to vote.

Regardless of the outcome, community organizing and increasing voter turnout are fundamentally a step toward a more direct form of democracy, a more participatory politics that continues to influence policy outside of elections. The ultimate goal is a stronger movement, with deeper grassroots, clearer common goals and more capacity to challenge and change the status quo. M

Election special

Fiona Jeffries

After October 19

Being present for the election will take work, sticking around afterwards is more important

IN SO MANY ways, this election feels incomparably urgent. For at least a year, our news media, public debates, political strategizing meetings and private conversations have been saturated with stories of the destruction this government has reaped. Many of us are going to expend ourselves this month with the hope of producing change in Ottawa on October 19.

We will be thinking of this government's cruel refusal to seriously investigate the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada, or its disastrous embrace of an economic model that favours polluting extractive industries, its scandalous suppression of scientific knowledge, and a dogmatically free trade–focused and warrior-oriented foreign policy, to name just a few examples.

Manifestly terrible policies have created a surplus of grief, fear and despair that will be especially strong among refugees and recent migrants (who find it more difficult to bring their loved ones to Canada); environmental, Indigenous and free speech activists slandered and threatened with persecution; and besieged workers fighting for just wages and equal rights.

With so many grievances, it is easy to be swept up by calls to mobilize the vote in order to elect a new government. At the same time, we should not lose sight of the broader setting for this election. The reality of protracted and deepening (global) crisis forces us to reconsider the prevailing idea that elections remain the horizon of politics, but it is not the only reason to do so.

As political philosopher George Caffentzis explains, electing a representative is not a politics of *presence* but of *absence*. By that he simply means representative democracy is contingent upon our being absent from the arena of formal politics and the life-affecting debates and decisions that take place therein.

"Now for many of us busy, overworked folk this appears to be a good deal. After all, sitting through long debates and getting trained to go over government accounts is time-consuming and tedious," Caffentzis wrote, in 2012, of the U.S. Occupy Movement. "But in periods of crisis when you no longer trust who is presenting you again in your absence and when you no longer trust the whole apparatus of representation, the need to make your presence felt physically returns, i.e., to go back to basics and originally present yourself as a body in motion at a historic juncture ready to swerve the relations of power in your favour."

Enormous political capacities and energies were mobilized to achieve Barack Obama's extraordinary electoral victory. The public elation was palpable, powerful, but fleeting as a financial crisis escalated. The ensuing rightward drift of the Obama administration was possible because of the timid response of an American left that was depleted from its epic effort to elect a president.

In Greece, we can point to last year's equally astonishing electoral victory of Syriza, a left-wing coalition that campaigned on a popular anti-austerity platform. Faced immediately with the difficult task of renegotiating the terms of Europe's austerity program on behalf of the Greek people, the new government found itself impaled by the elected and unelected representatives of global finance.

Irish journalist Collette Brown summed up Syriza's conundrum in a tweet: "Troika message to Greece: you can elect whatever government you want as long as they implement our policies." Greece now faces the devastating situation of a government elected on an anti-austerity platform being tasked with implementing an even more severe austerity program than the one forced on past regimes by European creditors. (Ed. note: Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras resigned as Prime Minister in late August and called new elections for September.)

And herein lies the recurrent danger, an established pattern in the history of electoral politics. Disappointed and demoralized, people need time to replenish their political energies. Once they have, they are asked to throw those energies behind another party that promises to be *present* so that they—the voter—can be *absent* from the decision-making process.

The lesson here is that electing another party is not irrelevant, but neither is it much more than the tip of the political iceberg. Beyond mobilizing people to get to the polls there should be a long-term strategy of assembly that *moves us* closer to reclaiming the political realm more broadly. In so doing, we can begin to develop the capacity and energy for broader systemic change, not just electoral change.

In a world in which we have developed the capacity to *present* ourselves, rather than being *represented* in our absence, the question of what party happens to be in power would matter much less than it does today. Because no matter who forms government after October 19, what it does with that power *in* Parliament should depend, to a much larger extent than it does now, on what we do *outside* of it. M

THE PAST YEAR has seen the release of a number of books, reports, websites and social media campaigns all promising, in their own ways, to provide the definitive history — or critique — of the Harper government in majority since 2011. As all elections are in large part a test of the government's record, the *Monitor* editorial board thought it would be useful to present a sampling of key issues as expressed in various stocktaking exercises. We could never hope to capture everything, so we chose the following excerpts and commentaries for their variety, and for links to issues of social, economic and environmental justice.

As with all articles in the Monitor, the opinions expressed in these excerpts do not necessarily reflect those of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

SOUND ECONOMIC MANAGERS?

IT IS COMMONLY asserted this federal government has strong "economic credentials," and Conservative candidates will likely emphasize economic issues in their quest for election or re-election this fall. There is a growing gap, however, between these claims of good economic management and the statistical reality. In fact, the Canadian economy has been performing disappointingly (to say the least) for several years now and, by the time we head to the polls, may officially be in recession.

To try to understand just how off-kilter this government's claims are of sound economic performance, Unifor economists conducted a detailed empirical examination of the economic record under the watch of each prime minister in Canada's postwar history (1946 to the present). We base the comparisons on 16 conventional and commonly used indicators of economic progress and well-being, all available from Statistics Canada and other public sources, which fall generally into three categories:

- **Work:** Job creation, the employment and unemployment rates, labour force participation, youth employment, and job quality.
- **Production:** Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth (absolute and per capita), business investment, exports, and productivity growth.
- **Distribution and debt:** Real personal incomes, inequality, federal public services, personal debt, and government debt.

As you can see from the table, based on these 16 core indicators, this government has clearly presided over the weakest era in Canada's postwar economic history. The government's failure to put Canadians to work (the first priority of economic policy), its consistent emphasis on business-friendly policies like tax cuts, free trade deals and government downsizing (instead of concretely fostering real investment, exports, and growth), and the needless austerity policies adopted after 2011 have all contributed to this economic failure.

EXCERPTED FROM THE REPORT **RHETORIC AND REALITY: EVALUATING CANADA'S ECONOMIC RECORD UNDER THE HARPER GOVERNMENT**, RELEASED BY UNIFOR IN JULY 2015.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE IN THE HARPER DECADE

IT'S POSSIBLE 2015 will be a landmark year if a new binding global treaty on climate is signed in Paris this December. In contrast, federal policy over the past decade has stalled meaningful climate action. Prime Minister Harper's record is not just one of neglect, but of moving the yardsticks backwards in both the international arena and domestically.

In its minority days, the Harper government felt obliged to at least pay lip service to climate change. In 2007, John Baird, then environment minister, released *Turning the Corner: An Action Plan to Reduce Greenhouse Gases and Air Pollution*, which promised "tough industrial regulations."

No such regulations have yet to appear for oil and gas, the source of one-quarter of Canada's industrial and commercial greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. At best, one can point to the transportation sector, where the Harper government has adopted the Obama administration's higher fuel efficiency standards for vehicles. Measures to address pollution from coal-fired electricity generation, on the other hand, carve out existing plants from any action until 2030.

WHERE DOES THE HARPER GOVERNMENT RANK IN POSTWAR ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE?

Job Creation | Average annual growth in employment | **1.0%**	9
Employment Rate | Change in employment as share of working age population | **-1.4 points**	8
Unemployment Rate | Official unemployment as share of labour force **7.1%**	4
Labour Force Participation | Change in labour force participation as share of working age population | **-1.0 points**	9
Youth Employment | Average annual growth in under-25 employment | **-0.3%**	8
Job Quality | Average score, CIBC Employment Quality Index (1988=100) **87.2**	9
GDP Growth | Average annual growth in GDP adjusted for inflation | **1.6%**	9
Real Per Capita GDP Growth | Average annual growth in real GDP per capita **0.4%**	9
Business Investment | Average annual growth in real business non-residential investment | **2.5%**	8
Exports | Average annual growth in real exports of goods & services | **0.3%**	9
Labour Productivity | Average annual growth in real GDP per hour of labour **0.9%**	8
Personal Incomes | Average annual growth in real personal income per capita **0.9%**	8 TIE
Inequality | Average share of top 1% in personal income | **12.7%**	8
"Social Wage" | Average annual growth in real federal non-military program spending per capita | **0.6%**	6
Household Debt | Change in personal debt as share of GDP | **+20 percentage points**	9 TIE
Government Debt | Change in federal net debt as share of GDP **+0.9 percentage points**	7

If anything, climate policies have provided the prime minister a wellspring of rhetorical attacks. During the 2008 election campaign, Harper took aim at Liberal leader Stephan Dion's proposal for a carbon tax, calling it a "tax on everything" that would "screw everybody across the country." With new attention on climate change in 2015, the prime minister recently returned to script, calling carbon pricing a "tax grab," thus framing the preferred climate action instrument of many in small-government, anti-tax terms.

Within months of achieving a majority government, Prime Minister Harper pulled Canada out of the Kyoto Accord, a move that undermined the first global treaty aimed at constraining carbon emissions. More recently, in the lead-up to the Paris climate conference, Canada could not be bothered to meet a deadline for submitting GHG reduction targets.

One of the Harper government's top foreign policy goals has been to seek approval of the Keystone XL pipeline through the United States. Amid popular resistance and delays from the Obama administration, the Harper government battled for new pipelines to the B.C. coast to supply the Chinese market. Former natural resources minister Joe Oliver defined this as "an urgent matter of Canada's national interest" in an open letter that smeared concerned citizens as radicals in the service of U.S. interests.

If anything, Oliver's letter in early 2012 appears to have backfired, triggering widespread opposition in B.C. to pipelines and tankers, most notably Enbridge's Northern Gateway project. The Harper government's response has been to up the ante, approving the project, while using Canada Revenue Agency audits to intimidate critics in the environmental movement and beyond (the CCPA was also singled out for audit).

Contrary views were silenced. National Energy Board reviews of fossil fuel mega-projects no longer welcome public input, and in any event are not subject to scrutiny with regard to their climate impact. The National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy, which had a habit of pointing out the credibility gap between government rhetoric and action, was shut down.

The government's record is thus one of relentlessly tearing down barriers to new fossil fuel development. This is perhaps best characterized by the 2012 omnibus budget bill, which, among other things, dismantled environmental regulations that might affect oil sands growth and accelerated the approval process for new pipeline and tanker projects.

In the courts, the Harper government has fought tooth and nail against legal challenges brought by First Nations affected by oil sands development. However, fierce opposition from First Nations may be the undoing of Harper's oil sands ambitions, as their rights are constitutional in nature and cannot be overrun by fiat.

More potent than oil sands and pipeline protests, the collapse of oil prices starting in July 2014 dealt a critical blow to Harper's economic plan. Saudi Arabia's decision to no longer constrain production, and thus let world oil prices fall, has exposed Canada's weakness as a high-cost producer.

Another looming shift will come from action on climate change, with an estimated four-fifths of Canada's proven oil reserves needing to stay underground. The fossil fuel divestment movement is having an impact, making fossil fuels into the new tobacco, and challenging a business model incompatible with a habitable planet.

Energy and climate have been central to the story of the Harper decade. In the end, history may decide this government's central strategy of making Canada an "energy superpower" was a failure.

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ANTI-TERRORISM OR ANTI-DEMOCRATIC?

WHEN BILL C-51, the Anti-Terrorism Act 2015, was tabled in Parliament this spring, Canada's leading human rights organizations called for the bill to be withdrawn. The International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, Amnesty International, the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Canadian Muslim Lawyers Association, La Ligue des Droits et Libertés, and the National Council of Canadian Muslims have stated from the outset that the serious human rights shortcomings in Bill C-51 are so numerous and inseparably interrelated that the bill should be withdrawn in its entirety.

We believe that any national security law reform should instead, first, be convincingly demonstrated to be necessary and should then proceed only in a manner that is wholly consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the country's international human rights obligations.

We believe that the government never made the case for Bill C-51 beyond the simple assertion that it "needs" additional powers to protect public safety. But it has provided no explanation as to why Canada's spy agency (CSIS) needs unprecedented and troubling disruption powers. It has not made a credible case for the vast, opaque and unaccountable all-of-government information sharing regime that Bill C-51 creates. And it has provided no evidence for how "no-fly" lists with appeal provisions that lack due process actually improve aviation security and public safety.

Throughout the parliamentary hearings on Bill C-51, not a single witness offered a concrete example of how the draconian measures therein would bet-

ter protect public safety. Legal experts have also pointed out that some provisions in Bill C-51 actually undermine anti-terrorism activities. For example, the new criminal offence of advocating or promoting the commission of terrorism offences "in general" may frustrate detection of potential threats when speech gets driven underground; it could also chill community efforts to de-radicalize extremist views. Yet these serious concerns have not been addressed in any way.

While Canada's national security agencies are granted ever-increasing powers and scope, no effort has been made to provide for a system of robust and independent accountability, despite urgent calls for reform. For instance, Canada stands stunningly alone among our closest allies in intelligence sharing in failing to ensure parliamentary oversight of national security. Bill C- 51 has only compounded the accountability problems that already exist by making it harder for individuals to hold government officials to account for rights violations.

FROM A JOINT STATEMENT ISSUED JUNE 29, 2015 BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES ORGANIZATIONS LISTED IN THE FIRST PARAGRAPH.

WHERE IS FEDERAL LEADERSHIP ON POVERTY?

FOLLOWING THE 2008 recession, it was clear to everyone that addressing the state of the Canadian economy was a matter of importance. When the Conservatives gained a majority in 2011, there was nothing to prevent them from developing and implementing a plan to end poverty in Canada as part of the government's foundational Economic Action Plan.

There had been some important groundwork done by parliamentarians up to the 2011 election. In 2009, a subcommittee of the Senate committee on social affairs, science, and technology released a report, *In from the Margins: A Call to Action on Poverty, Housing and Homelessness*, that extensively documented the state of poverty in Canada and provided 72 recommendations for how the government might work to eliminate it.

On November 17, 2009, the House of Commons adopted a motion resolving to develop an immediate plan to end poverty in Canada. This marked the 20th anniversary of the 1989 unanimous resolution of the House to end child poverty in Canada. Then, in 2010, another House of Commons committee produced a *Federal Poverty Reduction Plan: Working in Partnership Towards Reducing Poverty in Canada*, based on an extensive consultation process involving department officials, social policy experts and people with the experience of living in poverty.

This momentum was halted by the 2012 federal budget. In a move that surprised and disappointed anti-poverty advocates across Canada, the government cut all funding to the National Council of Welfare. It was the only federal agency with a mandate to address issues facing low-income Canadians.

For 43 years, the National Council of Welfare had been producing research and policy recommendations on poverty in Canada, including annual reports on social assistance and the social impacts of poverty. Although the federal government had not previously acted directly on the recommendations of the council, its work was widely used, and it played an important advisory role at the federal level. The closing of the council was a discouraging signal to those waiting for real federal action on poverty eradication.

By 2012, the majority of the provinces and territories had developed or were developing poverty reduction plans (British Columbia is the only province without one). While their ambition is welcomed, and the provinces are uniquely positioned to address complex socioeconomic issues specific to their jurisdictional responsibilities, the lack of federal leadership limits what Canada's subnational governments can achieve.

In a move that surprised and disappointed anti-poverty advocates, the government cut all funding to the National Council of Welfare in 2012.

And so, at the initiative of organizations working toward poverty eradication, and in an effort to keep the need for a federal plan on the radar, the All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus (APC) was established in 2012. The APC was made up of MPs and Senators from all major parties, along with civil society organizations, community leaders, researchers and other stakeholders. Together, they continued the good work that has already been done on concrete solutions for poverty reduction—work the APC hopes to continue following the fall election.

Providing even further guidance, in 2015, the Dignity for All campaign—launched in 2009 by Canada Without Poverty and Citizens for Public Justice—developed its own model for a federal poverty eradication plan. It was developed through extensive consultation with community and social policy organizations, and includes recommendations on six key areas: income security, housing and homelessness, health, food security, early childhood education and care, and jobs and employment. This framework for action was structured so that it could be immediately implemented by whoever forms the next government.

As a consequence of the failure of the current government to act on poverty, 4.8 million Canadians struggle on. Aboriginal peoples, female lone parent families, newcomers to Canada, and racialized Canadians continue to be most affected by poverty. The United Nations has repeatedly told Canada that, given the country's wealth,

the poverty rate is unacceptable and a national plan or strategy is required. We have the opportunity, heading into the next federal election, to make sure this happens.

DARLENE O'LEARY IS A SOCIOECONOMIC POLICY ANALYST WITH CITIZENS FOR PUBLIC JUSTICE, A MEMBER-DRIVEN, FAITH-BASED PUBLIC POLICY ORGANIZATION IN OTTAWA.

DECISION-BASED FACT-MAKING

JIM WOODGETT, DIRECTOR of research at Mount Sinai's Lunenfeld-Tanenbaum Research Institute in Toronto, recently tweeted, "Canada invests <2% of GDP in science. If only there was an election in the offing."

For the science community in Canada, the Stephen Harper years have been pretty dismal, marked by a long litany of cuts, fossil fuel industry–driven regulatory changes, the muzzling of government scientists and sidelining of environmental concerns, climate change inaction, information restriction and control, demonization and intimidation of environmental groups, and just plain anti-science nastiness.

Of course, with the Conservatives standing a decent chance of forming a government again, it's hard to know how important the issues related to science and evidence are compared to, say, security or the economy. Civil society groups such as Evidence for Democracy and Our Right to Know, as well as the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, have worked hard to make sure the cuts to science—and harm to scientific integrity in this country—are top of mind on October 19.

All these different and complementary science advocacy campaigns need good information—about how evidence-based decision-making is a good thing, but also precisely how the government waged its nine-year war on science. And that's where I come in.

In the spring of 2013, I started to notice the constant stream of media reports about cuts to science funding, the muzzling of departmental scientists and other anti-science policies coming out of Ottawa. I'd been watching this stuff since the Conservatives were first elected in 2006, but something seemed different. Could it be the policies implemented in the notorious 2012 omnibus budget bill were starting to show real world impacts? I began paying even closer attention, keeping track of all the media reports I saw.

