

MONITOR

Progressive news, views and ideas



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Founded in 1980, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) is a registered charitable research institute and Canada's leading source of progressive policy ideas, with offices in Ottawa, Vancouver, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto and Halifax. The CCPA founded the *Monitor* magazine in 1994 to share and promote its progressive research and ideas, as well as those of like-minded Canadian and international voices.

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KATIE RASO

No matter what your first issue is, media democracy is your second

IN PREPARING THE editorial for this issue, I did something all too familiar when writing about Canada's changing media landscape—beset by new information, I started over.

When I was writing my master's thesis on how Canadian newsrooms archive their stories, the majority of the edits were continual updates needed to accurately reflect the shrinking and conglomerating media outlets. Canada's media landscape is far more concentrated in its ownership and lack of diversity than its American counterpart. For years the media democracy movement has been sounding the alarm about this concentration and the lack of alternative outlets. As Robert McChesney says, no matter what your first issue is, media democracy is your second.

Calls for increased media literacy have grown in the wake of QAnon—a widely discredited but deeply held anti-establishment conspiracy theory that continues to spread across North America. It matters that roughly 15% of Americans believe in QAnon. And that fake news farms are using social media to spread lies to suppress racialized voter turnout, stoke tensions between Latinx and Black communities, and discredit community organizers. But while the type of media used are new, we've been here before. QAnon is this decade's satanic panic. It's supercharged and more violent, but the root issues are the same.

Where we ought to focus our concern now is on addressing how Canadian mainstream media talks about settler colonial states. At the end of May *The Intercept* revealed that CBC News Toronto Executive Producer Laura Green told staff, “We

do not use Palestine to refer to the West Bank or Gaza...as there is no modern country of Palestine.”

It should not be surprising that Canadian media struggles to cover colonizer states abroad when we struggle to find an equitable language to address the issues in our own settler colonial state. As we were preparing this issue, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation reported finding a mass grave at the Kamloops Indian Residential School with the remains of 215 children buried at the site. The Kamloops school was one of 139 residential schools in Canada that operated between 1831 and 1996, taking children from seven generations of Indigenous families. Mortality rates at the schools are reported to have been between 40 and 60 per cent.

This is why I threw out my original editorial.

Robert Neubauer and I studied how Canadian news media covered the Northern Gateway protests in 2012. We found that the media downplayed and marginalized the concerns of dissenting First Nations communities and consistently juxtaposed their views with pro-pipeline “experts” who asserted the economic imperative for the entire country to bring bitumen to market. In the decade since, little has changed. In the last issue of the *Monitor*, Robert Hackett and Hanna Araza wrote about how Canada's Postmedia outlets remain fervently pro-petrol and communities that stand in the way are quickly dismissed.

But the bias in the Canadian media goes beyond these incidents with competing interests. For example, the coverage of the attacks on

Mi'kmaq lobster fishers last summer offered a “both sides” approach that suggested it was impossible to lay blame while white fishers lit Mi'kmaq boats on fire. Similarly, news stories about the protests at 1492 Land Back Lane frequently muddied the clear land claims of the Haudenosaunee.

These are not the news stories of a country that (1) understands the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to which Canada is a signatory, (2) has come to grips with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, (3) has reckoned with what the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls wrote in its final report: “Genocide is the sum of the social practices, assumptions, and actions detailed within this report; as many witnesses expressed, this country is at war, and Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are under siege.”

These are the news stories of a country that accepts that 73% of First Nations' water systems are at high or medium risk of contamination and 60 long-term drinking water advisories remain in effect, that food insecurity is 3.7, 2.7, and 2.2 times as prevalent among Inuit, First Nations living off reserve, and Métis adults, respectively, than it is among non-Indigenous adults in Canada.

The grave that the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation discovered this year is not an isolated incident. We need a media that can help us make sense of our history, create space for voices of those we have harmed, and begin to build a path to restorative justice for all Indigenous people. **M**



Everything is connected

I may well be a tad hasty in contributing a response to the editorial in the May/June issue of the *Monitor* without yet reading the rest of the offerings. However, I am so impressed with Katie Raso's thoughtful and well-crafted essay that I want to send my feedback right away!

I appreciate the depth of understanding of how well the web of life all around us has, over time, created immensely complex symbiotic relationships. Her reflections on the inner workings of her garden is a provocative metaphor to juxtapose with the workings of human societies: the most fruitful arrangements for all in a society are those that recognize and support each other!

A very clever and enjoyable presentation. Thank you!

Brian Hayward

Some helpful feedback on our new website

I may well be the minority but I find the new digital arrangement of the *Monitor* less useful. I greatly value the paper

version because I am much more comfortable reading a printed version in my hands. I greatly value the downloadable version because I can go back to an issue and pull a quote from it for my writing. But I can find nowhere on the new website where I can download an issue or find back issues.

That said, aside from its acceptance that there is no alternative to capitalism, the *Monitor* is a nine on a scale of one to ten. The CCPA is a source of sane analysis in a slowly disintegrating world. Hope rests on the continued action of it and other reality-based analysis.

J. Tom Webb

Response: We appreciate reader feedback as we work to bring the Monitor to more audiences through different platforms, including the MonitorMag.ca. Back issues are still available in their entirety at policyalternatives.ca. And both of our websites have search engines which provide access to our analysis and commentary, including our critiques of capitalism and our proposals for alternatives.

Income equality for better health outcomes

What a great analysis and recipe for action Trish Hennessy and Lindsay McLaren present in "A Broader Vision of Public Health" (cover feature for the Jan/Feb 2021 issue).

Starting with the naive assumption (if not cynical lie) of Conservative and Liberal policymakers that

the private sector would pick up the slack, Hennessy and McLaren catalogue the erosion of the health care system's capacity to deal with the inevitable pandemic, which was "always a question of when not if."

Their insistence that public health is more than hospitals, physicians or health care (or even, I would add, access to a personal caregiver) strongly resonates with data showing that public health quality is related to the social determinants of health. In his book *Power and Inequality: A Comparative Introduction*, sociologist Gregg M. Olsen noted over a decade ago that "a growing body of epidemiological research... well over 100 studies have shown that health is graded by income, or more broadly, socio-economic status." He further noted that "redistributing income in society can improve the health of the less well-off without affecting the health of those at the top."

Hennessy and McLaren demand a "health-in-all-policy approach," which is definitely called for and essential. They are laser-focused in their conclusion that health quality, for both individuals and communities, is a direct function of social inequality. Dr. Danielle Martin has done a good job clarifying what needs to change in her 2017 book *Better Now: Six Big Ideas to Improve Health Care for All Canadians*: "the biggest disease that needs to be cured in Canada is the disease of poverty. And part of the cure is to implement the fifth Big Idea:

A Basic Income Guarantee for all Canadians."

Vince Salvo

Enclosure in India

Asad Ismi's superb essay (May/June 2021 issue) nicely frames Indian farmers' protracted protest as the epochal event that it is: a final step in the two-phase Enclosure movement that began when land was first appropriated to serve the interests of a then-nascent capitalist economy in 17th-century Britain.

Not only do the 85 per cent of India's farmers who are small land holders risk being "cleared" off as their land is enclosed and taken over by global agribusiness. The essay's telling references to WhatsApp, Facebook and Mukesh Ambani's Jio platform for e.food purchase and distribution signals how the farmers, along with their fellow citizens, are being enclosed and integrated into the digitally networked iteration of capitalism that marks the completion of the global transformation it set in motion at the dawn of modern empires.

I recommend two books that help illuminate this and underscore the importance of this historic farmers' struggle: *The Origin of Capitalism* by Ellen Meiksins Wood and *The Great Transformation* by Karl Polanyi.

Heather Menzies

Letters have been edited for clarity and length. Send your letters to monitor@policyalternatives.ca.

Canada not on track to meet a number of climate targets, thanks to the oil and gas sector

Canada's Energy Sector, a new CCPA-BC Corporate Mapping Project report by veteran earth scientist David Hughes, finds the oil and gas sector alone will cause Canada to fail to meet its Paris Agreement target of a 40 per cent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

Hughes finds the sector will also cause Canada to miss its net zero target by 2050 as laid out in Bill C-12.

The report concludes that continuing on the country's current path for the oil and gas sector makes meeting Canada's emissions-reduction targets impossible.

Education property tax cuts worsen income inequality in Manitoba

Analysis by CCPA-Manitoba Director Molly McCracken shows that the province's Education Property Tax Reduction Act is poorly targeted, with the majority of benefits going to wealthier property owners.

Passing this act means the Manitoba government

will lose approximately \$384 million (\$192 million/year over two years) in revenue by 2022.

This kind of deficit financing will result in service cuts at a time when economists agree governments should invest public dollars strategically to address the COVID-19 recession.

Some welcome developments in Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan government's recent commitment to finally allocate \$19 million in federal child care funds and tap into federal assistance for voluntary COVID-19 isolation sites was welcomed by CCPA-Saskatchewan Director Simon Enoch.

But Enoch urged the provincial government to move faster to allocate existing federal money and fully access *all* federal COVID-19 dollars.

Despite these recent announcements, the Saskatchewan government is still leaving \$49.4 million on the table for the essential workers wage top-up, as well as \$31 million from the Safe Long-Term Care fund. While these recent moves are encouraging, Enoch says there is still a lot more room for leadership from the Saskatchewan government.

Keys to a housing-secure future

CCPA-Nova Scotia and the Housing for All Working Group released a new report, *Keys to a housing secure future for all Nova*

Scotians, which centres the expert voices of those on the frontlines of the housing crisis from across Nova Scotia.

"[T]hose who have experienced the crisis firsthand, they know best what the impact of the private, for-profit, market-driven approaches to housing and homelessness has been," says CCPA-Nova Scotia Director Christine Saulnier.

Cape Breton University Associate Professor Catherine Leviten-Reid says, "the report prioritizes public, non-market affordable housing, funded by general revenue, that is affordable, quality, green, democratic, and addresses equitable access for everyone. The evidence is clear: We need to move away from the current approach to housing, which relies heavily on the market to meet housing needs and leaves so many without any assurance that they will have access to this basic human right."

Transforming long-term care in Ontario

Investing in care, not profit, a new report published by CCPA-Ontario, makes recommendations for transforming long-term care in Ontario—lessons from COVID-19 that could apply to other provinces too.

More than two-thirds of Canada's COVID-19 deaths occurred in long-term care homes, a ratio more than 50% higher than in other OECD countries.

This catastrophe is rooted in decades of

underfunding and neglect. Addressing these problems will require comprehensive reform: increased government funding, reduced wait lists, better standards of care and staffing, effective enforcement and far less contracting out.

Crucial to success will be limiting the profit motive in delivering this essential service.

The post-pandemic national economic outlook

In his most recent presentation to the federal Standing Committee on Finance, CCPA Senior Economist David Macdonald encouraged the federal government to fully invest in the COVID-19 recovery—including in the care economy.

"I am encouraged that the federal government is committed to rebuilding the economy rather than being overly preoccupied with federal deficits," Macdonald said. "Large federal deficits were necessary to avoid much worse deficits in other sectors. Had the federal government not covered expenses, those deficits would have been much worse for the provinces, for individuals, and for businesses."

Macdonald pointed to historically low interest rates and no sign yet of sustained inflation, adding: "When we've got 800,000 low-wage workers still out of a job compared to February last year, we are nowhere near full capacity, and inflation will remain subdued for a long time to come." **M**

Randy Robinson / Ontario Office

Ontario's fiscal plan doesn't tell it like it is

Post-COVID budgets are built on cuts

ONE YEAR OUT from a provincial election, two different stories are emerging about Ontario's finances.

The first comes from Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy. It goes like this: because of COVID-19, Ontario has a record budget deficit and we need to reduce it. Many people think this can only happen if we raise taxes or cut public services, or both, but that's not so, says the minister: through the miracle of economic growth, we can spend more on public services and reduce the deficit at the same time.

"Some will claim that balancing the budget will require cuts to public services or higher taxes down the road, but we will choose another path," the minister said back in March. "Our recovery will be built on a strong foundation for growth, not painful tax hikes or cuts."

The chart at right shows how the future unfolds in the minister's story. The red line is provincial spending on public services and interest on debt; the blue line is revenue. At the start, spending is higher than revenue, but over time, as revenue grows faster than spending, the lines cross, and the budget deficit is gone. It takes 10 years, but it's totally painless, Bethlenfalvy says.

"Expenditures do go up every year," he said when the 2021 budget came out. "I said that there would be no cuts, and this budget very clearly demonstrates that."

That's one way to look at it. Unfortunately, the minister's version leaves out some very important facts.

To tell the full story about funding public services in Ontario, we need to look at what we actually need. That means taking inflation into account. It means taking population growth into account. And it means recognizing that an aging population requires higher spending, especially in health care.

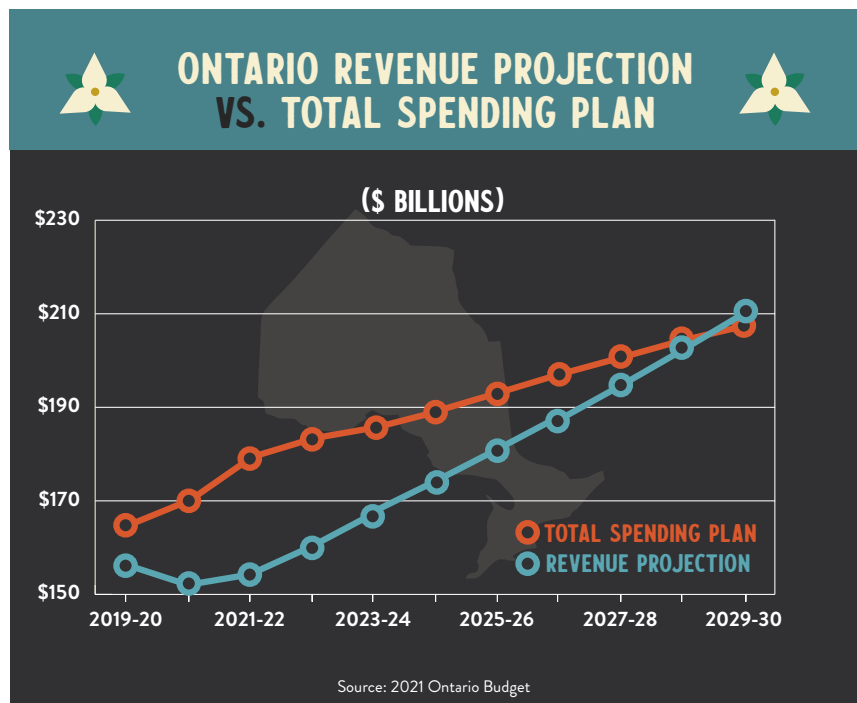
Just as importantly, telling the truth about spending in Ontario also means recognizing that current levels of investment aren't enough. We need faster investment in long-term care. We need to support students as they recover from the disruption of COVID-19 and tackle the \$16-billion school repair backlog. We need to lift people on social assistance out of poverty. We need

a plan for the environment that goes beyond picking up litter. And so on.

