## MONITOR



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#### **MONITOR**

Founded in 1980, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) is a registered charitable research institute and Canada's leading source of progressive policy ideas. The CCPA began publishing the *Monitor* magazine in 1994 to share and promote its progressive research and ideas. The *Monitor* is published four times a year. The print version is mailed to all supporters who give \$35 or more a year to the CCPA.

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## FROM THE EDITOR

**By Trish Hennessy** 

## Does Alberta really want to cut and run?

Wild Rose country has entered a prickly period of separatist politics

couple of years ago I went to see my aunt at a seniors' home in rural Saskatchewan. An elderly gentleman passed by and I was introduced as visiting from Ottawa.

"Oh," he said, puffing up. "Did you bring *Trudeau* with you?"

He proceeded to rant, not only about then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, but his father before him. If you've ever spent time in rural Alberta and Saskatchewan, you might have come across this certain disdain for Ottawa.

I grew up with it, not fully understanding why Ottawa was pronounced like it was a swear word.

Eventually, I came to learn about the deep sense of grievance that fuels Western alienation on the Prairies. As Ricardo Acuna writes in this issue of the *Monitor*, Western separatism is an age-old story—one that's entering a new chapter.

Just as most Canadians are feeling an extraordinary wave of nationalistic pride in the face of Trump's odious politics, a new wave of Alberta separatism—fuelled by the politics of oil and gas—has spilled onto the scene.

Rather than uniting to fight Trump and assert Canadian independence,

a group of right-wing populists are seeking independence from Canada. Alberta Premier Danielle Smith is playing right into their hands, promising a referendum on the subject next year. Meanwhile in Saskatchewan, Premier Scott Moe uses every opportunity to blame Ottawa—often for problems that are within his own power to fix.

As Simon Enoch writes in this issue, "To listen to politicians like Alberta's and Saskatchewan's premiers, the recent rise in Western separatist sentiment has nothing to do with them, it is rather an inescapable by-product of Ottawa's longstanding neglect of the west and its (energy) interests.

"But such Western Canadian politicians have not been mere spectators sitting idly by with mouths agape as the flames of western discontent have gathered strength," Enoch writes, "No, they are the arsonists."

Canada's federation has never been perfect. It was, after all, built on the foundations of colonialism at the expense of exploited migrant labour and the violation of Indigenous Peoples' rights, livelihood, and lives.

Indeed, any serious move towards Alberta separatism would face serious challenges from First Nations themselves. As Matt

Its reliance on oil would leave that province with few economic cards to play Wildcat writes in this issue, "First Nations in Alberta have strongly voiced opposition to Bill 54, also known as the *Election Statutes Amendment Act*. The bill has been widely interpreted as opening the door for a referendum on Alberta separating from Canada, a move the First Nation leaders say disregards Canada's relationship with Indigenous signatories to the numbered Treaties."

Treaty rights are not just symbolic, Wildcat writes, they're binding. But Wildcat also comes with a warning:

"While I wholeheartedly agree Alberta separation disregards Treaty rights and is illegal, I also think it's missing what is most dangerous about this situation for Indigenous Peoples. The danger is not Alberta separating, the danger is the Alberta separatist movement."

Should Alberta's separatist movement succeed, it would no longer have Ottawa to kick around. In fact, Alberta would face new headaches—of its own making.

Its reliance on oil, in a world that will inevitably turn away from that market as the climate crisis worsens, would leave that province with few economic cards to play. And, as Wildcat warns, the success of a separatist movement would give rise to ugly social and political dynamics. For a glimpse, see what's happening to the south of us.

As Stewart Prest writes, "[T]he long and short of it is that a sovereign Alberta would be condemned to be free, but not free of obligations. In the place of constitutionally guaranteed enforceable rights, its residents would have only what its government can negotiate with its sovereign neighbours.

"Alberta and its government would be on its own, for better—and for worse."

That elderly gentleman at my aunt's seniors' home might be cheering on the separatists, hoping it takes root in Saskatchewan. But a wise person once told me: be careful what you wish for.

#### YOUR LETTERS

We love to hear from our readers. Send your letter to the editor (250 words or less) to monitor@policyalternatives.ca



#### Spring 2025 Monitor

Thanks to E.R. Zarevich for "taking the initiative," reading and reviewing four excellent non-fiction titles by Indigenous writers, including Niigaan Sinclair's *Wînipêk*, winner of the 2024 Governor General's Award for non-fiction.

I appreciate Zarevich's appeal "to learn by picking up" such works. A few years ago, I had no idea what to pick up. Beth Brant (Bay of Quinte Mohawk), Tomson Highway (Cree), Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation) and Jody Wilson-Raybauld (Kwakwaka'wakw) all helped. Each created a reading list inspired by the various and varied perspectives that make up "Indigenous literatures."

Jody Wilson-Raybauld, also reviewed by Zarevich, recommends 11 works of "profound impact" in *True Reconciliation: How to Be a Force for Change* (2022). Wilson-Raybauld notes how there have long been books about Indigenous Peoples, but now there is a "proliferation of books by Indigenous Peoples, about our realities and experiences...that can be readily found."

Beth Brant, in *Writing as Witness:* Essay and Talk (1994), includes "A Beginning Bibliography" of 75 works by mostly Canadian and some American Indigenous writers. Brant (1941-2015) credits "Pauline Johnson" for starting "a movement that has proved unstoppable in its momentum...to write down our stories of history, of revolution, of sorrow, of love."

Tomson Highway's From Oral to Written: A Celebration of Indigenous Literature in Canada, 1980-2010 (2017) contains mini-reviews or "snapshots," as he calls them, of 176 works spanning six genres—autobiography and biography, young people's literature, drama, fiction, non-fiction and poetry. The "first wave" of 1980-2010 Indigenous writing "pried open the floodgates," Highway notes in his epilogue. "And there is no stopping the deluge."

Finally, reading Daniel Heath Justice's Why Indigenous Literatures Matter (2018) is like taking a course on "colonial fragmentation...yet also...reconnection and recovery." In response to a quip about a "lack" of Indigenous literature, Justice started tweeting an Indigenous writer's name-each day of 2016. Starting with Beth Brant for January 1, Justice lists in his appendix 365 Indigenous writers (with recommended titles) from Canada, USA, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand, but also from Finland to Norway, Samoa to Tonga, Nigeria to Zimbabwe, and more.

**Brian Pastoor,** Stouffville, Ontario

I read your first article about protecting democracy with a little bit of wry consternation. What we have in Canada is not a real democracy. If it were, maybe I would feel like my vote counted even though it never really does. Our first-past-the-post-system elects a Conservative in my riding in every single election, even though the majority of people vote progressive. However, the progressive vote always splits between the progressive parties

and the Conservative waltzes up the middle to victory. Until we change our system of voting, many people, like me, will continue to feel frustrated and, for younger voters, it turns them off to the point of not voting at all. That is why we have so little buy-in at elections. People feel disconnected from their government and that's partly the fault of the system itself. Trudeau promised to change it and then reneged on that promise almost immediately. I have always felt it my civic duty to vote in elections, but I feel like I'm knocking my head against a wall. Until we change the system in a way that every vote counts, the turnout at elections will continue to drop. But the spring election may have been different since people see an existential threat in front of them and have flocked to two parties instead of spreading their interest among five or six.

June Mewhort, Woodville, Ontario

Beginning on the evening of the most recent presidential election in the United States, the Canadian taxpayer-funded medical services plan granted me a crucial back-surgery operation to be expertly conducted and warmly supported by a team of health care professionals born in eight different countries from five different continents. Not the biggest, richest, or most powerful nation on the planet, Canada is certainly one of the most human—an eclectic gathering of souls truly living the global village idiom. However, given our government's sworn duty to care for its peoples, it is disheartening to see our worldclass health-care system being threatened by diminishing support because of our increasing desire to bury taxable income in tax-deferring investment programs. Perhaps, the time has come to seriously consider assessing a small off-the-top, across-the-board, flat-rate tax on gross income to ensure adequate financial support for health care, the

most critical issue in the lives of all (see Scandinavia). Though missing tax-free teasers, all valid investment programs would continue to function normally. In the meantime, the medical free enterprisers among us, those who advocate ever-increasing privatization of our social program, could make life easier for everyone by simply moving south where profits trump people.

#### **Peter Rowlands,** Newmarket, Ontario

The spring 2025 issue of the *Monitor* with your Hennessy's Index noting that "Fair Vote Canada marked the 100-year anniversary of politicians promising to move to proportional representation in Canada" puts its finger on a major problem: *Canada has a weak democracy*.

Our democracy is weak because many issues and decisions that governments make are difficult for people to understand without study. Result: parties court people's votes with slogans and simple solutions that do not lead to the wise governance we need to safely guide us through the next few difficult decades.

There is a solution: get a representative body of voters to study complex issues, who can then provide sage advice to governments. These representative bodies, free of ideologies, are "citizens' assemblies".

In Canada, citizens' assemblies have studied electoral reform and uniformly recommended we adopt a proportional representation system. Governments have then uniformly found ways of ignoring this advice. Why? One reason is they would lose power; they'd often have to share decision-making with other parties, listen to them, and make compromises as in a strong democracy.

Citizens' assemblies are not a cure-all, but much more use could, and should, be made of them. Citizens' assemblies might recommend testing whether a guaranteed basic income would reduce poverty and be good for Canada. Citizens' assemblies might consider how best to reduce disparity in wealth—we know it would benefit society, but how can we bring it about? There are many other policies to study.

There are two vital features of a citizens' assembly. It must truly represent the population of people affected by the policy under consideration; and it must have free and unbiased access to information for a reasonable period of study and debate.

To be truly representative, assembly members must be selected at random from the population concerned. Voters' lists (used to select members for the citizens' assemblies on electoral reform) are available only to federal and provincial governments.

Because selected individuals have the right to decline membership in the assembly, a bias can occur. This could influence the assembly's decisions. There are ways to reduce or limit biases, but these require gathering information about assembly members.

Everyone in the population of concern should be able to provide their views and ideas to a citizens' assembly. Non-partisan academics, lawyers, and others with useful information about the policy should be freely available to the assembly members upon request.

These conditions generally were met by the citizens' assemblies on electoral reform in B.C. and Ontario. The B.C. assembly's recommendation that the province adopt proportional representation was supported by 93 per cent of its assembly members. No percentage appears to be available for the Ontario assembly.

This means that if the entire voting population in B.C. and Ontario had received the same unbiased information and time to discuss and debate electoral systems as assembly members had, the voters of those provinces would also have chosen proportional representation with a high degree of

agreement. They did not receive that opportunity. Misinformation abounded, and referendums failed.

To date, citizens' assemblies have been convened by governments. Should citizens' groups be allowed to request citizens' assemblies? What guidelines and rules should governments follow in such cases?

The work of citizens' assemblies should be protected from interference by governments, corporate lobbyists and others. Assembly members are anonymous while serving on the assembly. What other rules, and maybe even legislation, should protect members and assemblies from interference with their work?

Assembly members may have to leave paid employment while serving on the assembly. What would be fair remuneration for both unemployed assembly members and highly paid ones? If a median or average salary is paid to members, could an employer top up the salary of a highly paid employee who wishes to serve on the assembly? Could the employer be required to do so?

These and other questions need study and debate by political scientists, and others. The potential benefit of citizens' assemblies for wiser governance is too great to be ignored. Citizens' assemblies are a nearly perfect democratic institution: their members do not have to "tow the party line", they are not concerned about re-election, and their opinions are not swayed by personal gain, either financial or social.

Finally, citizens' assemblies can protect political parties from voter retribution when unpopular policies are enacted: those policies were not the will of a party, but of a well-informed democratic citizens' body! The chances of wild swings in policies with changes in government would be lessened.

Philip Symons, Victoria, B.C.

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

#### The latest from the CCPA

#### Gap between minimum wage and living wage is growing

As outlined in the CCPA-Nova Scotia 2025 updated living wage report, the gap between the minimum wage and the living wage is now over \$10 an hour, providing only 60 per cent of what is needed to cover basic living costs.

