

Introduction

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IN 2008, THE Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) published *The Harper Record* as the latest installment in a series of publications that have, over the past 25 years, chronicled the policy legacies of successive federal governments. A distinguished group of 47 writers and researchers worked with editor Teresa Healy to assess Stephen Harper's first two years as prime minister of Canada's 39th Parliament. The intention was to offer a detailed account of the laws, policies, regulations and initiatives introduced by the Conservative minority government during its 32-month term from January 2006 to September 2008.

This new edition of *The Harper Record* builds on the earlier compilation by examining the Conservative government's policy record from the 2008 crisis through the subsequent Great Recession and ongoing economic recovery. The book was over a year in the making, and though it lands in the middle of an important federal election we feel it will continue to be relevant to policy-makers, activists, historians, journalists and the public for many years to come. From the economy to the environment, social programs to foreign policy, immigration reforms to tax cuts, the tar sands to free trade deals, and many other areas, the 36 contributors to *The Harper Record 2008–2015* detail the facts and key moments of the 40th and 41st Parliaments.

As we reflect back on these years, it is clear that election dates obscure as much as they reveal in marking significant moments in Canadian political life. In reviewing the chapters herein, we see that the more important moment for this gov-

ernment—the pivot at the centre of its ongoing plans to recast the Canadian political economy, to transform how we think about the government—was the 2008 crisis and recovery. The crisis was the context within which the government restructured the public sector and labour relations, cut public services, deregulated industry, dismantled environmental protections, reformed Canada’s immigration system, and undermined parliamentary democratic processes.

Putting the record in context

The 40th Parliament, which began in November 2008, was dominated by the impacts and implications of the global financial crisis and resulting Great Recession, as this period is frequently called. Less than two months after the government was re-elected with a minority in 2008, Prime Minister Harper faced the probability of a vote of non-confidence and a possible NDP-Liberal coalition government if the Governor General approved.

The opposition had swelled to a crescendo as a result of the government’s minimalist response to the deepening economic crisis displayed in its *Economic and Fiscal Update* of late November. While countries around the world were co-operating to stimulate the global economy through public investments, Canada was an outlier, planning more tax cuts, privatization and balanced budgets into the future.¹ Harper pre-empted the eventuality of a coalition government by asking the Governor General at the time, Michaëlle Jean, to prorogue Parliament, which she agreed to do on December 4, 2008. In early January 2009, before Parliament returned, Harper appointed 19 Senators to the unelected chamber.²

Later that month, the government tabled a budget in which it promised stimulus spending in line with the 2% of GDP committed by other governments in the G20. It was in one sense a survival measure that went against deeply held Conservative ideology, which is why the stimulus measures were offset by corporate and income tax cuts. Though the projected stimulus fell to \$18 billion in 2009 and \$15 billion in 2010, the *Economic Action Plan* represented a dramatic change of direction on the part of the government,³ which would spend almost \$100 million advertising the program between 2009 and 2014.⁴ The coalition crumbled and public support for the government increased.

But then by the end of 2009, with the opposition parties raising questions about what the government knew about the torture of Afghan detainees, the prime minister again requested prorogation. Harper shut down Parliament until March 2010, when the government delivered its Speech from the Throne and a new budget,⁵ but

not before appointing another five Senators, thus assuring the Conservatives would have a majority in the upper chamber.

By mid-2010, national economic growth had begun to recover, but there were 300,000 more workers unemployed than when the recession began.⁶ When the G20 met in Toronto in June 2010, civil society organizations held counter-events, demonstrations and conferences. The federal government's security forces co-ordinated the policing of the event, turning the city centre into a militarized zone and conducting the largest mass arrest in Canadian history (more than 900 people were detained).⁷

Perhaps surprisingly, Canadians were gripped that summer by the government's decision to end the mandatory long-form census, which would have been undertaken in 2011. Many individuals, as well as organizations, provinces, territories, and First Nations objected to the government's decision to eliminate an important source of knowledge about the population upon which policy decisions could rationally be based.⁸ Canada's chief statistician resigned and Statistics Canada faced an unprecedented crisis.⁹

The 2011 budget was delivered in March and demonstrated a sharp return to conservative fiscal policy on the part of the government. Total federal program spending was slated to drop by 16% in 2009–10 and by 12.9% in 2015–16, representing the return of an austerity agenda from a government committed to tax and spending cuts.¹⁰ The government was defeated immediately after delivering its budget. Harper went to the Canadian people asking for a “strong, stable, majority government.” He received it in the election of May 2, 2011.