In May 2013, I published on my blog a first edition of what would eventually become a very long list of anti-science actions taken by this government as part of what I called The Canadian War on Science. The post went viral, with comments and emails pouring in suggesting items I'd missed. Within a few weeks, I'd updated the post with another 20 to 30 items in addition to the original 50 or so. I updated it again in October 2013 and October 2014, and plan to once more during the campaign. (The list currently contains about 300 items, by the way.)

It has been an amazing, enlightening and frightening project. I've learned an awful lot about what makes the Conservative government tick; the themes and trend lines—basically, the bending and breaking of scientific enterprise in Canada—are all too apparent.

The muzzling of scientists is one of the most famous and certainly best-documented trends over this period. One of my favourite illustrations is the case of Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) scientist Mark Bothwell and his work on rock snot.

In May 2014, Bothwell and U.S.-based collaborators published an article in a scientific journal about algae blooms. When Canadian journalists tried to interview him about his work, their request was bounced between 16 different government communications operatives, producing 110 pages' worth of emails, and taking so long the article had to be put out without a peep from the DFO scientist. They didn't know any of this at the time; it came out later that year in a media access to information request.

Why the fuss about rock snot? Algae blooms are connected to climate change, of course.

The twisting of the National Research Council's mandate from an organization that mixed basic and applied research to a "concierge for industry" model demonstrates another aspect of Conservative science policy—the desire to make everything serve "the

Government blocks media access to scientist whose research contributed to our understanding of algae blooms, seen here in Lake Erie in 2011.

economy." Canadian industry has always been weak in R&D investment; this was clearly a strategy to have the Canadian government pay for development work that Canadian companies should be (but aren't) doing themselves.

Finally, for our purposes—I could go on—there is the money that has been taken away from scientific and environmental infrastructure through budget cuts.

The Polar Environment Atmospheric Research Laboratory (PEARL) and Experimental Lakes Area (ELA) are internationally renowned research stations providing vital knowledge about environmental pollutants and the way climate change is affecting the North. When the government announced it was cutting its ties to PEARL, such a stink was raised that funding was at least partially restored. The ELA lost all federal money; it was saved only through a joint effort of the Ontario government and the International Institute for Sustainable Development.

As depressing as this litany of woe can be, I still have hope that my list, and the work of Evidence for Democracy and others, can play an important role in the upcoming election. Canadians can debate the record of the current government when it comes to the economy or national security. On evidence-based decision-making and scientific integrity, the record is clear: a titanic disaster.

JOHN DUPUIS IS A LIBRARIAN AT THE STEACIE SCIENCE & ENGINEERING LIBRARY AT YORK UNIVERSITY IN TORONTO AND RUNS THE BLOG CONFESSIONS OF A SCIENCE LIBRARIAN, WHICH YOU CAN READ AT SCIENCEBLOGS.COM/CONFESSIONS.

WELCOME TO CANADA, YOUR JAIL CELL AWAITS

THE HARPER GOVERNMENT jailed more than 87,317 migrants without charge between 2006 and 2014, and spent more than a quarter of a billion dollars over five years to detain migrants. Migrants are the only population within Canada who can be jailed simply on administrative grounds, without being charged with a specific criminal offense.

In 2014, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' Working Group on Arbitrary Detention strongly chastised the Canadian immigration detention system, writing that Canada "should refrain from detaining irregular migrants for an indefinite period of time and should ensure that detention is used as a measure of last resort, that a reasonable time limit for detention is set."

The University of Toronto's international human rights program released a legal study in 2015 finding that Canada's increasing detention of non-criminal foreigners in maximum security prisons amounts to arbitrary, cruel and inhumane treatment that violates international obligations.

Immigration detention is one of the fastest growing forms of incarceration in Canada. Over the past 10 years, the government has detained an annual average of 11,000 migrants, including up to 807 children detained each year. In some cases, young Canadian children such as Alpha Anawa have been born in Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) custody, spending their entire lives behind bars.

"Immigration detention is getting way out of hand. They are locking us up and forgetting about us," said Francis Davidson, a four-year detainee at the Central Correctional in Ontario who has been taking part, with other detainees, in regular hunger strikes. "I have seen four people held in detention with me pass away while in CBSA custody, there is no end to detention and I am worried the next one will be me."

There have been at least 12 documented deaths in immigration detention custody since 2000. They include Sheik Kudrath, Joseph Fernandes, Jan Szamko, Kevon O'Brien-Phillip, Shawn Dwight Cole, Prince Maxamillion Akamai, Joseph Dunn, Lucia Vega Jimenez, Abdurahman Ibrahim Hassan, and a number of unidentified detainees.

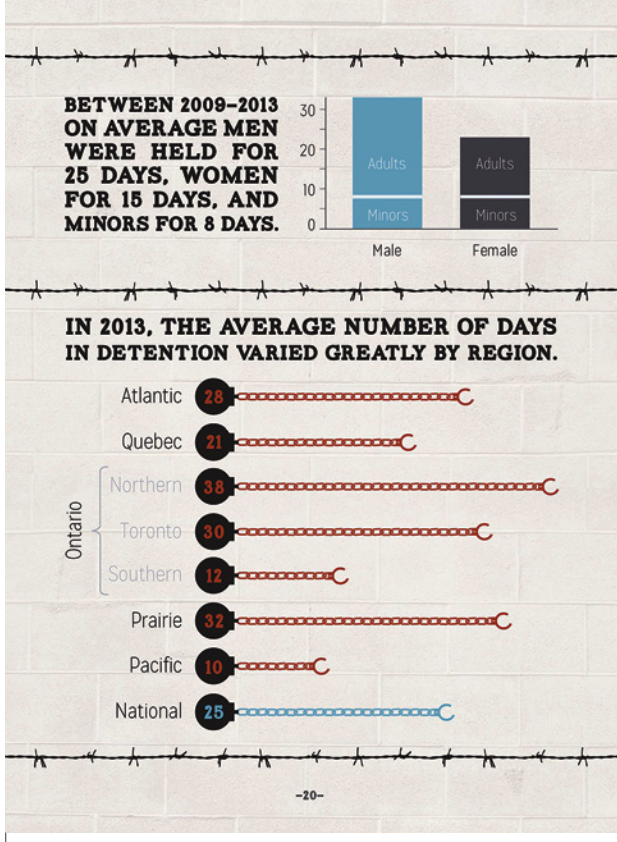

Chart taken from a 2014 report by the End Immigration Detention Network.

CBSA officers have broad powers to detain migrants if they believe, based on mere suspicion, the person is a flight risk, a danger to public safety, inadmissible on security grounds, or is not adequately identified. Contrary to popular perception, 94.2% of refugees are detained on grounds other than being an alleged security threat.

Canada is one of the only Western countries to have indefinite detention, often with limited access to family, legal counsel and third-party monitoring agencies. The U.S. and EU countries have a "presumptive period," meaning that if removal cannot happen within a certain number of days, detainees must be released. In the U.S., this period is 90 days. In Canada, some immigration detainees have been jailed for nearly 10 years without charges or trial, including South African anti-apartheid icon Mbuyisa Makhubu.

Canada is also becoming one of the few Western countries to practise mandatory detention. In 2009 and 2010, the federal government justified the months-long immediate detention of

over 500 Tamil asylum seekers aboard the MV Ocean Lady and MV Sun Sea, including women and children, by fear mongering and falsely claiming they were "terrorists," "illegals," and "irregular arrivals."

Due to the sweeping 2012 "Refugee Exclusion Act" (Bill C-31, officially known as Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act), many more refugees, including children, face mandatory incarceration upon arrival if designated as irregular arrivals. Five different groups of Romanian refugee claimants were designated as such by the federal government. The consequences of an irregular arrival designation, for each person over 15 years of age, include being forced into prison for two weeks to one year, and being forced to make a refugee claim from jail.

According to a recent report from the End Immigration Detention Network, fewer migrants are being released from detention each year, with a national release rate average of just 15%. In Ontario, less than 10% of migrants are released, compared with 27% in the West.

The decision to detain or release is made by Immigration and Refugee Board members—civil servants who are not required to be trained in the law. Board member release rates vary arbitrarily between 5% and 38%, and there is no comprehensive judicial oversight of these decisions. A recent *CTV News* report revealed that government lawyers were forcing detained Tamil refugees to pay back thousands of dollars in debt to smugglers in order to be released from jail.

Migrant detainees are held in one of three CBSA-run immigration holding centers in Toronto, Laval and Vancouver, or else in one of over 40 provincial prisons, including maximum security prisons. Over one-third of all migrant detainees are held in provincial prisons. Canada is one of the only Western countries to mix populations of migrants facing administrative offenses with people facing the criminal justice system, increasing the potential for in-custody tension and violence due to different lived experiences.

EXCERPTED FROM A REPORT BY **NO ONE IS ILLEGAL–VANCOUVER** ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S RECORD ON IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE POLICY,

SACKING THE WATCHDOGS

SINCE ITS ELECTION in 2006, the federal government has directed considerable energy toward undermining independent agencies with responsibility for overseeing its activities. Two main tactics have been used to impair the ability of watchdog agencies to properly police the conduct of the Canadian government: inadequate provision of funding, and direct interference with the activities of these agencies and their leadership. This has affected entire sectors of Canadian public life, including human rights, the environment, the economy, agriculture and nuclear power.

A particularly egregious example of the federal government's myriad efforts to obstruct an independent oversight agency is its approach to the investigation into Canadian Forces' treatment of Afghan detainees by the Military Police Complaints Commission (MPCC).

The MPCC was established in 1998 as an independent civilian oversight agency, responsible for examining complaints about military police conduct. The decision to commence the investigation was made by Peter Tinsley, then chair of the MPCC. The federal government consistently obstructed the investigation by withholding requested information and documents, and seeking to suppress evidence gathered in the course of the MPCC's hearings. It also challenged the jurisdiction of the MPCC, resulting in a ruling that restricted the scope of the MPCC's investigation.

Twenty-nine public servants subpoenaed to give evidence by the MPCC received letters from the Department of Justice that were described as intimidating and aimed at discouraging public servants from appearing as witnesses before the commission. Then, in December 2009, Prime Minister Harper prorogued Parliament in the midst of the investigation. This prorogation obstructed the work of a parliamentary committee, occurring just weeks after the government had been forced to hand over unredacted versions of documents relevant to the allegations.

After nearly two years of court challenges and a consistent lack of co-operation on the part of the federal government, public hearings commenced at the MPCC. Richard Colvin, formerly a senior Canadian diplomat in Afghanistan and a key witness before the commission, was publicly attacked by the federal government, which accused him of lying and basing his evidence on Taliban propaganda. In the midst of the commission's hearings, the federal government did not renew Peter Tinsley's appointment as MPCC's chair, raising fears that the decision was politically motivated.

Tinsley's treatment is not isolated. The heads of other oversight agencies who have taken positions contrary to the federal government have suffered serious professional and personal consequences. Some have been fired, prematurely removed from their post or openly criticized by the government. Many, contrary to the norm, have not been re-appointed for a second term.

Adrian Measner and **Deanna Allen,** respectively president and vice-president of communications at the Canadian Wheat Board, were sacked—Measner in 2006 and Allen in 2008—after publicly criticizing the government's plan to change Canada's "single desk marketing system" to a "dual marketing system" over the widespread objections of wheat farmers.

Linda Keen, president of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC), was fired in January 2008. Her firing occurred after she closed down the Chalk River nuclear reactor for not meeting safety standards. Some suspect Keen's

firing was related to her vocal support for more rigorous standards and better funding for the CNSC. Duane Bratt, a political science professor at Mount Royal College in Calgary, studied the controversy. He concluded that there was "strong evidence that the isotope crisis was the opportunity to fire Keen, not the cause."

Yves Côté, ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces, was advised in January 2008 that he would leave his position partway through his mandate. This announcement came after Côté had written several scathing reports and publicly criticized the government for its treatment of military families and veterans.

Paul Kennedy, head of the Commission for Public Complaints against the RCMP (CPC), was advised in November 2009 that his appointment would not be renewed. Kennedy had repeatedly called for more funding and more independence, and conducted a number of high profile investigations into RCMP practices. The CPC's funding was cut in 2009, considerably limiting the scope of its investigations.

Pat Stogran, then the veterans ombudsman, was told in August 2010 that he would not be reappointed for a second term. This came after Stogran advocated for better services and benefits for veterans, and decried Veterans Affairs Canada's "penny-pinching insurance company mentality."

Pierre Daigle, the subsequent veterans ombudsman, was publicly criticized by the federal government in 2012 for writing letters to the chief of military personnel on behalf of two veterans wrongfully dismissed from their employment with the Department of Defence. The government accused him of having overstepped his jurisdiction, and described his reports into the dismissals as "unbalanced."

Scott Vaughan, federal commissioner of the environment, stepped down in 2013, two years before his term was to expire. His early resignation has been attributed to his deteriorating relationship with the minister of environment, who introduced a series of changes to environmental protections that ran counter to recommendations by Vaughan.

The heads of several oversight agencies who have taken positions contrary to the federal government have suffered serious professional and personal consequences.

Howard Sapers, the correctional investigator of Canada, will not have his term renewed when it expires in 2015. Since his appointment in 2004, Sapers has spoken out about the federal government's handling of the prison system, including the treatment of inmates from racialized communities, including Aboriginal inmates, people with mental illness and the use of solitary confinement. Sapers held the position for 11 years. While it is true this is a relatively lengthy tenure, there has been wide speculation that the government's decision to replace Sapers is driven more by a desire to silence his criticism of the government.

EXCERPTED FROM THE REPORT **DISMANTLING DEMOCRACY: STIFLING DEBATE AND DISSENT IN CANADA**, RELEASED IN JUNE BY THE **VOICES COALITION** (WWW.VOICES-VOIX.CA).

BUDGET CUTS: HOW NOT TO ADDRESS INEQUALITY

THE HARPER GOVERNMENT has taken deliberate steps to widen the income gap and undermine decades of programs aimed at achieving social equality and social justice in Canada. One of its first acts upon taking office was to lower corporate tax rates, a gift to big business worth $60 billion since 2006. Canadian corporate tax rates are now among the lowest in the world and rob Canadians of much needed funds for social programs, job training and infrastructure...

The Parliamentary Budget Officer says that even a modest one per cent increase in corporate taxes would put an extra $1.3 billion annually back into federal coffers, but Harper refuses to listen. The government also allows between $100 billion and $170 billion dollars a year to leave Canada, untaxed.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reports that in order to balance the budget (having lost so much income from lowering corporate taxes), the Harper government has deeply cut federal spending in a way that has led to weaker economic growth and a weakening job market in precarious times. Over successive budgets, cuts have been implemented, one on top of the other. The cumulative effect of these cuts by 2016 will be $14.5 billion a year...

The most affected government departments serve the most needy in our society. Human Resources and Skills Development, now called Employment and Social Development Canada, will have lost one-quarter of its workforce by 2016. A program supporting homelessness initiatives has had a 62% cut to its staff. Eight Veterans Affairs offices across the country that served disabled and unemployed veterans have been closed.

Core funding for national disability organizations no longer has a "protected envelope," meaning there is more competition for less money. Much of the funds that went to grassroots organizations that advocated on behalf of the disabled was re-routed to apolitical service providers or cut altogether.

Cuts have affected social housing right across the country. Nearly 200,000 low-income Canadian households depend on federal rent-geared-to-income to pay their rent. The Harper government is taking millions a year from the budget of the Canada Mortgage and

As a consequence of these policies, inequality has grown and the income gap has deepened during the Harper years. Today, the bottom half of the population owns just 6% of the wealth.

Housing Corporation. By 2016, there will have been a 52% cut over six years and 100,000 units will be affected. At current defunding rates, by 2030, nearly 85% of the entire federal housing budget will have been cut.

Cuts to literacy organizations across the board will remove the only literacy programs in some communities. The federal funding for the P.E.I. Literary Alliance has ended after years of supporting this amazing network. "When we are gone," said Catherine O'Bryan, the alliance's executive director, "there won't be anybody promoting literacy on the Island, or pointing out how important it is to provide programs for people with low literacy skills." Nearly half of all Islanders have such low literacy levels, they are ill-equipped to deal with today's complex world, reports the alliance.

The cuts hurt communities and people. In a presentation to a Nova Scotia standing committee on community services, the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities talked about the triple whammy of being poor, unemployed and disabled, and passionately argued the case for funds to continue its work. For years, Service Canada has been a major contributor of core funding that allowed organizations like theirs to pursue initiatives such as providing wheelchairs to children, community-based transportation, and scholarships for young people. But deep cuts to federal funding, which started in 2013, are to continue until there is no funding for this group by 2016.

Independent Living Vernon in British Columbia is losing most of its funding from Employment and Social Development Canada. The organization provides community access programs, employment planning, crisis intervention and peer support to disabled and unemployed people. It has already had to rent out part of its offices and the number of staff has been cut back. The agency fears that these funding cuts will strip the disabled of their independence.

As a consequence of these policies, inequality has grown and the income gap has deepened during the Harper years. Today, the bottom half of the population owns just 6% of the wealth. Since 2005, the top 10% saw their wealth grow by 42% while the bottom 10% saw their median net worth shrink by 150%. This demographic is actually poorer today than it was a decade ago. Meanwhile, by 11:41 a.m. on January 2 this year, Canada's 100 highest paid CEOs pocketed what most Canadians will work all through 2015 to earn. Due to Stephen Harper's policies, Canada has the fastest growth in income inequality in the OECD...

The National Council of Welfare served as an independent advisory body to the federal government on poverty and the issues facing low-income Canadians since 1962. Its members included low-income people, anti-poverty advocates, labour unions, teachers, youth, First Nations and others working for social justice. The council conducted independent research on poverty and inequality, published hundreds of reports, and developed a national anti-poverty strategy that informed government policy. Its modest $1.1 million budget was axed in the 2012 omnibus budget bill and the organization was forced to close its doors.