The government isn't interested in new spending, though. Its current fiscal plan won't even maintain public services at current levels.

Thanks to the Financial Accountability Office, we can estimate that because of inflation and population changes, overall provincial program spending has to grow by 3.8% per year just to maintain current public service levels. According to the 2021 Ontario budget, program spending over 10 years (not including short-term COVID-specific spending) is set to grow at an average annual rate of 2.1%. Thus, the funding gap between what's needed to maintain services and what the government plans to spend averages 1.7% annually.

This year and next (an election year), planned spending is expected to maintain services overall, more or less. After that, though, there's a gap between what's needed and what's planned. That gap grows bigger each year, reaching \$33 billion in 2029-30. Put another way, the finance minister's long-term plan is to cut per



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capita funding to public services by 15% compared to the current level.

That is a huge cut by any measure.

A 15% cut would be bad enough if Ontario were a big spender. It's not. When it comes to public programs, Ontario is already dead last in Canada in per capita spending. Before the pandemic, Queen's Park spent \$2,000 a year less, per person, than the average of the other provinces. Further cuts would be devastating.

The obvious and better alternative is to raise revenue, something the government seems unwilling to do. "Historically this government, and our party, has not been the ones to raise taxes," Bethlenfalvy told a reporter not long ago. "As you know, we've been reducing taxes."

The government's tax cuts during this term in office are currently costing provincial coffers at least \$4 billion a year, leaving that much less for public services.

The only source of new money Queen's Park appears to approve of is the federal government. Bethlenfalvy and Premier Doug Ford both insist that Ottawa is short-changing the provinces on the Canada Health Transfer.

This claim, which has been rightly called "disingenuous at best and dishonest at worst," is also, in the case of Ontario, irrelevant. Given that the people of Ontario are net contributors to the federal government, the Ontario government is essentially asking the feds to raise money from Ontarians and then hand it over to the province. There is no reason why Queen's Park can't raise the money itself, right here at home.

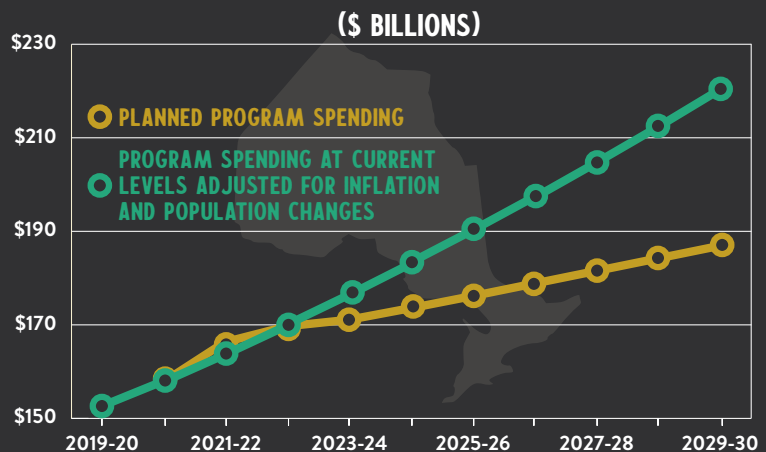
It's worth underscoring that the health and economic costs of COVID-19 have not been shared equally. Millions of Ontarians and thousands of companies will come out of the pandemic better off financially—in some cases, dramatically better off—than they went in. Now is the time to lay out a plan for fair and progressive tax increases to rebuild our public services.

Over the next 12 months, Ontarians will hear the finance minister say, repeatedly, that his budget plans are built on economic growth, not cuts to public services. That's just not so.

It's up to the rest of us to tell it like it is. **M**



ONTARIO PROGRAM SPENDING: PLAN VS. STATUS QUO



Source: 2021 Ontario Budget, Financial Accountability Office, and author's calculations



Trade and investment

STUART TREW

A Canada–U.K. deal that protects Big Oil? We should be cheesed off.

BORIS JOHNSON INSISTS Canadians should be eating more Wensleydale. Actually, that’s putting it a bit mildly. “*What’s really needed now is more affordable, high-quality British cheese in Canada,*” exclaimed the United Kingdom’s prime minister in a late-May interview with the CBC’s Rosemary Barton, “and I *hope* that we can do a deal to allow that.” Ominously, Johnson then produced an enlarged photo of his new national flagship, the *Stinking Bishop*, a Royal Navy vessel on a mission to promote British interests around the world. The implication was clear: resist Britain’s cheesy demands and face a hot rain of Shropshire Blue from the Bishop’s 100+ heavy cannons.

I’m playing with you here. The recently announced trade flagship does not yet carry the name of a Gloucester semi-soft (I may submit the idea if the U.K. holds a naming contest for the vessel and it’s open to residents of the colonies). Johnson did not show Barton a picture of the vessel on her Sunday news show, and as far as we know it won’t be armed. But the promised new deal with Canada is quite real. And it will cover much more than the cultured and aged excretions of bovine mammary glands. A likely chapter on investment protection, depending how it’s played, may even have gunboat-diplomacy-like effects, by shielding entrenched fossil fuel interests from demands for democratic control and a just transition.

Earlier this year, Canada ratified a Trade Continuity Agreement (TCA) with the U.K. that more or less upholds the bargain reached between Canada and the European Union in the 2017 Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). Having quit the EU in 2020, the U.K. forfeited membership in Europe-wide trade deals like CETA. The bilateral TCA is meant “to provide stability and predictability for businesses and workers in both countries,” according to the Canadian government. Somewhat paradoxically (if stability is your goal), Canada and the U.K. committed in that deal to begin negotiating a *totally different agreement* by April

2022. This presents an interesting challenge for critics of neoliberal trade regimes.

On the one hand, we should not mourn the end of CETA’s applicability to Canada–U.K. trade. Canada made unnecessary sacrifices and missteps in that deal in return for very modest market access improvements in a limited number of export sectors. The result was a “last century” deal that reinforces inequity and corporate bias in the global rules-based order, one that may well depress wages in the long run and that has so far perpetuated Canada’s pre-CETA trade deficit with the EU, according to a 2019 CCPA report.

As part of this sad CETA bargain, municipal governments in Canada are now prohibited from applying local preferences or economic development conditions to most public purchasing, a progressive policy option still available to cities in most other countries. A new certificate of supplementary protection regime in Canada, mandated by CETA’s intellectual property chapter, has already extended lengthy monopoly protection for dozens of brand-name medications by up to two years, with many more in the patent pipeline. This one-sided Canadian concession will soon be reflected in increased costs for private and public drug plans that would otherwise have been able to purchase cheaper generics sooner.

Importantly, CETA includes a strong investment protection chapter and “investment court system,” an institutionally novel form of investor–state dispute settlement (ISDS) built to save the transatlantic deal from popular opposition in Europe. This ISDS “court” is not yet operational, as all EU member states must first ratify CETA and only half have done so. A key question for Canada and the U.K. is therefore whether to include a CETA-style investment chapter in their bespoke free trade pact or something closer to traditional ISDS. If our governments truly care about transitioning away from fossil fuels and zeroing greenhouse gas emissions, they will ditch both options.

The ISDS regime was developed after the Second World War to shield Western private investment, mainly but not exclusively in resources, from interference or nationalization by governments in newly independent former colonies. The German financier Hermann Abs worked with Royal Dutch Shell to produce a draft treaty, or “Magna Carta for the protection of foreign interests,” in Abs’ words, whose provisions “pervade the more than 3,000 investment treaties that are in force today,” writes Nicolás M. Perrone in his new book, *Investment Treaties and the Legal Imagination* (Oxford University Press).

These treaties, like CETA or the old NAFTA, allow foreign firms and investors to bypass local courts and sue countries, sometimes for billions or even tens of billions of dollars, when they feel a government decision has unfairly hurt their investments. The disputed measure needn’t be discriminatory, expropriative or patently abusive to violate the generous investment

guarantees in a standard treaty. Government-led clean energy transitions, controls on utility rates to keep water or electricity affordable to the public, and decisions not to grant mining permits to unpopular and/or environmentally damaging extractive projects have all been successfully challenged in ISDS proceedings.

To date, Canada has lost or settled 10 ISDS claims filed under NAFTA and paid out more than \$263 million in damages to private claimants while soaking up more than \$113 million in unrecoverable legal costs (up to March 2020). Nearly two-thirds (64%) of all ISDS claims against Canada have targeted environmental or resource management decisions by federal or provincial governments.

In one internationally notorious case, U.S. aggregates firm Bilcon won compensation from Canada for a rigorous environmental assessment that put a stop to a proposed quarry in an environmentally sensitive coastal region of Nova Scotia. The lone dissenting arbitrator in that case called the decision a “significant intrusion into domestic jurisdiction”

that “will create a chill on the operation of environmental review panels.”

Even emergency responses to unexpected crises like the 2007–2009 global financial crisis or the current COVID-19 pandemic are not off-limits to opportunistic investors seeking compensation for alleged violations of their considerable investment treaty rights. Chrystia Freeland, then foreign affairs minister, said at the conclusion of the CUSMA negotiations in 2018 that removing ISDS from the new NAFTA “strengthened our government’s right to regulate in the public interest, to protect public health and the environment.” Canada’s pitiful record backs her up on this point.

As CCPA trade researcher Scott Sinclair said in his April 2021 report, *The Rise and Demise of NAFTA Chapter 11*, getting rid of ISDS in CUSMA was a remarkable victory for social movements that campaigned for years against treaty-based investment arbitration. So it was disturbing to watch a Global Affairs Canada official claim before the House of Commons trade committee

in February that “Canada maintains the flexibility to negotiate variable outcomes with respect to our various partners on ISDS, and we would determine whether or not we would be seeking ISDS on a case-by-case basis.”

Extricating Canada from the policy-chilling effect of NAFTA’s investment chapter only to jump into a similar legal arrangement with the U.K. makes little sense in light of Freeland’s negative comments about ISDS. It looks downright foolhardy when we consider the frequent use of investment treaties by British firms, and the extractive sector in particular, to challenge government regulation of oil, gas and mining projects.

Of 1,104 known treaty-based ISDS cases globally up to December 31, 2020, 90 (just over 8%) involved U.K.-based investors. This is about half the number of known cases brought by U.S. investors internationally (194, or almost 18%). And it is about a third more cases than Canadian investors have lodged abroad (58, or just over 5% of all known ISDS claims globally). U.K.



firms averaged a few cases a year until about 2010, when annual caseloads intensified, peaking at 10 in 2015.

Of the 40 U.K.-based ISDS cases launched since 2015, 17 (about 42%) involve the extractive sector. In 2017, British firm Rockhopper used the ISDS process in the Energy Charter Treaty to demand US\$350 million in compensation for Italy's 2016 ban on new oil and gas operations near the country's coast. The case is pending. Expanding ISDS to cover litigious British firms can only frustrate efforts in Canada to fight climate change by hobbling government plans to phase out fossil fuels, implement stricter sustainability criteria on mining operations, or transition to cleaner forms of power generation. Canada is already facing an investor-state dispute from a coal mining firm incorporated in Delaware, which claims Alberta's phaseout of coal-fired electricity violates its NAFTA rights to minimum standards of treatment. Multiple similar ISDS cases demanding billions in compensation have been filed in Europe against clean energy transitions.

Just as ISDS between Canada and the U.K. would threaten legitimate public responses to climate change here, so too would Canadian firms be able to challenge just transition measures in the U.K. The Mining Association of Canada has called for "the continued inclusion of robust ISDS mechanisms" in Canadian trade and investment agreements. Canadian oil, gas and mining companies listed on the London Stock Exchange through subsidiaries may even be able to sue Canada under a poorly worded investment treaty, a legal sleight of hand known as "forum shopping." Based on Canada's high-profile push to attract more foreign investment in our domestic extractives sector, this disciplinary feature of ISDS might be part of the appeal for Global Affairs Canada and the Trudeau government.

Neither the CETA "investment court" nor the investment chapter of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (which the U.K. is seeking to join) provide any cover for government measures aimed at decarbonization, strengthening environmental assessments of new extractives projects, or achieving our Paris Agreement commitments. Canada's current roster of Foreign Investment Protection Agreements (FIPAs) also permit ISDS claims against expropriation and minimum standards of treatment even where a disputed government measure was taken as part of Canada's treaty responsibilities to Indigenous peoples.

The International Energy Agency now claims that any new investment in fossil fuels is dangerously out of step with a safe climate, reversing decades of advocacy for the sector. Pursuing a trade and investment treaty with the U.K. or any other country that facilitates and protects investment in oil, gas and other unsustainable extractive projects is, frankly, far more preposterous than Johnson's musings about British heirloom cheddars. If ISDS were a cheese, it would be far past its best-before date. Time to throw it away. **M**



Colour-coded Justice

ANTHONY N. MORGAN

Mediating Blackness

CANADIANS, ESPECIALLY THOSE in more progressive circles, tend to think of ourselves as a more socially aware, morally refined and culturally sophisticated citizenry than the average body politic. This is especially true when we compare ourselves to Americans, which history, geography, culture and economy lead us to do more often than we may be comfortable admitting. That said, this Canadian social convention isn't entirely baseless.

After all, if we take a small snapshot of the disastrous era of American politics that was post-Obama and pre-Biden, we can point to unparalleled examples, such as the emergence and dominance of the Tea Party and the social terror wrought by MAGA hat-wearing and hate-spewing white supremacist mobs. And, of course, there's also Donald Trump himself, who, as a presidential candidate and later as U.S. president, openly professed and perpetuated some of the most explicitly racist, sexist, homophobic and xenophobic political discourse and decision-making in living memory. While the raw and pronounced mainstream expressions of American social, political, cultural and economic regression are of the sort not typically seen in Canada, we'd be wrong to think too highly of ourselves as morally superior to our American counterparts in at least one critical sense, namely, the media representations of Black people.

Despite our collective tendency to view our country and society as being multicultural, inclusive, equitable and diverse, Canada's media and popular culture landscape is still staunchly anti-Black. While it's true that the 21st century has seen a marked increase in Black representations in Canadian broadcast radio, television, film and corporate multimedia platforms, the Canadian media continues to predominantly (re)produce narratives, shows, storylines, reports and general messaging that rely on distortions, stereotypes and images that normalize and give legitimacy to notions of Black people as deviant, deficient and inferior. It remains exceedingly rare to find storylines, characters, reports and narratives that responsibly represent Black people, families and communities in ways that are reasonably reflective of the multilayered diversity, complexity and nuance that is actually found in Canada's Black populations.

For example, the average Canadian would not have to look too far to find shows, commercials or news

broadcasts that reify or at least fail to disrupt anti-Black tropes that depict Black people as simply criminal, violent, dangerous, threatening, lazy, loud, comedic, poor, angry, athletic, unintelligent, hypersexual, or from broken and/or abusive homes.