If the 40th Parliament was dominated by debates over economic crisis and stimulus spending, the 41st Parliament witnessed conflict over the government's efforts to reassert a more fiscally conservative economic environment. The 2012 federal budget imposed deep cuts, catalyzing civil society to organize to fight the government's agenda. From the Quebec student movement in 2012 (the Maple Spring) to renewed calls by Aboriginal women for an inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women, the appearance of Idle No More late in 2012 to rising conflict over pipeline developments in Western Canada, disputes over hydro developments in Labrador to new evidence of voter suppression in the 2011 election, opposition to the government's procurement plan for new fighter jets to the ongoing crisis in manufacturing and slow growth, the government had a lot on its plate.

As members of Parliament prepared to return to Ottawa after the summer recess in 2013, Stephen Harper again went to the Governor General with a request to prorogue Parliament until after Thanksgiving. Many observers believed the government was avoiding renewed criticism of a nascent Senate spending scandal¹¹ that would continue to dog the prime minister into the 2015 electoral campaign, as journalists continually raised questions about the handling of the scandal by

the Prime Minister's Office and demanded to know which PMO officials were involved. The 41st Parliament ended, as it began, in acrimony.

With this book, we are doing a number of things at the same time. We record the facts, legislation, statements, decisions and dates of the many changes made by the government of Stephen Harper in the last two Parliaments. In part, we do this in order to contribute to our collective memory of this time, which is a useful goal in itself. Contributors to this volume go further, however, to analyze specific policies in terms of their broad impact on the economy, social relations, and on diverse sectors of Canadian society.

Not all policies affect individuals, communities or governments in the same way. Some of these changes involve shifting inter-governmental relations, between the federal and provincial governments, and between government and Canada's First Nations. Because we are reviewing the government's record in the 40th and 41st Parliaments, we write this introduction in the past tense. At the time of writing, we are in the midst of an election campaign whose result will not be apparent for some weeks yet.

Each contribution to this collection is based upon careful research in particular policy domains. Below we introduce some of the shared and crosscutting themes raised in the chapters that follow. Together they paint a picture of a government that weakened its ties to Parliament, narrowed its relationship with civil society, exerted strategic control over inter-governmental relations, rejected scientific and expert knowledge in the interest of pursuing more partisan economic and social policy objectives, and sought to promote market relations through the activities of the state. In each case we see the importance of the 2008 financial crisis to achieving the government's objectives: from stimulus to austerity there is an organic connection between the government's response to the Great Recession and its systemic transformation of the role of the Canadian state.

Weakened ties to Parliament

In 2011, while still in minority, the Conservative government was found to be in contempt of Parliament by a committee of MPs whose work was impeded by the government's failure to produce estimates on the costs of its major initiatives (Mallea). For the first time in Canadian history, a vote in the House of Commons affirmed this assessment and the government fell on a vote of non-confidence. When it was returned with a majority later that spring, the government began in earnest to restructure its relationship to Parliament under the strict control of the Prime Minister's Office.

With its important win on May 2, 2011, the Harper government, like recent Liberal majorities, was no longer bound by many of the formal restraints of Parliament

(Wilson): the Conservatives controlled the House and Senate, giving the party the option of passing legislation without having to accommodate opposition amendments or broader public concerns. An example of how the Harper government would approach parliamentary and extra-parliamentary consultation while in majority arose early with the decision to take away the single-desk marketing power of the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB). The process created a template the government would follow for much of its legislative agenda over the following years, notably in the CEAA review and passage of Bill C-51 (Kinney; Mazigh).