Kellie Leitch, former parliamentary secretary to the minister of human resources, said other NGOs, such as Canada Without Poverty, would take up the slack. This is sheer nonsense. Canada Without Poverty does not have any official role in advising the Harper government. The government is free to ignore it. And as Leitch well knows, the Harper government cut all funding to that charity, whose aim is to eradicate poverty in Canada, back in 2007. Canada Without Poverty is also one of the organizations being audited by the Canadian Revenue Agency for being too political in its advocacy on behalf of the poor.

Other important Canadian civil society institutions and organizations working on social equality that have had their funding cut partially or entirely by the Harper government include: Canadian Council on Learning, Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, Canadian Volunteerism Initiative, Canadian Council on Social Development, and the Federal Youth Employment Program.

AN EXCERPT FROM THE REPORT **BROKEN COVENANT: HOW STEPHEN HARPER SET OUT TO SILENCE DISSENT AND CURTAIL DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN CANADA**, BY **MAUDE BARLOW,** NATIONAL CHAIRPERSON OF THE COUNCIL OF CANADIANS.

GOING BACKWARDS ON GENDER EQUALITY

ALTHOUGH CANADA WAS among the OECD countries least affected by the 2008 global financial crisis, the federal government has adopted a course of austerity measures—cutting public sector jobs and services. Current projections suggest that there will be an 8% reduction in federal public sector jobs by 2015, when the impact of post-2008 austerity measures are felt in full. This will have a disproportionate impact on women because the public sector is one of the places where gaps in income and employment are smaller. Women working in the public sector earn an average of 4.5% more than their peers in the private sector. Women seeking comparable work in the private sector see an estimated $2,000 reduction in their annual income.

In 2009, the federal government passed the Public Sector Equitable Compensation (PSEC) Act. The PSEC Act significantly reduces the ability of public sector employees to make formal complaints about sex-based discrimination in their pay. It redefines sex-based pay inequality as a bargaining issue for public sector unions and a matter to be decided with respect to market forces. In 2012, the government passed Bill C-38, which makes parallel changes to the Federal Contractors Program, leaving compliance with the Employment Equity Act for contractors of the federal government to the discretion of federal cabinet ministers.

Federal investments in job creation in the private sector have focused on training and jobs in industries that are amongst the most male-dominated: mining, oil and gas, and construction. Women make up 18% of mining, oil and gas workers and 12% of construction workers. The pay gap in these sectors is also larger than in many other industries, with women earning 63% of what their male peers earn in the oil and gas industry and 68% of what their peers earn in construction.

In 2009, the federal government announced a temporary extension of Employment Insurance coverage for eligible unemployed workers. These changes did not address the specific barrier to eligibility faced by women. Women are more likely to be employed in temporary and part-time work and continue to be disadvantaged by high thresholds for eligibility. During the recession, the gap in men's and women's eligibility for employment insurance widened significantly from a 2.3% gap in 2008 to a 14% gap at its worst. That gap has since narrowed to its pre-2008 levels. Women's benefits, like women's incomes, are consistently lower than are men's benefits, with women's Employment Insurance benefits amounting to $60 less per week than men's on average.

In 2008, the federal government introduced a tax policy allowing seniors to "split" their pension incomes—this effectively allows the senior spouse with the higher taxable pension income to transfer some of that income to the lower-income spouse. Because women's retirement incomes are lower on average than men's this means that the bulk of the benefit goes to senior men. This tax policy is also highly regressive, with the top 10% of income earners benefiting the most (receiving $820/year on average compared to $0.10/year for the bottom 10%).

The federal government is currently committed to extending income splitting to dual-parent households with children under the age of 18. Projections suggest this will have an equally regressive impact, increasing inequality overall and significantly decreasing women's labour force participation.

This is a troubling trajectory, and programs such as this, as well as the PSEC Act, run counter to the first objective of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which calls for macroeconomic polices that reduce gender-based inequality.

TAKEN FROM **PROGRESS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS: MISSING IN ACTION—A SHADOW REPORT ON CANADA'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION**, PREPARED BY A NETWORK OF NGOS, TRADE UNIONS AND INDEPENDENT EXPERTS, AND RELEASED BY CCPA IN 2014.

FIVE MYTHS ABOUT THE TOUGH-ON-CRIME AGENDA

MYTH 1: Tough-on-crime policy is about promoting public safety.

According to the federal prison ombudsman, long prison sentences combined with a shortage of rehabilitation programs are a direct threat to public safety. Correctional Service Canada agrees that rehabilitation in prison is essential to the successful reintegration of offenders into the community. Yet programs are currently being eliminated for the sake of alleged budgetary restrictions. Among other things, this means fewer offenders are being released on parole (and therefore under supervision), and others are being released directly to the street with no supervision at all, many having received no treatment or rehabilitation.

Large numbers of prisoners are being double-bunked, leading to appalling conditions of overcrowding, disease and violence. Correctional officers recognize the danger of overcrowding: violence in the prisons has increased and use of force by guards has escalated.

Myth 2: Tough-on-crime policy is about helping victims.

Actually, incarceration after a crime has been committed does not help the victim, and does nothing to prevent crime and subsequent victimization in the future. Victims' advocate Lorraine Berzins, who worked in federal penitentiaries for 14 years and has been a victim of serious crime including a hostage-taking, says the tough-on-crime agenda causes harm, goes against all the evidence about what keeps communities safe, and costs a lot of money. She says victims are more concerned about prevention and rehabilitation than they are about tough sentencing. Another victims' advocate, Arlène Gaudreault, says victims are being exploited by the federal government and used as a tool for partisan purposes. She says tackling the root causes of crime, including poverty and inequality, is the way to reduce victimization.

Myth 3: Tough-on-crime policy is good use of taxpayer dollars.

In the first five years of the Conservative government's mandate, there was an 86% increase in federal prison costs (from $1.6 billion to $2.98 billion). Between 2002 and 2012, Statistics Canada says criminal justice spending overall increased by 23%. In addition to the colossal costs of incarcerating more prisoners, there are the increased costs of policing, prosecuting, judging, paroling, supervising and so on. Meanwhile, the government has largely rejected more effective and less expensive policy options.

For example, house arrest has a high success rate and costs less than incarceration. While offenders who serve their sentences in prison reoffend at a rate of 30%, only 15% reoffend if they serve their sentences outside the jail. Fifteen such sentences save the sys-

tem $1 million a year, but the government has moved to restrict the use of house arrest. The objective, it says, is to punish violent repeat offenders, so they added a number of offences to the list of those that do not qualify for house arrest. They include bribery, forgery and perjury, none of which has a violent element.

In another case, the government's own five-year, $7.5 million study showed that a program called COSA (Circles of Support and Accountability) saved $4.60 in policing, prison and other costs for every dollar spent on the program. COSA provides trained volunteers to help sex offenders reintegrate into communities. The program achieved a dramatic reduction in repeat sex crimes, showing anywhere from 70% to 83% lower recidivism rates. Thus, victimization was being reduced while money was saved. Despite its professed concern about sexual predators, the federal government removed its funding for COSA.

Myth 3: Heavier enforcement controls crime rates.

The crime rate has been falling all over the western world since the 1990s, including in Canada, and other countries have recognized that over-incarceration is not the way to address crime. The United States even recently came to its senses, spurred by the staggering costs of incarcerating thousands of non-violent, victimless offenders. Today, there is a bipartisan move to repeal mandatory minimum sentences and to release prisoners on an amnesty program. New York State reduced its incarceration rate by 15% over 10 years and saw its violent crime rate drop by 40%. Texas also reduced its imprisonment rate and recorded a reduction in crime of 10% over five years.

Canada used to be admired internationally for its approach to corrections, particularly its treatment of young offenders and its progressive rehabilitative programs. Today, Canada is moving in the other direction—establishing mandatory minimum sentences, incarcerating more offenders, making it harder for them to obtain parole and ensuring that the conditions of their incarceration are harsher. Of great concern is that the proportion of Aboriginal and visible minority inmates is increasing exponentially. The most rapid increase is among women and particularly Aboriginal women.

Myth 5: People who break the law deserve long, punitive sentences.

This government would have us believe that offenders are violent, incorrigible and bound to repeat criminal offences; that they are unlike the rest of us and without exception a danger to society. In fact, offenders are your family members, your friends and your neighbours. They usually have big problems of their own, and it is by attacking these problems that we will promote public safety.

Right now, about half of federal inmates are screened for mental health problems. A majority of them have been abusing alcohol or drugs. Large numbers of inmates were physically and/or sexually abused as children. About 60% of inmates have not finished high school, and nearly 40% have not finished Grade 8. All of these are risk factors for criminal behaviour and sensible policy would suggest that we should be tackling these outside the prison setting.

Those who commit crimes, "are all human beings, they're all different. Some of them are going to respond positively if you give them better opportunities, better choices.... We have to have hopeful redemption for those individuals to get them on the right path." Prison should be reserved for "truly dangerous" individuals. "We're not talking hundreds or thousands here, we're talking a relatively small number of people." Whose opinion is this? That of former Toronto police chief Bill Blair. Mr. Blair is not known to be "soft on crime." Voices like his should be listened to.

PAULA MALLEA IS A CCPA RESEARCH ASSOCIATE WITH DEGREES IN CANADIAN LITERATURE, CANADIAN HISTORY AND LAW FROM QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY. SHE WAS CALLED TO THE BARS OF UPPER CANADA AND MANITOBA, AND PRACTISED CRIMINAL LAW FOR 15 YEARS IN TORONTO, KINGSTON AND BRANDON. SHE EXPLORES THE HARPER GOVERNMENT'S CRIME POLICY IN MORE DETAIL IN A FORTHCOMING ANTHOLOGY CO-EDITED BY TERESA HEALY AND STUART TREW, WHICH WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR FREE DOWNLOAD AT WWW.POLICYALTERNATIVES.CA.

CORPORATE POWER, DEREGULATION AND THE THREAT TO PUBLIC SAFETY

CANADIANS EXPECT THEIR governments to take the necessary regulatory measures to protect their health, safety and environment. They do not trust corporations, focused as they are on making profits for their shareholders, to regulate themselves.

Probably few people are aware of the extent that self-regulation has taken hold in Canada. We only discover it when the process breaks down, as it did on July 6, 2013 in the Quebec town of Lac-Mégantic. The train derailment and explosion that early morning left 47 dead, revealing a deeply flawed rail safety regime in which a series of regulatory failures multiplied the chances of a catastrophe.

Though corporations often say they like regulatory certainty, most have a kneejerk aversion to rules that cut into profits and interfere with business. They will push governments to deregulate their activities, and have had varying levels of success in that regard in Canada.

Deregulation is the process of reducing or eliminating existing regulations, preventing the development of new regulations, and diminishing the capacity of government agencies to develop, administer and enforce regulatory programs. Conservative ideology asserts (without much evidence) that by lowering costs to business deregulation increases profits, which leads to more investment, which in turn leads to faster economic growth and job creation.

True to form, the Harper government has aggressively deregulated over its mandate, with an emphasis on helping the oil patch get projects and pipelines built faster. It has simultaneously outsourced its primary responsibility to

regulate in the public interest, devolving ever more power to companies to make their own judgments about the risk to public safety.

To help advance its deregulation agenda the Harper government severed the traditional independence of the public service as a dispassionate source of evidence-based policy advice. The new role of civil servants was to implement, without question, decisions already made on the basis of ideological preconceptions and industry demands.

In 2011, the government set up the Red Tape Reduction Commission, modelled on former Ontario premier Mike Harris's similarly named commission in the 1990s. The federal commission's conclusions were incorporated into regulatory policy, the Cabinet Directive on Regulatory Management (CDRM), which took effect in the spring of 2012.

While lip service is paid to health, safety and the environment, short-term costs to business (red tape) were, in practice, the sole test for determining whether a proposed regulation would be accepted. The Prime Minister's Office is the ultimate gatekeeper, determining which proposed regulations go forward and which do not.

The CDRM broke new ground with its so-called one-for-one rule, mandating departments to repeal at least one existing regulation for every new rule proposed to Treasury Board. The one-for-one rule progressively lowered the ceiling on the number of regulations without properly considering the safety implications. Treasury Board President Tony Clement boasted Canada was the first industrialized country to legislate such a rule.

How did the confluence of corporate power and ideologically driven deregulation play out in the lead-up to the Lac-Mégantic disaster?

The oil industry is unquestionably the most influential business lobby in Ottawa. In light of rapidly expanding bitumen and shale oil production, but long pipeline approval delays, its people furiously pressed the flesh to ensure the flow of oil-by-rail was not disrupted, or costs increased, by more and tougher regulations.

Lac-Mégantic's downtown core lays in ruins as fire fighters continue to water smoldering rubble on July 7, 2013.
THE CANADIAN PRESS/Ryan Remiorz

The rail industry is also no slouch on Parliament Hill. In 2008, lobbyists rewrote the rail operating rules with Transport Canada's blessing, paving the way for companies to run their freight trains with just a single operator. Several years later, despite union objections and resistance within Transport Canada, the industry exerted its influence to make sure the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway (MMA), a company with an atrocious safety record, could run its unit oil trains, through Lac-Mégantic and other communities, with a single operator.

In the months leading up to the accident, the rail lobbyists repeatedly petitioned politicians and bureaucrats, arguing that strengthened regulations for the transportation of oil were unnecessary. As internal government documents show, the Harper government appeared willfully blind to the growing danger posed by the monster surge in oil-by-rail, fixated instead on its goal to make Canada an "energy superpower."

The government failed to heed repeated warnings about unsafe tank cars and the volatility of the oil inside them. It ignored cautions by the National Research Council regarding single-person train operations, and starved Transport Canada of the regulatory resources needed to cope with the oil-by-rail boom. Reports from the auditor general of flaws in the rail regulatory regime—in practice, companies were largely free to regulate themselves—fell on deaf ears.

In the aftermath of Lac-Mégantic, the federal government has taken measures to try to restore public confidence in the regulatory regime. It has also sought to obscure the full extent of regulatory failure—a failure that originates in the collusion between powerful corporate interests and an ideological fixation on deregulation as the pathway to a strong economy.

As the distance grows between us and the accident, as media attention and memories fade, and as its fundamental causes remain hidden there is a danger the myth of the "good corporate citizen" will be resurrected as a justification for letting company shareholders determine the balance between safety and profit.

Without a reversal of these priorities—public safety before private profits—another tragedy is just a matter of time.

BRUCE CAMPBELL IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CCPA.

DOING IT ALL FOR YOUR BABIES

THE PITCH TO "HARD-WORKING CANADIAN FAMILIES" OPENS A MUCH BROADER POLICY DEBATE ON CHILDREN, THE CONSTITUTION AND OUR INCOMPLETE SOCIAL SAFETY NET

"HARD-WORKING CANADIAN FAMILIES deserve a break," declares a Conservative Party online fundraiser. "We'll give families more money to help with the high costs of raising kids," say the Liberals in their *Fairness for the Middle Class* election program. "Middle-class families are working harder than ever, but can't get ahead," said Thomas Mulcair in the NDP's August 2 campaign launch. "We believe we must stop designing our communities around the car and start designing them around families and children," says the Green Party's "family-focused program."

The emphasis on families in the 2015 election is intense, but not new. In 2011, the Conservatives were already "Here for hard-working Canadian families," the NDP's platform was called "Giving your family a break," and the Liberal plan focused on "Your Family. Your Future. Your Canada." What's different, perhaps, is the pivot toward families with children. New child benefit cheques hit mailboxes in July, there are proposals out there for an honest-to-goodness national child care plan, as well as the promise of tax-splitting for couples—if they have children.

These two articles—by **Helena Towle** and **Ann Douglas**—and the Index also deal with children and parenting, but fit awkwardly into the narrative being spun by the major political parties. They are about the ways families are let down by Canada's social safety net, how precariously employed families are left out of pitches to the struggling middle class, and how constitutional challenges to introducing new national programs are not true obstacles to improving the lives of all children—from birth until they, too, are asked to vote.

ILLUSTRATION BY ALISHA DAVIDSON

Helena Towle

Collaborative education, a centralized approach?

FROM ENERGY PIPELINES to Senate reform to child care and proposals for a national pharmacare plan, the constitutional division of powers between federal and provincial governments is as much at play in the 2015 election as any other issue. At heart, is the question of when and how the federal government should work with the provinces to solve issues of national concern. It is tied up in debates about the redistributive role of the federal government, the purpose of taxes, and ideological differences among provinces with (it sometimes feels like) extraordinary powers to frustrate co-ordinated programs.

My particular interest in this national debate, and the electoral opportunities it creates, relate to my research into the differences between provincial education programs for people with disabilities. Although the conversation surrounding centralization is complex in the application of social services, this is an area that would clearly benefit from a centralized perspective. This would be in line with Canada's international obligations, while taking into account the medical diagnosis that defines access to services is standardized across the country.

Canada has signed international covenants (e.g., Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) that require it to meet the needs of people with disabilities within the *general education system*. In other words, all students, with all needs, should be taught in the same classroom. Education in Canada is under provincial/territorial jurisdiction, which means that each child's right to education is protected by the province or territory in which they live. Although the policies that define inclusive education in each province and territory are a vast improvement from the segregation and institutionalization that children with disabilities have historically experienced in Canada, they still have a long way to go before they are truly inclusive.

Because each province or territory is composed of unique populations with unique needs, it makes sense that, to some degree, their education policies would differ. However, when the same diagnostic label is used, access to services and programs should also be the same, regardless of jurisdiction. Unfortunately, the variation in inclusive education policies, their implementation, and the way that they are funded means that, currently, a student with a disability in one part of the country may receive a considerably different amount of support than a student with the same type of disability in another region.

Transition planning is one area that varies from one province to another because the age at which a student must leave school is not the same everywhere. For example, students must have graduated high school by 22 in Saskatchewan, but 20 in Prince Edward Island. Transition planning is important because it is the surest path to creating positive outcomes for students with disabilities, including access to affordable housing and potential employment opportunities.