To be clear, my contention isn't that these are characteristics not featured among Black individuals, families and communities. They're a reality in all communities. My point is that there is such a myopically limited range of expressions of Black life, personalities and realities featured in Canadian television, news, film and media, that this restrictive framing gives the impression that these tropes are all there is to Black people. In other words, my point is about balance, not censorship.

The chronic lack of diversity in Canadian depictions of Black narratives, characters and contexts oversimplifies to the point of making a caricature of Blackness. And the majority of Canadians consume these as if they are authentic depictions of Black people and communities. That

these images are overwhelmingly produced and broadcast for the consumption of primarily of non-Black viewers gives room for added concern. We should ask ourselves, why do these misrepresentations of Black people sell among Canadian viewers? The most honest and critically reflective among us would admit that these images sell because they confirm prevailing anti-Black attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, biases and beliefs about Black people that we have already been conditioned and collectively socialized to hold. This socialization and conditioning is largely, though not exclusively, engineered through what is and is not taught in schools about Black people, histories and realities. It is also significantly aided and abetted by a centuries-long and ongoing exclusion of Black people from positions of power and authority in society, especially in the areas of education; communications and media; economics and business; arts, culture and heritage; policing and justice; government and policymaking; and health and wellness.

Why is the persistence of anti-Black misrepresentations in broadcast media, film and television relevant to Canadian progressive policymakers, professionals, scholars and students? There are three main reasons.

First, media representations have a significant impact on the sense of self-worth, self-acceptance and self-esteem of Black people. This, in turn, has a significant impact on the collective wellbeing of Black communities, particularly in the areas of employment, business and entrepreneurship, education, health care and housing. As such, the predominance of negative media representations of Black communities threatens the viability, success and sustainability of progressive social policies meant to support these communities.

Second, the imbalanced media representations of Black people serve to justify, excuse and perpetuate systemic anti-Black racism in Canadian laws, policies and practices. They do so by shaping social norms and perspectives in ways that encourage a collective disregard, disrespect and devaluing of the inherent humanity and dignity of Black people. This actively discourages politicians and policymakers from making and supporting laws, policies and programs that truly support the wellbeing of Black people and communities. Said differently, the media's mischaracterization of Black people leaves these communities to be seen as less than, undeserving and incorrigible. This ultimately results in fewer Canadians being supportive of policy interventions that truly centre and prioritize the economic, social and political empowerment of Black communities.

Finally, the entrenchment of a culture of media representations of Black people serves to normalize a collective notion of second-class citizenship of Black people. This contravenes constitutionally protected human rights of Canada's Black populations. For instance, the alarming and longstanding overrepresentations of Black people

Worth Repeating

Colonization persists

"Colonization is not a dark chapter in Canadian history. It is a book that the federal institution continues to write. We are tired of living in someone else's story and refuse to continue to have it written for us. We have written and will continue to write new chapters and will not ask for permission to live lives full of dignity and respect. We will demand it."

"Residential schools and Indigenous genocide are a 21st-century problem. Acting is in the hands of the government. The [Liberal government] can choose to support efforts toward real change, like the motion we proposed today, or they can join governments of the past in perpetuating violence against Indigenous peoples. Do not tell me they cannot afford to honour the promises made during colonization about housing. Provide all Nunavummiut with decent homes. Canadian billionaires added \$78 billion to their wealth in just the last year and we are not taxing them. This is about priorities. Do not tell me the government cannot afford to provide safe spaces for Inuit."

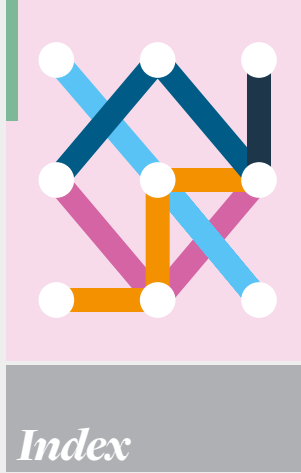
—NDP MP Mumilaaq Qaqqaq, to the House of Commons, June 3

in instances of unemployment, housing precarity, health disparities, racial profiling, incarceration, indefinite immigration detention and deportations, and police use of deadly force, are anti-Black human rights violations to which Canadians have become desensitized. The media is deeply implicated in this desensitization because of the steady stream of images, narratives and depictions that offer an overwhelmingly imbalanced and negative projection and presentation of Black people. This results in Canadian society feeling that Black communities do not actually deserve the rights and equality guarantees outlined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as well as in federal and provincial human rights legislation. Further still, media misrepresentations make us all more susceptible to internalizing an inherent and reflexive suspicion that makes us avoid giving Black individuals or communities the benefit of the doubt.

Specifically, these representations prime Canadians to be collectively inclined to believe that instances and social conditions of anti-Black racism, while generally not acceptable, are somehow justified because of the action or inaction of the Black individual in question, the norms of “the Black family,” or “the ills of Black culture.” These are narratives that are not just spun by right-wing media pundits and racists, but often find fertile ground in the conscious and unconscious beliefs, biases and attitudes of progressive policy professionals and members of society alike.

It is because of the underexplored interconnections between anti-Black media portrayals and socioeconomic outcomes faced by Canada’s Black communities that I developed an open-source anti-racist media literacy tool called the Universal Charter on Media Representations of Black Peoples. Though created in 2013, this tool remains relevant as a resource for a critical understanding of how mainstream media impacts social and policy outcomes for Black communities.

My ultimate aim in creating the charter and in writing this piece is to emphasize what I think is a point that is deeply underappreciated among people who are truly committed to seeing fairness, justice and equity fully realized for Black people in Canada. Public policy that is intended to support progressive outcomes for Black communities must be developed, led, implemented, managed and evaluated in a manner that is responsive to the pernicious impacts of Canadian media on these communities. **M**



COVID-19’s impact on media in Canada

COMPILED BY ALYSSA O’DELL

67

The number of media outlets closed temporarily or permanently during the first year of the pandemic. Of this number, 40 have closed permanently. Media closures create news deserts. It becomes harder for communities to learn about local news and to hear from a diversity of voices, and easier for local governments to be less transparent.

3,011

The number of total permanent and temporary job cuts in Canadian media workplaces since the start of the pandemic, across 182 publications. More than 1,200 of these job losses have been confirmed as permanent.

\$122 million

The amount Bell Media received from the federal Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy while increasing dividends to shareholders and laying off hundreds of workers in early 2021 (the company has denied requests for data on exactly how many jobs were eliminated).

29

The number of community newspapers that have permanently closed since March 2020. A total of 49 news outlets have suspended or cancelled some or all print editions.

63%

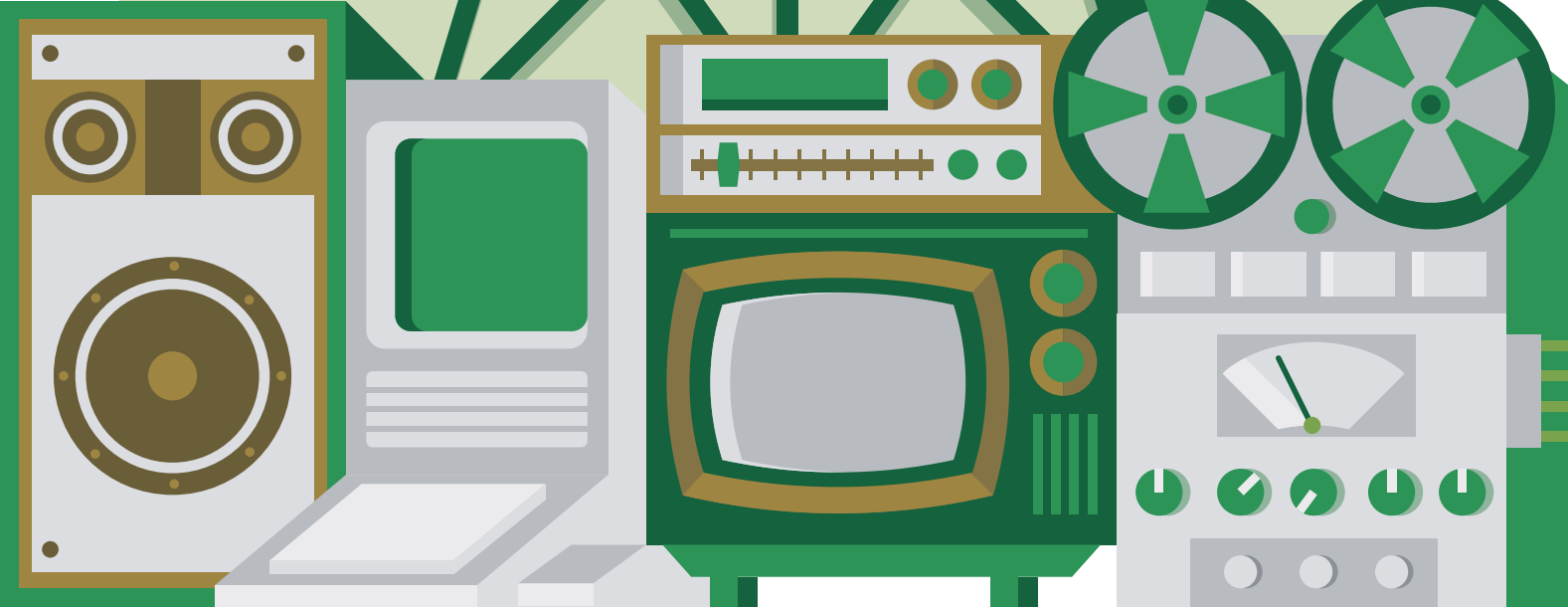
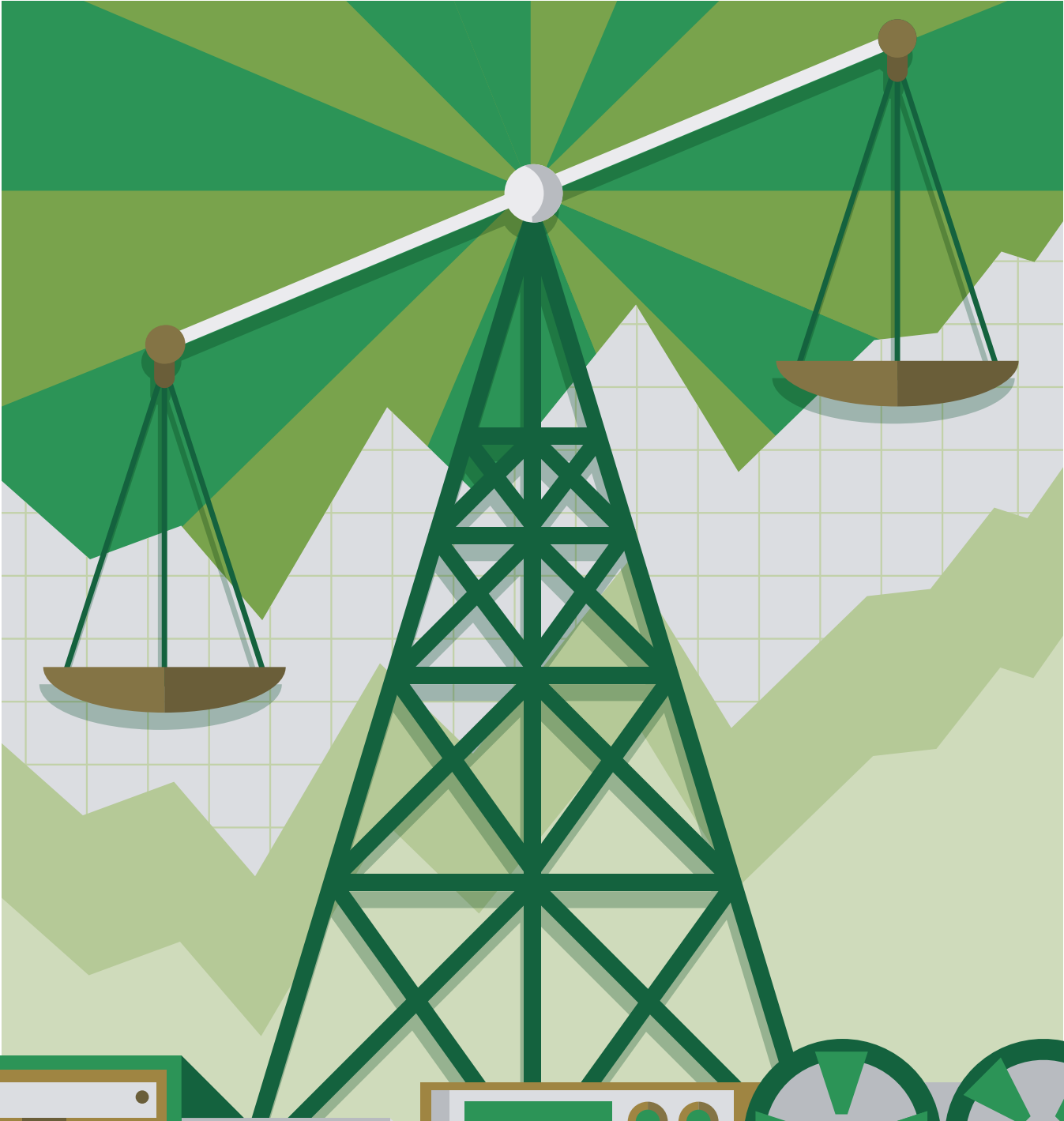
The portion of respondents to a July 2020 Statistics Canada survey who said they relied on digital newspapers or online news websites for information about the COVID-19 pandemic. Ten per cent said they did not use the internet at all to find information about the pandemic.

\$60 million

The amount paid by NordStar Capital for the purchase of Torstar Corp. in August 2020. The sale included the Toronto Star and 76 other daily and weekly newspapers across Ontario. Since changing hands, Torstar has sold digital ad technology to grocery giant Loblaws and has announced a new online casino venture to “help support the growth and expansion” of journalism. As reported by *Canadaland*, NordStar’s owners have also made numerous political donations to provincial and federal Conservative candidates over the past decade.

4

The number of new independent and progressive digital news websites launched in 2021, including the *Monitor’s* own MonitorMag.ca. As well, the newly launched Overstory Media Group has plans to expand its local online news publications across the country and says it will hire 250 journalists.



We need stronger anti-monopoly laws if we want to curb corporate influence in the news

AS A VOICE of dissent and check on power in our society, a free and open press is a pillar of our democracy. But what use is that freedom and openness if our press is dominated by a handful of wealthy interests? A concentrated press market with few players means powerful actors, be they owners, corporations or politicians, are able to quash the information Canadians need to hold to account the people and institutions that govern them.

An example of this power in action is the Irving Oil environmental controversy in 2015. Reuters published an article about mechanical problems at the Irving marine terminal in Saint John. These problems caused the terminal to leak dangerous and carcinogenic compounds into the air. The local newspapers, owned by Irving, never reported on the issue, though they did run an article about one environmentalist's complaint to the government about it. Reuters published a second article detailing how the Irving refinery had been spewing ash-like pollutants that exceeded the refinery's operating permit for the past six years. Local Irving-owned media were again silent on the issue.