Although the statutory minimum wage has increased in recent years, this followed a long period in which rates fell behind the rising cost of living, and now the gap between the minimum wage and the necessary living wage has widened.

Comparing Nova Scotia's living wages to median wages across the region, we also know that approximately 50 per cent of workers earn less than a living wage. Additionally, more than 30 per cent of workers in Nova Scotia earn less than \$20 an hour.

This systemic trend of low wages has Nova Scotia near the bottom or second-to-bottom position for wages across the country, highlighting the need for a thorough review of working conditions in the province, says Halifax-based CCPA-Nova Scotia Director Christine Saulnier.

#### Elbows Up for Canada Post

With the federal government seeking major spending cuts, crown corporations like Canada Post could be met with a proposal to privatize the service. But as Regina-based CCPA Senior Researcher Simon Enoch writes, what the proponents of privatization rarely mention is that privatization comes with

costs—particularly for rural and remote communities.

"We do not need to imagine how private mail service would operate in remote and rural communities: We already know," writes Enoch. "Private delivery services like UPS and FedEx already place a 'Remote Rural Surcharge' on their delivery prices to rural and remote postal codes. If you happen to live in Sept-Iles, Quebec, your surcharge is \$15.75 with FedEx. If you live in northern Manitoba, it can be as high as \$130. Even with these added fees, private delivery firms often rely on Canada Post for 'last-mile' deliveries in rural and remote areas of the country.

"This is the reality that Canadians need to understand when confronted with arguments for the privatization of our public mail service. No private provider would service these areas at the rates Canada Post currently charges. Customers will either pay more in a private model or the private provider will have to be subsidized by the government, and our tax dollars, to deliver to unprofitable locales."

Canada Post has long been recognized as an essential service. "As we enter a new era of nation-building, we need to re-imagine how our public postal service can be used in innovative ways to foster economic development, deliver vital programs and contribute to our national identity as Canadians," writes Enoch.



#### DOGE-style federal cuts will worsen inequality

Statistics Canada data shows the income gap between wealthy and low-income households is at a record high. CCPA-Ontario Senior Researcher Ricardo Tranjan warns the federal government's commitment to federal operating spending by 15 per cent will make matters worse.

"Instead of using its taxing and spending powers to reverse this trend," Tranjan wrote in the *Toronto Star*, "the federal government is planning to indiscriminately cut government programs, showing little regard for public servants and average Canadians.

"Inequality will worsen as a result, making Canada look more like the neighbour we have a beef with."

#### Combatting wildfires requires more than just water bombers

Facing a record-breaking heat wave in early May, Manitoba had a devastating start to its unofficial fifth season—fire season—as wildfires ravaged communities and smoke blanketed much of the province. Climate change is no longer a distant problem for future generations—it is here now, Scott Durling, Laura Cameron and Chris Morrow write on the CCPA blog.

To tackle the crisis, Manitoba needs more than just new water bombers. We urgently need a strong provincial climate action and adaptation plan, write Durling, Cameron and Morrow.

Manitoba had already seen over 105 fires by June and smashed numerous temperature records, leading the province to declare a state of emergency. Tens of thousands of people were evacuated, dozens of homes were destroyed, and tragically, lives had been lost.

Evacuation and emergency response supports for northern communities struggled to keep pace.

This hot, dry and smoky spring and summer weather is increasingly becoming the norm. Winnipeg is expected to experience 52 days above 30°C each summer beyond 2050.

Durling, Cameron and Morrow promote a two-part plan to deal with the climate crisis:

- Chart the equitable pathway for how Manitobans will move around, heat homes and feed families without relying on oil and gas by 2050.
- Plan for the impacts of a changing climate, such as wildfires, extreme storms and health emergencies—in partnership with Indigenous communities, building a new economy rooted in equitable and reciprocal relationships.

#### 10 steps for CleanBC renewal

In his submission to the B.C. government, CCPA Senior Economist Marc Lee, based in Vancouver, offered 10 ways for CleanBC to renew the province's climate goals:

- 1. Create a provincial adaptation fund.
- 2. Invest in B.C.-wide public transit.
- 3. Enhance subsidies for electric bikes and scooters, and local charging infrastructure.
- 4. Upgrade older, multi-unit buildings.
- 5. Develop more clean energy in partnership with First Nations.
- 6. Implement a provincial zerowaste plan.
- 7. Reform industrial carbon pricing.
- 8. Bring back the Climate Action Tax Credit.
- 9. Implement independent accountability systems.
- 10. Listen to the public, not fossil fuel lobbyists.

#### Remembering Paul Martin's 1995 budget

Big business, neoliberal economists and right wing parties—including the federal Liberals—are using the Trump-induced economic crisis to make deep cuts to federal spending and regulatory oversight and to expand role for private business and tech platforms in the delivery of public goods and services.

As Ottawa-based CCPA Senior Researcher Katherine Scott writes, "Liberal governments have done it before and they can do it again, the argument goes. After all, 'the extra \$70 billion in spending needed to get defence and defence-related expenditure up to five per cent of GDP has to come from somewhere,' conservative economist Jack Mintz recently wrote in the *National Post*.

"In the business press, Paul Martin's 1995 budget has taken on an almost mythical status—described at the time as a "Maple Leaf Miracle" in *BusinessWeek* and now, years later, as an unparalleled public policy accomplishment.

"But before Canada hurls down this road again, a reality check is in order. The millions of low and modest-income households that were hit hard by cutbacks to unemployment insurance, large reductions to social assistance, health care, education and community services, and years-long waitlists for social housing certainly don't remember budget 1995 as a "miracle."

"Nor do the 45,000 public servants who lost their jobs, or the municipal administrators left to do more with much much less as a result of federal downloading.

"Many of the intractable public policy challenges we face today—like hallway medicine, the massive shortfall of non-market housing, financially insolvent post-secondary institution, and historically high levels of income inequality—can trace their roots to the 1995 budget, and the \$100 billion in personal and corporate tax cuts introduced a few short years later," writes Scott.

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Company men: CEO pay report 29.4 K VIEWS

To respond to U.S. tariffs, Canada should hit Trump where it hurts **21.2 K VIEWS** 

### UP FRONT

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Austerity is a gift to authoritarian populists Simon Enoch/13

Racialized workers stand to lose ground if Canada's economy tanks Katherine Scott/14 Molly McCracken

#### A pipeline is the wrong way to go

he Western Canadian climate-induced wildfires show that the time for action on climate is now. But the Premier of Manitoba has pitched a fossil fuel pipeline to be built from Alberta to Hudson's Bay in response to the prime minister's call for "energy corridors" to diversify export markets away from the United States. Climate was not mentioned once in Premier Wab Kinew's letter to Prime Minister Mark Carney on Manitoba's five nation-building projects.

Instead, Canada and Manitoba must invest in renewable energy and infrastructure to help all Canadians and to not greenwash fossil fuel expansion projects as responsible economic development.

The prime minister and premiers are under pressure to demonstrate that they are taking action in the face of U.S. tariff threats and diversify markets. But Canadian oil products are currently exempt from tariffs, as are all products that are compliant with the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Trade Agreement (CUSMA). The U.S. has backed away from threats of tariffs on Canadian oil. Most of the crude oil the U.S. imports is from Canada—62 per cent. The U.S. relies on Canadian oil, and to replace this would require increasing its production by 30 per cent, which is not feasible in the short- or mid-term.

Furthermore, the global oil and gas demand is expected to peak in 2030, if not sooner, and then decline as countries transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy.

However, many of the nation-building projects being considered by the prime minister are fossil fuel expansion projects. In response to pressure from the oil and gas industry, Conservatives and Alberta, the prime minister has promised that the federal government will expedite federal approvals on infrastructure projects within two years, rather than five. But comprehensive reviews take time, and even with cooperation from provinces and Indigenous governments, the federal government has final approval over all projects that cross provincial boundaries.

The Canadian oil industry itself does not want the Canadian government to pick projects for fast-tracking; instead, it wants to delay climate action by asking the federal government to remove the emissions cap on industrial projects and eliminate the industrial carbon tax, two measures that Prime Minister Carney has said he will not do.

Pipeline development has been a boondoggle in Canada. The industry wanted the Northern Gateway and Energy East pipelines built, but both projects ultimately failed. The Northern Gateway project failed due to strong and ongoing opposition from First Nations communities, concerns over environmental impact and the potential for oil spills on B.C.'s coast. Energy East's failure is attributed to the high expense and emissions of fossil fuels.

The Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, which tripled the capacity to ship Alberta oil to tidewater, was constructed by the federal government to meet the demand for a pipeline from the oil and gas industry in Alberta. The Canadian Trans Mountain pipeline cost Canadian taxpayers \$34 billion and does not currently have a private-sector buyer. It is not working at capacity due to reduced demand.

Enter Kinew, with a pitch for a northern pipeline from Alberta to the Port of Churchill. The premier stated that Manitoba is "open for business" for private sector development to build a pipeline that would transport an "energy product, hydrogen, or a potash

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slurry", despite committing to no new pipelines during the last provincial election.

It appears Kinew is presenting himself as a nation-builder to the prime minister and the rest of Canada. The northern Manitoba pipeline is being pitched as a means to attract private capital for economic development. However, what is being ignored is the fact that the private sector has no interest in financing such a project. Experts advise that the arctic shipping season is too short, even if the federal government funds expensive icebreakers to break up the ice. Building a pipeline on fragile northern muskeg would be challenging, particularly as permafrost in the north melts due to climate change. The threat of a spill to the northern Canadian coastline is significant.

Most importantly, investing in fossil fuel infrastructure in 2025 is contrary to scientific findings, legislated federal commitments, and international commitments; it will exacerbate global warming, making life on earth hotter and worse for all.

There is an alternative. Manitoba needs to prioritize climate mitigation and resilience in its nation-building projects. Canada and Manitoba are well-positioned to invest public resources in expanding Manitoba's clean energy advantage in nation-building projects, alongside critical infrastructure for clean water, roads, schools, and housing, as called for by the Assembly of First Nations.

Manitoba is on the right track with initiatives to expand the publicly owned hydroelectric grid to Nunavut, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, initiatives that would also bring economic development to Manitoba's north. Much more needs to be done to grow wind, solar and geothermal energy. Federal and provincial investment is needed, alongside promising initiatives in partnership with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities for ownership and economic reconciliation. ■

Molly McCracken is the Manitoba director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. This originally appeared in the *Winnipeg Free Press*.



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Stuart Trew and Marc Lee

### Interprovincial trade barriers

Political theatre

he Trump administration's tariff war on the world economy has highlighted a longstanding tension in Canadian federalism: so-called interprovincial trade barriers.

Federal and provincial politicians claim these barriers cost the Canadian economy hundreds of billions of dollars in lost activity each year.

In reality, the cost of interprovincial trade barriers has been vastly overstated—virtually all goods, services and investments already flow freely across provincial borders. In fact, this is codified in the 2017 Canadian Free Trade Agreement (CFTA).

The CFTA contains general exceptions for some areas of public policy, like social services (if they are maintained by the state for a public purpose), water (in its natural state), and language and culture, but most of these exceptions do not affect interprovincial trade.

In addition, governments in Canada wishing to preserve policy decision-making in sensitive sectors, such as forestry, mining, energy and fisheries, may do so by listing specific exceptions to the CFTA's trade rules. Until recently, the federal government claimed its exceptions for fisheries policy, maritime transportation, offshore oil and gas projects, and passenger rail services were "essential for supporting Canadian interests."

Then on June 30, the federal government ditched all of its remaining CFTA exceptions, following Ontario's lead. It's not clear what the long-term consequences from these careless moves will be, including possible trade challenges from abroad, but they are unlikely to promote economic growth. If anything, these moves merely prioritize business interests over workers' rights or environmental protections or any other social priorities.

By dropping regulatory capacity in the name of reducing trade barriers, governments are giving more power to corporations. The danger is that this could set in motion a "race to the bottom" by dropping safety standards, for example, that protect workers.