During the 2011 election campaign, the Conservatives said that if returned to government they would allow farmers a vote on their plans for the CWB. Shortly after winning a majority, the government backtracked, announcing through Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz that the federal election had served as the only vote necessary on the matter. The government used closure in Parliament to limit debate on Bill C-18 and chose not to refer it to the House of Commons standing committee on agriculture and agri-food. Instead, the government created a special ad hoc committee to review the CWB legislation, which was granted royal assent before the end of the year (Slater).

Expediency was not a Conservative innovation, but the increased use of omnibus bills as a means of obscuring significant legislative initiatives at budget time was. From 1995 to 2000, federal budget implementation legislation averaged 12 pages in length.¹² In 2009, it was 530 pages long, while the Harper government's 2010 *Budget Implementation Act* topped 880 pages. It was through this mechanism that the government introduced the largest-ever dismantling of Canadian environmental policy, buried in the 2012 *Budget Implementation Act* (Kinney). As a result of the act's process and content, the desires of corporations to bring resources to market trumped the public's ability to deliberate the impact of oil, gas and mining projects. Similarly, 2012 omnibus legislation gave the immigration minister powers that had previously required parliamentary oversight and public consultation, including the right to decide the number and priority of immigration applications and what constitutes a "safe" country of origin for refugee claims, while the 2014 omnibus budget bill restricted the ability of refugees to claim social assistance (Walia, Carlaw).

The Harper government sought other less-than-democratic means to avoid parliamentary deliberation on controversial legislative changes. For example, the government used private member's bills 25 out of 30 times in 2014 to advance tough-on-crime laws (Mallea). Bill C-377, which imposes onerous reporting requirements on labour unions, was also introduced this way, the benefit being that private member's bills receive less scrutiny than official government legislation and are frequently poorly written. In substance, C-377 provided for future changes to be imposed

through regulation, thus avoiding further parliamentary oversight (Braley-Rattai). For an example of how that might work in practice, we can point to the justice minister's use of his executive authority to bypass debate in the legislature in order to unilaterally increase the length of prison sentences (Mallea).

This last governmental trick did not depend on having a majority of seats in the House of Commons. While in minority, the Harper government made changes to the policy governing temporary workers by administrative rather than parliamentary means whenever possible. In majority, however, the Conservative government chose to announce changes to migration policy after direct consultations with employers, instead of approaching Parliament and inviting public debate. The government frequently announced such changes on Fridays when media and public attention was low (Flecker).

Though the government responded appropriately to the severity of the 2008 financial crisis, it did not prepare for any future crises by increasing oversight of the financial services sector, where it remains quite limited (Roberge). Where the government had an opportunity to *decrease* parliamentary oversight it did so. This was an important but rarely acknowledged consequence of the government's efforts to expand the global investor rights regime through the signing of dozens of international investment treaties. These agreements, which typically include a controversial investor–state dispute settlement mechanism, diminish the rights of citizens, legislatures and courts by significantly expanding those of foreign investors (Sinclair). The government quietly ratified a highly contested Canada–China Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPA) while a court case assessing its constitutionality was still undecided.

Narrowed relationship with civil society

In an abrupt departure from the broad consensus and brokerage politics that characterized previous governments' approach to democracy, the Harper government since 2008 sought to build a very small but stable "winning coalition." Carlaw explains this was more than an electoral strategy; it informed how the Conservatives would govern. The Harper government learned that it needed a majority to dominate the opposition, which had developed significant strength in the context of the global financial crisis. For example, the government was compelled to make large investments in First Nations housing and infrastructure as a direct result of the organized opposition of First Nations and Aboriginal leadership during the 2008–09 prorogation crisis (Wilson). Henceforth, the government began alerting

the population that it intended to seek a “stable” majority government with which to advance its agenda.