Canada is no stranger to dynastic ownership of its media companies. Thomson, Atkinson, Black, Irving: each family name is synonymous with the control of major press operations, either nationally or regionally. Governments have been aware of this issue for decades, but they've done little to address it.

In 1970, the Senate tabled a special report acknowledging that

Canada "should no longer tolerate a situation where the public interest in so vital a field as information [is] dependent on the greed or goodwill of an extremely privileged group of businessmen." The Senate also found that "control of the media is passing into fewer and fewer hands," with media barons controlling more of the print media landscape. As a solution, the senate proposed a Press Ownership Review Board that would screen mergers between newspaper companies to prevent corporate interests from taking full control over Canada's print media. Unfortunately, this vision was never realized.

Then, in 1981, the federal government appointed a royal commission to examine the newspaper sector on the heels of numerous paper closings in Montreal, Quebec City, Winnipeg and Ottawa. The commission found that: "Concentration engulfs Canadian daily newspaper publishing. Three chains control nine-tenths of French-language daily newspaper circulation, while three other chains control two-thirds of English-language circulation."

The commission concluded that these media conglomerates produced poor newspapers. They tended to spend less on editorial content than smaller print news services. There was also a growing public perception that the quality of political coverage was in decline and that diverse interests were not represented. The commission took aim at cross-ownership too, where paper owners also held major interests in other sectors (like Irving Oil), suggesting a conflict of

interest between the interests of wealthy owners and fair reporting.

In response to the crisis it saw in the media landscape, the commission proposed laws to limit newspaper ownership and strict restrictions on mergers to prevent further consolidation. However, like the Senate's review in the 1970s, none of these recommendations were pursued—to the relief of the newspaper owners, who had vigorously opposed the commission's recommendations.

In the years following the commission's work, Canada's newspaper environment has become even more concentrated as chains continue to acquire and shut down papers. This steady acquisitive march only accelerated as alternatives to newspapers for advertising began to emerge in digital markets and ad dollars began to migrate. Even before the dramatic rise and subsequent domination of digital advertising by Google and Facebook, the supply of advertising space had exploded, leading to a collapse in advertising revenue following the 2008 financial crisis. With the bottom falling out, local news outlets were shuttered or swapped between national and regional players at increasing speed as newspapers fought over pieces of what appeared to be a shrinking pie.

While further consolidation has been sold as the only way out of this spiral, Canadian press markets remain in freefall. Today, Canadians have less access to local news than ever before, and the days of all but a few select publications remain numbered. With each purchase, newspaper consolidation means

another independent voice is subsumed by the broader corporate interests of Canada's increasingly dominant players.

And, as in the past, government action has been wholly ineffective at preventing this consolidation. The Competition Bureau, Canada's antitrust authority, has the ability to stop the ongoing consolidation of Canada's newspaper environment—in principle. It is responsible for reviewing deals like the acquisition of papers by newspaper chains. But despite its authority, it has yet to take meaningful action.

In 2014 the bureau reviewed Postmedia's acquisition of at least eight English-language newspapers from Quebecor Media. The bureau rationalized that the papers Postmedia would acquire were sufficiently different in terms of readership and content that they were not in direct competition with each other. So, even though the deal led to Postmedia owning all the major newspapers in Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and Ottawa, the bureau found that the transaction was "unlikely to result in a substantial lessening or prevention of competition."

This year, the bureau also closed its investigation into an alleged conspiracy between Postmedia and Torstar involving the swap of 41 newspapers and subsequent closure of 36 of those papers. Although the bureau raided the offices of Postmedia and Torstar and examined six current and former Torstar employees under oath, it was still somehow unable to find sufficient evidence that Torstar and Postmedia engaged in a conspiracy to divide the newspaper market.

Why has the bureau been so ineffective in curbing the growing dominance of Canada's newspaper chains? The answer lies in our weak laws. Our antitrust legislation epitomizes neoliberal blind faith in the power of free markets and their inherent ability to self-correct through competitive forces. Canada's competition law is tolerant of monopolies and largely stands by as they pose an increasing threat to our democracy.

Beyond antitrust law, recent policy efforts have aimed to address the lack of diversity in Canada's news landscape. On first blush, the federal government's \$50-million local journalism initiative provides hope that local news creators could get the support they need to enhance the diversity of news coverage. However, critics have pointed out that a sizable chunk of this funding has been given to Postmedia papers.

The program also restricts funding to news outlets that have been operating for at least a year. As a coordinator of the program admitted, part of the rationale behind these restrictions is to prevent more competition in "already struggling markets"—like those where dominant media companies have been shuttering newspapers. While well-intentioned, this solution is focused squarely on preserving a dying status quo rather than looking to the future.

Looking beyond Canada, Australia has also moved to reinvigorate its news landscape. In early 2021, it released legislation that created a mandatory bargaining code between digital giants and Australian news organizations. The purpose of the code is to tip the scales in favour of news organizations in their advertising negotiations with companies like Google and Facebook. Initial opposition to the code was fierce, with Google threatening to pull out of the country entirely, but the major players eventually capitulated and entered negotiation. We should applaud Australians for exercising their sovereignty against these companies, dispelling the myth that this can only be done by superpowers and unified blocs. But we should also understand the limitations of this approach.

Australia is home to one of the most concentrated news markets on the planet, rivalled only by China and Egypt. Instead of addressing this core issue, Australia is only allowing domestic media titans to carve a larger chunk of digital advertising revenue out of digital giants. While the code may strengthen the balance sheet of Australian media conglomerates, it will do nothing to promote diversity and dissenting voices for Australians. The Australian solution is firmly grounded in preserving the status quo, despite its existing issues.

If Canadians want to preserve our own status quo, then we are firmly on track. But if we want to release Canada's news system from the undue influence of powerful interests, we must pursue two parallel solutions.

First, Canada must find ways to bring original news organizations with new models into the fold. In both Canada and Australia, current solutions focus more on shoring up the balance sheets of press monopolists instead of creating new organizations. However, with a dynamic news market, new organizations could rise up to challenge the dominance of entrenched players and foster diversity in our media landscape. While Canada is beginning to see media companies such as Canada-land, The Sprawl and The Hoser pursue alternative operating models, these are rare points of light in an otherwise shrinking landscape.

Second, Canadians must fundamentally rethink the laws that have led to our current monopolization crisis. The path forward for news must be fundamentally different than the one taken to date, and an anti-monopoly vision of that path is the most promising one. Canada must adopt a clear anti-monopoly approach to regulating business, including newspaper chains. This new approach must recognize the value of a diversity of voices and challenge the logic of consolidation, breaking the cycle of acquisition that robs communities of independent journalism.

Monopoly in *any* market is a threat to democracy, and nowhere is this threat more acute than in our vital news markets. **M**

The media hasn't even begun to reckon with sexual violence and neither have we

Content warning: This article contains details about sexual violence.

LAST MARCH IN London, England, a 33-year-old woman named Sarah Everard went missing while walking home from a friend's place. Nine days later, she was found dead, allegedly kidnapped and killed by a police officer.

Everard's horrific murder received international media coverage, reigniting conversations about violence against women around the world.

The dominant, hashtag-generating narratives following Everard's murder focused on "strangers" and the "streets" as sites of inherent danger for women. A young woman walks home alone at night, only to be kidnapped, killed and dumped in a forest at the hands of a deranged man.

For decades, the media has been circling the issue of sexual violence, mirroring society's discomfort. #MeToo revealed the pattern of serial abuse of power and widespread nature of sexual violence, but it only brought to light certain types of violence inflicted on certain types of victims. Post-#MeToo, we continue to focus on the rare cases where the assault occurred in a public space, the perpetrator is a stranger, and the victim is a cis woman who walks home alone in the dark, because we still can't handle the uncomfortable truth that sexual violence is much closer to us than that.

In Canada most sexual assaults against women are committed by someone they personally know, and nearly half of murdered women are killed by their spouse or intimate partner, with an additional

significant portion committed by other men close to the victim.

By focusing on the minority of assaults committed by strangers in public spaces, the media keeps survivors silent, abusers in positions of power, and society complicit in and in denial of the epidemic of sexual violence in the home and at the hands of the state.

Misrepresentation of sexual violence in media

Rape is incredibly common, but when we discuss it, we're careful to remove ourselves from the equation. Violence against women and femmes is boiled down to statistics, reports and inquiries, and the rape problem in someone else's backyard. We cover the stories that don't shatter our realities, because it's easier to dismiss survivors than it is to reckon with the commonplace nature of sexual violence in our communities.

As Sohaila Abdulali puts it in her book *What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape*, "We just don't want to think about the uncomfortable truth that a rapist is just a guy, any guy, who rapes."

We treat "sex" and "rape" as if they're so easily confused, and feign shock and horror anytime a survivor comes forward. Barring monumental evidence and numerous eye witnesses, a sexual assault can be reduced to the tired "he said/she said" narrative, giving abusers a chance to make their actions digestible to the public, so we can collectively rationalize and explain away the violence. *Was she unconscious the whole time? Maybe she woke up halfway through and enjoyed it.*

The media's events-based reporting style and fixation on assaults

with "newsworthy" qualities bodes well for abusers. Each case of sexual violence brought to our attention is treated as independent from the last, allowing us to attribute blame to individuals—the "bad apples"—instead of viewing each assault as symptomatic of a deeper root.

#MeToo brought the systemic nature of abuse in Hollywood, media, government and academia into mainstream consciousness. But as Claire Moran put it in an article for *The Conversation*, "the movement is neoliberal feminism masquerading as collective action." Like the media, #MeToo individualized the issue by relying on survivors to publicly out themselves, which only a privileged few can do. In rare cases, abusers faced consequences, but even then, the structural causes of sexual violence remain intact.

Media plays a vital role in our collective understanding of the breadth of the issue of sexual violence. Media informs us of what constitutes "sexual violence" (or at least what is considered completely unacceptable) and with each story paints a portrait of the victim and abuser in the public imagination. But this coverage often bears little resemblance to the violence most victims experience.

During an assault, many victims go into a kind of psychological paralysis where their thinking and feeling capacities shut down in order to survive. When survivors later try to make sense of their memories, they rely on the media to reflect their experiences back at them, so they can understand what they've endured and label their trauma.

But the media is drawn to unusual cases with newsworthy narratives

like serial attacks committed by strangers, not the pattern of sexual violence endemic to everyday life. Rarely in the news do we see the stories where the victim is the friend, partner, sister or daughter facing the mindfuck that is being sexually assaulted by a man you are close to.

The failure to accurately represent the most common ways we experience sexual violence is most detrimental to survivors looking for answers. With the most prominent narratives having no threads of resemblance to their lived experiences, survivors may question their own claims to survivorhood. Feeding women and femmes stories about men hiding in the bushes ready to attack only makes us more susceptible to accepting violence in our home lives because we haven't been given the conceptual tools necessary to recognize rape in the home perpetrated by a partner, friend or family member as *rape*.

Systemic causes of sexual violence

The international outrage prompted by Sarah Everard's murder—an outrage reserved solely for the deaths of white women—once again located sexual threat in the “stranger,” overlooking the power structures and systemic inequalities that make women vulnerable to violence.

Lost in the discussions about making streets safer for women is the fact that Everard's murderer was a police officer. This isn't a superfluous addition to the conversation, as if he could have just as easily been a mechanic or a carpenter. As a member of law enforcement, in his daily life, this man was given license to assert control and commit violence against community members on behalf of the state, and Everard's murder was one case of that violence.

While Everard's murder was an unlikely instance of police brutality, it shouldn't come as a surprise that a member of law enforcement was the perpetrator—rape culture is endemic to policing. Two U.S. studies have found that at least 40 per cent of police officers' families experience domestic violence, in comparison to 10 per cent of families in the general population. In 2016, dozens of Indigenous women filed complaints against police officers in Val-d'Or, Quebec, with allegations ranging from physical assault, to rape, to women being driven out of town and left to walk home in the cold. And these accounts are likely just the tip of the iceberg.

There's a cruel irony in the fact that after Everard went missing, her murderer's fellow police officers knocked on doors warning women to “be careful going out alone.” And that despite reports of sexual assault, Val d'Or's police force continues to terrorize Indigenous women.

“The state is the single biggest threat to women's health and safety,” writer Charlotte Shane explains in response to the misplaced discourse on women's safety following Everard's murder. She writes that the state “administers violence directly through policing and incarceration and indirectly, through relentless

deprivations and oppressions that maintain a regime of interpersonal violence against women, that keep women underpaid and isolated, dependent on male partnership or state surveillance to access resources.”

In 2020, 160 women and girls (that we know of) were victims of femicide in Canada—that's one murder every 2.5 days. Government-mandated lockdowns and stay-at-home orders during the COVID-19 pandemic have seen cases of domestic violence and femicide skyrocket, as women and femmes have little reprieve from their abusers when forced to stay in their homes.

We need to stop acting as if public spaces are where women and femmes are most at risk of experiencing violence. We are in the midst of a femicide crisis, and it's time for us to reckon with the fact that sexual violence is most prominent in the home.

We need to listen to survivors

For decades, we've been having generalized discussions about “women's safety” while failing to implement the lifesaving policies and legislative changes women and femmes have been calling for.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the Canadian government has invested over \$207 million toward helping women experiencing homelessness and fleeing gender-based violence. While this investment is a good start, addressing the entirety of the issue will require more than funding existing support structures.

For one, women's financial precarity must be addressed. In 2017/18, Statistics Canada found that over half of women staying in shelters for victims of abuse experienced financial abuse. It's imperative women be provided with economic security.

Solutions specific to Indigenous women and girls have been put forward by Canada's National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, including access to legal aid, education, culture and funding for Indigenous civilian police oversight bodies.

Numerous organizations representing survivors have made the needs of their communities clear. For example, DisAbled Women's Network Canada names inaccessible transportation, fear of losing housing and/or welfare benefits, and fear of being institutionalized as barriers disabled women face in reporting sexual violence and accessing services. And sex worker advocates cite policing, criminalization and precarious status as primary causes of violence against women who are sex workers.

Ultimately, it's not the stories profiled by the media that we should be focusing on, but the cases that are dismissed because we don't want to do the work of re-evaluating the people and systems we have been made to trust. It's time for a society-wide reckoning with the pervasive nature of sexual violence in our home lives and at the hands of the state. And it's time for sweeping policies and legislative changes aimed at the systemic inequalities that make women and femmes vulnerable to violence. **M**

Weaponizing fact-checking: What Canada needs to know

IN THE SUMMER of 2020, military reservist and small business owner Corey Hurren posted COVID-19 conspiracy content before arming himself and ramming the gates of Rideau Hall with the intention of arresting Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Before this attempt, and after the start of the pandemic, Hurren found refuge in conspiracy theories like “Event 201,” which he referenced in a note left in his car. This theory claims that the elite are the reason behind the pandemic, and it is based on an actual exercise (called Event 201) that took place a few months before the COVID-19 outbreak, which simulated a policy response to a hypothetical pandemic scenario.