Without a responsible national standard and a right of provincial governments to set stronger public

interest regulations, worker, public and environmental protections could easily be compromised.

Canadian governments should, instead, hold onto the policy-making autonomy they have left under our existing restrictive trade agreements—and embrace regulatory leadership rather than a regulatory race to the bottom.

Ontario's relatively stronger rules on pesticide use in agriculture, B.C.'s responsible rethink on open net-pen fish farms and Quebec's strong environmental assessment process for major projects are all good examples of precautionary legislation whose marginally detrimental trade impacts we can easily live with.

Provincial governments could score political points by making Canadian wine, beer and alcohol more easily accessible across the country. A responsible plan for setting high national standards for freight trucks and the drivers who pilot them could potentially lower the cost of moving goods from west to east and vice versa.

The proposal from premiers Doug Ford and Danielle Smith to buy Canadian-made vehicles to replace government fleets was a good one. This positive, engaged interprovincial cooperation will deliver far more gains for Canadian workers than removing CFTA exceptions or pursuing careless mutual recognition agreements.

However, by and large, the new internal trade agenda does little to compensate for major economic losses resulting from the Trump tariffs. That is the quiet truth behind the overblown promises about "liberalized" interprovincial trade.

While any economic benefits of the new "free" trade between provinces and territories are minimal, they have a real cost: to leave both federal and provincial governments with fewer tools to navigate the economic and environmental uncertainty ahead.

Marc Lee is a Senior Economist with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) Stuart Trew is a CCPA Senior Researcher and Director of the Trade and Research Project.



Gina Gill Hartmann Adobe

Carolina Aragão

## Youth unemployment is approaching a boiling point in Ontario

anada is confronting a deepening youth employment emergency that policy-makers and political debates have largely overlooked.

Given Ontario's status as the country's most populous province and largest economy, understanding youth unemployment trends is essential for grasping how deteriorating economic conditions are affecting young people.

Youth unemployment in Canada has recently reached a nine-year record high, with Ontario experiencing some of the country's highest youth unemployment rates. This crisis stems from interconnected challenges, such as the lasting impact of COVID-19, a surge in the number of young people (including international students) now struggling to find work in a deteriorating economy, and the absence of effective employment service programs to address these pressures.

A review of the provincial numbers is even more urgent as ongoing trade tensions will affect key industries across Ontario, amplifying economic volatility and further restricting job opportunities for young people.

#### The scale of the crisis

Using the latest Labour Force Survey estimates from Statistics Canada, we examined youth unemployment in Ontario between 2019 and 2025. For these estimates, we calculated rotating averages from June of a given year to May of the following calendar year. What we find is a troubling picture of a generation confronting major obstacles.

While young people have typically faced greater employment challenges than older workers, recent economic changes have dramatically worsened the landscape for youth, with Ontario's teenagers facing the hardest hit.

The statistics are sobering. Between 2019 and 2025, unemployment rates among teens aged 15 to 19 climbed from 14.9 per cent to 22.2 per cent, a 7.4 percentage point increase. This means nearly one in four teenagers in Ontario's labour force is unemployed.

While unemployment is lower among young adults, they haven't been spared either. Unemployment rates rose from 9.9 per cent to 13.2 per cent for Ontarians aged 20 to 24 (a 3.3 percentage point rise) and climbed from 6.2 per

cent to 8.7 per cent for those aged 25 to 29 (a 2.5 percentage point change).

#### Gender and age

The crisis doesn't affect all young people equally. Our analysis reveals that Ontario teenagers have faced particularly devastating labour market conditions, with unemployment growing by over nine percentage points among male teens and by 5.6 percentage points among females.

Unemployment is higher among young men, continuing a persistent trend driven by several factors. While young women increasingly pursue post-secondary education and combine studies with part-time work, a growing number of young men have become disengaged from work, education, and training altogether.

While unemployment patterns vary across gender and age groups due to different structural factors, they share common roots in deep systemic issues. These include racialized gaps in educational completion, limited skills development opportunities, and barriers to inclusive employment practices—all symptoms of a fragmented institutional support system that inadequately prepares and supports young people transitioning into adulthood.

#### Finding work takes months, not weeks

In addition to facing higher unemployment rates, young Ontarians today also spend significantly more time looking for work when they are between jobs.

The duration data reveals an equally disturbing trend. Among teenagers aged 15 to 19, the average unemployment period nearly doubled, from eight to 15 weeks between 2019 and 2025, an increase in search time of over 90 per cent. The increase in unemployment spells were also extremely high among 20 to 24 year-olds, going from about a 10-week search in 2019 to an average of 17 weeks in 2025.

Time looking for a job is even higher among those aged 25 to 29 years old. For this age group, finding work in 2025 has become a five-month ordeal, compared to an average search of 14 weeks back in 2019.

Extended unemployment periods carry consequences that reach far beyond economic hardship. Young people experiencing prolonged joblessness often face mental health challenges, delayed financial independence, and difficulty establishing career trajectories. These critically missed opportunities also have repercussions for their professional networks and workplace skills.

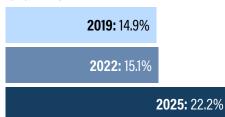
#### Education: protective but not a guarantee

Long considered a pathway to economic security, education provides some shelter against unemployment, but labour market conditions are also deteriorating for young people with post-secondary education. Looking

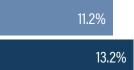
#### Youth unemployment is rising among three age brackets

Unemployment rates by age groups









9.9%

#### 25-29 YEARS



Estimates using rotating averages, April to May. Source: PUMF Labour Force Survey (LFS), 2018-25 specifically at young adults aged 25 to 29, who are more likely to have completed their education, reveals how this crisis cuts across all educational levels.

Between 2019 and 2025, the most vulnerable experienced the harshest conditions. Young people without a high school diploma saw unemployment rates that almost doubled, from 11.4 per cent to 21.4 per cent. High school graduates faced significant difficulties too, with unemployment rates climbing from 8.4 per cent to 13.3 per cent, a change of almost five percentage points.

But even those with post-secondary credentials weren't immune to broader economic pressures. Young people with college or trade diplomas experienced an increase in unemployment from 5.1 to seven per cent in 2025, while university graduates saw rates rise from 5.6 per cent to 7.8 per cent in the same period.

As companies sharply reduce their hiring of entry-level workers, students and new graduates are grappling to find work.

The youth unemployment hike unfolds against a backdrop of broader economic hardship. Ontarians are already struggling to put food on the table, keep a roof over their head, and many are taking on debt just to get by.

As the CCPA has highlighted, the rising youth unemployment demands action that matches its scale. We need the expansion of publicly funded job training and programs to tackle youth unemployment, reinvestment in post-secondary education, and the redirection of proposed tax cuts toward targeted investments in young people's economic future.

While the provincial government announced new investments in training and skill development, the current allocation may not be enough to tackle the double challenges of rising youth unemployment and re-skilling older workers displaced by tariffs.

The data is clear: Ontario's young people need support and the time for transformative youth investment is

here. M

Carolina Aragão is a researcher at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' Ontario office.

**Katherine Scott** 

#### Low-income families in Canada have less disposable income than ever

anadian households spent an average of \$76,750 on goods and services in 2023, a substantial increase of 14.3 per cent over 2021. This boost in spending was largely driven by the surge in inflation (up 10.9 per cent) over this period, which took the wind out of the sails of the post-pandemic recovery and hit low-income households hard.

The federal government was slow to respond, falling back on a series of temporary measures that have done little to ease immediate financial pressures and rein in the cost of housing. Affordability was at the top of the list of voters' concerns in election 2025. Canadians are still waiting for a comprehensive plan that offsets the cost of essential goods and services, now consuming an ever-larger share of family income.

#### Canada's post-pandemic inflation shock

In 2022, close to half (44 per cent) of Canadians reported being "very concerned" about their ability to meet day-to-day expenses—as did nearly two thirds (63 per cent) of those living in the lowest-income households.

While inflation has eased since 2022 and is now trending around two per cent annually, the actual cost of essentials hasn't gone down. The overall price of the typical basket of goods and services for the average Canadian household rose by a hefty 17.4 per cent between 2019 and 2024. The increase was even higher for food (23.3 per cent), shelter (24.0 per cent) and transportation (21.6 per cent)—notably for gasoline (55.6 per cent).

The cost of food and shelter is still running high. In 2024, the average price of groceries was 10.4 per cent higher than it was in 2022, and the cost of shelter was 11.6 per cent higher. Lower interest rates helped to modestly reduce costs for those initiating or renewing mortgages, but the pressures on rent prices have accelerated as the population has grown. Today, shelter costs are 15.4 per cent higher than they were in the spring of 2022, compared to an increase of 9.2 per cent in the total Consumer Price Index (CPI).

The high cost of living and heightened economic uncertainty remain top of mind for millions of Canadians. In October 2024, nearly three in 10 (28.8 per cent) people aged 15 and older were living in a household that had found it difficult or very difficult to meet its financial needs. This represents a drop from October 2022 (35.5 per cent) but remains much higher than the figure from October 2020 (20.4 per cent). The 2024 rate was especially high among renters (39.2 per cent) and recent immigrants (41.2 per cent).

#### Wage gains lag inflation among low-income households

Low-income households have had nowhere to turn. Pandemic era income

#### Wage gains haven't kept up with inflation in lower income households

Change in after-tax income and consumer price index by household income quintile, 2019Q4 to 2024Q1

#### Household disposable income

Price of 2019 basket of goods and services

POOREST QUINTILE

\$1,498 \$2,046

SECOND QUINTILE

\$1,815

\$2,484

THIRD QUINTILE \$3,655

\$2,936

**FOURTH QUINTILE** 

RICHEST QUINTILE

\$4.603

Parliamentary Budget Office (2024), A Distributional Analysis of the Purchasing

\$10,392

supports provided a cushion in 2020 and through early 2021, but they were quickly wound down just as inflation was starting to spike. Modest wage growth post pandemic hasn't been enough to offset rising costs for the basics and interest payments on debtand wage gains have been trending down too this past year. In 2024, the annual wage increase for retail workers making an average of \$745 per week was zero.

Higher-income households, on the other hand, had much more room to manoeuvre. Not only did the top 20 per cent of households record the largest wage gains between 2019 and 2023, they also benefitted from higher investment returns in the market and the run-up in housing prices, widening the gap in income and wealth with poor households. These households were easily able to accommodate rising prices.

#### Wage gains haven't kept up with inflation in lower income households

Increased food, shelter and energy costs is an especially devastating reality for low income households because these households spend more of their income on essentials, leaving little to spend on healthy food, suitable housing, needed medications or education—never mind savings to put aside for rainy days.

Poor and modest income families spend basically every dollar they have on their immediate needs-94.6 per cent vs 55.7 per cent among those in the top 20 per cent.

High rates of inflation have only made this situation worse. For example, in 2013, the average household in the bottom income quintile spent six of every 10 dollars (59.8 per cent) on food (13.7 per cent), shelter (30.4 per cent) and transportation (15.8 per cent). By 2023, that same household was spending 62.6 per cent of total expenditures on essentials.

Among low-income renters in the private market, the burden is especially severe. In 2022, according to OECD data, 34.8 per cent of them spent more than 40 per cent of their income on

shelter, while 31.0 per cent of low-income mortgage holders were in the same boat.

By contrast, households in the top quintile spend less than four dollars of every 10 on these basics, a figure that fell by three percentage points between 2013 and 2023—from 37.9 per cent to 34.9 per cent. Indeed, the gap is likely larger if you take into consideration that higher-income families tend to buy better quality services than those in lower-income groups.

#### Haphazard approach predictably delivers poor results

The post-pandemic "affordability" crisis reconfirmed that inflation has massive redistributive effects. In this instance, as the vast majority of households confronted surging living costs, those at the top of the income ladder were able to leverage the opportunity to amass greater wealth.

The affordability crisis also spurred a backlash against the federal government, which was slow to respond to people's concerns. It has yet to meaningfully respond.