Some provinces such as Manitoba have a specific transition plan policy with detailed checklists and guidelines, while others (Saskatchewan included) only have a chapter in their inclusive education policy that addresses transition planning. All students and their parents or guardians are entitled to the resources and support they need to ensure their child has the opportunity to be integrated into the education program of their choosing. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but that should not mean there is also no national baseline or standard.

There is nothing stopping the federal government (this one or the next) from developing an action plan, with co-op-

eration from all relevant parties, to achieve full inclusion in the provincial education systems for all children with disabilities. Student-centered delivery can be objectively met through teacher and education administration training about disability: in the same way that medical doctors are given the same tools to diagnose a person with a disability, teachers, the key to student success, should be given standardized federal training that creates expertise for a growing population. In 2006, Statistics Canada found that over 121,000 children between the ages of five and 14 had a disability related to learning.

Currently, most provincial and territorial policies have an opt-out option. In other words, a part of the education policy says that if the school feels it has made exhaustive attempts to include a student with disabilities in the classroom, without success, it may change the child's education plan and move the student to another classroom or school for special needs. As long as options for alternative programs and segregated classrooms are available, students with disabilities will lose out whenever an educator believes the support they are providing is inadequate.

Collaboration is what creates a truly inclusive classroom, based on respectful and reciprocal relationships among teachers, parents, students and education administrators. Despite variance across provincial education systems, improvement of inclusive education is a common need across Canada and should be on any list of social programs, including child care and pharmacare, requiring strong federal co-ordination. Improving teacher training and removing all opt-out policy measures would be a good place to start building a co-operative relationship with the provinces and territories.

Ann Douglas

Precarious employment is a parenting issue

REMEMBER WHAT IT was like back when your child was a newborn—how you used to gaze into his eyes and dream of the day when he'd be old enough to juggle multiple part-time, temporary jobs in the hope of someday, maybe, being able to afford his own place?

Okay, you didn't actually have that dream. And neither did I.

And yet, increasingly, that's what the workplace has to offer our kids—jobs with no benefits and no future. Not only are young workers finding it difficult to access employment (almost one in five are unemployed), many are being forced to settle for underemployment in the form of low-wage, insecure jobs, a situation that may see them boomeranging back home to take up residence in the basement because they can't make ends meet without a little extra help from the Bank of Mom or Dad.

Consider the latest data from the research group Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO). Earlier this year, PEPSO reported that barely half of workers aged 25 to 65 in the Toronto-Hamilton labour market have access to stable, full-time jobs paying anything more than a basic wage. That means the remaining workers are being forced to settle for bare-bones ("precarious") employment arrangements in which schedules are uncertain, long-term security is non-existent, training is a rarity, and benefits are minimal or non-existent.

Only 17% of workers in precarious job situations have access to company pension plans; only 7% are eligible for drug, vision, or dental benefits; and only 12% can expect to be paid if they have to miss a day of work due to illness. It's a pretty iffy way to make a living and a pretty shaky foundation on which to build a life, whether you're a parent or a child.

In fact, according to PEPSO, precarious employment has an impact on the decision to become a parent—workers in precarious jobs are almost three times as likely to delay having children than workers with stable, full-time jobs—and the ability to access income supports following the birth of a child. Parents with precarious jobs are less likely to meet the eligibility requirements for maternity/parental benefits through Employment Insurance than parents with more reliable employment, for example.

Precarity, with its unpredictable hours, also affects access to child care, and it can make it tougher still to cover the miscellaneous expenses of childhood—everything from sports registrations to prescriptions for medications—when you're not quite managing to scrape by from paycheque to paycheque.

The time constraints are not just about the money. How do you make plans to be there for your child's birthday or to volunteer at your child's school when you have no idea what hours you'll be working tomorrow, let alone next week? Ditto for signing up for professional development opportunities that might boost your odds of breaking free of the bad jobs ghetto. It's difficult to commit to or finance your own training when both your schedule and income are constantly in flux.

It's a worrisome situation, for sure. But there's a lot we can do, and that we should be asking policy-makers to do, to reduce the impact of precarious employment on individuals, families and communities.

For starters, we need to think more critically about what constitutes a good job—to factor in what families actually need in order to thrive

as opposed to merely survive. That means recognizing how unreasonable it is to expect precariously employed individuals to be able to finance their own sick days, health benefits and retirement savings when unstable work arrangements make it impossible for them to budget beyond today.

In other words, we need to shift the "good jobs" conversation so it is no longer fixated on wages alone, but factors in total compensation and quality of life. As PEPSO notes in *The Precarity Penalty*, "The benefits of increasing a worker's wage may be limited if a worker does not have access to benefits or does not know how many hours they will be assigned in the coming month."

We need to recognize the hidden costs of asking the most precariously employed workers to organize and finance their own training, with the net result being a shortage of skilled workers. And we need to acknowledge the impact of the shortage of high-quality, flexible child care arrangements, a situation that results in many precariously employed workers being forced to rely on unlicensed and even unpaid services.

We need to strengthen existing employment standards legislation to better meet the needs of workers who are precariously employed. For example, employers should be required to post work schedules two or more weeks in advance and/or pay a premium rate to workers who take on work with little or no notice. Shifts cancelled within 24 hours of the scheduled start time should be paid at a minimum of two to four hours' worth of wages. The San Francisco Retail Workers Bill could serve as a model to policy-makers here—and a beacon of hope to workers who are being worn down by the grind of being perpetually on call for little or no compensation.

We need to find ways to encourage employers to create more full-time jobs, by offering additional hours to existing part-time workers as opposed to simply hiring additional part-timers. And, when part-time work is the only option for a particular employer, we need to encourage that employer to share their employees with other employers, working co-operatively to co-ordinate schedules.

In other words, we need to start demanding more of employers when it comes to creating good, stable, family-sustaining jobs—and more of policy-makers when it comes to putting the necessary workplace protections in place.

Common sense says we're doing it wrong by asking individual workers to solve a problem that's all of ours to solve together, for our own sake, and especially for the sake of future generations.

The Index

Child Care

Compiled by Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood

Canada spends about 0.25% of GDP on child care, well below the OECD average of **0.7%.**

The maximum monthly payment under the enhanced Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) is **$160** per child. The payment is taxable and must be reported as income.

The average monthly cost of infant child care in Toronto is **$1,676,** the highest in Canada, followed by **$1,394** in St. John's.

The average monthly cost of child care in Quebec is **$152** due to the province's $7-a-day child care program, which produces **$147** in government revenue for every $100 of state subsidies, and lets **70,000** more Quebec mothers go to work.

The Conservative government introduced the enhanced UCCB in 2014. The opposition parties are promising new child care spending if they win the upcoming federal election.

The NDP promises to create a national **$15-a-day** child care program and create or maintain **one million** affordable child care spaces across Canada while maintaining the UCCB.

The Liberals promise to replace the UCCB with a tax-free monthly Canada Child Benefit worth up to **$533 per month** per child.

The Green Party promises to eliminate the UCCB, create a universal child care program and implement a tax credit worth **$1,500 per year** per child to businesses that create workplace child care spaces.

SOURCES Pierre Fortin, et al. "Impact of Quebec's Universal Low-Fee Childcare Program on Female Labour Force Participation, Domestic Income and Government Budgets," University of Sherbrooke (2012); "A Maclean's primer on child care," *Maclean's* (August 2, 2015); "Child Care: Early Childhood Education and Care," in the 2015 Alternative Federal Budget; David Macdonald & Martha Friendly. "The Parent Trap: Child Care Fees in Canada's Big Cities," CCPA (November 2014).

Lisa Forbes

Growing the Indigenous vote

OCTOBER 22, 2014. Municipal election night in Manitoba. Indigenous voters are posting to the Winnipeg Indigenous Rock the Vote (WIRTV) Facebook page. One woman says she got out to vote despite the pain, still healing, of a past beating by police officers. There are lots of selfies of jubilant parents and children at the polls. One young woman came out because her sister is one of the missing Indigenous women and a First Nations mayoral candidate had announced he had an action plan.

The reason most first-time Indigenous voters gave for participating in the election was that they had a choice that included Indigenous candidates with a platform that addresses issues of interest to Indigenous people. No one in the Winnipeg municipal election ran under a formal political party affiliation. They built a platform based on their supporters' interests. It's different at the provincial and federal levels, where Indigenous candidates vying for office carry the banners of one or another major political party, with the inertia that creates.

Some choose not to participate in Canadian politics due to a lack of meaningful Indigenous contributions to the Canadian political system and party politics. Indigenous candidates are fine, but how effective can they be, some say, in a system that does not work for Indigenous people? It's a good question. Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act 2015 (Bill C-51) is a case in point. Would a party that understands the historical and contemporary place and rights of Indigenous Canadians have drafted a security bill in such a way that views our interests first as a threat to domestic security?

Voting queens: Brett Renee Meeches (left) takes a selfie of herself, Amber Fontaine (middle), Shanna Copenace at the polls in Winnipeg.

Some Indigenous people wonder if a federal pan-Indigenous party is the way to bring Indigenous perspectives to Canadian politics. Such a party could play a role in keeping issues widely thought of as "Indigenous" in a prominent place on the political stage. These issues include access to safe drinking water on First Nation reserves, a federal inquiry on missing and murdered Indigenous women, equitable health and education funding for residents of First Nations, the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the adoption of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations.

Canada's Indigenous people are diverse and so are our interests. Some of those issues (jobs, taxes, national child care) might be addressed by the major political parties as they are for other Canadians. We, like other Canadians, are concerned about climate change and the protection of waterways. WIRTV co-founder Sylvia Boudreau led a forum on Indigenous issues for mayoral candidates in our last municipal election. Certainly, our members would welcome a similarly focused forum in the upcoming federal election.

The self-exclusion of some Indigenous nations from Canada's national elections, as an affirmation of sovereignty, is a frequently discussed issue, but one that does not really come up in WIRTV circles. There is no denying that the federal government is required, in Canadian law and through its negotiated legal contracts with Indigenous nations, to provide municipal and social services, goods and transfer payments to Indigenous nations. Yet the reality is that these obligations are not rendered so easily. The federal government has the most influence of any government on

the day-to-day lives of First Nation reserve residents. If for only this reason, the participation of Indigenous people in federal elections is of paramount importance.

Winnipeg Indigenous Rock the Vote is the brainchild of Jackie Traverse, a Cree artist and human rights activist. Founded in the fall of 2014, the campaign's main goal was, at first, to prevent a particular mayoral candidate from winning office. He had advocated for policies that discriminated against Indigenous and homeless people. That candidate came in fourth in the local election, behind two Indigenous people. Race is perhaps not as prominent an issue in the October federal election, but the effect poverty has on Indigenous voting is just as evident.

Although there is a growing middle class of Indigenous people in Winnipeg, a disproportionate number of Aboriginal people are still living on low incomes. And people in poverty are less likely to vote. Why? Because they are always working to meet their basic needs: food, shelter, safety. Navigating the rules, systems and bureaucracies of accessing identification, and meeting voting rules takes time, energy and money.

By far, the issue that came up most often during the Winnipeg election was access to proper voting identification. Many low-income people cannot afford proper ID, or they move around so often it is a hassle to maintain an ID with the correct address. In addition, Indigenous people are far more likely to not have a fixed address due to movement between reserves and rural communities to stay at the homes of relatives and friends in urban areas.

The Fair Elections Act, enacted last year despite protests from almost all experts on the electoral process, has created barriers to voting for all Canadians, but most of all for the young (students), homeless, poor, immigrants and Indigenous people. For instance, the voter registration card, sent by Elections Canada to the home address of registered voters, was used by 400,000 people as a piece of identification in the last federal election. This will not be an option in the October election.

For First Nations residents, the Fair Elections Act presents two unique obstacles.

First, there is the replacement of vouching for another's identity at the polls with the new "attestation" system. Whereas one registered voter with proper identification used to be able to vouch for many others without ID, they can now only attest for one other person. This ends the practice of having a Chief vouch for the residency of multiple resident members from her First Nation reserve.

Second, the new requirement for First Nation reserve residents, that they have their Indian band administrator complete a "Confirmation of Residence" letter to use as identification, creates burdensome and unnecessary hurdles to voting. For the rest of Canadians, a driver's license is the only ID required to register or vote. Our experience so far in registering voters is that even those First Nation residents with a driver's license are not being permitted to register.

Some polls have shown that a strong Indigenous turnout at the polls this election could make a big difference in the results. Winnipeg Indigenous Rock the Vote has been helping with voter registration and providing ID clinics, and there are several other Indigenous voting groups promoting registration and voting in the upcoming federal election. All of us hope for a turning of the tide. If it can work in one city, there's no reason it can't work across Canada. M

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Kelly Carmichael

Fairness should be the key to electoral reform

THIS YEAR, CANADA'S electoral system will be a federal election issue. Canadians will be considering which electoral system best reflects their values and priorities. Are we satisfied with winner-take-all politics that prioritizes specialized issues in swing ridings? Or do we want a system that will provide the type of governance that will deliver long-term solutions to pressing issues that affect all Canadians?

The first-past-the-post system reinforces regional differences and pits voter against voter in key ridings. If you live in a party stronghold, you might as well hit the snooze button because you know, like the last election and the one before that, you will never have a representative that reflects your views.

Liberal voters in Alberta, Conservative voters in Quebec and Green voters across the country all know their votes carry less weight.

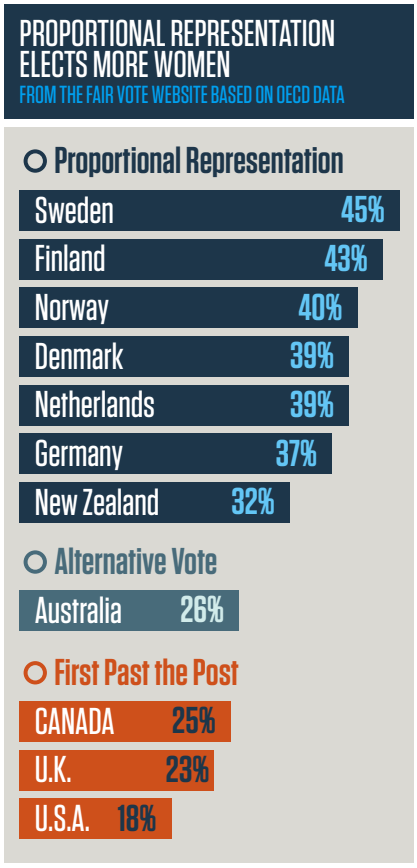
Not only are voters not equal, parties that get less than 40% of the vote can form a majority government, leaving more than half of the electorate unrepresented. When only 60% of voters show up at the polls, we're not looking at 40% of the electorate, but rather 24% of voters making all the decisions on behalf of everyone.

People who favour the status quo claim that first-past-the-post delivers "stable, majority governments." In other words, a small portion of the electorate can do whatever they want and you can't do anything about it for four years. Wouldn't governments built on integrity, co-operation and compromise be more attractive?

First-past-the-post costs taxpayers a lot of money. Majority governments often spend their tenure undoing policies of the former government rather than focusing on future policy needs. It's called policy-lurch: defunding programs while building new ones in their image.

We keep flip-flopping between false majority governments (a majority of seats without a majority of the vote) and unstable minorities at the expense of our country's long-term priorities, and our voting system is largely to blame.

Stephen Harper's government has spent the last four years focused on undoing Canada's liberal image at the cost of developing legacy policy of its own. The next government will do the same.



More than 80% of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries are governed under a proportional representation system. Policies built on consensus have lasting value. If a policy is not supported by the majority of the electorate it should not pass. That's a hard pill to swallow for those who have a narrow focus on ramming through partisan policy.

Research shows that proportional representation results in lower income inequality, better environmental performance, stable economies and long-term goals that better respect the intentions of voters. When citizens have more power, they are more satisfied with their democracy.

Proportional representation will not end majority governments but it means a party needs a true majority of voters to garner all the power. Governments that are supported by true majorities have more credibility and licence to build lasting policy that is supported by the citizens.

Canada's health care system and the Canada Pension Plan were both delivered by parties working together and supported by a majority of Canadians. When policies are built on consensus and co-operation they stand the test of time.

Proportional representation will not solve all Canada's democratic issues but it provides equal representation, and equal representation will contribute to the renewal of Canadian democracy.

This year, when considering electoral reform, the primary question we should ask is this: What is fair? Let's ensure that parties of all stripes know that votes should be equal and effective and contribute to a government that represents everyone. M

Karl Nerenberg

Voting tactically is a complicated game

THE FIRST THING to do when we talk about strategic voting is to call it what it really is: tactical voting. A strategy is an overall plan to reach a goal; a tactic is a particular action one takes in support of a larger strategy.

If your goal is a change in federal government, one possible tactic during the election would be to vote for the "progressive" candidate who has the best chance of winning.

Voting tactically is like a prisoner's dilemma, the psychological game in which two "criminals" are given the choice to testify against each other or to remain silent. Depending on what combination of choices the two make, the consequences for each of them can be very different. Each of their fates depends on the choice of the other prisoner.

Voters who want to cast their vote tactically have to know which progressive candidate in their riding has the best chance to win. In other words, like the prisoner in the dilemma, they must make an educated guess as to how their neighbours plan to vote.

National opinion polls would not help such voters, because political support for the different parties varies greatly across the country. Even provincial polls provide little helpful information. Within each province political allegiances vary greatly from riding to riding.

At one point early in the 2011 election campaign, some voters in Ottawa Centre told me they intended to vote, in their words, "strategically." They said they would vote for the Liberal candidate. I reminded them that the incumbent was NDP MP Paul Dewar, but they weren't convinced.

That sort of notionally strategic choice fits with the historic pattern in which Liberals have urged NDP supporters not to "waste" their votes. Liberal leaders—most recently Paul Martin in 2004—have quite openly made that pitch, with some success. Now, with the NDP leading or tied with the Conservatives in the opinion polls (at time of writing), the shoe may be on the other foot.

Voters who want to cast their vote tactically must make an educated guess as to how their neighbours plan to vote.