While Hurren’s actions did not end up physically hurting anyone, they highlight the dangerous implications of fake news in Canada. The conspiracy theories that Hurren fell into were debunked by fact-checking organizations months before his attack on Rideau Hall, but that information either never entered Hurren’s digital world, or he didn’t believe it if it did. His actions demonstrate the real violence and consequences that we are increasingly seeing in Canada and around the world as the spread of misinformation online becomes more common.

According to Stats Canada, 96% of Canadians who used the internet to search for COVID-19 facts came across information they suspected were false or misleading. And two in five Canadians said they believed such misinformation before realizing that it was false. As the pandemic increases discussions around fake news and studies come out showing

evidence of previous foreign disinformation campaigns in Canadian elections, taking the discussion around fake news to the mainstream level is becoming more essential.

Although the federal government took steps to contain misinformation during elections by modernizing laws to stop false statements about candidates, its efforts to combat disinformation during the pandemic are far from impressive. In response to the rise of misinformation online, and in some instances fueled by governments themselves, we have seen the emergence of dedicated fact-checking organizations. But this is not a simple solution, nor a silver bullet for the spread of misinformation.

Fact-checking, which is the process journalists, editors or dedicated fact-checkers use to verify news before publication, is an integral part of journalism. However, the new age of fact-checking includes organizations that investigate *published* news to judge its truthfulness. The first dedicated fact-checking organizations were founded in 1994 in the U.S., and now there are about 300 organizations worldwide. The fact-checking industry has been held up as one solution to combat fake news dissemination, especially after political interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. Political fact-checking in particular is seen as an effective way to refute false statements made by politicians.

The fact-checking landscape in Canada is relatively small, particularly when compared to the U.S. Only a few active fact-checking organizations and initiatives verify news in Canada. These include

French-speaking Agence Science-Press and Descrypteurs along with DisinfoWatch and Facebook partner AFP Fact Check Canada.

AFP Fact Check Canada is part of Global News Agency while Descrypteurs belongs to Radio-Canada and focuses on the spread of false information on social media. Agence Science-Press is an independent media non-profit, with a section for fact-checking called “The Rumor Detector.”

DisinfoWatch was launched in 2020 as part of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, to monitor and debunk disinformation around COVID-19 and foreign disinformation. Both Descrypteurs and AFP are part of Poynter’s International Fact-Checking Network, which aims to ensure accountability in journalism by providing a code of principles and verifying nonpartisan organizations that follow this code. But as more fact-checking organizations join media companies, the independence of fact-checking itself is becoming questionable. Facebook’s work with nonpartisan fact-checkers to detect fake news in Canada and other countries is an important case study in the ways in which fact-checking can be weaponized.

The fact-checking methodology organizations rely on can differ, but the process mainly focuses on three steps. First comes choosing a claim to verify, then investigating it by examining publicly available evidence and contacting relevant sources. Finally, fact-checkers judge the truthfulness of the claim and publish it using rating systems.

Despite arguments about its overall effectiveness, research has found that the process of checking

political claims and documenting facts is beneficial for the political landscape and its spread can increase awareness about misinformation. However, it is essential to remember that fact-checking is not a silver bullet. Every day there are thousands of claims to check and fact-checking is a lengthy process. This forces researchers to only select a few claims to investigate. By the time a claim is verified, it may have reached thousands of people.

On top of all this, organizational and personal biases may affect the initial step of choosing claims to verify. Furthermore, choosing evidence to verify a claim is an issue of its own. Researchers rely on available official public data and information from non-partisan parties and governments to help them reach a judgment. But how can a verdict be reached when evidence is coming from undemocratic governments? Or, for a Canadian example, how can we properly fact-check Indigenous history when the government destroyed 200,000 Indian Affair files between 1936 and 1944?

After the massive fake news campaigns during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, Facebook initiated its third-party fact-checking program, inviting organizations worldwide to verify posts on Facebook and Instagram. The process was supposed to be simple. Facebook and fact-checking organizations identify suspicious viral posts, organizations then examine the accuracy of claims and eventually provide Facebook with a judgment. Afterward, the platform assigns different warning labels. If a post is misleading, this can result in penalties to users, like reducing reach and removing the ability to advertise and monetize.

Nevertheless, problems regarding the transparency of a program funded by a tiny portion of Facebook's revenue and its effects emerged. Organizations and initiatives like Snopes and ABC News stopped working with Facebook, citing numerous concerns. As a conglomerate with political and business goals, Facebook controls the spread of disinformation even when working with fact-checking organizations, as the platform interferes with fact-checking decisions by pressuring fact-checkers to downgrade labels.

Since Facebook does not fact-check opinions, they can use this loophole to ask fact-checking organizations to adjust their decision if they consider some claims "opinion pieces." This means that in addition to relying on a tech company to decide what is truth and what is fake we have to trust how they will manage their fact-checking process, which could be extremely dangerous for significant issues like pandemics or the climate crisis. One example of this is: a post by active Facebook advertiser Prager University that claimed misleading climate content and was labelled false by a fact-checking organization. Facebook later discussed changing the label and the verdict was downgraded, enabling Prager University to continue publishing misleading ads.

Besides Facebook's program, what is also worrying is how unknown groups and users impersonate fact-checkers to publish fake verifications to undermine legitimate fact-checkers. These groups also attack fact-checkers with misinformation campaigns to damage their credibility, in addition to threatening them. After suspicions regarding Saudi Arabia's role in the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, a fake Saudi Arabian fact-checking organization labelled news blaming the Saudi government as fake. Misinformation campaigns also promoted fake fact-checking news claiming that fact-checking project Factcheck.org exposed another fact-checker, Snopes, as a "liberal propaganda site."

Just as Donald Trump exploited the term "fake news" to avoid criticism until the term lost its meaning, politicians can do the same with "fact-checking." Politicians now expect to be fact-checked, and they are ready to use the term "fact-checking" to sweep away criticism and call opponents liars. Republican and Democratic leaders in the U.S. accuse fact-checkers of being backed by certain agendas, while other political candidates defend claims against their campaigns using their own fact-checking groups.

Despite these depressing developments, fact-checking remains an essential part of discussions around fake news. A strong fact-checking industry can stop the normalization of lying and advocate for policy changes. But the weaponization of fact-checking can cause irreversible harm. Deciding what is true at the moment is turning into an impasse, and weaponizing truth verifications can make the current thin line separating truth and falsehood even blurrier.

What happened after 2016 shows us that significant solutions and effects may come from big tech companies, who can halt or spread disinformation. Although Canada may still only be in the infancy of its fact-checking, Canadian fact-checkers could easily find themselves facing weaponization incidents similar to other cases worldwide. As a first step, Canada should refrain from outsourcing fact-checking to tech companies with the power to change verifications.

Canada and the rest of the world needs to establish a public discussion to explore transparency issues around platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and how they handle misinformation. In the meantime, platforms can amend their policies regarding highly persuasive topics (for example, Facebook's ban on publishing anti-vaccination ads).

Advertisements containing political, environmental and health misinformation can affect millions of people. One first and major step the government can take is to ensure that ads on social media platforms comply with federal and provincial laws that prevent misleading advertisements. Fact-checkers can support such processes by verifying ads pre-publication. Though it will never be an easy job, it will be a lot harder without independent fact-checking organizations. **M**



“Whoever controls the media, controls the mind”

THE ABOVE QUOTE attributed to Jim Morrison, lead singer of '60s rock band The Doors, could have been said today about the United States and Brazil. Media concentration in both countries has reached phenomenal levels, and it is compounded by the massive spread of pernicious fake news.

Conn Hallinan, a columnist with *Foreign Policy in Focus*, a project of the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Policy Studies, tells me that when Ben Bagdikian published his book *The New Media Monopoly* in 2004, there were 100 corporations controlling media outlets in the U.S. As of September 2020, six corporations control 90 per cent of media outlets in the U.S.: AT&T, CBS, Comcast, Disney, News Corp and Viacom.

Hallinan adds that “people read what those [six] corporations want them to read, and corporations like lower taxes, fewer financial and environmental regulations, in short, whatever makes them the most money. Since profits are the bottom line, staffs are cut back, papers are merged, and stories dumbed down to not upset anyone. So fewer papers, fewer reporters, tighter budgets (which means no investigative reporting) and a less informed population. Because democracy only works when people are informed enough to make choices, democracy is diminished.”

As Mickey Huff has said (in a video panel discussion), six corporations controlling the media is just another sign among many others that the U.S. is not a democracy. Huff, who is director of Project Censored, a U.S. media

literacy organization, describes the country as “an inverted totalitarian state, sort of a corporate society governed with illusions that [the state] responds to the people every four years [after a ballot] riddled with election fraud.” He points out that “even the elitists at Princeton University and Northwestern University have called the U.S. a plutocracy and an oligarchy [in 2013].”

Nolan Higdon, who co-authored a book about the U.S. media with Huff titled *The United States of Distraction* (2019), agrees that the country is not a democracy, and this is partly due to media concentration. Higdon is also author of *The Anatomy of Fake News: A Critical News Literacy Education* (University of California Press, 2020) and a lecturer in media studies and history at the University of California at Santa Cruz. He tells me about the effects of media concentration in the U.S., where legacy media is both made up of and seeks the approval of economic and political elites, and is used as a divide-and-conquer-strategy by those same elites.

“As a result,” Higdon says, “their reporting and messaging does not

Democracy only works when people are informed enough to make choices.

veer into populist discourses that reflect the will of the majority of people or the issues that concern them.... Instead, they reduce everything to a narrow frame of Republicans versus Democrats. The audience tunes into MSNBC or CNN or reads the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* to boo Republicans and cheer Democrats. And users of Fox News Channel, *Forbes*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Breitbart* do the same to cheer Republicans and boo Democrats.... The emphasis on what divides us distracts from the neoliberal ideology of empire that binds parties and the elite class that fund, support, and run them.”

While it is enforcing oligarchy inside the U.S., the mainstream media is also giving a warped view of the outside world to Americans, encouraging support for a foreign policy grounded in endless war. Even Donald Trump admitted this was the case when he was president.

As Higdon puts it, “Americans hear almost nothing about what is going on overseas.” He points out how, with very few foreign correspondents on the ground, legacy media now rely extensively on military and intelligence experts: “These are folks who have a vested interest in perpetuating war and denigrating the so-called enemy. Since most people in news media are trained on how to sound like experts...Americans receive military talking points as journalism.”

Compounding all this is the massive rise of fake news—one example of many being the scapegoating of Russia for stealing the 2016 election for Trump.

Media concentration’s other compounding factor is the rise of

big tech companies. In 2020 Google, Facebook and Amazon received the majority of *all* advertising spending in the U.S., and Amazon chief Jeff Bezos even owns *The Washington Post*. This incredible concentration of resources has meant the demise of many progressive alternative news media outlets. Meanwhile, powerful platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and YouTube make for very rapid diffusion of fake news.

Higdon calls the big tech companies “twenty-first century snake oil salesmen” who have a “profit model predicated on keeping people addicted to their screens by privileging sensational content that appeals to negative human emotions. That is what fake news is.”

Hallinan is also alarmed by the rise of big tech companies and fake news: “Americans have always been fed fake news, but not so much so quickly, without much in the way of dissenting voices. I have grave fears for the future.”

Brazil presents a similar picture to that of the U.S., with only 11 families controlling the most important media conglomerates. Politicians and religious groups play significant roles in this media oligopoly.

Grupo Globo (which owns TV Globo) is the country’s biggest media conglomerate. It reaches all of Brazil and has “an unmatched influence in politics, economy and society,” according to Sherlock Communications, a Latin American public relations firm. More than 70 per cent of Brazil’s TV audience is divided between four networks, with TV Globo getting more than half of this. The other major conglomerates are Record, Band and SBT. TV Globo is also the largest commercial TV network in Latin America and the second-largest in the world after the American Broadcasting Company.

In the print press, about 50 per cent of Brazilian readers turn to only four companies: Globo, Folha, RBS and Sada. Online media content is dominated by only four companies: G1, UOL, R7 and IGM, which together have almost 60 per cent of the online media audience.

Associate professor Helder Ferreira Do Vale teaches international studies at Xi’an Jiaotong–Liverpool University in China and is an expert in Brazilian politics. He tells me that Brazil’s media concentration has consequences for the country’s democracy because it negatively affects political accountability and government transparency. “Such high media concentration is obstructing a much-needed social transformation in a country that remains one of the most unequal in the world,” he adds.

According to OXFAM, the six richest men in Brazil have wealth equivalent to the approximately 100 million people who make up the poorest 50 per cent of the population. And the income of the country’s richest 5 per cent is equivalent to the income of the remaining 95 per cent. This elite monopolizes enormous economic and political power with its control over the

media, perpetuating extreme inequality and right-wing dominance.

As Ferreira Do Vale explains, “Brazilian media has often created and disseminated information and content that favours traditional values and a parochial political culture based on low appreciation for freedom of expression, individual rights, and open debate. This tendency has been increasing with the growing participation of evangelical families in the telecommunication sector in Brazil.”

Media concentration in Brazil is muddied even more by the participation of politicians in the sector. Although this is prohibited by Brazilian law, Ferreira Do Vale says this stipulation is “bluntly ignored” by those who are supposed to be lawmakers.

As of 2018, 32 representatives and eight senators sitting in Brazil’s National Congress owned broadcasting companies. This leads to ridiculously corrupt situations, such as legislators participating in decisions to grant themselves broadcasting licenses.

The combination of fake news with a traditional right-wing media has helped produce not just a conservative government in Brazil but an explicitly neofascist one. Since (and before) his election in 2018, President Jair Bolsonaro has openly displayed his hatred for women, the LGBTQI community, and Indigenous and Black people. He has called for the killing of leftists, the destruction of the Brazilian Amazon rainforest and the restoration of military dictatorship.

With 141 million mobile internet users, Brazil is “fertile ground for the massive use of fake news,” says Ferreira Do Vale. And he points out how Brazil’s media concentration created an even riper environment for fake news, because it is one “without opposing opinion, debate and dissent.”

For Ferreira Do Vale, Brazil’s fertile fake news environment allows opportunist politicians like Bolsonaro to flourish: “[He] never had a clear political agenda and a plan of action to solve Brazil’s problems so he often resorts to fake news to hide his lack of viable ideas and propositions to lead Brazil. Also Bolsonaro employs fake news to divert public attention in moments of crisis.”

Significantly, according to Ferreira Do Vale, “It is increasingly clear that Bolsonaro greatly benefited from fake news to win the 2018 presidential election. He resorted to demagogic rumours (for example, the hacking of the Brazilian electronic voting system by the Venezuelan government) disseminated through WhatsApp messages sent from foreign cell phone chips to illegally acquired phone lists.”