Governments around the world introduced a variety of measures to help shield families from the effects of the inflation shock. For its part, the Canadian government leaned heavily on temporary measures, doubling the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Credit for a six-month period in late 2022, introducing a "Grocery Rebate" in summer 2023 (doubling the GST Credit once more for the fiscal quarter), and providing a one-time \$500 top-up to the Canada Housing Benefit for renters.

The federal government rolled out another one-off "tax holiday" last Christmas that temporarily removed the GST/HST from selected goods and services like groceries, snacks, and kids clothing. The planned \$250 Working Canadian Rebate for Canadians earning less than \$150,000 was shelved when then Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland resigned from Cabinet, calling on Justin Trudeau to "eschew costly political gimmicks, which we can ill afford."

Another costly gimmick we can ill afford: the new Liberal government's

plan to drop the personal income tax rate of the lowest federal tax bracket from 15 per cent to 14 per cent. Millions will see some benefit but not the poor. Indeed, the richest 40 per cent of Canadians will glean three-quarters of the promised tax savings—all at a total cost of \$5.4 billion annually in foregone revenues. The Conservative tax proposal during the election campaign was even worse.

#### Affordability rests on a strong social safety net

An effective response to the cost-ofliving crisis demands a comprehensive approach—and not a series of one-off measures. It also recognizes the disproportionate burden that low-income households bear, including measures that are directly aimed at curbing inflation in those areas that comprise the greatest share of their household expenditures.

The new Canadian Dental Plan and revamped Canada's Housing Plan are important building blocks of an approach that can make a difference, despite the shortcomings of each. The Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care program fits in this category too. Ten-dollar-a day child care has had a hugely positive impact on family budgets for the lucky parents who have secured a spot in the system. In the aggregate, the cost of child care services declined by 28 per cent between 2021 and 2024.

Investments in strong public infrastructure such as health care, education and housing are the foundation of a successful affordability plan that fosters communities where all can thrive. According to the OECD, those in the lowest-income quintile would have to spend three-quarters of their after-tax income on essential services if they had to purchase them directly.

The challenge, as poverty is rising, is to develop a comprehensive affordability strategy that bolsters public infrastructure and provides sustained financial support for low-income households shouldering the greatest costs.

A real affordability plan would, for instance, significantly expand the stock

Congratulations to CUPE flight attendants who work at Air Canada: they stood up for their rights and won.



Air Canada's strike was not only needed but wanted: flight attendants voted to strike with a mandate of 99.7 per cent, indicating overwhelming member support for the union and their bargaining committee.

Plus the CEO pocketed \$12 million last year.



All it took was the government to stop siding with the employer to find a solution.

Peggy Nash, executive director, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

of community and nonprofit housing, directing more money to the Rapid Housing Stream of the Affordable Housing Fund, the new Canada Rental Protection Fund, and the Urban, Rural, and Northern Indigenous housing strategy. A real plan would address the financialization of housing that continues to fuel the affordability crisis and bring in a robust renters' bill of rights and national rent controls.

A real plan would introduce measures to contain the power of oligopolies that control the production and distribution of food and tackle excess profits in Canada's food industry. We could look at the introduction of strategic price controls on a basket of essential goods and strengthen existing pricing gouging laws. The voluntary agreement among large grocery stores to stabilize food prices, brokered by the federal government in fall 2023, has not arrested the rise in food prices. The situation is particularly pressing given the heightened risk of profiteering that now exists in the context of the trade war.

And a real affordability plan would overhaul Canada's income security system, including reforming the Employment Insurance (EI) system and closing the gulf that exists between the cost of living and benefit rates of programs such as social assistance. One place for the federal government to start is raising the rate of the new Canada Disability Benefit, due to start in July. Its current design ensures that it will help far too few people in need because of unnecessarily restrictive eligibility criteria and the wildly insufficient size of the benefit.

"Bringing down costs for Canadians and helping them to get ahead" was number three on Mr. Carney's list of priorities for his new government. But it is not clear how the new government plans to move forward. The budget is slated for the fall. The time-limited tweaks to El introduced in March don't bode well. In the meantime, low and modest-income households will continue to struggle with the high cost of living.

Katherine Scott is a senior researcher at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.



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Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood

### A new window for nation-building

he Rideau Canal, Canadian Pacific Railway, Wartime Housing Limited and Trans-Canada Highway were nation-building infrastructure projects. Employment Insurance, the Canada Pension Plan and universal health care were nation-building social programs. And while we cannot ignore the colonialism and discrimination inherent to many of these projects, they are also important examples of government-led initiatives driven by concerns around sovereignty, resilience and the public interest.

Since the ascendance of neoliberal orthodoxy in the 1980s, however, we have forgotten how to build a nation. For decades, we have ceded economic and social leadership to the private sector. The role of government has been relegated to that of an enabler of private wealth generation—an institution whose primary responsibilities are deregulation, privatization, lowering tax rates and signing new free trade agreements.

Prioritizing the profitability of the private sector over a people-centred national vision has had clear consequences. Income and wealth

inequality has reached extraordinary levels. Working families have been crushed by stagnating wages and underfunded public services.

The true vulnerability that this approach created, however, has only been laid bare by Donald Trump's slash-and-burn presidency. The Canadian economy is more deeply intertwined with American markets and corporate investment than ever before. At a moment when Canada's very sovereignty may depend on a pivot away from the U.S., we lack the capacity to do so.

It is not too late for nation-building, but we must rediscover our political imagination. Canada must remember what it means to put sovereignty and the public interest above the short-term concerns of the corporate sector. We must remember what it means to build the physical and social infrastructure that brings material benefits to workers, households and communities across Canada.

Fortunately, there is no shortage of good ideas that fit the bill. Here are a few that should be on the table.

First, Canada needs a publicly owned east-west electricity grid. Clean power is perhaps Canada's greatest strategic asset of the 21st century. Connecting provincial and regional grids reduces our dependence on the U.S. fossil fuel trade and lowers energy costs for consumers and businesses. Unlike an oil pipeline, a clean grid also creates

new economic opportunities for the communities that it passes through.

Second, Canada needs a massive, publicly led build-out of affordable homes—something the federal government used to do until the 1990s. Constructing new non-market housing using energy efficient designs can drive down the cost of living in our cities, create jobs across the country and promote more sustainable communities.

Third, Canada needs a revitalized clean manufacturing industry. The economy is rapidly electrifying, but many of the materials and technologies that electrification requires are not being produced domestically. We cannot compete in every sector, but there are many products, from steel and aluminum to electric buses and trains, that can and should be made in Canada. Competing with the artificially low cost of production in places like China or the southern U.S. will require major public investments throughout strategic supply chains.

Fourth, Canada needs a true public bank that can prioritize the public good. Canada's private banks and public pension funds are failing to support ambitious projects in the public interest. They are also facilitators of U.S. foreign investment and backers of unsustainable sectors, such as the fossil fuel industry. A national public bank could accelerate community-led, sustainable and publicly owned projects across the country.

These ideas are only a start. More will be needed to rescue the Canadian economy from U.S. dependence and political interference. What all these ideas have in common, however, is a commitment to true nation-building. And while they would not directly prop up the corporate sector, they would create the economic stability that businesses crave.

These are public projects in the public interest, and they are the key to Canada's independence and prosperity in the century to come. **M** 

Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood is a senior researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. This article originally appeared in the *Toronto Star*.

Simon Enoch

## Austerity is a gift to authoritarian populists

t is becoming increasingly clear that the newly elected federal government intends to govern the country along all too familiar neoliberal lines. The prime minister's promises to deliver a 15 per cent cut in the federal budget by 2029, as well as an aggressive deregulatory agenda and tax cuts primarily benefitting the affluent, moved the *Globe and Mail* to declare that "Brian Mulroney could have endorsed it."

While the government has tried to downplay the size of the cuts by insisting they will be delivered painlessly through attrition and efficiencies, it is becoming apparent that these cuts will dramatically impact public service delivery to Canadians. As CCPA Senior Economist David Macdonald observes,

For cuts this is deep, it would require across-the-board job losses and major service reductions. In other words, if it proceeded it would represent a major disruption to federal public services and would rival the 18.9 per cent cut in operation expenditures of Paul Martin's 1995 budget as the most extreme budget slashing in Canadian history.

These cuts will dramatically impact federal department transfers to provinces and municipalities in vital areas like disaster assistance, housing and infrastructure, workforce training and catastrophic drug coverage, not to mention eliminate thousands of public sector jobs. And as Angella MacEwen reminds us, none of this was in the Liberal election platform that they campaigned—and won—on.

A lot of Canadians viewed the last election as an existential fight against the kind of authoritarian populism represented by Donald Trump in a Canadian guise. As Frank Graves and Jeff Smith describe it, authoritarian, or "ordered" populism "emphasizes obedience, hostility toward outgroups, a desire to turn back the clock to a time of greater order in society, and a search for a strongman type to lead the return to a better time." As Graves and Smith explain, the "ordered populist" outlook" is more closely aligned with Canadians whose political sympathies lie with conservative political parties."

The rise of authoritarian populism throughout the world is a direct consequence of decades of neoliberal policies. Neoliberalism's focus on

Gina Gill Hartmann Adobe cuts



disciplining workers by gutting labour rights, disempowering unions and defunding social programs, while simultaneously freeing capital through de-regulation, lower taxation and enshrining investor rights through free trade agreements has led to growing economic inequality as workers wages stagnate and wealth concentrates among the wealthiest one per cent.

The growth of inequality in a society results in a host of morbid symptoms, eroding social cohesion, increased political polarization, declining trust in institutions and loss of social mobility. The resentment, status anxiety and reduced trust created by neoliberal economic conditions have been channelled by cynical right-wing populists towards a host of imaginary enemies—from immigrants and refugees, to journalists and universities, to queer students, and teachers in public schools.

Recent research demonstrates that austerity increases support in economically vulnerable regions for right-wing populist parties. As one study concludes, "our results suggest that the success of populist parties hinges on the government's failure to protect the losers of structural economic change."

This new federal government's program of enforced austerity is a gift to Canada's authoritarian populists. It will only provide more fuel for the grievances that fire the authoritarian populist furnace. By cynically emulating so many of the Conservative's preferred policies in regards to public sector cuts, immigration, tax cuts for the wealthy, and militarism, the federal government is effectively validating parts of the authoritarian populist worldview, making these policies look less distasteful to some Canadians.

All of this conspires to create the conditions to make authoritarian populism an even more attractive option for many Canadians in the next election. If the federal government continues to pursue this path, they will be remembered less as a bulwark against authoritarian populism, but more as its midwife.

Simon Enoch is a senior researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

**Katherine Scott** 

#### Racialized workers stand to lose ground if Canada's economy tanks

ow-waged workers in Canada are facing greater precarity as Canada's economy weakens, and racialized low-waged workers—a growing demographic—are more vulnerable still. Canada's federal government can, and should, offer supports to mitigate the uncertainties racialized workers are facing.

The signs of the economic threat are clear: Canada's unemployment rate edged up in May, and heightened uncertainty is beginning to take a toll across the economy. We are already seeing declines in manufacturing and the transportation and warehousing sector. This is especially troubling for the low-waged workers in these industries—over half of whom are racialized.

Not long ago, the situation was very different. There was a period from spring 2022 to spring 2023 when Canada's employment rate hit record highs. The post pandemic recovery afforded the opportunity for many workers to pivot into higher-income jobs, including many racialized workers who had been long stuck at the bottom of the wage ladder.

That moment has passed. The gulf between the workers locked in low-waged industries and those in high paying occupations and sectors, such as professional services, is now widening again.

This divide is particularly stark among racialized workers. With the sharp increase in immigration to Canada, racialized workers have led employment growth across the labour market, increasing their share of workers at the top *and* at the bottom of the labour market.

The upshot is that there's been little progress on the wage front among racialized workers aged 25 to 54 years. The wage *gains* of high-income workers in professional services and utilities have been offset by the wage *losses* of other racialized workers in administrative and support services, construction and the like.