NDP campaigners will be tempted to encourage all progressives to rally around the party that has the best chance of unseating the current bunch. Former New Democratic apparatchik Jamie Heath made that argument in a *National Post* column this July. And he went further, claiming the Liberals are not now, nor have they ever been, a truly progressive party. They only act that way to win elections, according to Heath.

His solution to the split-vote-on-the-left conundrum is for the Liberals to fade away, to be replaced by one, national progressive political option. It is an argument very similar to the one Liberals used against the NDP for decades.

As Heath's column appeared in the *Post*, political scientist Paul Fairie had an article in the *Globe and Mail* that analyzed polling numbers to conclude the NDP and the Conservatives would have had an equal chance of "winning" an election had it been held in the summer. By that, Fairie meant winning a plurality of seats, not a majority. There is virtually no chance anyone would win a majority, he wrote.

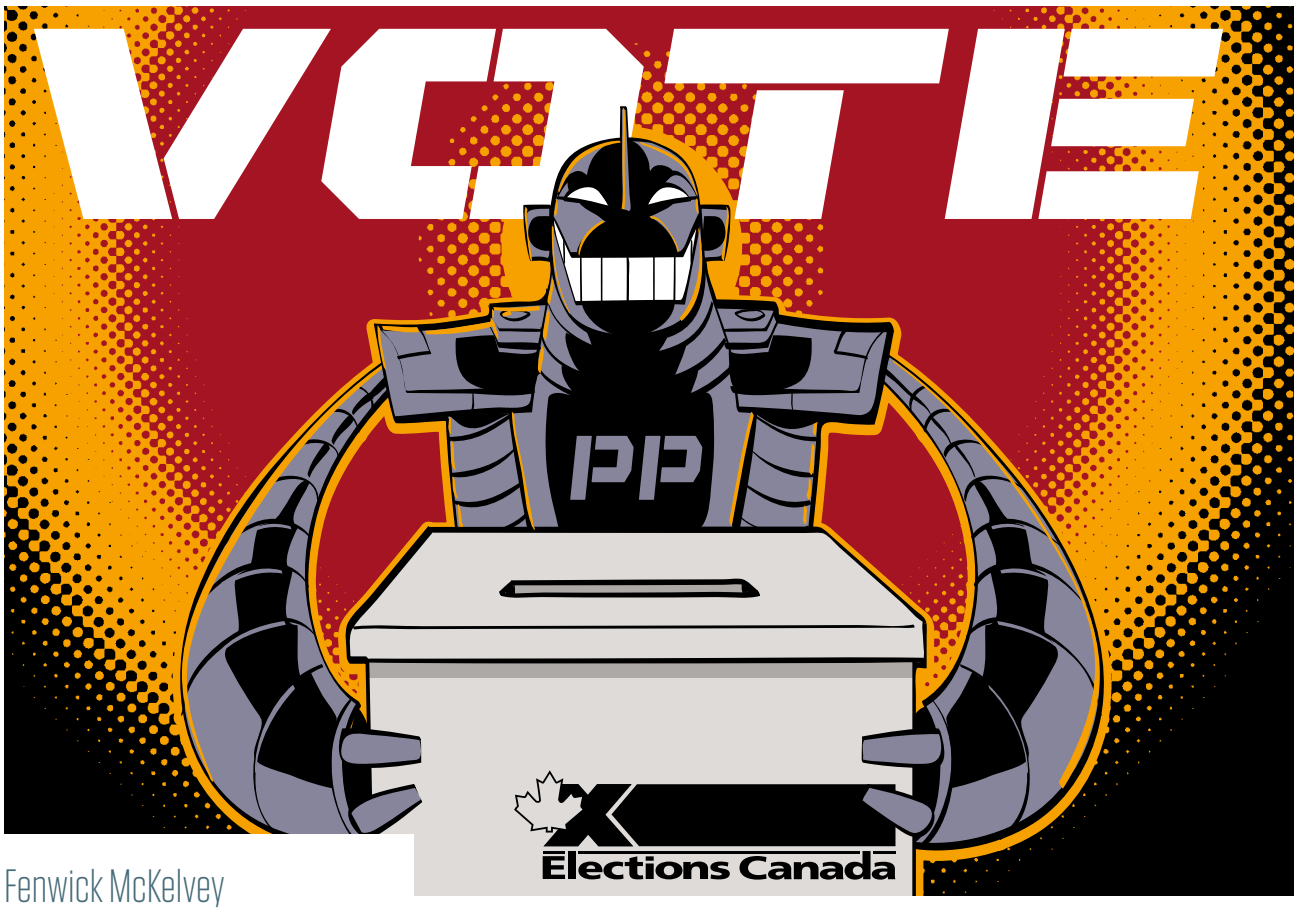
In Fairie's analysis, there was a 97% chance a mid-July election would produce a government in which the NDP and Liberals combined held a majority of seats. In just about any other democracy such a result would inevitably produce a coalition government. In Canada, Fairie wrote, the public is still deeply suspicious of coalitions.

In 2008, Prime Minister Harper said the proposed Liberal-NDP coalition, which needed the support of the Bloc Québecois, was a case of the losers snatching victory from the winners. That bit of demagoguery worked then. But it might not work this time.

Let's say the Conservatives lose their majority, but still win the largest number of seats. The NDP and Liberals together win more than half the seats. An NDP-Liberal coalition would not have to be propped up by the Bloc, and the public view of coalitions might be very different from what it was in 2008.

In the end, is the effort to mount national "strategic" voting campaigns worth it? Should voters be fretting about how to most effectively cast their vote tactically? This writer's answer to both questions is, on balance, no.

Voting tactically turns the electoral process into too much of a prisoner's dilemma game, and I am not sure that is good for democracy. M



Fenwick McKelvey

Battling political machines

Coming to a riding near you!

ILLUSTRATION BY REMIE GEOFFROI

EVERY PARTY HAS its political machine; technology, software and infrastructure that it rolls out into battle every time the writ drops. While talking points change, the machine keeps running in the background, getting the message out, measuring its impact and mobilizing voters. With the entry of social media and sophisticated voter databases, we might even want to drop the horse race metaphor for something else—something like a spectacle where robots fight each other for the big prize.

It's not as far-fetched as it sounds. More than ever before, this year's election resembles an episode of *Robot Wars*, a popular TV show from the early 2000s in which remote-controlled robots destroy one another in an unpredictable, dangerous arena. This election will offer a particularly tough arena—another testing ground of new techniques and machinations.

Given the unreliability of polls, each party is relying on its own proprietary data infrastructure to get a sense of what's going on with supporters and the general electorate. In addition, the pace of the election—though obviously not the length of the campaign—has quickened, forcing parties to respond to the 24/7 media environment.

You can see the machines in action by comparing the political messages in your inbox to what you're friend is receiving. The Liberals won the 2013 election in British Columbia by inches, relying on micro-targeting to find the few voters that could make all the difference in a close race. The federal parties' data analytics and staff know-how will make a difference in how they eke out a win.

Like *Robot Wars* contestants, political parties have been working on upgrades to their machines. Key to any upgrade is their national political campaign software. What was once a simple database of voter intentions now logs more and more campaign activity. Better campaign software helps party field organizers connect with voters and pull the vote.

The Internet also now allows for unprecedented contact with voters, but not without the technology to target, test and optimize messages, as well as to collect as much data as possible. Data analytics help find the right voters to target and determine the smart, personalized messages they will receive over social media and by email.

The Conservatives had a head start in all of this, but there have been setbacks. The party's CIMS database, originally developed by the Ontario Progressive Conservatives in the late-1990s, has been growing for at least 10 years, giving the federal party a special advantage in micro-targeting voters in key ridings. But it is not all rosy in the Blue Machine.

The Conservatives attempted to switch to a new system known as C-Vote, but reports in 2013 suggest it was a fiasco, costing the party up to $9 million and forcing them back to CIMS. This year, the party launched C2G (CIMS To Go), a mobile interface that allows data entry while canvassing. Such real-time reporting from the field has been a long-sought-after goal of any political machine, but it is not an exclusively Conservative technology.

The Liberals, borrowing directly from the Obama campaigns, struck an exclusive contract with NGPVAN—one of the technology firms used by the Democratic Party—to integrate their database, mailing and web presence into a system known as Liberalist. Liberalist also features greater integration than CIMS since it runs their websites and email messaging.

Generally speaking, an integrated database helps keep track of voter activity across platforms. Expect to see Liberal canvassers with their own mobile solution, known as MiniVan, competing with Conservative volunteers on C2G. The Liberals have had a lot of time to optimize their machine since its launch in 2011, so staff and other volunteers might be better trained than other parties.

The NDP have also gone the Obama route, hiring Blue State Digital to help with data analytics and the party's digital mobilization over email. Simultaneously, the NDP replaced its old NDP Vote database with Populus to keep track of voter records. Populus seems to run on foreAction, a campaign management system for political parties and non-profits developed by NetFore Systems in Ottawa.

This creates a lot of unknowns for the NDP. How will the federal party bring its local campaigns up to speed on the new system? Will Blue State Digital and Populus play well together? Whatever the answers, the effort demonstrates the NDP has invested in keeping up with the other parties, hoping the investment will pay off on election day.

Those who've seen *Robot Wars* know it creates a lot of wreckage, and the party machines will likewise collide over the course of the campaign. There will (hopefully) be no flame-throwers or chainsaw arms—frequent additions to the TV show's battlebots—but the comparison is clearly useful.

The bots and party machines are built for battle, thrown into an unpredictable arena. While some tweaks can be made mid-struggle, momentum will make too many alterations difficult. Some parts will break, some tools might not work together (or at all). And on October 19, if you don't like horse races, would you be comfortable with "May the best robot win?" M

Jessica McCormick

Unfair electoral reforms make it harder to vote

"YOU'LL HAVE TO come back later with someone who can vouch for you."

These were the words I heard as I turned away from a polling station in St. John's on May 2, 2011. I had spent the previous month encouraging students to vote, organizing vote mobs and hosting debates with candidates. I knew my vote mattered. But without a Voter Information Card from Elections Canada, or piece of ID with my address on it, I had to walk away. I was lucky to find a friend from the same polling division who did return with me so I could cast my ballot. It was discouraging to think how many other students would not have that option.

In February 2014, the Conservative government tabled the Fair Elections Act under the guise of preventing voter fraud. The public outcry was almost immediate. More than 200,000 Canadians signed petitions opposing the bill and organized demonstrations outside MP's offices. Experts, academics and former chief electoral officers said the proposed electoral reforms were dangerous. The government ignored these concerns and forged ahead with what was obviously a voter suppression agenda.

We can say this because the Fair Elections Act created new barriers to voting for many groups, especially students and seniors, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and the homeless. Voters are no longer able to use the Voter Information Card as proof of identity or address in order to cast a ballot. Proving one's address can be especially difficult for students who often move twice a year and do not maintain a current or local address on their ID. The Conservative government also eliminated vouching in favour of a more cumbersome and intimidating attestation process for voters who cannot prove their address.

Only 38% of young people voted in the 2011 federal election. It's a much bigger problem than voter fraud—one that Canada's chief electoral officer has been trying to address through a number of studies and programs. Strangely, the Fair Elections Act prohibits the office from encouraging people to vote, denying them access to information about their democratic rights. By muzzling the chief electoral officer, the government has almost guaranteed the youth vote will continue to decline.

Earlier this year, the Canadian Federation of Students and the Council of Canadians challenged the Fair Elections Act in court in an effort to have the new laws overturned before the 2015 federal election. In early August, an Ontario Superior Court judge denied an injunction against key sections of the act while identifying that those same sections could disenfranchise hundreds of thousands of voters. The full legal challenge will not be heard until after the federal election.

Rather than fulfilling the promise of fair elections, the Conservative government has told some voters—conveniently those more likely to vote for other parties—they should stay home on October 19.

Canada's electoral laws need strengthening to ensure that *every* vote counts. Reversing these attempts at voter suppression is vital to building a healthy democracy for this generation and the next. In the meantime, it will take considerable efforts to ensure voters have the motivation, ID and address requirements they need to cast a ballot in this election. M

Simon Tremblay-Pepin

A Québécois perspective on the federal election

I'VE BEEN ASKED to talk about what the federal campaign looks like from here in Quebec. Before I share my impressions, a few reminders, since we sometimes have trouble understanding one another. For instance, your anglo-Canadian analysis of the results of the last election probably differs widely from my own. I will therefore quickly explain my take on 2011, because in order to understand what will happen this fall, we need to grasp what happened four years ago.

In the aftermath of the May 2011 elections, I wrote a series of three articles for the CCPA's *Behind the Numbers* blog. I had come to the following conclusion: the NDP's success in Quebec was not based on the merits of the party's program, or even the appeal of its jolly moustached leader, but because people had rejected all other options. A majority of Quebeckers decided the NDP looked relatively inoffensive—even somewhat likeable—because of its centrism and open mind on matters regarding the political future of Quebec (our dreaded *question nationale*).

When I look at the political landscape today, I stand firm by this analysis. Despite the Orange Wave, there is still a shortage of enthusiasm for federal politics in Quebec. In fact, the "wave" depended on this historical detachment from Ottawa. Federal politics are only ever deemed interesting here when Quebec feels it is directly engaged or threatened, like during the sponsorship scandal of the mid-2000s.

Fast-forwarding to 2015, this sentiment may be changing. Though Quebeckers are generally indifferent toward the federal government, many are also fed up with Harper. They believe that his party is dangerous, and this will be key in the next election. To profit from this sentiment, the Liberals and NDP will naturally each present themselves as the only party that can end the Conservative government's reign.

At first glance, the NDP appears to have an obvious head start: it forms the Official Opposition, making it the prime contender. And until very recently it seemed likely that unless Justin Trudeau could successfully rehabilitate the Liberal image in Quebec—not an impossible task, but a very difficult one—the situation generally favoured the NDP.

However, things have changed quite a lot in a short time. Gilles Duceppe's resurrection, as unexpected and undemocratic as it is, has single-handedly helped to raise the Bloc québécois from the dead, obscuring the unfortunate, even disastrous series of events that followed the party's 2011 thrashing, with the potential to help the Bloc regain its "natural" place in the polls.

That said, we should note that in the 2011 elections, the Bloc grabbed 23% of the vote, the Liberals 14%, and the NDP 42%, with the ultimate result being a rout for the Bloc.On August 20 this year, polls put the Bloc in even worse shape at 16%, the Liberals at 20%, and the NDP at 47%. Those numbers, if they hold over the campaign, portend another Bloc upset this October.

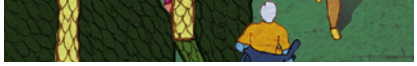
Can Duceppe appeal to Quebeckers one more time? Certainly, but only if he learns his lessons from 2011. The bitter, vengeful and guilt-inducing tone of Bloc partisans during that election—taken up by Duceppe in defeat afterwards—should not be resuscitated. And having announced an unspectacular lineup of candidates, the Bloc will need to breathe new life into its discourse to restore its pertinence and attractiveness to voters. There is no new foundation in resentment (though we sometimes wonder if there is anything else driving the party's current leader).

If the NDP is to get a shot at taking power, the party must remain in the lead in Quebec. Like the Bloc, there are no surprise candidates wearing orange this year. For Thomas Mulcair to maintain his competitive edge, he will need to better attend to and address the issues that are damaging to his party here, most notably the NDP position on Energy East. The fact that Mulcair supports this environmentally unjustifiable pipeline project makes him an easy target for the Bloc.

Regarding Quebec's political future, Mulcair does not have the luxury—in contrast with Layton in 2011—of remaining deliberately vague, since he is a former minister in a Liberal Party of Quebec government and a former director at Alliance Québec. Mulcair cannot afford to alienate the 40% of Quebec voters who find too much federalist enthusiasm rather unpalatable.

The problem for Mulcair is that the closer he inches toward the Bloc on these issues, the more space he creates for the Liberals, both in the rest of Canada and in Quebec.

To conclude, and to repeat an all-too-often overlooked truth, the field on which the federal electoral game is played in Quebec is paved with indifference. With no hope of garnering enthusiasm in the electorate, the party that convinces voters it can bring down Harper, while avoiding generating annoyance with unpopular stances on touchy issues, will stand the best chance of taking Quebec—and with it, potentially, Ottawa. M



Excerpt

Nora Loreto

Canada's youth: From passivism to activism

IT HURTS TO admit that neoliberalism is winning, but this acknowledgement is necessary in order to understand youth engagement, disenfranchisement, and what kinds of social movements are attracting young people. This understanding is fundamental if we are to co-ordinate and organize the generations that the Welfare State forgot.

Neoliberal attacks have been relentless. They have flowed from all governments in Canada in the past 30 years and have left no public service or civil employee untouched. They have fundamentally altered how young people interact with each other and with the world around them. And, as the Internet has further privatized interpersonal interactions, traditional notions of "community" have been supplanted by social media and online communities. Although they share many characteristics of the IRL community ("in real life"), they do not offer members of that community physical support or social structures to help one another out. In effect, it's community without the measures that make community so useful or important.

Paul Verhaeghe, writing in *The Guardian U.K.*, argues that the changes brought about by neoliberal policies are basically changing who we are: "Our norms and values make up an integral and essential part of our identity. So they cannot be lost, only changed. And that is precisely what has happened: a changed economy reflects changed ethics and brings about changed identity. The current economic system is bringing out the worst in us."

Neoliberalism has also created an environment where young people believe that success and failure hinges solely on an individual's capacities. Having grown up hearing that "it only takes one person to make a difference," trying to be that super-human necessarily results in defeatism and frustration. Verhaeghe explains: "Our society constantly proclaims that anyone can make it if they just try hard enough, all the while reinforcing privilege and putting increasing pressure on its overstretched and exhausted citizens. An increasing number of people fail, feeling humiliated, guilty, and ashamed. We are forever told that we are freer to choose the course of our lives than ever before, but the freedom to choose outside the success narrative is limited. Furthermore, those who fail are deemed to be losers or scroungers, taking advantage of our social security system. This 'individual choices' framing is then used to impose ever-harsher neoliberal economic and social policies."