Ferreira Do Vale adds that a Brazilian fact-checking organization called *Aos Fatos* found that “in three critical days (October 14, 15 and 16) of the presidential election campaign of 2018, 1,504 WhatsApp accounts sent to different WhatsApp groups 14,090 messages containing fake news against Bolsonaro’s political opponents.” **M**

Why can't we know more about what political parties know about us?

MORE THAN A decade ago, then CEO of Google Eric Schmidt told the *Atlantic* that Google's policy "is to get right up to the creepy line and not cross it." Schmidt was talking about how predictions about individual-level user traits could be leveraged by the company.

In the past 10 years a lot has happened to shift public awareness of the data that's collected about us. If there was a watershed crossing of that line in politics, it was the 2016 Cambridge Analytica scandal that saw U.K. political parties and other actors collect immense amounts of personal data and use it to target voters.

Related concerns have long been present in Canada, where collection and use of personal data by federal political parties is largely ungoverned. Proposed changes to one of Canada's key pieces of privacy legislation (Bill C-11) do not address that exemption. As it stands right now, political parties in Canada face little oversight or transparency requirements for the data they collect and create about Canadian citizens.

Lack of regulation means limited transparency for federal political parties

Many have sought to address how Canadian political parties use personal data. But behind these important public and scholarly reports lie persistent frustrations with the lack of transparency around these practices. If, as the argument goes, political parties' use of voter data enhances the democratic process, why can't voters know what these practices actually entail?

The lack of transparency around political parties' personal data practices is one symptom of insufficient regulation around federal political parties and their personal data practices. In fact, Canadians are widely supportive of extending privacy laws to political parties. Yet, despite suggestions that a federal election could be on the horizon, Canada's federal political parties are not subject to robust privacy legislation and there is little indication that they will be any time soon.

The long-awaited proposed overhaul to private-sector privacy legislation in Canada does not address political parties' personal data practices, and related provisions in the 2018 Elections Modernization Act are limited. The governing Liberal party has long been disinterested in increasing

regulations around how political parties collect, store and use voters' personal information. This is despite risks raised by scholars, the privacy commissioner, civil society groups and parliamentary committees. At the provincial and territorial level, British Columbia is the only jurisdiction that regulates political parties' privacy practices.

These limited regulations have implications for what electors can readily learn about how federal political parties use their personal data. Certainly, there are arguments to be made about the role that personal data plays in political engagement. As a representative of the Liberal Party of Canada has suggested, the use of electors' personal data "helps us to speak to the issues that matter most to them and in turn mobilizes democratic participation in our country." Again we must ask: if the use of personal data is imperative to political engagement, then why can't the specific practices used to collect it be made public?

Political parties are in competition with one another. This means some might argue that their personal data practices should be kept secret for competitive reasons. But if, as some insist, political parties are non-profit and not commercial entities, how strong is this rationale?

Right now, specific questions around the strategies and tools that federal political parties use to collect, manage and use our personal data are incredibly difficult, and perhaps impossible, to answer from publicly available information. The privacy policies available on political parties' websites are undoubtedly

We asked the federal Conservatives, Liberals and New Democrats about their personal data practices and privacy policies. We got no answers.

a step in the right direction, but the scope and detail provided around parties' personal data practices is limited. As Colin Bennett, professor in Political Science at the University of Victoria said in a Zoom interview with us, "they are inadequate, but there is some information there."

At the same time, speaking directly to party representatives about these issues is challenging. We reached out to the designated privacy officers of the Conservative Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party of Canada to discuss their parties' personal data practices and privacy policies. We received no response. A similar message sent via the Liberal Party of Canada's contact page for members of the media went unanswered.

What can actors do with our personal data?

One of the more invasive practices of Cambridge Analytica was the prediction of psychographic information. Psychographics are data that describe individual psychological properties of a person. Psychographics can include personality traits like your Myers-Briggs personality type, your "dark triad" (which evaluates traits associated with psychopathy) or traits like how prone you are to boredom. Despite the invasive nature of psychographics, the risks of developing political ads to target psychologically segmented populations may be overstated.

Bennett points out that in the political marketing space Cambridge Analytica was "a bad actor" compared to most firms, and that "there is no evidence that Cambridge Analytica was in any way active in Canada." While there is certainly micro-targeting happening in Canada, when it comes to political parties Bennett says that "they don't have the money to create the content" and micro-targeting is "perhaps not as dangerous as people think it is."

However, Bennett is clear that these kinds of practices do endanger democratic norms at different levels. He says micro-targeting "means that the messaging is largely in secret," which diminishes "the process of self-correction in a democracy." Secrecy creates implications for governance where politicians might be encouraged to, as Bennett put it in our interview, "say one thing in one part of the country to one group of voters, and exactly the opposite to another group."

Even if a Cambridge Analytica-type event is unlikely in Canada, one may still be curious about the full capabilities of predicting private traits. In a review of scholarly research published last year, Trevor Deley (one of the authors of this article) and Elizabeth Dubois found more than 30 individual-level traits that could be predicted from social media and digital

footprint data. These included a person's income, mood on a per-second basis, stage of life and even deeper-level values that can predict personality.

Many of these traits cannot be collected without consent in B.C., where political parties must abide by privacy laws. Also, this search was only limited to academic publications, which are likely behind the curve on these technologies.

These kinds of metrics go beyond psychographics into what is sometimes referred to as neuromarketing. Neuromarketing can be described as attempting to predict what you think as you think it in order to create more persuasive and personalized marketing materials. Under current privacy laws political parties in most provinces can predict private traits with limited restrictions around transparency and ramifications for data breaches. Without transparency we still have little idea what is being predicted about us.

As mentioned earlier, there is precedent in Canada for applying privacy laws to political parties. The B.C. privacy commissioner ruled that political parties are subject to the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA), and that federal electoral district associations operating in B.C. would also be subject to PIPA. This ensures that residents in that province are able to know what data is collected about them by political parties, including data inferred by political parties like scores indicating partisan support.

Transparency as a first step

The secrecy around federal political parties' use of Canadians' data means that it's difficult to determine whether and how they use specific strategies and tools like the ones outlined above. But given the budgetary constraints Canadian political parties operate under, it is likely that most of these tools exceed parties' available resources.

Nonetheless, it's important to consider and review these examples, especially in light of the limited regulation around Canadian federal political parties. While such initiatives likely go beyond the current capacity—and potentially the desire—of some or all of the political parties, there are only minimal safeguards against their using such sophisticated methods in the future.

A first step towards alleviating these concerns does not have to wait for regulatory action. Political parties can make the techniques and systems they use around personal data more clearly and readily accessible to the public now.

More transparency around federal political parties' personal data practices would be a boon to journalists and researchers working in this area, as well as interested Canadians. And, most importantly, it seems likely that this transparency could contribute to increased trust in Canada's political parties, ultimately strengthening this country's democratic system. **M**



Why we shouldn't be surprised that right-wing media grew during the pandemic

THE VIRUS IS not the only thing that has been spreading during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whether they're promoting Canadian pastors and businesses opposing lockdowns, or pushing conspiracy theories about the origin of the virus or what is happening in quarantine hotels, right-wing media sources have been able to bolster themselves with pandemic coverage and gain social media traction because of it.

Brandon Rigato is a PhD candidate in communication studies at Carleton University and a senior research assistant with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-supported project *Populist Publics: Memory, Populism, and Misinformation in the Canadian Social Mediascape*. He explained how right-wing media has been able to benefit from the pandemic: "From the source of the virus, the legitimacy of the virus, and the reaction to it—each stage has provided sources of material for right-wing media.

"The early stages of the pandemic, where public health officials were trying to understand the COVID-19 virus, was used as fodder to criticize public health officials such as Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's chief public health officer," says Rigato.

As the world grappled with the pandemic, scientists and public health officials grappled with trying to stay on top of a rapidly changing situation and update their guidance as new information emerged. This is a completely normal part of the scientific process, but it began to erode some people's trust in

government and other institutions, which led them to turn to non-traditional media sources.

Although this distrust has been amplified by the pandemic, Rigato says that it is nothing new. "Trust in expertise, institutions and democracy itself has been waning well before the pandemic began," he says.

In recent years, there has been growing distrust of the media. Sarah Rae, a conservative-media reader, told me one of the reasons she thinks some centrists and conservatives have turned away from mainstream media: "Through shrinking of industry and elimination of resources [Canadian journalism has] lost much of [its]

The turn toward right-wing media during the pandemic reflects increasing distrust, a growing reliance on clicks, and a decline in media independence

own independent stories and seems to cut and paste from the large U.S. companies, whose headlines are decidedly partisan."

Rae brings up something that many journalists can attest to: the media industry is struggling with ever-shrinking resources. And this means that some newspapers do reprint American stories to fill their pages, but there's also a larger issue in the industry that she touches on, the lack of independence.

The Canadian mediascape has a problem: the majority of our newspapers and television news channels are controlled by a small number of media conglomerates. This has led some consumers to question the availability of different perspectives when much of the mainstream media have the same owners. Although reporting, for the most part, maintains independence from ownership, the public may not believe this is at all the case.

Social media has also helped right-wing media proliferate during the pandemic. Whether suffering the loss of loved ones from the virus or the loss of livelihoods due to lockdowns and insufficient government support, many Canadians have been struggling and looking for answers.

And this is when people so often turn to alternative sources.

Two such Canadian sources have grown noticeably during the pandemic. In September 2019, *Rebel News* had 179,000 Twitter followers and 177,000 Facebook likes. At the time of writing (May 2021), this had jumped to 207,000 Twitter followers and 207,000 Facebook



likes. The *Post Millennial* has more than tripled its following. It had almost 17,000 Twitter followers and 30,000 Facebook likes in September 2019, and as of May 2021 it had 65,000 Twitter followers and 91,000 Facebook likes.

Some people champion the videos posted by right-wing media of business owners refusing to remain shut under lockdown. Some people looking for someone to blame share posts about conspiracy theories around China creating the virus in a lab and controlling the World Health Organization (WHO).

Actions like these are often symptomatic of fear.

Rigato explains that some “conspiracies are rooted in contemporary geo-political struggles.” Many countries have become increasingly cautious about China’s growth in power, and numerous politicians both in the U.S. and here in Canada have been perpetuating conspiracy theories about China.

The mainstream media does not typically cover conspiracy theories like these, but alternative media sources have taken more liberty. Right-wing media have been able to legitimize these claims because politicians like Member of Parliament Derek Sloan have given credence to them. Rigato explains that when Sloan asks whether Dr. Tam “worked for Canada or for China” it helped to legitimate conspiracy theories floating around about China’s control of Canada and the WHO.

Right-wing media sources do not necessarily promote these conspiracies because they believe they’re all true, but extreme headlines get more views, and more views mean more revenue. Rae sees the issues with the growth in click-bait news on both sides of the political spectrum both before and during the pandemic as “terrifying.”

“Not for those who are willing to spend time critically assessing headlines they are given, or those who are educated in the underlying issues and form their own stances (left and right),” Rae says, “but for the large majority in the middle who form their full political identity based on the 13-word headlines they read.”

Although the Canadian right-wing media has made the current culprits China and different levels of Canadian government, spreading these types of theories are nothing new. Rigato explains that the conspiracy that “a malicious elite sector of the global population that is secretly manipulating the behaviours of the world by puppeteering governments and other major institutions” has been used before, notably for anti-Semitic aims, and is now just targeting a different group.

It’s important to remember that people are especially vulnerable to this type of messaging during times of crisis or disaster. The pandemic has left people scared and confused and looking for some type of reason or response. This has led them to turn to media sources that give them the answers they crave, factual or not.

The turn towards right-wing media during the pandemic is also symptomatic of larger problems with the Canadian media that were already there: increasing distrust, a growing reliance on clicks, and a decline in media independence.

These are not simple issues to fix, but it is integral that they are addressed to protect lives during the pandemic and to keep the public informed beyond it. **M**



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PAUL WEINBERG

The bad smell hanging around Hamilton

IN LATE MARCH the smell of burnt coal hovered over east Hamilton's Crown Point neighbourhood, not far from the steel plants along Lake Ontario.

A March 25 article in the *Hamilton Spectator* reported that a temperature inversion (two layers of air, warm on top of cool) was keeping pollutants in a holding pattern that posed a "moderate health risk" to residents with heart or breathing problems. If a situation like this lasts more than six hours, Ontario's Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks can contact the local steel companies and request a voluntary cutback of emissions, which it did in this case. The last time the ministry requested that was in 2012.

The strangely sweet odour reminded resident Kat Bezner of her childhood in coal-rich Silesia, in Poland. Kat and her partner Jochen Bezner belong to the Citizens Against Pollution and they regularly attend the steel companies' community liaison committee (CLC) meetings.

Stelco, ArcelorMittal Dofasco and Rain Carbon all have CLCs. The meetings are taking place virtually for now, but in non-pandemic times they involve concerned residents sitting in a small room alongside representatives from the company, the ministry, and organizations like the Hamilton Board of Health, the Hamilton Port Authority and the Hamilton Conservation Authority, to hear about any progress the company has made in meeting provincial air-quality standards, among other things.

CLCs are open to anyone, and a few interested folks like myself and

my partner do attend regularly to voice our concerns. But they generally don't draw a large crowd. The information from the steel companies can be excruciatingly technical, although it's not impossible to follow after a while. Sometimes, a *Spectator* reporter drifts in to take notes, but that is also rare.

The issues require someone with enough time, commitment and encyclopedic knowledge of steel-making to stay on top of industry developments. Kat and Jochen Bezner fit that bill. So does Lynda Lukasik, Environment Hamilton's high-profile and energetic executive director.

One of Environment Hamilton's initiatives is StackWatch, which encourages residents to contact the ministry about problematic emissions from the steel mills. StackWatch started in 2003, but emissions, pollutants and bad smells hanging around are not a new story for a more than a century-old steel town like Hamilton.

To meet our Paris Agreement climate goals, the steel industry will have to make green steel.

Lukasik herself is a multi-generation Hamiltonian with steelworker roots. She never met her grandfather on her mother's side of the family. He worked for Stelco but died when Lukasik's mother was still in her early 20s. Lukasik has often wondered if occupational exposure played a role. "You think about decades and decades of high exposure to contaminants, especially for people living in the neighbourhoods close to the mills," she says. "And the interesting thing is when you think about Hamilton, that's something we don't really talk about."

Today, a more automated steel sector employs fewer people but the problem of industrial pollution is still present. Hamilton's media have reported on periodic emissions or flares from steel company stacks and Environment Canada air-quality alerts for the city.

Sometimes the wider issues are reported on too. "A couple of years ago the *Toronto Star* did a big investigative piece looking at the province's failure to penalize polluters but to happily give them economic development grants," points out Lukasik.

On April 26, one month after that temperature inversion created moderately risky air quality, it was Dofasco's turn to address its CLC via Zoom. Jochen Bezner, who is a mechanical engineer who has also studied metallurgy, was frustrated that day with the ministry's answers. The ministry was hesitant to point fingers, he said—even though the smell had to have come from the coking operations (which rely on metallurgical coal) at either Stelco or Dofasco. "I want the ministry to dig a little deeper,

because this springtime has been really awful, in the smell of coal,” said Bezner.