With the increase in the number of low-wage racialized workers, the wage gap between racialized workers—and their gap with white workers—is only set to widen further.

In 2022, 13.1 per cent of racialized workers aged 25 to 54 years occupied a low-wage job, almost twice the level of comparable white workers (7.1 per cent). By 2024, the proportion of low-waged racialized workers had risen to 15.2 per cent while the rate among white workers held steady at 7.3 per cent.

An entrenched racial wage gap among core-aged workers persists as well. Racialized workers earned 84.6 cents per hour for every dollar a white worker earned in 2022—and the same 84.6 cents for every dollar in 2024.

The wage gap is, and remains particularly high, for racialized women. In 2024, racialized women earned, on average, 74.1 cents for every \$1 a white male worker earned, a difference of roughly \$10 per hour.

With an economic recession on the horizon, low-waged workers currently struggling with the very high cost of living risk falling even further behind.

Canada is not prepared. The federal government has not addressed the shortcomings of our EI (Employment Insurance) system that were so graphically revealed during the pandemic. There remain gaping holes in our employment standards and regulations. Our health and social services systems have not recovered—drained and strained by years of austerity.

Our immigrant settlement services, for their part, have been running flat out to serve the needs of the million+newcomers and temporary residents who have entered the country in the last three years.

A bold, comprehensive response is urgently needed to address the racial disparities and structural inequities entrenched in Canada's labour market.

Katherine Scott is a CCPA senior researcher.



An age-old story entering a new chapter

Ricardo Acuña

n February 1982, Gordon Kesler of the Western Canada Concept (WCC) party won a by-election in the riding of Olds-Didsbury and became the first separatist elected to the Alberta Legislative Assembly. In fact, he became the first separatist elected outside Quebec since before either Alberta or Saskatchewan became provinces. In 1986, two sitting members of Saskatchewan's legislature, Bill Sveinson and Lloyd Hampton, became members of the WCC and began sitting as such.

Forty three years later, in June 2025, that same Gordon Kesler was actively campaigning for Cameron Davies, leader of the separatist Republican Party of Alberta, in his bid to win a by-election in the same riding (now called Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills).

Kesler failed to win re-election to the Alberta legislature in the general election that took place just nine months later. The WCC failed to win any seats in the 1986 Saskatchewan general election. And Cameron Davies failed in his bid during the recent Alberta by-election. Kesler, Sveinson, and Hampton remain the only three avowed separatists ever to sit in a legislature in Western Canada.

Many media pundits are suggesting that we are in the midst of a similar surge in separatist sentiment in Saskatchewan but the numbers just don't bear that out. A poll from Angus Reid, held the week after the federal election, found that 19 per cent of Albertans and 15 per cent of Saskatchewanians would definitely vote for their province to leave, with another 17 per cent and 18 per cent, respectively, saying they lean in that direction.

The recent Alberta by-election results, however, paint a different story. Across the three ridings where by-elections were held, the total combined vote of the two separatist parties (the Republican Party of Alberta and the Wildrose Loyalty Party) was only 9.9 per cent. Even if you just look at the result in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, likely one of the most separatist-friendly ridings in the province, only 18.9 per cent of voters supported a separatist party. That's a far cry from the 36 per cent of Albertans that Angus Reid said would support or lean towards voting to leave.

Given the longstanding tradition of voters using by-elections to send messages of discontent with the status quo and elevate radical alternative voices to office, especially when there is no actual threat of the results toppling the government, one would expect the numbers to be more reflective of the polling numbers. The fact that they weren't suggests that all the chatter about growing separatist sentiment is overblown, and

that there is no actual threat of Albertans even coming close to voting to leave in an eventual referendum.

Why then, if there has been no real growth in separatism as a threat in Alberta and Saskatchewan, has there been so much handwringing and teeth-gnashing about it since the federal election?

Part of the explanation comes down to simple sour grapes. Folks in Alberta and Saskatchewan like electing Conservatives—particularly the brand of Conservatives that came about after the Reform Party of Canada, founded by Preston Manning in the 1980s under the slogan "the West wants in", rebranded as the Canadian Alliance and then became the Conservative Party of Canada after successfully taking over the Progressive Conservative Party.

Even at the height of Liberal popularity in the 2015 federal election, the Conservatives handily won most of the seats in Alberta and Saskatchewan—the only two provinces where that happened. In 2019 and 2021, the Conservatives added B.C. and Manitoba to the provinces they won (winning the popular vote but not the most seats). Despite those wins, the results in the rest of Canada continued to elect the Liberals to government.

With Conservatives leading in the polls from spring 2022 onward, and being in clear majority territory through most of 2024, folks in Alberta and Saskatchewan were convinced that finally, after suffering through a decade of not just a Liberal federal government, but a Trudeau Liberal government, they would be able to return a western-friendly Conservative government to Ottawa. When that failed to materialize—Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba were, once again, the only provinces where the Conservatives were able to win a majority of seats—Prairie Conservatives saw it as an affront foisted on them by the rest of Canada. They saw it as reinforcing their belief that the whole system is rigged in favour of "eastern Liberals" and against Alberta and Saskatchewan.

This attitude is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that in the same Angus Reid poll quoted above, of those who said they would vote to leave Canada, 72 per cent of Albertans and 78 per cent in Saskatchewan said they would change their mind and vote to stay had the Conservatives won the election. That's not fundamentally about support for independence; it's about not liking that the rest of Canada doesn't agree with their politics. It's about the far-right fringe not liking it on the fringe.

Beyond the separatist fringe, however, there are other dynamics fuelling anger against Ottawa in the Prairies. Finances and living conditions for

working-class folks across the country have deteriorated over the last decade. Food and gasoline costs, utilities, unaffordable rents, lack of housing generally, and public education and health care in crisis were all sources of legitimate frustration for all Canadians in the lead up to the 2025 elections.

A recent report from Jim Stanford at the Centre for Future Work shows that, for people in Alberta and Saskatchewan, many of those challenges were aggravated.

The two provinces share the lowest minimum wage in the country, and since 2019, both have trailed the rest of the country in weekly earnings growth. Both have consistently seen wage growth below the national average. In fact, both Alberta and Saskatchewan saw negative growth in real hourly wages between 2019 and 2024.

This has been a particularly hard pill for Albertans, who went from consistently having the highest growth in wages and earnings in the country to having the lowest. Alberta is also no longer the highest-wage province in Canada, which was exacerbated by having the highest rate of inflation in the country and the most expensive electricity. At the same time, per student government spending on education is the lowest in the country, and surgery wait lists

and emergency room wait times are some of the worst in the country after years of cuts and experimentation with privatization.

Albertans and Saskatchewanians have not hesitated to lay all of these economic and social challenges at the feet of the federal Liberal government, despite the fact that the bulk of them were either self-inflicted or the result of global economic trends like post-pandemic inflation and supply-chain issues.

And in a long-established tradition that pre-dates the birth of Saskatchewan and Alberta, premiers Scott Moe and Danielle Smith did everything they could to reinforce and encourage the blaming of the federal government for all their provinces' woes.

Anti-Ottawa populism on the Prairies in response to these types of grievances is not new, however. The United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) and the Progressive Party were born on the Prairies out of protest against John A. Macdonald, forcing farmers to buy equipment from Eastern Canada, despite it being more expensive, and against Wilfred Laurier for denying Alberta and Saskatchewan control over their natural resources in 1905 when they joined confederation.

When the Great Depression combined with the drought and

dustbowl conditions to decimate rural economies on the Prairies, folks in Alberta and Saskatchewan did not hesitate to blame the federal government for their economic suffering, despite the fact that everyone across the country was also suffering the effects of the depression and the drought.

When the federal government granted Saskatchewan and Alberta rights to their natural resources in 1930, they gave the provinces control over exploration, extraction, and development, and maintained control over interprovincial trade and international exports. That split has been at the core of conflict between Prairie governments, especially Alberta's, and the federal government ever since—a conflict neither province has ever hesitated to exploit to get its way.

As Alberta's oil sector boomed post-1947, the province needed the feds to approve pipelines in order to prevent a glut of oil on the Prairies. In 1949, the federal Liberals approved a pipeline to Wisconsin (extended to Sarnia in 1956), and in 1950, another one to Vancouver, with extensions to Seattle. The U.S., relishing Alberta's potential as a secure and friendly supplier of oil, began to give the province privileged access to their market, and essentially treating it, for trade purposes, as another state.

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Alberta's producers leveraged this privileged treatment by the U.S. to demand better treatment from the Canadian government, suggesting they could supply Prairie oil to refineries in Montreal for only a slightly higher price than the international oil then being imported to Canada. When the Quebec government balked at this suggestion, Alberta began to loudly complain about alienation and lean into their relationship with the U.S. With a Progressive Conservative from Saskatchewan, John Diefenbaker, as prime minister, Ottawa gave in to Alberta's demands in 1961. Diefenbaker's National Oil Policy forced every Canadian west of the Ottawa Valley to purchase Alberta oil at prices 33 to 50 per cent higher than imported oil. As such, Ontarians were the ones who subsidized the exponential growth of the industry in the 1960s.

When the price of oil essentially doubled in 1973 because of the Yom Kippur war and subsequent oil embargo, inflation skyrocketed in Canada. To quell inflation and rising prices, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau put a 40-cent tax on every barrel of oil exported from Canada, using the proceeds to subsidize the cost of oil imported to Eastern Canada.

Alberta Premier Peter Lougheed riled up anger in Alberta by calling the move a serious infringement by Ottawa on Alberta's rights. In 1979, when the Iranian revolution resulted in oil prices doubling again, Lougheed and Trudeau could not reach agreement on a path forward. In October 1980, the federal government implemented the National Energy Program (NEP). The NEP created a "made in Canada" oil price, dropped prices on natural gas, imposed a federal tax on petroleum and natural gas, and increased the federal government's share of petroleum income while reducing the provincial share and the industry share.

The NEP resulted in a huge outcry from Alberta and the U.S., who accused Trudeau of socialist-style nationalization. Lougheed called the intrusions entirely unacceptable, challenged them in the courts, and cut provincial oil production significantly. It was at this time that the term "western alienation" first came into broad circulation, and the threat of secession was once again raised in negotiations.

In 1981, Alberta's pressure tactics prevailed, and Trudeau agreed to significant changes in the NEP. In 1982, the Supreme Court sided with Alberta's

jurisdictional challenge, and the feds stopped taxing the oil industry.

That same year, Gordon Kesler was elected to the Alberta legislature for the Western Canada Concept. And two years later, the Prairie provinces were instrumental in helping elect Brian Mulroney as prime minister. Mulroney made a big deal of signing the Western Accord with the Prairie provinces and phasing out the few remaining elements of the NEP.

The historical examples above do not just highlight causal factors shaping Ottawa's relationship with

Edmonton and Regina. They also point to what have become deeply ingrained patterns of behaviour by Alberta and Saskatchewan—patterns that elected leaders in the two provinces feel compelled to repeat ad nauseum because of their self-imposed overdependence on oil and gas revenues.

It is not history repeating itself inevitably. Because the groundwork has been laid over the decades to predispose the population to believe that the federal government is out to steal their resource wealth and mistreat their provinces, it has become an easy playbook to follow: it works, and there have been very few efforts to explore new ones.

That same playbook spurred the formation of the Reform Party in 1987 and the eventual election of Stephen Harper as prime minister. It allowed Ralph Klein to secure the Accelerated Capital Cost Allowance, essentially a tax write-off, from Prime Minister Jean Chretien's Edmonton-based energy minister Anne McClelland to help spur the late 1990s boom in the oil sands. And it is the same strategy that Danielle Smith and Scott Moe used to secure the elimination of the federal carbon tax.