March 2015 student demonstration against austerity changes proposed by the Quebec government.
THE CANADIAN PRESS/Ryan Remiorz

When examining youth engagement, journalists often frame issues in terms of the individual, especially during election time. Rather than ascertaining whether or not politicians are addressing issues that youth as a cohort care about, journalists and pundits prefer to focus on electoral disengagement, mislabeled as "apathy." This narrative consistently focuses on youth voter turnout, and, while it's certainly supported by certain facts—Elections Canada pegged voter turnout after the 2011 election at 38.8% for 18–24-year-olds, while their grandparents voted at 75%—it's a lazy and irresponsible assessment of the reasons for youth disengagement.

Such analyses usually focus on the structural barriers that stop people from voting. For example, Janet McKenzie, chief electoral officer for the City of Vancouver during its 2014 municipal election, summed up youth voting efforts in this way: "We want to make things flexible around voting

and we want to make every effort to remove the barriers that we can, by making voting as easy and convenient as possible, and ensuring that casting a ballot is quick and easy." This is the dominant narrative, but it's not a fair assessment of the real reasons why young people vote less.

Some of these reasons were identified by Christian Medeiros in the University of Toronto's student paper *The Varsity* before the 2014 municipal election in Ontario: "The poor financial state of youth exacerbates their alienation from the political system. By many accounts, youth are getting started later in life than ever before. Education and training take longer, steady jobs are further off, homes are on the distant horizon, and the thought of starting a family does not even cross their minds."

Campaigns and efforts to get people to vote by making it easier will fail by design, because it isn't about inconvenience; it's about feeling as if voting is totally futile. When you grow up in an Ontario where two decades of premiers from all political parties have continually raised tuition fees—despite the fact that you've voted against those politicians every time you were eligible—it's impossible not to feel that the system was set up to deliberately disengage young people.

This is not to say that attempts to make voting more difficult have not also been pursued by governments. The Harper government, seizing a contextual opportunity, imposed measures to directly and increasingly disenfranchise people. What better time to make it more difficult for people to vote, after all, than when voting levels are already at record lows? Changes made under the ironically-named Fair Elections Act eliminated Voter Information Cards as proof of residence, and will prevent Elections Canada from engaging in public education campaigns about the mechanisms of how to vote.

Young people who move too often to keep the address on a driver's license up to date will now find it extremely difficult to prove residency during an election campaign. And, if an election happens to coincide with a time of year when students have recently changed residence (at the start of September or the end of April, for example), it effectively could mean that they will not be able to vote where they live, or—short of engaging with the cumbersome voting-by-proxy method—that they will have to refrain from voting at all. The Canadian Federation of Students and the Council of Canadians have instigated a Charter challenge, arguing that the act constitutes a violation of individual rights guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

With education, health, and social services all funded and managed by provincial governments, the most hurtful results of austerity flow from provincial policies. This means that, in the shadow of an extreme right-wing federal government, there is still little solace to be found among the various shades of neoliberal grey. After enduring these neoliberal policies for all of our conscious lives, it's no wonder that young people are voting and participating less in formal democratic structures.

New locations of political action

Despite their disengagement from formal political structures, young people are far from apathetic. In fact, as the millennial generation has come of age, the intensity of various forms of protest has accelerated. From online protest communities that emerge in chat rooms, to the platforms that can be used on Facebook to promote various types of action, it's clear that the location of political action has simply migrated from the formal to the informal—from inside formal political parties to outside those structures.

Since the anti-globalization protests of the late 1990s and the early 2000s, several generations of activists have moved through various incarnations of political action. The anti-globalization movement coalesced around the Summit of the Americas protests in Quebec City in 2001, and the effects can still be seen. In Quebec, the intense mobilization that surrounded the summit directly led to the creation of Canada's only true left-wing political party, Québec Solidaire.

In English Canada, the fallout from the events of September 11, 2001 in the U.S. weakened the anti-globalization movement. It took the organized English left two years to find its footing again, and stage impressive anti-war mobilizations across Canada. On February 15, 2003, in solidarity with actions across the globe, nearly 400,000 people protested in more than 80 cities and towns across Canada against the war in Iraq. Legislative victories for Canadian progressives have become more and more rare, but these co-ordinated mass demonstrations played an important role in stopping Prime Minister Jean Chrétien from sending Canadians to war in Iraq.

Things changed dramatically after Stephen Harper first rose to power in 2006 by forming a minority government. Harper continued, and accelerated, the neoliberal policies that had been launched in the 1980s by Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservatives and extended by the Liberals under Chrétien and Paul Martin. Canadians who were just children at the time of Martin's health and social transfer cuts have been bearing the subsequent brunt of skyrocketing tuition fees ever since. They have also been adversely affected by the increasing privatization of health care and a precarious job market—developments exacerbated by the further cuts to social spending made by the Harper government.

When Stephen Harper deployed his position and power to stop the opposition parties from uniting to form a coalition government, most Canadians remained silent and passive. But protests led by young people who organized them online erupted across Canada. The protests demonstrated that young people understood the unjust and undemocratic nature of what Harper had done, contrary to the approval he received from most of the mainline media. A core of pro-democracy activists was formed, and they mobilized the same protests a year later when Harper pulled the same stunt to avoid having documents released that exposed Canada's involvement in the torture of prisoners in Afghanistan.

Although these anti-prorogation rallies were widespread and well attended, they were unavoidably futile because the only demand that could be made by a pro-democracy gathering was that democracy itself be respected. The rallies were not rooted in the need for an alternative to the status quo, but simply demanded that Stephen Harper play by the rules and stop using anti-democratic measures to shut down debate. By the time it had run its course, the narrative that activists were promoting was far too reformist: they sought to replace Stephen Harper's power with the softer touch of Stéphane Dion or Jack Layton.

So, despite an impressive level of civic engagement and hundreds of protests across Canada, the protests resulted in very little change. In fact, after they had run their course, Harper vastly bolstered his power by winning a majority government—power he has been harnessing ever since to further cut social programs and dismantle the welfare state.

But not long after the second wave of federal prorogation protests waned, massive youth-led demonstrations were organized to protest the G8/G20 summit meetings in Toronto, shaking up the city for the better part of a week in June 2010. Community groups, students, and labour activists had been mobilizing for months before world leaders came to town. They mounted a co-ordinated march of tens of thousands, defying tear gas, sound-cannons, and clubbing by police, whose hundreds of pre-emptive arrests were clearly meant to discourage people from marching at all. The G20 was a rallying point, but it wasn't an entirely successful display of people power. Instead, it turned into a military training exercise, where the latest in civilian-grade military equipment was tested on peaceful protesters. It sent the message: you have no right to demonstrate.

Clearly, $1 billion was enough to purchase some very scary "crowd-control" equipment. But, more importantly, the powers granted to the more than 20,000 police by the Ontario government allowed for the mass arrest and detention of more than a thousand people—the highest extent of unlawful mass arrest in the post-war period since the October Crisis. Years later, it would be the brutal conduct of the police, the stories that emerged from the Eastern Avenue Detention Centre, and the violent police repression that would mark the history of the G20 in Toronto.

A year-and-a-half later, the Occupy movement emerged. Occupy Wall Street (OWS) erupted in New York City as a protest held in the heart of the city's financial district. Inspired by OWS, young people organized camps in towns and cities across Canada, many of their occupations lasting well into the first snowfalls. While the success of Occupy itself was debatable, it definitely showed that there exists some level of class-consciousness, and that young people will take to the streets, even if they don't take to the ballot boxes. Occupy seized on the common knowledge that, while things are getting much better for the one per cent, the 99% are struggling. Their uprising helped give voice to a new generation of activists and, more important, physically manifested the evidence of their concerns. In a world of online communities and neoliberalism, the importance of Occupy rooting itself in a physical location cannot be overstated.

In the United States, Occupy Wall Street has mutated into a support system to help communities when the government has failed them, and this just might be the most interesting possibility for the future role of social movements in that country. When Hurricane Sandy devastated the U.S. eastern seaboard and destroyed much of the coastal properties of New York City and New Jersey in 2013, it was Occupy Sandy that helped most effectively to co-ordinate relief measures. Through a network of volunteers surviving on donations of space, materials and money, Occupy Sandy dispatched activists across the damaged regions to help people save what they could from their battered homes. Occupy Sandy volunteers were fitted with gear necessary for this task: boots, masks, goggles, sledgehammers, crowbars, wheelbarrows, etc.

This is likely the future of the left: rather than working within the formal political structures, people will organize new ways to help one another and build community, especially during times of crisis where formal structures can't meet basic needs. Where governments fail, the radical response from those communities will be as simple as stepping in and undertaking the role of government ourselves: rebuilding our communities ourselves.

Occupy did not leave the same legacy in Canada. After the encampments fizzled out, there wasn't much of Occupy that remained here, other than one camp that kept its occupation going until the spring. That camp was at McMaster University in Hamilton, where students did have access to space in the Student Centre. There, an occupation was established with desks, comfortable chairs, and a bookshelf. It became a hub for progressive organizing on campus for the rest of the school year.

While debates were occurring across Canada about what to "do with" Occupy, students in Quebec were totally re-defining what kind of protest and what kind of sustained action is possible. The 2012 student strikes in that province have their own history, rooted in waves of organization and student strikes that rose and fell throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Standing on the shoulders of activists from years past, students organized through CLASSE, the Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (Large Coalition of the Association for Student Union Solidarity).

College and university students went on sustained strikes that interrupted the normal operations of institutions across Quebec. They were a strong reaction to the Liberal government's plan to increase tuition fees. The protests snowballed on March 22 into more than 300,000 people marching in Montreal, where the students were met with harsh opposition and oppression from government and police forces. As the protests grew larger and more popular, the police tactics became even more oppressive. Over the course of the student strikes,

3,418 people were arrested, including a member of the national assembly.

The student strikes presented a perfect storm of events that would spur the social movement to explode—student solidarity that had been unparalleled in Quebec up to that point. Widespread disenfranchisement and anger with the Liberal government fuelled people's willingness to take to the streets in a massive show of public protest. The Opposition Parti Québécois supported the students, though their support for the students' core issues was weak. By May, new laws were passed banning rallies after dark and protests by 50 or more people without giving the police advance notice of the route. As the weather warmed, casserole protests—where people thronged the streets with pots and pans—became weekly events. The chorus of voices opposing the Liberal government's repressive measures expanded to include prominent Quebec celebrities and lawyers marching in their robes. It became clear by May that this upsurge of dissent could very well topple the government.

And it did: Premier Jean Charést lost his seat and the Liberals lost power in the election that followed in September. Many of the student activists, however, were reluctant to urge people how to vote in that election, warning that austerity measures taken by a PQ government could be just as damaging as austerity by the Liberals. And, although the PQ was elected on a platform that was relatively progressive, it soon broke nearly every promise, increasing tuition fees and then calling a snap election over its divisive and xenophobic "Values Charter." The Liberals regained power and formed a majority government 18 months later, setting the stage for the next big social response to austerity.

Cracking down on dissent

The student strikes were remarkable for many reasons, not the least of which was demonstrating that, far from being apathetic, young people were willing to risk their future careers to demand fair and affordable (or, in the case of colleges, free) higher education. Young people celebrated the direct result of their sustained and co-ordinated actions, but then saw how the formal political system would betray and disappoint them. They also had the painful experience of having their peaceful demonstrations attacked and repressed by the government and police, whose brutality was unprecedented in the post-war period.

Cracking down on protests through legislation that violates basic rights, and then ferociously enforcing these undemocratic laws, has become increasingly popular in Canada. Even while marking the anniversary of the student strikes in 2013, hundreds of students were arrested simply for demonstrating in public. Montreal's controversial law P6, which remains in effect, compels activists to give their protest's routes to police in advance for it to be deemed "legal." It might also just provide the police the time to crack down more quickly on protesters.

At the end of the federal parliamentary session in 2013, the Harper government quietly passed a private member's bill that bans the wearing of a mask or veil at protests deemed to be illegal. The law provides for a maximum sentence of 10 years—even though it has long been illegal to wear a disguise for the purpose of committing a crime.

Progressive organizations are under attack, too. From being audited by the Canadian Revenue Agency to find out how "political" they have been, to having collective agreements imposed rather than freely negotiated, rights and freedoms are being more restricted, activists more aggressively targeted, and arrests made on less and less evidence. All of this suppression serves as a deterrent for anyone wishing to engage in peaceful protest or any other kind of progressive activism. It's an exercise in dissuasion that seems to be directed especially at the young people who have become active in public protests because they have lost hope of making gains through the formal political and voting systems.

Two movements have endured police oppression on a scale applied to few others, and it serves as a barometer for how the Canadian state views radical politics. These two movements also show possible ways forward for a new left to emerge, completely outside of formal political structures. First, the social movement Idle No More has engaged thousands of people from reserve communities to downtown city cores. It has unleashed an amazing amount of energy and passion, through both creative actions and traditional ones. New leaders have emerged, especially young women leaders, and they are committed to stopping the harmful colonial and neo-colonial policies imposed on Indigenous communities by provincial and federal governments.

Idle No More is a civil rights movement, and its sustainability is rooted in the liberation aspirations of Indigenous peoples. But it's also a movement that requires solidarity from its allies: Canadians who benefit from all the treaty rights guaranteed by the Crown to force their elected representatives to finally respect the responsibilities that flow from those rights. Idle No More is a movement that unites communities that have lived on this land for time immemorial. Its ability to operate outside the political system is critical to achieving its ultimate goal: a re-definition of federalist Canada that includes First Nations' self-determination and sovereignty.

The second promising cohort is the environmental movement, which has grown to be both mainstream and radical, encouraging many young people to join it. From the victory on Burnaby Mountain in British Columbia, where activists stopped the planned construction of a new pipeline, to the victory at Cacouna, Quebec, where plans to build an oil terminal were shelved after activists showed how it would threaten nearby beluga whales, activists are pushing back against the assumption that unlimited resource exploitation is the key to Canada's economic prosperity. With billions of dollars at stake in such projects, however, it's no surprise that police have started cracking down on environmental activists,

too, and that new legislation seems to be targeting them.

At the end of 2014, Conservative MP Wai Young introduced a private member's bill that seeks to punish anyone who tampers with "critical infrastructure"—a proposed law that critics say could cover sabotaging oil pipelines or blocking railroad lines. The bill, if passed, would make minimum jail sentences mandatory, meaning that a judge would have no choice but to impose them on anyone found guilty of an offence. The maximum sentence would be 10 years in prison.

Perhaps Conservative activist Tom Flanagan was more pragmatic than prophetic when he warned of the "danger" that could be generated if Indigenous and environmental movements united.

Idle No More, the environmental movement, the student movement, and the labour movement all stand in opposition to neoliberalism. Under neoliberal logic, these organizations should not be able to withstand the steady and constant attacks by neoliberal governments and corporations, but they do. These movements target the most fundamental tenets on which neoliberalism is based: that people don't need community, and that people should remain powerless. But the struggles and successes of these organizations, despite all the right-wing neoliberal efforts to crush them, prove that young people can resist subjugation, build connections, and join the crusade for a better world for themselves and their families.

Bridging the young-old divide

For young people to resist neoliberalism and engage in the fight-back, they need the help of older progressives. Whether through social movements or uniting around a single issue like student debt, success lies in the capacity of all people to work together. For young people, that means finding help from older Canadians, including authors like John Ralston Saul, who can see Canada in the shadow of its former self.

Bridging the divide between younger and older people in order to resist this right-wing onslaught requires understanding how people's realities differ. Finding ways for inter-generational solidarity to work relies on activists talking to one another and supporting each other's fights, whether it be debt forgiveness and free higher education, or preserving pensions and health care.

But the barriers erected by neoliberalism make it very difficult to have these conversations. Rather than being able to start with common phrases and common experiences, progressives of all ages need to take time to explain what they mean by what they discuss: which assumptions are underpinning recounted experiences? What are we projecting from our own experiences onto people of other generations? How can this communication problem inhibit our ability to work together?

Certainly, we don't have the luxury of time to work these things out; we have to find ways to develop this understanding and camaraderie while we undertake our collective projects. In reality, part of the disorganization of the left stems from the fact that neoliberalism has impaired both our sense of community and our ability to find new ways to connect and work together.

Ralph Nader points to the process that is undoing the left: "All in all, Washington is exporting concentrated corporate power animated by government power without respect for the social, economic, and democratic rights of the Canadian people. And Ottawa, under both major parties, is buying it incrementally, but relentlessly, with ever larger chunks of the country's sovereignty and social system." This process has accelerated since Nader's speech in 2011, so finding new ways to bridge our divisions is more important now than ever.

Young people and students have demonstrated, over and over, that on the whole they're a thoughtful, creative, and progressive lot. The broader struggle will be for progressive older people to find ways to make room for their involvement within unions, social movements, or other political structures: by opening spaces where young people can direct campaigns work, encouraging young people to hold positions of authority, and allowing for new structures to emerge to replace old ones. Progressives in all movements—especially the labour movement—need to include young workers at the centre of their operations, or risk becoming irrelevant. Connections also need to be forged between student activists and labour activists that go beyond the walls of a particular institution. Making the connections between student debt, seniority, and pension reform could forge strong relationships that currently are lacking.

Also necessary is taking cues from emerging social movements that are uninterested in working through formal electoral structures. Rather than buying into the short-term cycles of government, we need to build a true grassroots movement that can withstand the shifts in political power while maintaining a strong and steady opposition to neoliberal tactics. It is in this spirit that I wonder: can we imagine a new federalism, a new localism, new democratic spaces that can operate outside formal structures?

If young people are checking out of the system, will their later aging make them conservative and induce them to try to work within the old and ineffectual formal structures? Or is the millennial generation the group that will demand completely new and genuinely democratic governance? The answer to that crucial question will have a decisive effect in shaping our country's future. It will either result in Canada's further social, economic, political, and environmental decline, or to a revitalization so wide and deep that it will make Canada the truly great nation it could and should be. M

Excerpted from Nora Loreto's chapter in the book ***Canada After Harper****, edited by Ed Finn with an introduction by Ralph Nader, which was published by Lorimer in August. The book contains several chapters by CCPA researchers and associates, including Kate McInturff, Trish Hennessy, Lynne Fernandez, James Turk, Larry Kuehn, Colleen Fuller, Scott Sinclair and Stuart Trew.*

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

The *Monitor* asked CCPA staff members what questions they are hoping to have answered by candidates, and the campaigns in general, before the October election.