Stephen Burt, district manager of the ministry’s Hamilton office, replied on the same Zoom call that he was not ruling out further investigation and denied “brushing [the issue] under the rug.”

Afterward, Lukasik asked the Dofasco representative how his company was responding to the ministry’s request to voluntarily curtail emissions. Dofasco environmental director John Lundrigan seemed unprepared for this question, offering this: “We do have a standardized process...when we are notified by the ministry. We have a procedure where we walk through the number of areas [on the checklist].”

At a separate Stelco CLC on April 28, that company’s environmental affairs manager, Andrew Sebestyen, was more forthcoming: “We got the notice of the odour going out and I immediately contacted our operations people in the plan that we have in place...Anything that could be stopped was stopped.”

Jochen Bezner is still skeptical. He describes all of this as “window dressing,” since neither Stelco nor Dofasco can afford to curtail their operations on short notice to meet the ministry’s request. “At the end of the day the community is stuck with the emissions, regardless,” he says.

In 2005, Ontario adopted tough new air-quality measures for industry (regulation 419 under the Environment Protection Act). According to an ex-ministry source who wants to remain anonymous (a retired air-quality engineer familiar with ministry practices and policies), ministry staff spent another few more years developing a raft of new technical standards, the intent being to catch up with more advanced air-quality standards for industry in the United States.

The question in 2021 is whether regulation 419 will ever fully come into force. Lynda Lukasik is doubtful, citing the slow and incremental pace that never seems to reach actual adoption. So is the retired engineer, who says the regulation was designed with the science in mind but the steel industry is firm that it cannot comply: “There is technology there to reduce emissions. [The companies] basically have to redo the whole coke-making process or get rid of it in steelmaking. The problem [with] that is it can affect significantly the steel productivity and product quality.”

Ministry spokesperson Gary Wheeler told me that that over the past decade the ministry has negotiated site-specific standard agreements with the companies that establish benchmarking goals for reducing several dangerous contaminants emitted by the steel and iron sectors. These include benzo[a]pyrene, benzene, suspended particulate matter, and manganese. Sulphur dioxide, another substance of concern, is not yet on this list.

Benzo[a]pyrene is especially lethal as a carcinogen, which explains the ministry’s recent decision, in

response to a community request, to do more air-monitoring for this substance in the vicinity of the steel plants.

Wheeler maintains that there has been progress under the agreements. He says that the facility-wide maximum modelled concentrations of benzo[a]pyrene for the Stelco and Dofasco plants have been reduced by about 35 to 40 per cent since 2015.

Early last December residents were given an opportunity to provide suggestions for improving the process for site-specific standard action plans at the Environmental Registry of Ontario. One concern raised by the Citizens Against Pollution was the ministry’s failure to toughen up the air-quality standards for contaminants over the next two-and-a-half years. Another was that the community was not given enough time to provide meaningful feedback.

Afterward, Jochen Bezner says that “very limited changes” have sprung from the feedback given to the ministry. One was the additional air-monitoring for benzo[a]pyrene, mentioned earlier. The other is that Stelco’s particulate limit was adjusted downward by about 40 per cent, to match what Dofasco was obligated to meet. “For some reason Stelco for 10 years had a much higher [limit],” Bezner said, “which for at least the last five years was not justified.”

If Canada is to meet its Paris Agreement climate change goals, the steel industry will ultimately have to eliminate coke ovens and make green steel, which is produced using hydrogen generated by renewable energy sources. This is actively being investigated in Europe. Will the Canadian industry follow suit?

Dofasco’s John Lundrigan says it’s too early to say: “There are multiple different paths [for] how a steel company can get to a net-zero state.” But he added that it’s a “great and exciting time to be in this business.”

Meanwhile, people living in or around the Hamilton industrial harbour face two worrisome carcinogenic substances associated with the way that steel is now made.

An updated 2021 ministry study showed that residents of Hamilton’s Beach Strip neighbourhood have a one-in-10,000 chance of experiencing in their lifetime respiratory cancer from benzo[a]pyrene, plus blood and bone marrow cancer and acute myeloid leukemia from benzene. This drops to one in 100,000 in other areas of Hamilton and Burlington. Outside these cities, the rate in southern Ontario drops further to one in a million, which is considered normal.

On a more positive note, resourceful residents reporting and taking photos of black smoke coming out of the stacks forced the ministry to act, says Lukasik, who was also a witness in a recent court case against Dofasco. On May 25 the company pleaded guilty to violating provincial air-quality standards after a massive release of pollutants from its blast furnace in July 2018. It was ordered to pay a fine of \$268,750. **M**

Meet Monica Vandenhoven, CCPA donor

Meet a donor who considers the CCPA “a guardian of the truth”

How has COVID-19 forced you to think outside the box?

I quickly adapted during the first few months because I enjoyed taking my daily walks along the Gnatcho Trails in Windsor. It was a new way to have some social contact. Then, everything changed in September when my husband had an accident. Luckily, I was allowed a short visit once a day while he was in hospital. Our life became more challenging as a result of the care needed following his discharge, but I'm very aware of the tremendous hardships for many of my fellow Canadians and soon had put our issue in perspective.

Tell us about someone who was a big influence on your early life.

My first eight years were spent on our farm in Otonabee (near Peterborough) leading a life that still gives me pleasant memories. When my father had a heart attack, a decision was made to move nearby and have a general store, with the hope of making life easier, which it did. My parents became more and more aware of the needs of many of the local families. They were very active in the community. They took good care of the eight of us, gave lots of encouragement, made sure that we had a balance of work and play, and helped us when we needed it—but they expected that we would take responsibility for our actions. I know that a willingness to give a



hand, to offer support and to have respect for everyone came from them.

Tell us about someone you find particularly inspiring right now.

Elizabeth May, who has always remained faithful and active to her cause as an environmentalist.

What have you been reading to keep your mind busy and your soul fed as we all stay home as much as possible?

Books: *Philosophy in Bite-Sized Chunks* (Lesley Levene); *Native Son* (Richard Wright); *Sins of the Mother* (Irene Kelly, Jennifer Kelly and Matt Kelly); *Boyhood Island* (Karl Ove Knausgaard); *Uncharted: How to Navigate the Future* (Margaret Heffernan); *Utopia for Realists* (Rutger Bregman).

Magazines/newspapers: *Monitor*; *Globe and Mail*; *Windsor Star*; *Guardian Weekly*.

You have been a CCPA supporter for 20 years. What is it about our work that keeps you investing in it year after year as a monthly donor?

I think that the CCPA is the guardian of the truth and provides us with documented evidence. CCPA publications provide things to consider as a better solution to the many Canadian challenges, both within Canada and in our global relationships.

For example, a recent report by Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood and Clay Duncalfe, *Roadmap to a Canadian Just Transition Act: A path to clean and inclusive economy*, proposes an excellent plan that addresses socio-economic challenges for a just transition to zero-carbon by the year 2050.

Do you have a favourite quote? And tell us why it speaks to you.

In his article “No plan, big problem” in the March/April 2021 issue of the *Monitor*, Michal Rozworski wrote: “Only the market can cajole us to do things together or to divulge thoughts we didn’t even know we had. That, in neoliberal dogma, is its unique magic. And private profit is its engine.”

Our emotions are enormously powerful drivers of many of our actions and that is what the market plays on.

A legacy gift is a charitable donation that you arrange now that will benefit the CCPA in the future. Making a gift to the CCPA in your will is not just for the wealthy or the elderly. And a legacy gift makes a special impact—it is often the largest gift that anyone can give. To ask about how you can leave a legacy gift to the CCPA, or to let us know you have already arranged it, please call or write Katie Loftus, Development Officer (National Office), at 613-563-1341 ext. 318 (toll free: 1-844-563-1341) or katie@policyalternatives.ca.





The good news page

COMPILED
BY ELAINE HUGHES

Some re-energizing news

To meet globally agreed climate change targets, G7 countries recently agreed to stop international financing of unabated coal projects and phase out their support for all fossil fuels. “Unabated” means the coal is burned for power or heat without using technology to capture the resulting emissions, a system not yet widely used in power generation. Putting an end to fossil fuel funding is seen as a major first step the world can take to limit the rise in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times, avoiding the most devastating impacts of climate change. / [Reuters](#)

According to the International Energy Agency, global renewable power capacity increased by around 45% in 2020. Renewable sources of electricity like wind and solar grew at their fastest rate in two decades and are set to expand even more rapidly over the next two years, with

high-capacity renewables likely to account for about 90% of new global power capacity. The Canadian government indicated that renewable energy sources make up around 16% of the country’s total primary energy supply. / [CNBC](#)

Old ways forward

Using readily available local material (raw earth compressed into bricks), two Dakar, Senegal construction companies have found that traditional building techniques require almost no energy, respond better to the tropical climate, minimize the use of carbon-emitting cement (which accounts for 8% of global CO₂ levels), create local jobs and reinvigorate traditional know-how. / [Reuters](#)

In response to the threat of typhoons and rising sea levels, people in Vietnam’s Ca Mau province are working hard to restore and preserve mangroves to help defend the land. Bordered by the sea on two sides, the region is among the most vulnerable to climate change. Since 2007, erosion has eliminated roughly 90 square kilometers of protective coastal forest there. / [Mongabay](#)

The Marks family of Sydney, Australia, transported 569 loaves of bread using just six paper bags in one year. One bag lasted 104 trips. Inspired by the resilience of these so-called single-use items, Andy Marks has turned the bread bag experiment into an art project entitled “We

All Speak for the Trees” that prompts viewers to reflect on the value and impact of everyday objects. / [Planet Ark News](#)

After years of trying to reduce fire fuels in a steep ravine filled with overgrown vegetation and facing roadblocks, Santa Cruz’s Highland Firewise community has raised \$6,000 towards homing 400 grazing goats there. The goats are able to take out vegetation up to seven feet high by standing on their hind legs and they will eat pretty much anything. The community’s “goat fund me” initiative needs another \$4,000 to make it happen. / [Santa Cruz Sentinel](#)

Do call it a comeback

Presumed extinct until a tea plantation worker in Assam came upon one in 1971, the world’s tiniest pig is returning to the wild, thanks to a conservation program. Representing the last living species in the genus *porcula*, there are now as many as 400 wild pygmy hogs roaming the Terai grasslands of northern India again. Here they tear up grasses, creating trails for other animals and making space for light in which other plant species may grow. / [Good News Network](#)

Ecuador recently confirmed that a giant tortoise found in the Galapagos Islands in 2019 is a species that was thought to be extinct a century ago. In an attempt to save *Chelonoidis phantasticus*, the Galapagos National Park

is preparing an expedition to search for more of the giant tortoises. / [CBC news](#)

A new analysis has found that an area of forest the size of France has regrown around the world over the past 20 years, showing that regeneration is paying off in at least some places. Nearly 59 million hectares of forest has regrown around the world since 2000, enough to potentially soak up and store the equivalent of 5.9 gigatonnes of CO₂ (that’s more than the annual emissions of the United States). The two-year study, conducted via satellite imaging data and on-ground surveys across dozens of countries, highlighted areas of regrowth in the Atlantic forest in Brazil, the boreal forests of Mongolia, and parts of central Africa and Canada. / [Guardian](#)

YOUR CCPA

Get to know Karen Schlichting

OFFICE: **MANITOBA**

POSITION: **OFFICE MANAGER**

YEARS WITH THE CCPA: **TEN**

This issue is all about media and news. What's your go-to source for information this year?

I generally get the bulk of info from CBC radio and Democracy Now and from my smart friends. I've actually probably listened more to the news this year because of all the COVID updates—still coming at us like a wall of water, drowning me some days and washing over me others.

What are you most excited to do with the CCPA Manitoba team next year?

Our new Errol Black Chair, Saku Pinta, will be taking on his first-ever Alternative Municipal Budget. I'm excited about getting the word out about that and getting our city engaged in envisioning alternatives to how we do transit, recreation, policing, taxes, our water and sewage—alternatives that take income inequality and the environment as central issues to the health and functioning of our city.

Outside of the CCPA, what progressive issues are you following?

As I write this Gaza is being obliterated, which is deeply concerning to me. Israeli and Palestinian histories are long and complicated but, as in Canada, the conflict is so lopsided, so unjust and at the heart of so many other dysfunctions and violence. This is what colonization looks like. And on related topics: incarceration, defunding the police and abolition.

What is something cool/fun/impressive about the CCPA Manitoba that people might not know?

We have published a veritable library of reports and commentary in our



small office over the past 25 years. In 2020 we had 109 news stories directly quoting Molly McCracken or Lynne Fernandez. That's almost one every three days, adding up to 967,440 potential eyes and ears reached by CCPA in Manitoba in one year! Thanks to research done by Alyssa O'Dell from the National office, we can confidently boast of our media influence.

Extracurricular activities: I'm pretty pumped about disc golf, one of the activities we could do throughout COVID—even in winter. I love to garden, bake pizzas and bread in the outdoor wood-fired oven I built, walking, tennis. Hanging out with my 89-year-old dad.

What are some challenges in your region? A lack of safe and affordable housing. Austerity: the province continues to push a "cost-saving" agenda and tax cuts to the detriment of education, democracy, labour, health care, COVID recovery and the

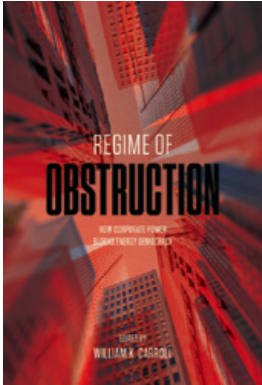
environment. A disastrous combination for us all, but especially for the most vulnerable in our community.

What are you most hopeful about in the coming year?

Being outside! I don't think COVID will fade quickly, nor will the disparities in income, but we can all still breathe relatively good air in the prairies, see birds, watch things grow and change through the seasons. I also hope that COVID helps us focus our political attention on things that really matter. Like caring for our elderly, decent working conditions for frontline workers and decent living conditions for those who do not work. I hope we can start to re-imagine how we do everything: jails, water and waste, housing, land, transportation, agriculture, land-back (not really happening at all but would be nice) city planning. But really these will not happen this year or the next, so it's best to just go outside.

Regime of obstruction

How corporate power blocks energy democracy



REGIME OF OBSTRUCTION HOW CORPORATE POWER BLOCKS ENERGY DEMOCRACY

Edited by William K. Carroll, Athabasca University Press

Available for purchase and free
online reading: [www.aupress.ca/
books/120293-regime-of-obstruction/](http://www.aupress.ca/books/120293-regime-of-obstruction/)

REGIME OF OBSTRUCTION features research findings from the first three years (2015–18) of the Corporate Mapping Project (CMP), a seven-year partnership that I co-direct with Shannon Daub, Director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives BC Office. The CMP is jointly led by the University of Victoria, the CCPA's BC and Saskatchewan offices and the Parkland Institute. It brings together a large team of researchers and advocates from a number of universities and civil society groups who share a commitment to advancing reliable knowledge that supports citizen action and transparent public policy toward a just transition away from fossil capitalism.