For the Harper government, democratic legitimacy was to be found in the general election, which is how “the people” make their desires known (Banack). According to Banack, the government freely dispensed with parliamentary deliberation because it assumed “the elites,” influenced by “special interests,” distort politics by slowing down or impeding the government’s agenda through such processes. Deliberation in Parliament or outside of it was seen as redundant, since policy decisions were to be based on faith in the party’s partisan (neoliberal) belief in the primacy of market solutions to most problems affecting the “people.” Banack calls this “technocratic populism,” a strategy with roots in Alberta’s past Social Credit governments.

Governance depended upon the creation of racialized groups of insiders and outsiders. The Conservative government invited segments of immigrant populations to see themselves as socially conservative, hard-working and patriotic new citizens in contrast to supposedly undeserving freeloaders, “bogus refugees” and “security threats” standing in the way of immigrant success (Carlaw). In recent years, the government made citizenship more difficult to attain, created inequalities among different types of citizens, and changed the conditions under which dual citizens could lose their citizenship rights (Carlaw). It enacted mass raids and deportations of non-status workers. It imposed mandatory detentions of refugee claimants, radically reduced family class immigration numbers, and wrapped these racialized policies in anti-immigrant rhetoric (Walia). Instead of promoting permanent economic immigration, the government favoured temporary migration and the creation of a disposable workforce (Flecker; Walia; Mertins-Kirkwood; Carlaw).

Since 2006, and in particular since the 2011 election, the Harper government exhibited a general orientation to politics that justified centralization of political decision-making in the hands of the PMO (Campbell), avoiding consultation and democratic accountability between elections. However, this was not simply a question of neglect, benign or otherwise. The Harper government depended upon the active suppression of democratic organizations making claims on the state. Eliadis provides us with the profoundly disturbing results of her analysis of 70 cases involving 108 organizations and advocates who have been vilified, harassed by regulations, spied on or otherwise closely scrutinized by the Harper government. In her estimation, nowhere in Canadian law or the Constitution is there provision for this kind of wholesale or pre-emptive action against such a large section of civil society. Mazigh articulates this dynamic in the context of security legislation implemented since 2008 as evidence of a dangerous imbalance between the ability

of the state to collect information about citizens, and the public's inability to hold the state accountable for these actions.

This shift in the relationship between the government and the governed is one of the most striking characteristics of political change instituted by the Harper government. Institutional changes have made it significantly more difficult for organizations to form and articulate collective interests, since the government favours individualized forms of interest representation. For example, the Harper government made significant efforts to delegitimize the role of the labour movement in Canadian society (Braley-Rattai). It imposed unique and onerous financial reporting obligations on trade unions through Bill C-377, which was passed without amendments—the government's last legislative act in the 41st Parliament in June 2015—despite significant and prolonged attempts to reform it in both houses. The government claims a right to carry out this and other measures as a result of its electoral mandate, but as a private member's bill C-377 had no such legitimacy.

The passage of Bill C-377 was the culmination of the government's anti-union strategy that was ramped up after the 2011 election. The government imposed back-to-work legislation on a series of lawful strikes in 2011–12. In the name of democracy, it abandoned the longstanding and stable tripartite system of labour relations in favour of practices allowing employers more opportunities to interfere with workers' rights to organize and bargain collectively (Braley-Rattai). Other tripartite institutions met similar fates. For example, all National Sector Councils lost their federal funding in 2013, and the employment insurance appeal process was also changed unilaterally. Business and labour groups, which fund the program, were not consulted (Wood).

The government's aversion to participatory processes in policy development is evident in all of the policy areas under review in this book. For instance, there was very little public discussion of the role or direction of the military during these years. Despite public displays of patriotism, militarism and an expanded role for the military overseas, military procurement has been a disaster, almost certainly because there has been no defence white paper since the Chrétien government issued one in 1994 (Webb).

Strategic control of inter-governmental relations

In 2006, Stephen Harper described the government's vision of federal-provincial/territorial relations as "open federalism." In this view, much social and economic policy is seen broadly as a matter for provincial governments to deal with according to their particular preferences. Originally open to partnerships between differ-

ent levels of government, the prime minister was conspicuously absent from important provincial meetings on the economy and the environment.