Today, they are simultaneously fomenting, amplifying, and leveraging the supposed threat of rising separatism and a potential constitutional crisis to secure a new list of demands on behalf of their friends in the oil industry. These demands include such things as eliminating the west coast tanker ban, the emissions cap, and net-zero electricity regulations, while approving pipelines to the North, East, and West coasts of the

None of these demands, however, is about the interests of Albertans or Alberta or the fact that, in Danielle Smith's words, "[t]his status quo threatens our province's economic future and way of life."

Recent forecasts suggest that oilsands will average record annual production of 3.5 million barrels per day in 2025, and 3.9 million barrels per day by 2030. It certainly doesn't sound like an economic future under

And it is no coincidence that this renewed focus on separatism and alienation comes as Smith is battling scandals on numerous fronts, and facing health and education systems on the verge of collapse.

Nobody would deny that the Prairie provinces have had legitimate beefs with the federal government over the years, but to pretend that we have somehow reached a point where those beefs are putting the country at risk is ridiculous and disingenuous.

The perceived growth in feelings of alienation and separatist sentiment are, once again, nothing more than a new push by leaders in Alberta and Saskatchewan to secure new benefits for their rich friends. It has alwavs been thus. M

Ricardo Acuña is executive director of the Parkland Institute in Alberta.



Reuters

Matt Wildcat

### Alberta separation: a legal issue for First Nations—it's political

irst Nations in Alberta have strongly voiced opposition to Bill 54, also known as the *Election Statutes Amendment Act*. The bill has been widely interpreted as opening the door for a referendum on Alberta separating from Canada, a move the First Nation leaders say disregards Canada's relationship with Indigenous signatories to the numbered Treaties.

In the case of Alberta, the First Nation signatories to Treaties 6, 7 and 8 have reserve lands within the province and the territory of Treaties 4 and 10 also overlap Alberta.

The disregard of the treaty relationship has also been expressed as being against treaty rights. The effort to protect treaty rights has

often focused on whether a referendum is legal to begin with. The legality of a referendum has been attacked on multiple fronts.

First, would the constitution of Canada allow for such a break? Here, First Nation leaders point out that the Canadian constitution is founded on the historic relationship between First Nations and the British crown. It is not possible to dissolve the treaty relationship unilaterally because Indigenous collectives have independent sources of political authority that are not dependent on the goodwill of Alberta or Canada.

From an Indigenous legal perspective, Leroy Little Bear has argued that within a plains Indigenous tradition, land was communally held, not just within a community but with other living beings as well. When Indigenous Peoples signed treaties, land was not held exclusively by humans, so First Nation people could only negotiate the ability of humans to share the land with each other.

From this standpoint, the only rights in land Alberta holds is to share the land with Indigenous Peoples. It does not have the right to legally separate. From the perspective articulated in the press releases from well over a dozen First Nation governments and organizations, the results of a referendum are inconsequential because such an action is unlawful.

The legal position of First Nations has been championed by Albertans and other Canadians who are deeply troubled by the passing of Bill 54. Take prominent entrepreneur Arlene Dickinson, who had this to say on her substack: "I've been genuinely stunned by what Premier Smith is saying and doing.... She's asserting control over land that doesn't belong to her. That land is subject to Treaty rights which are legal agreements between the Crown and Indigenous Nations that are protected under the Constitution. These rights aren't optional. They aren't symbolic. They're binding."

While I wholeheartedly agree Alberta separation disregards Treaty rights and is illegal, I also think it's missing what is most dangerous about this situation for Indigenous Peoples. The danger is not Alberta separating, the danger is the Alberta separatist movement.

Kathleen Martens at APTN has looked at how Alberta's separatist movement would treat Indigenous Peoples. The Alberta republican party envisions abandoning existing treaties and starting over. Such a policy position would rewind the clock over 50 years and is reminiscent of the 1969 White Paper from the federal government that sought to end political relationships that recognized the distinctive legal and political rights of First Nations.

From Indigenous legal traditions, Alberta separating is certainly illegal, but focusing on the legality of Alberta's separation distracts from the danger posed by an emboldened Alberta separatist movement.

I first started thinking about the long-term consequences of the Alberta separatist movement after learning more about the history of the Brexit referendum. Held in 2016, the popular vote to leave the European Union stunned mainstream commentators.

British Prime Minister David Cameron felt the Brexit referendum was needed to hold together different factions of the Conservative Party. Cameron felt a referendum would allow Eurosceptics within the Conservatives Party to have their grievances acknowledged and be an outlet to voice their frustrations. Yet Cameron himself campaigned to stay within the European Union and was aligned with the moderate wing of the Conservative Party.

Cameron's strategic error: he thought there was no possible way the "Leave" campaign would triumph. It resulted in Cameron's resignation as prime minister and the departure of Britain from the European Union.

There are some parallels to the United Conservative Party of Alberta (UCP) and Danielle Smith. First, the UCP has clear factions. In the spring of 2022, Jason Kenney resigned as leader of the UCP, not long after allegedly saying in a closed-door meeting: "the lunatics are trying to take over the asylum", in response to the most conservative faction of the party, which felt public health measures were government overreach.

During the leadership campaign to replace Kenney, four candidates held a press conference to voice their opposition to Danielle Smith's campaign platform to pass an *Alberta Sovereignty Act*.

The UCP used a voting method known as instant run-off voting. Party members could rank one to six of seven candidates. Each round, one candidate was dropped and their votes went to whomever was the next ranked candidate on each ballot.

Danielle Smith led from start to finish but required the maximum six rounds of voting to achieve a majority. Of 84,193 voters who cast a ballot, only 42,423 ranked Smith as a desired candidate.

Like Cameron, Smith says she is against separation and supports "a sovereign Alberta within a united Canada". It is not a huge leap to reason that Smith is using the same strategy as Cameron—the hope that a referendum will satisfy the ambitions of the far right of the UCP while keeping everyone under the same party tent.

While I cannot predict the future, I think it's reasonable to assume a referendum will likely embolden a separatist movement within Alberta by giving separation a platform and resources, allowing the separatist movement an opportunity to test what messages have purchase with people beyond their base.

Any growth of the movement will likely provide motivation to continue—even if the vote goes against them. Emboldening a separatist movement will change the political landscape for First Nation people by solidifying a base that views negotiating with First Nations as a last step, not a first step. The Alberta separatist movement's position towards First Nations is more reminiscent of the policy of assimilation expressed in the 1969 White Paper than any other organized political movement in Canada.

While the UCP introduced amendments to declare that any separation referendum cannot undermine existing treaty rights, First Nation people should have no faith in legal protections shoehorned in at the last minute. After all, the borders of Alberta and Canada were both drawn with no regard to Indigenous Peoples' own legal orders.

We should assume colonial governments will create a legal reality for themselves that allow them to accomplish whatever ambitions they have in mind. Rather than focus solely on the law, First Nation people must have a political analysis of what an emboldened separatist movement will mean.

The danger of this movement goes beyond the possibility of separation. The danger of the separatist movement is strengthening clear-cut sources of hostility against Indigenous Peoples in Alberta.

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Simon Enoch

#### The arsonists

#### The politicians stoking the fires of Western separatism

o listen to politicians like
Alberta's and Saskatchewan's
premiers, the recent rise in
Western separatist sentiment
has nothing to do with them, it
is rather an inescapable by-product
of Ottawa's longstanding neglect of
the west and its (energy) interests.

But such Western Canadian politicians have not been mere spectators sitting idly by with mouths agape as the flames of western discontent have gathered strength.

No, they are the arsonists.

And while neither of them are responsible for starting these fires, they have sought to fuel them by

stoking anger and distrust of the federal government at every opportunity. If western alienation is the kindling, these politicians and their rhetoric have been the propellent.

There is no argument that western alienation is built upon real and justified historic grievances against the political and economic power of central Canada.

From the tariff regime of the original national policy designed to serve eastern manufacturers to the detriment of western farmers, to the battle over natural resources culminating in the National Energy Program, to the dismantling of the

Crow Rate, westerners have long felt that their interests were often sacrificed for those of Ontario or Quebec.

Suffice to say, there is fertile ground for planting seeds of doubt about the intentions of Eastern politicians. But while suspicion of the motives of Ottawa is well-ingrained in the Western Canadian consciousness, the rhetoric of the Alberta and Saskatchewan premiers rises to another level. They portray Ottawa not as an equally representative level of government with which we may have (sometimes major) disagreements, but as a malign actor,

with sinister designs to destroy the western economy and even its way of life.

While Premier Scott Moe is probably best known to *Monitor* readers for his more high-profile efforts to snub the federal government, such as his refusal to collect the carbon tax and the largely symbolic *Saskatchewan First Act*, he is equally adept at finding malevolent motives in even the smallest of federal actions. Responding to news of a Natural Resources Canada request to study how electrification could assist in reducing or eliminating fossil fuels in certain sectors of the economy, Premier Moe's X (Twitter) account raged:

There's their real agenda: the federal government is going to study the complete elimination of our oil and gas industry... What kind of government studies wiping out one of the nation's most important industries & killing tens of thousands of Canadian jobs?

When rumours of federal government scientists supposedly trespassing on private farmland to test water reached the premier's ears, his government's immediate reaction was to suggest a link between the testing and a recent disinformation campaign telling farmers the feds were going to force them to drastically curb fertilizer use.

A month earlier, Moe had taken to X (Twitter) once again to misrepresent the proposed federal government plans to reduce emissions from agriculture via sustainable farming practices:

The same federal government who alienated our oil and gas industry is now putting global food security at risk by attacking the hard working agriculture producers across western Canada with an arbitrary goal to reduce fertilizer usage.

The fact that the federal proposal had *no mandatory* restrictions whatsoever on fertilizer use did not dissuade the premier from, once again, portraying Ottawa as an ill-intentioned enemy hostile to the province.

Similarly, while Alberta Premier Danielle Smith may be most well-known for her grander gestures against Ottawa, like suggesting oil companies no longer need to follow federal law, she has been equally prone to seeing federal conspiracies to undermine the Alberta economy behind almost any federal action.

For example, a federal government memo on "just transition" into a low-carbon economy was greeted by Smith as "a plot to eliminate 2.7 million jobs." While Smith had either intentionally or mistakenly confused total employment with job losses in the memo, she characterized the memo as an effort to eliminate "entire sectors of our economy and hundreds of thousands of good Alberta jobs that Ottawa believes are too 'dirty' to be tolerated."

Both premiers have grossly misrepresented or exaggerated federal actions in order to cast Ottawa

as the villain in their respective political narratives. Smith herself neatly summed up this narrative as she announced the formation of her "Alberta Next" panel.

"You know what Ottawa can't help but be fixated on?... Punishing our energy sector and layering on policies to keep it in the ground." It's not so much the West wants in" Smith added, "It's the West wants Ottawa out of its hair."

This is the crux of the premiers' battle with Ottawa, to allow oil and gas extraction with no political, economic or especially environmental interference from any other level of government. Having created what Angela Carter and Emily Eaton call a "regulatory Wild West" to allow for the unfettered exploitation of oil and gas resources at the provincial level, federal environmental regulations are often the sole, real constraint left on industry.

Yet despite this narrative of federal interference, the Canadian oil industry appears to be doing just fine. For all the sound and fury against the former Trudeau government being hell bent on destroying the oil and gas sector, oil production hit record highs year over year during much of Trudeau's tenure. Moreover, last year, exports of Canadian crude oil and equivalents rose by five per cent, reaching an annual record, partly due to the increased export capacity provided by the Trans-Mountain pipeline, a pipeline bought and paid for by the federal government.

While we can argue over the Trudeau government's strategy of trying to appease both climate-conscious voters via a carbon tax and energy sector proponents through the Trans-Mountain purchase, what cannot be denied is that, however we characterize Trudeau's energy and climate policies, they do not appear to have had the disastrous effect that both premiers regularly claim.

What the regular misrepresentation and demonization of federal policy does, in the words of Jared Wesley, is chip away at the "legitimacy of the federal government as an institution."

When the leader of your province regularly portrays the federal government as a hostile entity, looking to undermine your economy and prosperity, what are voters to think? Is it all surprising that some of them would see separation as a viable choice?