Here's what they said:

LYNNE FERNANDEZ

SENIOR RESEARCHER, CCPA-MB

Given the crucial role that unions played in forming the Canadian middle class, and the fact that declining unionism is now contributing to the shrinking of the middle class, what is your position on unions in Canada? How do you see government's role in promoting unionism?

MOLLY MCCRAKEN

DIRECTOR, CCPA-MB

How will your party implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission? How will you work with First Nations peoples to improve living conditions on reserves and social and economic opportunities? Will you remove the cap on federal funding to Aboriginal communities and reinstate the $20 million annual funding for Aboriginal organizations that was cut in 2012?

TRISH HENNESSY

DIRECTOR, CCPA-ON

What do you plan to do for the middle class besides offering more tax cuts, given that tax cuts deprive us of needed revenue to invest in public programs that benefit everyone?

STUART TREW

EDITOR, CCPA MONITOR

During this year's parliamentary and senate hearings into recent anti-terrorism legislation (bills C-51 and C-44), virtually every witness urged the government to improve on Canada's accountability regime for national security, yet the government ignored them. Public and parliamentary oversight of Canada's security activities will be all the more important in light of the controversial new powers given to CSIS in the Anti-Terrorism Act 2015 to detain people and disrupt potential threats to Canada. How will you and your party make sure these new powers are not abused, and that Canada's security agencies are held to account for their actions? Will you promise to have Canada finally adopt the recommendations of the Arar Commission with respect to oversight of Canada's too-often-unaccountable national security agencies?

KATE MCINTURFF

SENIOR RESEARCHER, CCPA

Violence against women directly affects millions of women and girls in Canada at a cost to the economy of over $12 billion annually. Rates of violence against women have changed little over the past decade. If elected, what would you do to end violence against women?

DAVID MACDONALD

SENIOR ECONOMIST, CCPA

We'll likely be in a recession by the time the election is underway, although we've been having weak growth ever since the Great Recession. What is your plan to get us out of this recession and the slow growth that preceded it?

THI VU

PROJECT MANAGER, CCPA-BC

A national child care program is long overdue. It would greatly benefit Canadian families, create good, green jobs, and would have significant benefits for the economy. If your party is in government, will you implement a national child care program?

EMILY TURK

ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS, CCPA

In Canada, the lack of access to safe abortion services is an ongoing obstacle and barrier for those who choose to terminate their pregnancies, particularly for individuals living in rural or remote areas. Despite having the necessary power, responsibility and authority to ensure that abortion services are provided without financial or other barriers, the current federal government has not taken any action to address the discriminatory abortion policies of provinces that contravene the Canada Health Act.

If elected, how will your party address access to abortion across Canada? Would your Government withhold cash contributions to provinces that fail to ensure the availability and accessibility of abortion services, as outlined in the Act?

IGLIKA IVANOVA

SENIOR ECONOMIST, CCPA-BC

Many Canadians recognize that the current economic strategy—narrowly focused on resource extraction industries like oil, gas and mining—is both economically and environmentally risky. How do you plan to do to create meaningful, sustainable, family-supporting jobs across Canada?

There are at least 135,000 fewer young Canadians working today than in 2008. Youth underemployment is an even bigger problem, with a large number of youth with post-secondary education employed in low-skilled jobs in retail or food services. What is your plan for dealing with youth unemployment and underemployment?

ERIKA SHAKER

DIRECTOR, EDUCATION PROJECT

Canada recently was the target of pointed criticism from the UN Human Rights Commission regarding our treatment of First Nations, missing and murdered Indigenous women, and refugees. What tangible steps will be taken to meet our international human rights obligations in these and other key areas identified by the UNHRC? What mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that the public funding required to honour these commitments is adequate, sustained and guaranteed—and meets the needs that have been identified by the communities most affected?

BRUCE CAMPBELL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CCPA

Canadians trust their government to protect their health, safety and environment. The Lac-Mégantic rail disaster broke that trust and exposed multiple regulatory failures behind the accident. The government assures us that it is taking all necessary measures to ensure transportation of oil by rail is safe. It cites the 2014 Transportation Safety Board report as the last word. However, there remain too many unanswered questions about the fundamental causes. As with other major industrial accidents, would you call a public inquiry into Lac-Megantic to get to the bottom of what went wrong to make sure it never happens again?

SCOTT SINCLAIR

DIRECTOR, TRADE AND INVESTMENT RESEARCH PROJECT

Supply management is a $27 billion industry that supports thousands of family farms and rural communities in all regions of the country. Producers receive prices that cover their cost of production and provide a fair return, while consumers benefit from having a fresh, local supply of milk, eggs and poultry at reasonable prices. Supply management is under attack in the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement. Will your party fully protect supply management from any erosion by the TPP?

Investor–state dispute settlement (ISDS) allows foreign corporations to sue states for compensation whenever they feel a policy or regulation interferes with their investment or profit expectations. Because of NAFTA, Canada is now the most-sued developed country in the world. Will your party oppose the inclusion of ISDS in the Canada–EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), especially given that ISDS is so unpopular in Europe that it threatens to block CETA's ratification.

MARC LEE

SENIOR ECONOMIST, CCPA-BC

Scientists tell us that some two-thirds to 80% of the world's proven fossil fuel reserves need to stay undeveloped due to climate change, and this percentage could be much higher for Canada. How should Canada respond to this challenge and what kind of leadership should the federal government play?

Rob Jowett

Suppressing the youth vote beyond the Fair Elections Act

WHEN BILL C-23, known as the Fair Elections Act, was first introduced in February 2014, legal experts, the media and opposition parties decried its capacity to supress voting in various sectors of Canadian society. They were particularly concerned with youth. The bill's critics argued that by removing vouching—the ability of one person to vouch for the identity of others—and banning the use of voter information cards as accepted forms of identification, young voters, especially students (who frequently change their address), could be disenfranchised.

These concerns are still valid despite modest reforms to C-23 to allow limited vouching at the polls. But focusing on how youth voting may be suppressed by the Fair Elections Act overshadows the larger issue of poor youth voter turnout in Canadian elections.

In the 2011 federal elections, only 38.8% of people aged 18–24 voted—more than twenty percentage points below the national average of 61.1%. Among those aged 25–34, turnout jumped to 45.1%. That upward trend continues through each age group until 65–74, where it hits 75.1% before dropping to 60.3% for those older than 75. It's interesting to note the disparity between the total number of people who voted in 2011 and the number of registered voters was also greatest for the 18–24 age group, meaning far fewer young people even bother to register.

This was the norm before the Fair Elections Act. And while eliminating or changing the legislation would certainly help, it will not fix the underlying problem of low turnout among younger voters. Suppression at this level is far more systemic, though not necessarily planned.

> At heart, low youth voting levels is an educational failure.

At heart, low youth voting levels is an educational failure. Specifically, the issue lies in the de-emphasis of social studies and Canadian studies in elementary and secondary school. Most provinces require only one social studies class per year at the elementary level, which also includes history and geography. In high school, there is typically only one required class in civics. In New Brunswick, Quebec and Saskatchewan, civics and social studies are not required at all.

Across Canada, social studies and civics classes are being pushed out in favour of STEM courses (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). To graduate from high school in Ontario, for example, students are required to complete a half-course in civics—typically their first lesson on democracy and voting since Grade 5. The course covers how the government functions, how elections work and why voting is essential for a proper democracy to function.

In comparison, those same Ontario high school students are required to take three math and two science classes, in which they learn how to factor polynomials and what causes mirrors to reflect light. These lessons have no real-world application outside of a STEM field, but are nonetheless required knowledge for students. Meanwhile, even though everyone theoretically has the right to vote, it's normal to graduate without fully grasping the importance of democracy.

Strange as this setup is, there is little incentive for the government to change it. As Canadian elections drift toward micro-targeting—the campaign in which small, select voting groups are targeted to elect MPs in swing ridings—youth, a relatively small voting bloc, are ignored.

To go down this road (as all parties appear to be doing) is to turn elections into a numbers game rather than an effort to form a government that broadly reflects the many interests of society. Elections should be about keeping government accountable, not being popular with the "right" voting groups.

The long-term dangers of de-emphasizing civics are enormous. In a democracy, the government is supposed to enact the will of the people, but why would it if the people are increasingly tuned out? And why should those over 18 tune in to begin with when no one has really explained to them why elections matter?

Initiatives like the Student Vote are useful, but as an opt-in program created by Elections Canada they will have limited effect. Some teachers may also take it upon themselves to teach their students, outside of the curriculum, about the importance of voting and the voice of citizens in a democracy.

But none of this is required learning. Students can ditch the extra lessons, nearly flunk their minimal civics classes, and still the provinces will consider them fully educated upon graduation. To those in government who have found democracy to be a hindrance, perhaps they are. M

Trish Hennessy

An election platform to reduce income inequality

WHEN THE CCPA started examining trends in Canadian income inequality in 2006, the topic was nowhere on the political radar screen. They were talking about it next door in the U.S., but here in Canada it was like income inequality didn't exist.

For the past nine years, our team of economists and research associates from across Canada have been documenting the rise of Canada's richest 1%, the struggles of a stretched middle class, and the persistence of poverty. We've been shining a light on every aspect of Canada's inequality problem. And we've been getting people talking.

This fall, as Canadians prepare to head to the polls, income inequality has finally taken its place in the political debate. For the first time since I could vote, more than one political party is talking about income inequality and proposing solutions.

Liberal leader Justin Trudeau vows, "We will fight this income inequality, because it has harmful effects. It is a source of social tension; it is stopping millions of Canadians from achieving their ambitions." Trudeau is promising a new child benefit for families, tax cuts for the middle class and tax hikes for those earning $200,000 and up.

NDP leader Thomas Mulcair says his party would take measures to reduce income inequality and eliminate child poverty. "A fundamentally un-Canadian thing is happening," he says. "The tremendous wealth that is being generated in this country today is landing in fewer and fewer hands. And those at the very top end are enjoying tax benefits that the majority just don't have access to.

"This has meant that the middle class has had to carry more of the burden and that more and more Canadians have fallen through the cracks. This has created a growing disparity in Canada."

Mulcair is promising to raise the federal minimum wage to $15, to implement a national $15-a-day child care program and to close the tax loophole on stock options. For its part, the Green party is promoting a guaranteed annual income to alleviate the stress on low-income households.

In government, the ruling Conservative party has focused its talking points on the economy (which has been faltering) and tax cuts. But the Conservative government's income splitting scheme only serves to worsen income inequality, and the party's silence on this issue is troubling.

Ideally, Canadian businesses would take the lead on reducing income inequality at the source: in the labour market. But, in the absence of corporate leadership to reduce income inequality and pursue environmentally sustainable job growth strategies, governments can be powerful actors—if they choose to be.

That's why the CCPA has launched a comprehensive online platform to show how a federal government in Canada could tackle the problem. It asks: What would Canada look like if we invested in the things that could solve income inequality?

It would mean everyone who wants a job would have a good one. It would mean building a strong safety net for everyone.

Workers who lose their job would get adequate employment insurance and training opportunities to pivot to a new job. People living with disabilities would get the supports they need to thrive.

Families with young children would have access to affordable, quality child care, no matter where they live in Canada. There would be a national pharmacare and dental care program.

It would mean young Canadians would have an opportunity to get a university education that didn't saddle them with student debt the size of a mortgage down payment.

It would mean stronger commitments and investments in First Nations communities across Canada, and there would be renewed funding for the Status of Women, to restore its original mandate.

It would mean implementing a national poverty reduction strategy, working in partnership with the provinces and territories—especially considering some have already assumed leadership on this file and have been awaiting a federal partner.

We would initiate a national homelessness strategy, and there would be better pension supports for seniors and supports for veterans. Good jobs, a strong safety net, good public programs: it's good for Canada and good for all of us.

The final part of our platform focuses on progressive taxation: restoring the corporate tax rate to 2006 levels, taxing capital gains as income, introducing a new tax bracket for Canada's richest, and more.

It's time for us to decide what kind of Canada we want to live in. Is it one where income inequality keeps getting worse? Or one where there is opportunity for all? M

Learn more about the CCPA's income inequality platform by visiting GoodForCanada.ca.

Kate McInturff

Swing big, Canada

An election pitch

BABE RUTH DIDN'T hit a home run the first time he stepped onto a baseball field. Frederick Banting and Charles Best didn't isolate insulin after an hour in the laboratory. Rosa Parks didn't end segregation in the United States with one bus ride.

The innovations and events that really change our world, shape history and inspire generations often come at the end of a long series of failures—failures driven by high aspirations and high stakes. There is no question that the stakes are high today. So why do our aspirations seem so small?

The debates that are taking place around the upcoming election in Canada are an opportunity to take a big swing at the big challenges we face. The problem is political campaigns hate risk almost as much as they hate complexity. Say something new, propose something big, try something no one else has tried, wade into sticky, long-term problems... Forgetaboutit.

Campaign managers aren't entirely to blame. They exist in a media environment that would rather replay a five-second public gaffe on an endless loop than broadcast complex discussions of complex problems. Probably most Canadians remember Mitt Romney's "Binders full of women." A debate on how to achieve pay equity? That's outside the media comfort zone (even in a two-month election campaign).

Which is why this election period is sure to be marked by the slow trickle of small, focus group–tested ideas into a sea of platforms that sometimes look more beige than red, blue, green and orange.

We can do better. We can dream bigger. We can be the focus group from hell. You know, the one that wants to know why we haven't put an end to child poverty or when we're going to wake up and smell the climate change.

Allow me to pitch you, dear voter, some big ideas.

1. The best place in the world to be Aboriginal

Imagine if Canada's relationship with First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples was marked by respect, dignity and pride. What would that platform look like?

In one year: Hold an inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. This could fail. It could follow in the footsteps of the B.C. inquiry that did not provide adequate support for the family and community members who wanted and needed to be present. It could produce no action, save no lives.

Or it could provide a platform for the families and communities that have been systematically ignored by non-Aboriginal governments ("not high on our radar").

Women like Rinelle Harper, who was left for dead by the side of the Assiniboine River, can stand before Parliament and make their demands. Families who were told by police that their missing daughters "were probably out drinking" can remind decision-makers that Aboriginal women are loved and valued. Real action to end violence against Aboriginal women and girls could save lives.

In five years: First Nations communities have safe drinking water, safe and adequate housing, and functional schools. Bring First Nations child poverty levels from near 50% to the national average of 14%. How it could fail: inadequate funding, inadequate support, and a poorly managed process that doesn't put First Nations peoples at the centre of decisions about their own communities could result in everyone walking away from the table.

Or we could realize the dreams of Shannen Koostachin, the young woman who just wanted a safe and comfortable school for herself and her community and fought for it until her death at the age of 15. The Red Cross wouldn't need to provide heat and drinking water for residents of Attawapiskat.

In 20 years: A fundamental transformation of the political and fiscal relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government, based on treaty rights, the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the principle of free, prior and informed consent.

This could fail. The negotiation of treaty rights could be undermined by the interests of those hoping to profit from resource extraction on Indigenous territories. Debates over repealing the Indian Act could create further divisions between communities and political leaders. The whole thing could devolve into such a highly technocratic legal process that the peoples whose interests are at stake are excluded from it.

Or Canada could be the model for the countries around the world seeking to establish new relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments.

2. Eliminate greenhouse gas emissions

Imagine if Canada traded in its Fossil of the Year award for something greener.

In one year: Implement a National Harmonized Carbon Tax (HCT) and invest the new revenues in renewable energy, green infrastructure and tax refunds for individuals. It could fail. Provincial governments could refuse to participate. The carbon price could be lowered to the point that it doesn't incentivize any change of behaviour. High-emitting sectors could successfully lobby against the implementation of the tax.

Or Canada could achieve deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, maintain strong economic growth and generate sustainable jobs.

In five years: Generate 90% of our electricity from non-emitting sources. To reach this goal the government would have to start investing immediately in green infrastructure (including better public transit), home energy efficiency retrofits, create tax incentives for energy storage, and work across sectors to support lower emissions and more energy-efficient manufacturing processes. How it could fail: high-emitting fuel prices could drop, working against the incentives provided for both consumers and manufacturers to switch to lower-emitting fuels.

Or we could be on the road to a sustainable future for the next generation, with more efficient homes, better public transportation and greener jobs.

In 20 years: Canada could be a global leader in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions to near zero, punching above its weight when it comes to slowing down global warming. By slowly accelerating these policies (increasing the HCT, investing in green infrastructure over time, shifting manufacturing processes), Canada could see its GHG emissions get close to zero by 2040.

How it could fail: we could hold on to the Fossil of the Year award for another generation, leaving the kids to pay the price of catastrophic climate events and global warming.

Or Canada could help tip the balance toward a global effort to reverse a global phenomenon and move the global community away from petty debates about who spilt the milk, so that we can start cleaning it up.

3. End violence against women and girls

Imagine if women were safe in their own homes. Imagine if girls could go to school without being harassed. Imagine if everyone agreed that the cause of rape was rapists and not the behaviour of the victim.

In one year: Follow up the inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls with comprehensive national action plans that address violence against Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women and girls. Australia did it. Dozens of other countries around the world have done it.

It could fail. A lack of leadership and resources could send this the way of all gender mainstreaming. Crossed and cut.

Or we could have concerted federal leadership on an issue that affects millions of women and costs our economy more than $12 billion a year.

In five years: Right now we have no accurate information about levels of violence against women at the local level. The government only tracks self-reported rates of violence at the national level and only once every three years. Five years of tracking levels of violence against women and girls at the local and regional levels could yield real and meaningful information about what policies are working and what programs need to be scaled up.