In social reproduction among other areas, the government withdrew almost completely from its national leadership role, reduced funding for social policy, and assumed that care work would be undertaken in the market and within the nuclear family (Bezanson). Significantly, the Conservative government used every opportunity to displace public health care as a unifying national symbol and defined it instead as strictly a provincial matter. When the Health Accord expired in 2014, the government imposed a “take it or leave it” approach with the provinces in which federal transfers for health care would henceforth increase in line with GDP growth when health groups insist there should be a 6% escalator (Newitt and Silnicki). Similarly, funding increases to the Canada Social Transfer were locked-in without negotiating flexibility for addressing the needs of provincial social services (Mussell).

At first, “open federalism” was seen to give provinces and municipalities increased room for policy innovation. However, over time, the federal government became more interventionist and reasserted its control over some of these policy areas without increasing the necessary funds. The Harper government became decidedly prescriptive in housing policy (Doberstein and Smith), as well as in the complex area of skills development and job training (Wood). In certain regions and in certain sectors (e.g., infrastructure and natural resource development) where the Conservatives desired to intervene they have done so. Krawchenko and Stoney see this as characteristic of an approach to federalism that is “strategic” rather than “open,” linked to the government’s stated goal of positioning Canada as an “energy superpower.”

In many ways, these were the policies of a very activist government. The Harper government fought all the way to the Supreme Court to close down Insite, a Vancouver-based supervised injection site that is renowned for its positive outcomes for people suffering drug addiction. After losing its case, the government enacted regulatory changes to make it unlikely that other such sites will be opened in the rest of Canada (Mallea). Where it did not suit the government to recognize separate jurisdictions, it conflated them. As part of the overhaul of environmental legislation and regulation in 2012, for example, the government removed what it called “duplication” in the environmental assessment process. One only needs to look at the federal government’s rejection, in late 2010, of the New Prosperity Gold-Copper Mine Project in British Columbia, which had been approved earlier by a faulty provincial assessment, to see the risks here. The purpose of the new “one project, one review” policy is clearly to try and fast-track large projects supported by industry (Kinney).

The government also did not live up to expectations for a new relationship with First Nations — expectations generated by Prime Minister Harper’s 2008 apology to residential school survivors. In fact, the government was highly interventionist in treaty, funding and land-claims negotiations (FitzGerald). Rather than adopt the negotiated agreements of the Kelowna Accord, the Conservative government tied federal funding to the imposition of reforms that increase ministerial control over elections and undermine constitutionally enshrined Aboriginal and treaty rights (Wilson). The federal government took control, underfunded then cancelled inter-generational healing practices in Aboriginal communities where Aboriginal-led, culturally appropriate programs were proven to be working well (FitzGerald).

Rejection of scientific and expert knowledge

The Harper government consistently used ideology to trump evidence-based policy decision-making in a number of areas—a fact highlighted frequently by many different voices since 2011. In family policy development, for example, the government relied less on expert knowledge and resorted instead to a broad ideological framework rooted in neoliberal economics and socially conservative “family values” (Bezanson). The government refused to fund research or advocacy for or about women through Status of Women Canada. Loss of funding caused many feminist organizations to close, creating a significant loss of capacity for feminist perspectives and policy alternatives (Stinson).

This approach to policy, which downplays or ignores evidence that runs counter to the government’s objectives, was also visible in policies affecting workers. Pan-Canadian research and analysis on labour market policy became virtually non-existent since government defunding ensured that organizations previously doing this work shut down (Wood). Facing criticism for the skyrocketing numbers of workers in the Temporary Foreign Workers Program (TFWP), the government split the program in two and changed the way temporary work permits were counted (Flecker). This obscured the social and economic impact of the International Mobility Programs, which were bringing an even larger proportion of migrant workers into the country than the TFWP (Mertins-Kirkwood).