Premiers Moe and Smith can try all they like to distance themselves from responsibility for the rise in western separatism, but their incendiary rhetoric and blatant misrepresentations have allowed these sentiments to burn hotter and longer than they ever would have without them.

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Reuters

Robert-Falcon Ouellette

## Stepping into the moccasins of Indigenous Peoples

S. President Donald Trump's threats against Canada's sovereignty are rekindling the patriotic spirit in Canadians. For Canada's Indigenous communities, waves of patriotism and changes in leadership are not synonymous with hope and renewal.

Power may change hands, but it is based on an institutional continuity shaped for over 150 years, often without—or even against—the recognition of Indigenous rights.

The problem is that the underlying logic of the Canadian state remains unchanged: it's based on the centralization of power, the control of resources and the management of Indigenous Peoples

through colonial structures. The political faces change, but the mechanisms of domination remain.

Canada is now stepping into the moccasins of Indigenous Peoples and getting a taste from the United States of what it means to be subject to an outside power dictating the rules of the game. Justin Trudeau's initial hesitant reaction to Trump's initial threat illustrated Canada's fundamental fragility: A state economically dependent on a domineering neighbour cannot fully assert its sovereignty.

This dilemma is reminiscent of that experienced by First Nations since the earliest days of colonization. When the treaties were signed, the promises were as solemn as they were poetic: "As long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the rivers flow..." But assimilation and dispossession run by their own logic of relentless inevitability.

Today, it's Canada that's discovering the instability of dependence on a more powerful partner. The free trade agreements negotiated under the Mulroney government and renegotiated with Trump under Trudeau were thought to secure Canada's position but ended up reinforcing vulnerability.

Suddenly Canada finds itself dependent on Washington's unilateral decisions, a situation familiar to First Nations.

When First Nations defend their rights, whether through rail

blockades, peaceful occupations or legal recourse, the state's response is often swift, brutal and inflexible. The RCMP is deployed. The courts are engaged. The army mobilized.

But when Trump openly threatened the Canadian economy, the reaction was cautious, sometimes fearful. This contrast is revealing. The Canadian government acts decisively against the most vulnerable, even within its own population, but softens its tone in the face of a foreign power when economic risk looms.

It's no coincidence that, despite a change of prime minister, the fundamental policies remain the same. Land control, police action against the Wet'suwet'en, legal battles before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal over Indigenous children—nothing has changed.

The time has come to rethink our concept of sovereignty. It's not by raising a flag or changing the head of government that we become truly independent. It's by recognizing the sovereignty of all peoples who share this territory.

First Nations don't ask for charity or apology: they demand respect for treaties, real autonomy, and an equitable place in diplomacy and international relations. They are nations with their own interests that span colonial borders.

Canada's sovereignty will only be legitimate when it integrates that of the First Nations. The country can no longer be based on exclusion, paternalism or fear. In an unstable world, the strongest alliances must begin right here, on this shared land. Prior to his election, Prime Minister Mark Carney reiterated his commitment to advancing reconciliation and emphasized that the federal government will seek the advice of Indigenous leaders on how to build Canada's economy.

And yet, during a campaign stop in Winnipeg, he uttered not a single word of recognition for Indigenous Peoples, nor a hint on reconciliation.

Trump, with his threats, aggressive nationalism and transactional vision of international relations, is not an anomaly in the political landscape—he's a mirror. He's showing Canada what it means to be dominated. What it's like to have your rights threatened by the logic of domination. What First Nations people have been experiencing for generations.

It's ironic that the Canadian state, which has historically neglected or downplayed the demands of Indigenous Peoples in the name of national sovereignty, now has to fight for its own independence. May it learn some lasting lessons.

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Niall Harney

## Wresting cost-of-living politics away from the populist right

eft- and right-wing populist movements that have dominated Prairie politics over the last century can trace their roots back to regional frustrations framed in opposition to heavily urbanized sections of Eastern Canada.

The initial iteration of populism to sweep Prairie politics was a left-wing movement of Western Canadian farmers, trade unionists, and progressives that—spurred on by the Great Depression—gave birth to the early Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. Since the 1980s, Western alienation has become the language of a right-wing populism that blends social conservatism, neoliberalism, and intensified resource extraction.

After a decade or more of waning influence, the Western Canadian style of right-wing populism has surged over the last decade, reshaping federal politics and provincial politics in Western Canadian provinces, to varying degrees.

Under the leadership of Pierre Poilievre, the federal Conservatives have adopted a populist style, making major gains in the last election, despite failing to form government. With an ascendant populist right and the federal Liberal government swinging to a more rightwing stance of business Liberalism, there is a political opening for the Canadian left to articulate a renewed response to right-wing populism that speaks to the present moment of economic uncertainty.

Getting there will require fresh ideas that speak to the class politics of the moment and make clear the deep instability created by Canada's neoliberal society.

As Simon Enoch and Charles Smith have explained, the form of right-wing populism in vogue among Alberta and Saskatchewan's conservative politicians can be classified as 'extractive populism.' While left-wing populisms are constructed around a class-based understanding of economic inequality, the core of extractive populism is a unified regional interest in extractive industries, particularly oil and gas.

In opposition to this unified Western-Canadian interest is an urban 'elite', regionally concentrated in Ontario and Quebec, undermining Western Canadians

through regulation of extractive industries—according to the right-wing narrative.

Despite evidence to the contrary—Canada has continued, year-after-year, to produce and export record-breaking volumes of oil and gas—the extractive populist framing has more than proven its worth as a political tool.

On the one hand, framing Western Canadians as victims of overly regulatory Eastern elites has allowed politicians to blame the federal government for issues they might otherwise be held accountable for, staving off political rivals. Opportunistically foisting the blame for inflation onto the federal carbon tax provides a case in point, ultimately forcing the abandonment of Canada's carbon tax.

Central to the extractive populist agenda has been utilizing political momentum to further eliminate restraints on corporate power, particularly when it comes to the fossil fuel industry. The Alberta Prosperity Project, one of the main proponents of Alberta separating from Canada, includes in its policy platform plans to cut the corporate tax rate, privatize provincial public services, and eliminate regulations on oil and gas production.

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith has also spoken of the desire to double oil and gas production over the next two decades by eliminating regulation and expanding pipeline capacity.

Pushing back on right-wing populism will require a renewed narrative around issues that working-class Canadians face—affordable food and transportation, housing insecurity, and health care access—and direct frustration towards reining in corporate power and abuse. Like the left-populism that gave birth to the CCF, one that is rooted in class politics.

To start, the Canadian left can look to policy tools to limit market volatility and corporate profiteering during crisis moments, an approach that was used with major success by governments around the world over the last four years.

As Jim Stanford and Erin Weir outlined in a recent report, the primary driver of Canada's post-lockdown cost of living crisis was a sudden spike in global oil prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Canada, like other north Atlantic nations, abandoned pricing policies for consumer fossil fuels in the 1980s as part of the neoliberal revolution, leaving gas prices to swing with volatile global markets instead.

In the year leading up to Canada's June 2022 inflationary peak, higher fossil fuel prices accounted for 43 per cent of cumulative price increases, measured by Statistics Canada. This does not account for price increases, for other goods and services caused by higher energy costs, which are difficult to track but significant since energy is a key economic input.

This sudden price increase was caused by speculation in global commodity trading markets, which was eye-wateringly profitable for finance and fossil fuel corporations. Profits in the oil futures market tripled between 2019 and 2022. Fossil fuel sector corporate profits were the highest of any sector in Canada during this period: 20 times higher than grocery firms.

Relatively little of this windfall went to fossil fuel workers. Employment and payroll figures remained below pre-pandemic levels throughout this period. Although some of this revenue windfall was captured in taxes and royalties, tens of billions more were paid out in dividends to shareholders and used for stock buybacks.

As Stanford and Weir conclude, there is a direct connection between these mega-profits and the high prices paid by Canadian consumers.

Fossil fuel firms were not only let off the hook for inflation in Canada, frustration over price increases was directed towards the federal carbon tax, an irritant for some sectors of fossil capital. However, in other countries, the response to windfall profits responded directly to the class politics of the moment.

In response to rising energy prices and corporate profits following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Spanish government introduced a cap on electricity prices, a windfall profits tax on large energy companies and a wealth tax.

Following Spain's lead, windfall profit taxes on large energy firms were adopted across Europe. The funds raised from the windfall profits tax were used to reduce public transit costs in cities across Spain by 30 to 50 per cent, and issue free rail passes for suburban and regional trains. The subsidies increased suburban rail usage by 27 per cent after just a few weeks, delivering savings for commuters and reducing fossil fuel consumption.

This helped Spain's left-of-centre government stave off a challenge from the radical right.

Inflation can have a pernicious effect on governments. Isabella Weber, one of the leading voices on pricing policy today, wrote in a recent review of populist price regulating strategies, "When people find that through no fault of their own, the goods they can't live without suddenly become more expensive, they lose trust in the system."

Pierre Poilievre's Conservatives clearly grasped this: as inflation ripped through the Canadian economy, he harped on his "Canada is broken" message. But the vulnerability within right-wing populism is that their proposal to fix the system is to turbocharge the free market model that is at the core of the current cost of living crisis.

The Canadian left needs a set of policies to tackle the economic volatility hurting so many Canadians while delivering billions to shareholders. Figuring this out is key for the left to wrestle cost-of-living politics out from the grip of right-wing populists.

Niall Harney is the CCPA-Manitoba's Errol Black Chair in Labour Issues.

## Unpacking Alberta's Western separatism



#### Who's driving Alberta separatism?

The Alberta Prosperity Project, a "private society", is pushing for a referendum on the subject. Alberta Premier Danielle Smith is fanning the flames by implementing an Alberta Next Panel examining sovereignty options and promising a referendum in 2026.

#### What do they want?

The Alberta Prosperity Project wants Albertans to have a referendum based on this question: "Do you agree that the province shall become a sovereign country and cease to be a province of Canada?"

#### What are they promising if they win the referendum? Some of the promises in a "free" Alberta:

- An Alberta pension plan (goodbye CPP).
- An Alberta tax collection system (goodbye Canada Revenue Agency).
- No personal income tax (goodbye public services and supports).
- An Alberta police force (goodbye RCMP).
- Immigration control (hello deportation policy).

#### Is it realistic? Not really. Three reasons why:

#### 1. Business doesn't like uncertainty

"They are only pitching a 'best-case scenario," Carlos Freire-Gibb, a business professor at MacEwan University, who has researched the risks in jurisdictions with separatist movements, told CBC. "I don't think any company will invest in a region where we don't know what's going to happen, what's going to be the legal status. The rosy scenario could happen, but most likely it will be very bad for Alberta, but it will also be very bad for Canada."

#### 2. Indigenous Peoples have legitimate rights and concerns

Gina Starblanket, a Cree-Saulteaux associate professor in Indigenous Governance at the University of Victoria, told APTN that Indigenous treaties would be negatively impacted by a move to separate: "(The treaties) are living agreements that established a distinct political relationship with the... Dominion of Canada—the government—and after Confederation the federal government was given the responsibility for maintaining that distinct relationship ... The provinces never actually made treaties with First Nations and they're not a party to those treaties."

#### 3. Negotiating with other jurisdictions and Indigenous groups will get messy

The Supreme Court of Canada was clear, Andrew Coyne wrote in the Globe and Mail, "that secession could only be legal if it were enabled by the necessary constitutional amendments. Which means it would have to be negotiated. Which means it would never happen. The negotiations—a series of zero-sum games involving at least 11 players, not counting the Indigenous groups, with no ground rules or timetable and probably requiring referendums in multiple jurisdictions both before and after would lead rapidly nowhere."





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Stewart Prest

#### What if Alberta left Canada?

s Alberta spins ever closer to a rudderless sovereignty referendum in which the premier provides all the leadership of a radio phone-in host—"let's open up the lines and hear what the people have to say!"—Albertans themselves and others are starting to ask important and difficult questions related to what would it actually mean, in practice, if Alberta did the deed and voted to leave.