It could fail. We could continue to rely on police-reported data even though the police, researchers and Statistics Canada all agree that 90% of sexual assaults and 70% of domestic violence incidents are never reported.

Or we could stop making decisions in the dark and start putting our resources where they will make a real difference.

In 20 years: No one dropping their daughter off at school will have to worry that she will be assaulted in her residence. No woman will have to think twice about sitting at a bus stop after dark. Our public and private spaces will be equally safe for women and men.

It could fail. We could throw up our hands and say, "It's too complicated, this takes generational change." Or we could open our eyes to both the violence that is all around us and the possibilities for change.

Some of our goals will take longer to achieve. We will, on occasion, strike out. Get booed. But please, don't leave the field, close the lab, or get off the bus.

Climate change isn't going to be reversed in a year or even a decade. Rebuilding the relationship between Indigenous peoples in Canada and non-Indigenous peoples isn't going to happen overnight. We can't end violence against women tomorrow. But if we don't start swinging, then we aren't even in the game. M

Asad Ismi

Mexico's human rights crisis and Canada's silence

THE 21ST ANNIVERSARY of NAFTA in September finds Mexico in the throes of a shocking human rights crisis that, since 2006, has seen more than 150,000 people killed and more than 27,000 disappeared. According to Amnesty International, torture in Mexico is "out of control," and police and security forces have "blood on their hands."

Canada, which prides itself on its global human rights record, has yet to make a single public statement about the Mexican crisis. Meanwhile the Mexican government is stonewalling efforts to get to the bottom of what Human Rights Watch has called "the worst case of abuse to take place in Latin America in the past few decades."

Kathy Price, a campaigner for Amnesty International Canada who focuses on Latin America, told me her group "is deeply concerned about a very acute and worsening human rights crisis in Mexico that is characterized by very serious violations of human rights including a massive increase in disappearances, torture, extrajudicial executions by state security forces, threats, repression, misuse of the justice system and a climate of impunity."

According to Price, there is a correlation between the government's militarization of its fight against organized crime and the increase in reports of very serious human rights violations.

She cites as an example the September 2014 kidnapping of 43 students from a teacher training college in the town of Ayotzinapa, in Guerrero state. About 80 students from the college had bussed into the town of Iguala to collect money for their studies and protest school hiring practices. Local police blocked their route back to Ayotzinapa and opened fire on the busses, killing several people before taking about 20 students into custody. Unmarked cars believed to be carrying drug gang members then arrived on the scene, the shooting resumed, and more people were killed or disappeared.

"This egregious crime opened up the eyes of the world to what is going on in Mexico and shows the level of infiltration and collusion between state actors and organized crime," said Price. "The question is why were these students attacked?"

Jorge Luis Clemente Balbuena believes the killings were a direct state attack on a community that is working to change the status quo in Mexico. Balbuena is a spokesperson for the 43 kidnapped students from the Raul Isidro Burgos teacher training college where he also studies. He and Hilda Legideño Vargas (pictured), the mother of one of the students kidnapped last September, visited Canada this spring to ask the federal government to put pressure on the Mexican state for a proper investigation, and to educate the Canadian public about the crime.

"Our school has been attacked for a long time by the repressive Mexican state, which has tried to silence us because we have been fighting for the rights of farmers, students and the community," said Balbuena. "The 43 students were kidnapped to stop our resistance. This is also why the Mexican government wants to eradicate the entire national network of teacher training colleges, which are full of progressive students like ours. These schools organize their community, which is precisely what the state fears."

Involvement of Mexican officials in the now paramilitarized drug trade is well documented, and the student kidnapping shows how deep this collusion goes. "The government says that the kidnapping was committed by criminals but the problem is that in Guerrero state and Mexico, we are ruled by criminals," Vargas told me. Balbuena concurred: "All public officials and the police in Mexico are involved with narco-traffickers and are corrupted by the drug trade and taking part in it. The kidnapping was directed by the state and the narcos attacked us on its behalf."

The former governor of Guerrero, Angel Aguirre, resigned in October 2014 in response to the crisis, and though 100 people have been detained, no officials have yet been charged in the kidnapping. At the end of June, *Vice News* reported that Mexican authorities were stonewalling an independent investigation convened by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. The IACHR wants to speak to 36 members of the Mexican army who might have been involved.

"Many respected analysts have talked about the 'Colombianization' of Mexico," Price said, referring to the widespread implication of private but state-sponsored paramilitary groups in the displacement and murder of thousands of civilians in Colombia.

"The Mexican military even warned a student trying to help one of the 43 who had been shot in the mouth that, 'You're going to end up being disappeared like the others.' This is very disturbing. The role of the military in this crime has not been investigated and needs to be. We are very concerned about the fact that the official investigation of this crime has been a whitewash."

An economic crisis in Mexico, linked to free trade, parallels the human

rights crisis, driving the spread of drug trafficking and increasing the influence of organized crime.

According to Dawn Paley, a Mexico-based Canadian journalist and author of the 2014 book *Drug War Capitalism*, U.S. agricultural exports flooded into Mexico after NAFTA was signed, decimating farmers and making local corn tortillas, a staple food, too expensive for many to buy. NAFTA has effectively replaced well-paying industrial jobs with a notoriously low-paying, export-oriented Maquiladora sector. Poverty is increasing in Mexico, which has encouraged many people to to turn to drug trafficking, she said.

Paley further argues the U.S. and Mexico have used their war on drugs as a cover for extending the control of multinational corporations over even more of the Mexican economy.

"The drug war is not about stopping the flow of drugs, but is actually aimed at expanding the territories available for transnational capitalism, which includes U.S. and Canadian corporations, through the processes of militarization and paramilitarization," she told me recently. "It's not a war on drugs, it's a war on people to discourage their resistance to corporate control. I document in my book how some paramilitary drug cartels have already attacked opponents of the operations of certain Canadian mining companies in Mexico."

The militarization of the drug war in Mexico really took off after 2008, when the U.S. Merida Initiative began funding Mexico's efforts "to fight organized crime and associated violence," in the words of the U.S. Department of State. At least $2.3 billion has been spent since then to upgrade Mexico's police force and army, but some of the money is for legal reforms. According to Paley, these "less-talked-about hidden aspects" of the Merida Initiative are actually meant to help "overhaul of the legal system in Mexico to make it more favourable for transnational corporations, something which has been sought after by the corporate sector."

While in Canada, Balbuena and Vargas spoke before an April 28 meeting of a parliamentary subcommittee on international human rights. Vargas told the Conservative, Liberal and NDP MPs present how desperate she was to find her child. She requested their solidarity and pleaded with the MPs to, "ask the Mexican government to carry out a real search for our children. We want to see how you can make a decision and communicate with the Mexican government so that our case can be dealt with."

Balbuena added how dangerous it was going to be for the pair to return to Mexico.

"I would like to say that at this time we are very afraid for our individual safety, for the safety of our parents, our family members, our students, the social organizations, and the professors, but mainly the parents and the families who stayed in Mexico," he told MPs. "I just wanted to add that because the Mexican government has never ensured anybody's safety. They are very repressive. We fear there will be a greater impact."

Luis Tapia Olivares, a lawyer for the Mexican human rights organization Centro ProDH who also travelled to Canada this year to address the same parliamentary committee, told me last year's kidnapping and the Mexican government's response must be addressed at the highest levels of government.

"Knowing the political and business interests and relations between Canada and Mexico, the Canadian government should be pressured to recognize that there is a serious human rights crisis in Mexico and that it should set conditions for its relations with Mexico based on guaranteeing respect for human rights there," he said. "This should be the condition for there being relations between the two countries."

But Price said she worries the Canadian government has not recognized the seriousness of the human rights crisis of its NAFTA partner, "and obviously that has a lot to do with Canadian economic interests in Mexico." She said the MPs that Vargas, Balbuena and Olivares spoke to were "deeply concerned by what they heard, which is heartening," but that the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development has not publicly called for a full investigation into the disappearance of the 43 students. "The department says that they have brought this issue up with the Mexican government privately but this is obviously inadequate," she said.

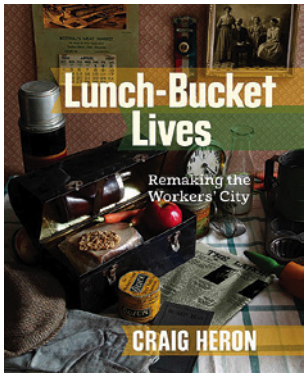
Hilda Ligideno Vargas holds a photo of her missing son, Jorge Antonio Tizapa Legideno, one of 43 college students who disappeared in Mexico.
THE CANADIAN PRESS/Justin Tang

There is considerable Canadian investment in Mexico and a million Canadian tourists visit the country every year, giving Canada real clout. Price said she would like to see the federal government make it clear that it finds the current situation in Mexico unacceptable.

"Given the massive scope of human rights violations in Mexico currently how can you be silent? When more than 27,000 people have disappeared? These are huge numbers. The scope and severity of the human rights violations are shocking and the situation is getting worse. These are the same scale of human rights violations that we usually see under military dictatorships but Mexico is supposedly a democracy." **M**

Reviewed by Paul Weinberg

The making of the Canadian working class



LUNCH-BUCKET LIVES: REMAKING THE WORKERS' CITY

CRAIG HERON

Between the Lines (2015), 784 pages, $39.95

NO REPORTER IN Hamilton from the daily newspaper, the Spectator, or the local CBC covered the June 24 book launch of *Lunch-Bucket Lives: Remaking the Workers City* at the Workers Historical and Cultural Centre in the city's historic north end. Nor did they seek an interview with the book's author, York University professor and labour historian Craig Heron.

It is a bit of a shame because local history is popular here in Hamilton, and Heron's new book offers plenty of fascinating detail into the experiences of working class people in Canada's largest industrial centre during a period of tremendous social and cultural upheaval between the 1890s and the 1940s.

Lunch Bucket Lives culminates Heron's decades of research into Hamilton's blue collar past that began with his 1981 PhD dissertation. His book is part of a grand tradition of social history scholarship that draws inspiration from *The Making of the English Working Class*, the classic 1960s work by British historian E.P. Thompson.

One explanation for the media no-show is that at 700-plus pages Heron's book is not a quick and snappy read. Another is that the book's theme may be out of synch with the city's post-industrial mood.

The legacy of Hamilton's once predominant manufacturing has not totally disappeared. Approach the city from the Burlington Skyway and you'll see active smoke stacks next to empty hulking structures in the vicinity of the harbour. Labour Day still draws a significant crowd and there are still thousands of families living here on union pension plans.

But it is also a city (numbering half a million) where medical services and McMaster University are the major employers, where the older lower city is undergoing a real estate boom (courtesy of Torontonians fleeing a million-dollar home market), and where, according to one local slogan, "Art is the New Steel."

This resetting of Hamilton's image is not new, explains Heron, who titled his book as an ironic counterpoint to a 1971 official commemorative history of the city, *Pardon My Lunch Bucket*.

So why read a book about a Hamilton that longer exists? Well, as Heron proposes, we can learn a great deal about ourselves today from understanding the past. He writes about a period before the advent of welfare, unemployment insurance or even serious laws legalizing unionization to help those falling through the cracks.

A similar sense of vulnerability has returned to Canada following the weakening of social service supports at all levels of government during and since the 1990s. A growing proportion of the work force (more than half in Hamilton, according to a recent United Way/McMaster study) is locked in temporary, contract or part-time positions.

There were also important economic differences in Canada at the beginning of the 20th century.

By 1900, Hamilton had its ample share of home-grown manufacturers, especially in steel and textiles, which eventually consolidated into larger companies. Local business leaders had a lot of say in the city's economic development, and that included the "coaxing" of manufacturers to set up factories here or to open up a local bank, says Heron.

Labour unrest was endemic because of the appalling working conditions, including long hours and the speed-up of production in the factories. But unions had difficulty gaining a permanent foothold in workplaces in the face of employer resistance. For a working male breadwinner, getting fired for union activity meant destitution for the entire family.

"Hamilton is a very depressing city," said one communist organizer during a brief visit in 1928. Another lamented the almost complete absence of unions, especially in the large plants: "When workers were questioned as to their conditions and wages, it became obvious what a paradise Hamilton is for the employers of the continent."

But working class people had other ways to express their grievances toward industrial paternalism, particularly at the ballot box during the First World War years, where they elected Independent Labour Party candidates locally and at other levels of government. As Heron explains, a farmer-labour coalition came to power in Ontario in 1919, but it was undone by dif-

ferences over such issues as the eight-hour day and prohibition.

Heron points to how Hamilton elites opposed what they saw as excessive democracy manifesting itself on an elected city council. In response, boards staffed with business people and experts were hived off to take charge in sensitive areas like technical education, hydroelectricity and parks to ensure administrative "efficiency." One prominent labour-leaning politician and future mayor, Sam Lawrence, came under fire in 1932 for being overly generous in the handing out of relief cheques.

Heron also mentions a general trend across North America to control the behaviour of the working class by nurses and social workers and other helping professionals. Within the rigid schooling programs a failure to conform or perform could get a child labelled "abnormal." A city mental health official told a local audience in 1929 that half the city's schoolchildren were mentally defective. Public health nurses also intruded into working class family homes to instruct women on the value of "intelligent motherhood."

Before the availability of sulpha drugs (the first antibiotics) in the late 1930s, medical science had few cures for serious aliments, says Heron. And so, understandably, many working people steered clear of doctors, nurses and hospitals until then and relied instead on their own traditional knowledge. Home births were apparently the norm before 1914.

The first decades of the 20th century also witnessed the availability of mass consumer products such as refrigerators, vacuum cleaners and other appliances. But few people in Hamilton could afford them before the prosperity of the post–Second World War period.

These are but a few choice tidbits of *Lunch-Bucket Lives*, which is ultimately about the complexities of social class—not a subject people talk openly about these days.

Reviewed by Helen Forsey

The anti-capitalist management guru

REBALANCING SOCIETY: RADICAL RENEWAL BEYOND LEFT, RIGHT, AND CENTRE

HENRY MINTZBERG

Berrett-Koehler Publishers (2015), 160 pages, $20.95

IN THE POLITICAL desert of the airport bookshop it was the only title that seemed appealing. Rebalancing Society? Radical Renewal? Looked good to me.

And for the most part, it was. The book was scarcely longer than the plane ride, but there was a lot of food for thought between its slim covers.

Author Henry Mintzberg presents an overarching analysis of what ails our societies and our planet, and proposes some steps toward the rebalancing he sees as the solution. Clearly writing for a broad and generally conventional readership, he challenges the rigid either-or dichotomies that hold captive so much of today's public discourse.

A professor of management at McGill University, Mintzberg is known for his unusual approach to big issues. Although his bestselling management books were never on my reading list, I was intrigued by the breadth of his views when I heard him interviewed on CBC Radio. Now, reading this latest work, I found his messages to be both unexpected and important.

Mintzberg's overall thesis, tantalizingly summarized in his introduction, is that the world is way out of balance in multiple dimensions, and that dramatic action is needed to reverse the process. The key to success, he argues, lies in a radical re-balancing of the public or private sectors with a reinvigorated and resourceful civil society, or "plural sector." Our continued failure to do this imperils not only our democracies and ways of life, but our planet and "those from whom we have borrowed it."

Despite blind spots—like most Great Men offering comprehensive solutions to the problems of the universe, the author fails to consider gender, racism or patriarchy—Mintzberg has good crap-detecting abilities. In the course of his analysis, he goes after a remarkable number of sacred cows: consumerism, trade agreements, patents, stock markets, corporate lobbying, "self-regulation," property rights, rampant privatization, and capitalism itself.

Without issuing blanket condemnations, he skewers common assumptions and practices, disparaging the imposition of corporate models that force public services "to pretend they are businesses," deploring "the homogenizing imperative in globalization that is antithetical to [community] distinctiveness," and noting that "the relentless drive for growth expected by frenetic stock markets" actually represents "the ideology of the cancer cell."

Mintzberg calls for critical examination of the "casual indulgences" that our society now takes for granted including technologies, like the car and the Internet, that favour individualism and isolation. Going further back, he denounces "the legal fiction" of corporations as "persons"—the sys-

tem that gives them the rights of citizens without the responsibilities—as one of the most outrageous features of modern capitalism.

Still, no one should mistake Mintzberg for a socialist. He sees huge problems with an over-reliance on any one set of interests, including those attributed to the proletariat. Stressing balance, he sees appropriateness rather than ideology as the proper basis for determining which sector (public, private or plural) should undertake a given activity.

But global capitalism is where he aims most of his criticism, acknowledging that in the past quarter-century most of the world has tipped massively toward the right. He warns against relying on the elusive remedies of "corporate social responsibility," individualistic leadership, or government action, the latter inevitably compromised by vested interests and lobbying. Instead, Mintzberg maintains, the plural sector must lead a societal change that embodies inclusiveness, community and respect.

"We need more than occupation movements," he says, "we need sling-

He warns against relying on the elusive remedies of "corporate social responsibility," individualistic leadership, or government action compromised by vested interests and lobbying.

shot movements"—his term for clever, creative resistance and regeneration initiatives based in the plural sector and linking local to global networks using today's technology. The details for achieving the overall change are left up to "you and me, individually and together."

Given the huge amount of ground Mintzberg tries to cover, it is understandable that the book feels scattered, its chatty style perhaps slightly overdone. More irritating, perhaps, are the author's efforts to appeal to and reassure what he terms "the 'good folks' of America." My main disappointment, however, is his failure to acknowledge the crucial role of oppression based on gender and skin colour in creating and sustaining the crises facing society and the planet.

Mintzberg names capitalism; why doesn't he name patriarchy and the other violent supremacist ideologies that continue to distort societies the world over? He may be under the illusion that we live in a post-feminist, non-racist world, but that assumption is just as unbalanced and dangerous as those he challenges. A "rebalancing" that ignores sexism and racism will just mean more of the same.

Though disappointing in these respects, this extended essay does provide one accessible and challenging entryway into the essential dialogues of our time. Its success will be seen in how actively the rest of us consider, criticize, refine and pursue Mintzberg's "rebalancing" vision. **M**

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