The government suppressed the mandatory long-form census (Eliadis) and chose austerity over evidence in the decision to defund autonomous health options for Aboriginal peoples (FitzGerald). It oversaw the closure of the Canada Health Council, which had been monitoring the performance of provincial health care systems (Newitt-Silnicki). With the decision to end door-to-door mail delivery, Canada Post and the Harper government ignored studies that concluded innovations in areas

of postal banking could raise money for the corporation (West). In a rare example where the government did respond to evidence in homelessness policy it divided the affected population into deserving and undeserving poor, and dramatically underfunded the program (Doberstein and Smith).

Before overturning the environmental assessment system completely, the government provided no scientific evidence to support its contention that faster reviews would be better, or that the previous processes were burdensome, except to affirm claims from business leaders that they were (Kinney). Canada could soon become the first country in the world to allow grain exports to have a low-level presence of genetically-modified foods not approved by its national regulator, in this case Health Canada (Sharratt). The decision, which came near the end of the 41st Parliament, was yet another example of the government's preference for deregulation (or corporate self-regulation) as experienced in food and rail safety, with catastrophic results in both cases (Campbell; West).

In security and intelligence policy, the government often disregarded advice when warned its legislative proposals were unconstitutional or in violation of the Charter. Heated rhetoric, much of it divisive and racially charged, supplemented for a lack of evidence that the bills C-44 and C-51, which granted CSIS extraordinary new spying and enforcement powers, were necessary, or that they satisfied the need to balance human rights and privacy concerns with Canada's national security (Mazigh).

Without regard for its international reputation as a leader in evidence-based criminal justice policy, the Harper government rejected its own studies demonstrating the positive outcomes of current policy for communities and offenders in favour of longer sentences (Mallea). When presented with evidence of human rights abuses during Israel's 2006 and 2014 bombing campaigns in Lebanon and Palestine, the Harper government continued to applaud the Israeli government for its restraint and to demonize Palestinians for provoking the attacks. This is the likely reason why Canada lost its bid for a seat on the UN's Security Council in 2010 (Gruending). In these areas, and especially on matters of climate change, the government's disregard of facts in favour of ideology isolated Canada on the world stage.

Perhaps the most shocking expression of the government's antagonism toward knowledge production came through revelations that it had destroyed two-dozen federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans scientific libraries, collections and archives across the country. No assessment of the impact of this decision was made prior to filling the dumpsters with historical records, but it came after systematic defunding of science, muzzling of government scientists, and the erosion of Canada's reputation as a world leader in environmental science (Zeffiro).

State intervention in the interest of markets

Faced with a deepening economic crisis in 2008, and the associated threat of being toppled by an NDP-Liberal coalition in the wings, the Harper government implemented, in 2009, one of the largest economic stimulus packages among developed countries. This included earmarking \$200 billion toward a fund to ensure continued lending by banks to businesses and consumers, \$6.2 billion in tax cuts, \$6.1 billion to extend employment insurance coverage, and billions more in infrastructure spending and direct support to some industries. However, the *Economic Action Plan* represented only a temporary shift from the government's partisan (neoliberal) aversion to intervention in the economy—unless that intervention helps “the market” do its work (Bernard).

As the economy recovered, however sluggishly, the Harper government returned to its preference for reducing the size of government, exposing a central inconsistency in its stimulus strategy: public investments were meant to be temporary, but taxes were reduced permanently (Krawchenko and Stoney). Those tax cuts disproportionately benefited upper-earners and, at the same time, greatly reduced government funds. This constraint was then translated into public spending cuts (O'Manique).

Along with a commitment to balanced budgets, reduced government revenues justified cutting program spending along with long-term underfunding of the public sector, and the closures of institutions within the broader public sector (West). The impact compelled sub-national levels of government to seek alternative modes of service delivery such as privatization, contracting out, and social impact bonds for financing infrastructure and public services (West).