As researchers with the CMP, contributors to this volume see corporate power as a key factor in the chasm between climate science and climate action. The CMP is a case study of the forces that shape Canada's climate policy, one that partners

social scientists with progressive policy researchers, journalists, and activist movements (including environmentalism, labour, and Indigenous leadership). Our approach is centred on a family of techniques that map the organization of power, socially, economically, politically, and culturally. These include analyses of the social networks through which power and influence flow; the commodity chains along which carbon extraction, transport, processing, and consumption occur; and the discursive structures that frame issues and narratives in the struggle to persuade publics, governments, and communities as to the desirability or inevitability of fossil capitalism as a way of life. But the project's scope extends to counter-power, as popular resistance to the regime of obstruction reveals how corporate power operates while also pointing toward alternatives. Our efforts have involved:

- exposing and problematizing corporate power in its various modalities, to various publics
- providing evidence-based ammunition to allies in social justice, Indigenous, and ecological movements, to bolster their counter-power
- offering policy analyses that propose feasible alternatives for a just transition from fossil capitalism—evoked in such projects as climate justice and energy democracy.

Modalities of Corporate Power

Contemporary corporate power is at once economic and hegemonic, manifesting itself not merely as an economic force grounded in accumulation but also as a political

and cultural force. In its economic aspect, corporate power goes hand in hand with the larger process of capital accumulation, from the labour entailed in extraction, manufacturing, and transport through to marketing and finance. The economic surplus that labour generates in production forms the basis for profit, interest, and rent and for the ultra-high salaries of CEOs. Capital's competitive dynamic means that each firm, including large corporations, must grow or eventually die, as other enterprises overtake it. Thus, most of the surplus that capital appropriates from labour is reinvested, giving capitalists power not only within current economic practices but also over the future. As capital accumulates, giant corporations and massive pools of capital concentrate power in the capitalist class's top tier—those who own and/or control large corporations. The economic power of corporate capital is reflected in the economic dependence of workers, communities, and states on corporate investments to generate jobs and government revenue.

Economic power includes the *operational* power of management, flowing through a chain of command in which the scope of decision making is narrowed as we move from top management to shop floor. Operational power is also wielded along commodity chains, from resource extraction through processes of transport, processing, manufacturing, and distribution. *Strategic* power, the power to set business strategies for the company, involves control of the corporation itself, often by acquiring the largest bloc of shares. This power is lodged in the board of directors but rooted in the nondemocratic character of corporate capital. Corporate directors are

annually “elected” but by shareholders only. The majority of those with a stake in the enterprise—workers, communities, consumers—are thus disenfranchised. Moreover, elections are typically based not on one vote per person but on one vote per corporate share owned, thereby enabling large shareholders to wield strategic control, as Jouke Huijzer and I show in chapter 4. Finally, *allocative* power stems from the control of credit, the money-capital on which large corporations depend. This power, which accrues to financial institutions of all sorts (banks, life insurers, asset managers, hedge funds), is crucial in expanding or retooling operations, launching takeover bids, or coping with cash squeezes during crises.

We also consider the *hegemonic* face of corporate power, as it extends into the political and cultural fields of state and civil society. Hegemonic power refers to how the ‘consent’ of those subject to power is secured, organized, and maintained—from the visceral level of everyday life up to the top tiers of state institutions. Here we see business leaders and activists who promote the virtues of corporate capitalism, along with a host of well-placed and highly skilled professionals who legitimate and facilitate the system through their involvement in areas such as public relations and media, policy formation, lobbying, higher education, accounting, and corporate law. Such experts can also be found on the directorates of leading corporations, where they function in an advisory capacity and often help to integrate the corporate elite by serving on multiple boards.

Complementing this integrated elite community is the *reach* of corporate power into the public sphere, effectively seeking to dominate the institutions, agendas, policies, discourses, and values that add up to an entire way of life. Corporate reach into civil society includes, for example, leadership exercised by corporate elites as they govern business councils, industry groups, policy-planning organizations, and institutions of higher education and research—and funding of these; public relations and corporate social responsibility initiatives; the framing of news and other media content to privilege business interests; and the corporate organization of communications media, whose goal of profit maximization trumps the public interest. Corporate power also reaches into the state via such relations and practices as intensive and sustained lobbying; regulatory capture; and revolving doors, through which business leaders become political leaders and vice versa.

A final aspect of corporate reach aligns corporations with the repressive arm of the state, as co-managers of dissent and surveillance. Coercive power is typically deployed when dissent becomes well organized and potentially effective. But this form of power is also central to the colonial project at all times—it is and has always been central to the forced dispossession of Indigenous people from their lands and culture to enable extractive industries and infrastructure.

Regime of Obstruction takes up these modalities of corporate power in relation to the fossil fuel industry—but we also turn our attention to issues of resistance and transformation, which are never far below the surface of our investigations. Indeed, the Corporate Mapping Project undertakes the work of exposing corporate power to support the struggle for a world beyond fossil capital. **M**

The Corporate Mapping Project’s research is supported in part by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

ROBERT HACKETT

Five books to understand... media democracy

“Know the media. Change the media.
Be the media.”

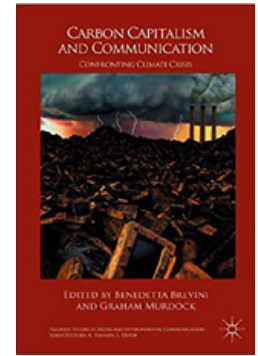
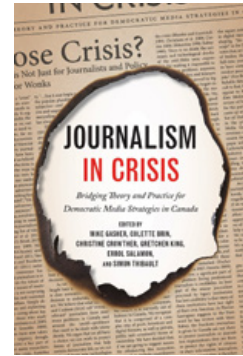
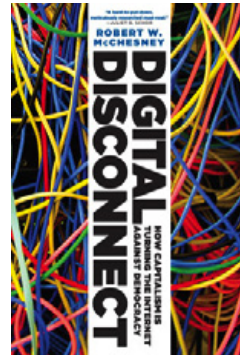
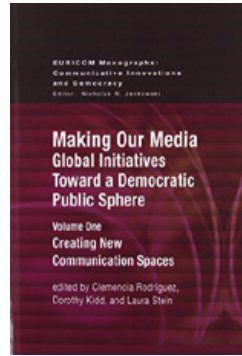
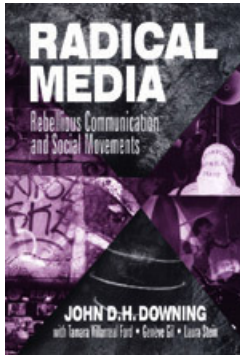
THAT MOTTO FOR Vancouver’s Media Democracy Days refers respectively to three pillars of media democratization: developing a critical understanding of the media system; reforming media structures and public policy, to encourage greater diversity and equality; and building independent, progressive “alternative” media.

A fourth pillar that could be called “do the media” comprises developing the communicative capacity of social movements for democratic progressive change.

Research helping us to “know the media” has a long pedigree, with several generations of researchers in the U.S., from Upton Sinclair and Ben Bagdikian, to Robert W. McChesney and emerging scholars like Victor Pickard. In Canada, Marc Edge, James Winter and NewsWatch Canada (*The Missing News: Filters and Blind Spots in Canada’s Press*), among others, have highlighted how concentrated corporate control and hypercommercialization have constrained journalism. Frances Henry and Carol Tator, in *Discourses of Domination*, point to the subtle ways that racism is embedded in Canadian press narrative.

The point, of course, is not just to interpret the world, but to change it. In capitalism’s North Atlantic heartland, twentieth-century progressive movements sometimes campaigned around specific media issues—for public broadcasting, against racism and anti-labour bias in media. In this century, such interventions have gelled into sustained movements consciously directed towards reshaping the media and/or creating new alternatives, opening new fields for scholarly research along the way.

In limiting myself to just five titles, many valuable contributions had to be left out. Presented here, chronologically, are



academic titles that both reflect and inspire media democracy activism while being accessible to general readers. Four of the five are multi-authored, with chapters that stand in their own right.

1. RADICAL MEDIA REBELLIOUS COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

John D.H. Downing with Tamara Villarreal Ford, Genève Gil and Laura Stein (2001)

This is the granddaddy of books on “alternative media,” a label that Downing rejected as too nebulous, and one increasingly co-opted by the “alt-right.” Engagingly written, Downing first offers theoretical grounding for the previously overlooked significance of radical media. He and his collaborators then launch an exhilarating ride through the struggles and achievements of radical media, spanning centuries and continents, from the effervescence of radical media during the 1974 overthrow of fascism in Portugal to the slow-building momentum of samizdat in the Soviet bloc, from oppositional religious pamphlets in sixteenth-century Europe to the Zapitistas’ use of the internet in the 1990s. Downing’s concept of media is broad. It includes dance, jokes, song, graffiti, dress, street theatre, culture-jamming, posters and (whew!) much else. Throughout, the book celebrates people’s capacity for resistance and creativity through communication.

2. MAKING OUR MEDIA GLOBAL INITIATIVES TOWARD A DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC SPHERE

VOLUME ONE: CREATING NEW COMMUNICATION SPACES

Clemencia Rodriguez, Dorothy Kidd and Laura Stein, eds. (2009)

VOLUME TWO: NATIONAL AND GLOBAL MOVEMENTS FOR DEMOCRATIC COMMUNICATION

Laura Stein, Dorothy Kidd and Clemencia Rodriguez, eds. (2009)

By the time this two-volume project was published, democratic media initiatives were redefining communication rights and bringing together new popularly accessible technology (community radio, handheld video, Indy Media Centres) with resistance to dictatorship and neoliberalism. Short essays introducing each of the seven sections provide illuminating context to 24 cases of transnational and national intervention, many from the global South.

3. DIGITAL DISCONNECT HOW CAPITALISM IS TURNING THE INTERNET AGAINST DEMOCRACY

Robert W. McChesney (2013)

As the internet developed, early technotopian hopes for more equal, informed and participatory civic communication faded. McChesney accessibly overviews the political economy of communication to explain why (hint: see the book’s subtitle), and makes specific proposals for structural and policy reforms to put the internet on a more democratic trajectory. His call for making broadband free to all as

a basic right surely resonates in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. JOURNALISM IN CRISIS BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE FOR DEMOCRATIC MEDIA STRATEGIES IN CANADA

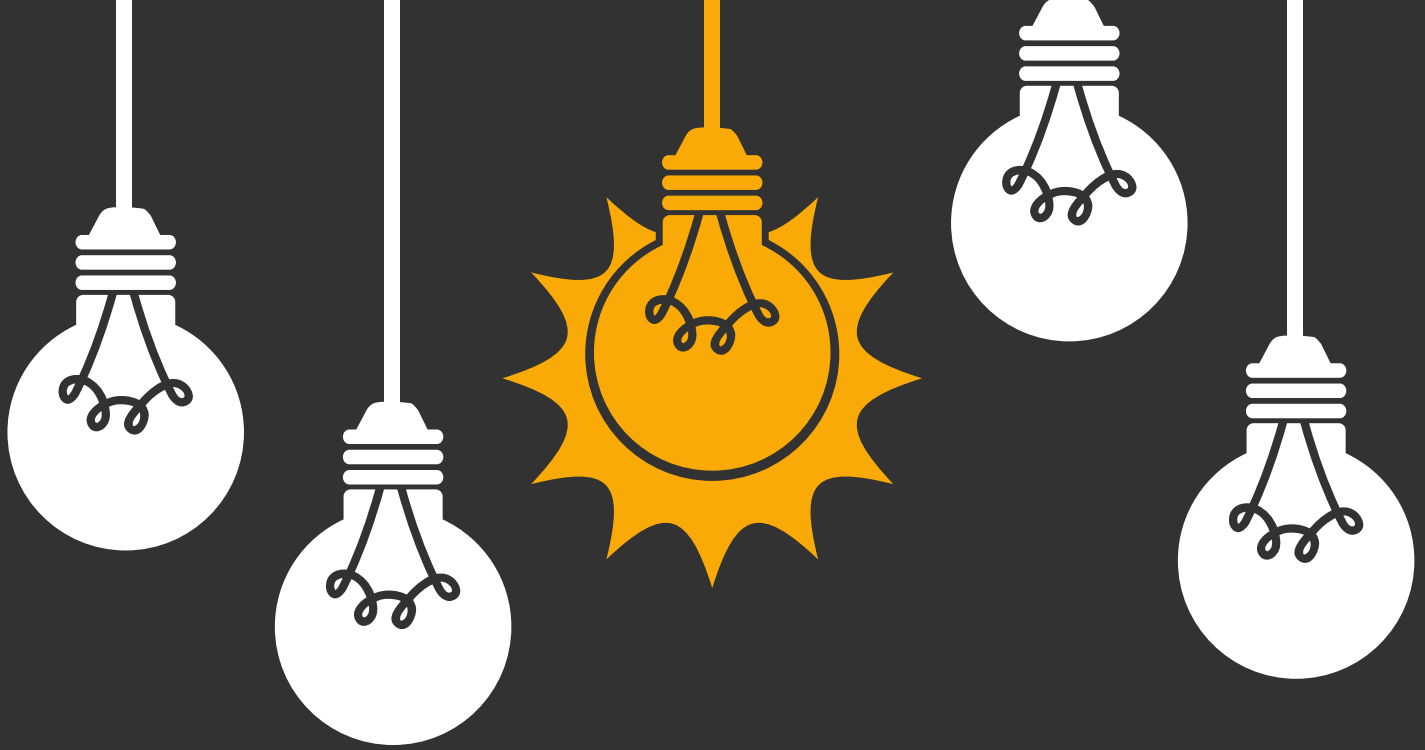
Mike Gasher, Colette Brin, Christine Crowther, Gretchen King, Errol Salamon and Simon Thibault, eds. (2016)

Warnings of a “crisis” in “civically relevant” journalism have grown more clangorous. In common with McChesney, this book presents journalism’s problems as the consequence of long-standing structural contradictions. The editors pose a choice: “work to protect forms of journalism that help sustain democratic life, or...wait and hope new technologies and economic models will deliver what we need.” The contributing journalists, academics and media activists choose the former. (Disclosure: I co-authored two of the 13 chapters.)

5. CARBON CAPITALISM AND COMMUNICATION CONFRONTING CLIMATE CRISIS

Benedetta Brevini and Graham Murdock, eds. (2017)

Climate crisis raises new and urgent tasks for democratic media: how to contest carbon capital’s power and the narratives of endless consumption and growth, and how to provide space for alternatives. Interspersing interviews with short essays, a number of environmental activists, journalists and academics consider how communication both contributes to and contests humanity’s biggest challenge. This is a good entry point into this emerging literature. **M**



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