Along with these cuts the government established a new regulatory policy requiring federal departments to repeal a regulation for every new one proposed to Treasury Board (Campbell). Meanwhile, regulators such as the Transportation Safety Board and Canadian Food Inspection Agency were starved of the resources they need to properly do their jobs. The failure of the regulatory regime is elaborated in Campbell's chapter on the Lac-Mégantic rail disaster that killed 47 people in 2013.

The neoliberalism embraced by the government favours market-oriented solutions to economic and social problems and rejects any assumption that governments should consider collectivist goals (West; Krawchenko and Stoney). This is evident in the persistence with which the Harper government sought to establish individual property rights on reserves, such as the right to buy and sell land, against the interests of many Aboriginal communities (FitzGerald). Instead of funding women's organizations oriented toward collective approaches, the Harper government changed the mandate of Status of Women Canada such that project funding decisions were to be based on entrepreneurial and business-oriented approaches (Stinson). When

studies suggested the need for more regulated child care spaces across Canada, the government chose instead to offer minimal child benefit payments and tax breaks to families—support that does not come close to funding home child care costs.

In the realm of social policy, the Harper government chose targeted rather than comprehensive approaches that were centred on tax breaks for single-earner households (Doberstein and Smith; Bezanson). Though some policy recognized the value of women’s unpaid work, it increased women’s dependence on the male wage (Bezanson). Doberstein and Smith similarly identify the partial appeal of the government’s social policy, but criticize the limited financial investment in housing during the last two Parliaments.

In general, the government used crisis stimulus spending to justify subsequent deep cuts to social programming and the public sector. The uncertain and precarious economic situation during the recovery was the perfect ideological device to undermine opposition to the cuts, and to weaken the voices of the most marginalized (O’Manique). From the government’s perspective the work of caring for people can be done in private homes or paid for through the market (Bezanson). This was evident in health care policy, where government neglect led to increased private sector funding and delivery (Newitt and Silnicki).

The government also used an expanded TFWP to deregulate the labour market, since this type of economic migration depresses local wages and increases flexibility for employers (Flecker; Mertins-Kirkwood). Spending cuts on active labour market measures (e.g., training) reached their lowest levels yet in 2011; at only one-third of the OECD average, this funding provides unemployed workers in Canada with few resources to engage in skills training (Wood).

The government’s commitment to free-market economics was apparent in the kinds of state institutions, laws and international treaties it supported. For example, more than their Liberal predecessors, the Conservative government promoted investment treaties to protect Canadian-based companies in countries where they have interests in mining or energy resources (Engler, Sinclair). These treaties attempt to limit governments’ efforts to protect their economic development options, social policy or natural environments by granting multinational investors the right to damages in the event government policy interferes with their investments or expected profits.

In other words, the government intervened quite forcefully to protect private investors and multinational capital, and to dismantle examples of non-market-based or collectivist economic systems. Once again, the forced end to the single-desk Canadian Wheat Board offers an unfortunately perfect example. An efficient advocate on behalf of farmers, the CWB ensured product moved swiftly along Canada’s rail system to port, earned a high price on international markets, and main-

tained the trust of buyers around the world. Today, grain farmers must negotiate separately within a market-driven food system dominated by a few large, mostly U.S. multinational companies—a system with obvious power imbalances (Slater). We see the same preferences in the energy sectors (pipelines over public opposition), the rail system (self-regulation over the precautionary principle) and social services (boutique tax breaks instead of the expansion of more efficient new social services like child care and pharmacare).

Conclusion

There are other themes to be gleaned from the contents of the chapters presented here. There are many policy areas and political practices that this book does not cover. However, we are convinced that this collection will contribute enormously to our collective understanding of the Harper government during the years 2008 to 2015, in particular the many ways the government profited from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression to further its vision for what government should and shouldn't do. We invite you to consider the insights that our contributors offer based on their careful analyses of a wide range of policy areas. The task of remembering the extent and the speed of the changes that have taken place under the Harper government is an onerous one. We are honoured to have been able to work with authors who have taken on this collective responsibility in such a dedicated and thorough manner.

Endnotes

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