There are a few different ways to answer this question, but the simplest answer is "no one knows". We would be in uncharted territory watching a land-locked single resource-dependent export-led economy opt out of a prosperous, peaceful, and highly decentralized democratic federation.

That said, we can do a little better than that using relevant episodes from history. Two key historical touchpoints are the national question in Quebec, and Brexit. In different ways, both examples drive home one inevitable point: the future of Alberta in its relationship to Canada would have to be negotiated post-referendum, one painful and uncertain step at a time. The story and legacy of the Quebec question tells us much about the path Alberta would have to walk to leave, and Brexit gives a hint of what to expect if it took that road. I'll take each in turn, and use both to shed some limited light on Alberta's situation.

Before going further, I should take a moment to unpack the concept of "sovereignty". In brief, it's an assertion of independent governmental authority, notably including a monopoly over the legitimate use of force over a defined people and territory.

It has both *de facto* components—that is, the government can actually do the things we expect governments to do—and, just as

crucially, de jure components, which means that other sovereign countries recognize that country as sovereign. Sovereignty is, in a sense, a club that other members control admission to, and Alberta would not be sovereign until other countries—notably Canada and the United States—recognize it as such.

Once they do, they would engage in relations through the mechanism of international law. What does that mean? Effectively, international law is the codification of agreements independent countries undertake with one another. In general, they cooperate if, and only if, they see it in their interests to do so. Indeed, in many ways "international law" is misleadingly named. While agreements and treaties are codified in language reminiscent of domestic in-country laws, the mechanism of enforcement is entirely different. Within a country, the government

enforces the law. Outside it, formal anarchy prevails: no single actor has the right and responsibility to enforce international law. Rather, international law is as binding as states collectively choose to make it. If one state breaks international law, it's up to the other state(s) to respond. If that doesn't happen, then it doesn't happen. It is for this reason that "international law" is so often observed in the breach. Simply put, if Alberta opts out of Canada, it loses every enforceable protection offered by the constitution, and in its place, gets exactly, and only, what it can bargain for.

#### The Quebec example

The Quebec sovereignty saga has, in many ways clarified, and refined the path to secession for provinces in Canada, and hints at what would happen after. In the wake of the near miss that was the 1995 referendum, the Chretien government, largely orchestrated by Stéphane Dion, took rapid steps to respond. Effectively, it outlined a Plan A, and a Plan B. Plan A was an attempt to address Quebec's longstanding grievances around things like constitutional amendments, recognition of its status as a distinct society, and autonomy over aspects of economic and social policy. We already see some evidence of a Plan A emerging in Alberta's case in the form of increased willingness to consider additional pipelines.

Plan B is more relevant to the discussion of the path to sovereignty, however, as it emerged in direct response to what many saw as a deliberate strategy of ambiguity in Quebec's quest for sovereignty. Plan B entailed first, a reference to the Supreme Court asking for clarification on the legality of sovereignty, and second the *Clarity Act*, which codified the federal government's understanding of the court's answer into Canadian law.

The court said, effectively, that no province had a right to unilaterally secede from the federation due to the implications for others within the country, but that the rest of the country would be obligated to negotiate secession in good faith if a clear majority expressed a desire to leave in response to a clear question. The details of what a clear question and clear majority looked like were left to political actors to define.

In its preamble, the *Clarity Act* made clear the stakes and the process, asserting that "it is incumbent on the Government of Canada not to enter into negotiations that might lead to the secession of a province from Canada, and that could consequently entail the termination of citizenship and other rights that Canadian citizens resident in the province enjoy as full participants in Canada, unless the population of that province has clearly expressed its democratic will that the province secede from Canada."

In the text of the law, the act spelled out what determining a clear majority might involve—including considerations of the question posed, the magnitude of the majority, voter turnout, and other contextual factors, and positioned the House of Commons as the arbiter of clarity.

Finally, beyond the stakes identified in the preamble, namely the end of Canadian citizenship and the termination of rights such residents are entitled to. The act also lays out clearly some of the points to be negotiated in the event of secession, notably "including the division of assets and liabilities, any changes to the borders of the province, the rights, interests and territorial claims of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, and the protection of minority rights."

What does all this mean? Again, if Alberta really were to step through the sovereignty door with a clear majority on a clear question, it would be condemned to be free—exchanging the collaborative rights of membership in the Canadian federation for the transactional relationship of independent neighbours governed by mutually negotiated and enforced international law.

#### You Brexit, you bought it

Brexit provides an example of just how painful a process that can be. The European Union was (and is) a kind of supranational federation, similar in a few notable ways to Canada's own. In Europe's case, each member country retains important elements of sovereignty that Canadian provinces do not, but it nonetheless was a pooling of sovereignty, such that states agree to be collectively bound by the same rules and institutions. Once the UK voted to leave, all bets in the unwinding of that pooling, so to speak, were off. Leavers' promises were like so many tears in the rain. Everything ultimately proved subject to a negotiation process that continues to this day, and the UK continues to pay for its access to the limited EU services it still retains. Political and economic rights, including even the boundary of the UK in Ireland, were all thrown into abeyance, to be painfully negotiated—and that was a situation in which the UK already operated as a sovereign state in ways Alberta simply cannot, from currency to defence to global recognition.

Quebec's quest for sovereignty-association is another example. Much of the murkiness in the debate



Reuters 2

over Quebec's proposed departure revolved around assertions by sovereigntists like René Lévesque that Quebec could, in effect, have its cake and eat it. A vote to leave, under the "sovereignty-association" formulation, was a vote to soften the relationship between Quebec and the rest of Canada, proposing an imagined future in which Quebec could choose the links it retained with Canada, and those it would sever.

From the perspective of the reset of the country, however, that was and remains a non-starter for any province declaring independence. Once it moves to become sovereign, any seceding territory would have authority to govern its own people and territory (subject to negotiations over things like citizenship and borders), but no say over what happens anywhere else beyond what it can negotiate.

Indeed, everything between Alberta and its neighbours would be subject to negotiations—both in its initial set up, and subsequent action. On the path to independence, things like share of national debt and the national pension plan fund would have to be negotiated, and Alberta would have little leverage to offer. Changes to the Canadian Pension Plan, for instance, currently require the consent of seven provinces constituting two-thirds of the country's population. There is no reason to think the other provinces would choose to abandon that agreement even after a vote to secede; thus Alberta would be compelled to offer terms the other provinces found acceptable to secure any share of the fund at all.

The border with other provinces and territories would also be negotiated, as would the status of marginalized populations and Indigenous Peoples within Alberta—negotiations that Indigenous Peoples themselves have indicated would be contentious, and subject to vigorous challenge in defence of Indigenous rights.

After all, if Canada is divisible, so is Alberta; and a Republic has no automatic claim to the obligations and rights of the crown with respect to Indigenous Peoples and treaty territories.

Once independent, Alberta would be a land-locked oil exporting nation. It would be negotiating with the Canada (and the U.S.) over everything from support for Alberta's admission to the UN and other aspects of membership in the international system, to currencies and exchange rates, to national and continental defence, to shared borders and citizenship rules, to admission in the USMCA—again, with as much leverage as you might expect for a country of 4.5 million people entering a free trade zone encompassing nearly 500 million people; an agreement that the U.S. president openly muses about ending.

Without such an agreement, Alberta would be left negotiating on a transactional basis with its much larger neighbours to the North/West/East, and South. In its negotiations with Canada, Alberta's biggest asset might actually be the presence of the Transcanada and Yellowhead highways, and rail lines connecting B.C. and its Pacific ports to the rest of Canada. Given the mutual benefit of continued trade flows, some reciprocity would likely be possible, but Alberta would have to expect a hard bargain from the recently jilted Canada, with no reason for Canada to build new pipeline capacity. Moreover—and what may be most overlooked so far in these discussions—Canada would have no obligation to help with the inevitable post-oil phase in Alberta, when the time comes to clean up the land and turn to new industries. The clean-up alone is estimated in hundreds of billions of dollars. The economic retooling defies my ability to estimate, but hundreds of billions more seems plausible. If Alberta leaves, it's paying that price tag alone, after the oil has run dry or the market for it has collapsed.

Similarly, a sovereign Alberta would necessarily entail the extinguishment of membership in Canada for provincial residents, in favour of citizenship in the new country. It would then be entirely up to Canada whether and under what conditions Albertans could retain dual citizenship in Canada—and if they did, what it would imply for thorny questions like voting rights. As with every other point of cross-border relations, it would be negotiated without any guarantees for the departing province. If the rest of Canada is unwilling to bend, Alberta residents who prefer to retain their Canadian rights will have to vote with their feet—as some Anglo Quebeckers did (along with their capital) when it seemed possible the province would leave.

Of course, there would be other options—well, another option, anyways. A Republic of Alberta would be free to pursue deeper relations with the American republic to its south. Given the deep presence of U.S. capital in the Alberta oil sector, such links run deep already. The U.S. president, meanwhile, has already made clear what likely terms would be for free trade-accession. Again, though, there would be no guarantees of representation for an Alberta so stuck between a rock and a hard place. Alberta could as easily become a U.S. territory, with limited representation, as the 51st state, "Puerto Rico North" is as possible as "Alaska South".

So, the long and short of it is that a sovereign Alberta would be condemned to be free, but not free of obligations. In the place of constitutionally guaranteed enforceable rights, its residents would have only what its government can negotiate with its sovereign neighbours. Alberta and its government would be on its own, for better—and for worse.

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#### "Alberta Next", migrants' rights come last

he "Alberta Next" initiative, led by Premier Danielle Smith, represents a significant push toward greater provincial autonomy within Canada.

Through town halls and surveys conducted throughout the province from July to the end of September, this project sought public input on crucial policy areas—including immigration and pensions—while asserting Alberta's constitutional rights within Canada.

The separatist movement in Alberta is tied to their perceived ideas of Western alienation and dissatisfaction with federal policies in Canada. It has the risk to significantly alter immigration policies and the treatment of newcomers. Critics worry that increased provincial autonomy could lead to more restrictive immigration policies that are worse than the current federal standards, potentially creating a system that discriminates between "desirable" and "undesirable" migrants.

Canada's historical context provides important lessons about the dangers of xenophobia in immigration policy. From the *Chinese Exclusion Act* of 1923 to the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II, past policies demonstrate how prejudice can shape immigration decisions, with lasting consequences for affected communities.

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) in Alberta already shows signs of structural inequality. Recent changes, including restrictions on low-wage foreign worker contracts to one-year terms, have sparked debate about worker security and labour market stability. Critics argue that the program enables employer exploitation while

providing limited pathways to permanent residency.

As migrants in Alberta deal with the anti-migrant rhetoric, the federal government's Bill C-2, the *Strong Borders Act*, poses significant implications for migrants in Canada and has the potential to increase deportation rates.

Bill C-2 heavily emulates American immigration policies. Additionally, the bill grants new powers to law enforcement agencies, allowing them to conduct mass immigration cancellations. This could lead to a scenario where large groups of migrants are processed for deportation simultaneously—further exacerbating the already precarious conditions many migrants already face. This bill would work hand in hand with the "Alberta Next" program.

The TFWP embodies the principles of neoliberalism by enabling employers to fill labour shortages with foreign workers, effectively sidestepping many protections traditionally afforded to domestic labour.

TFWP is crucial for the functioning of sectors struggling with labour shortages, thereby reinforcing its neoliberal appeal. The focus on economic efficiency often trumps social concerns, leading to calls for the program to serve as a flexible labour market tool rather than a pathway for permanent immigration.

Under the existing framework, temporary foreign workers often face precarious conditions, particularly in sectors like agriculture, construction, and health care. The program's structure, which emphasizes economic efficiency over social protection, prioritizes flexible labour markets over workers' rights and stability.

The intersection of Alberta's sovereignty movement with

immigration policy raises significant concerns about the future treatment of migrants. The clamour for provincial autonomy initiatives and current immigration programs could further marginalize vulnerable workers, particularly those from racialized communities.

Economic disparities and Alberta's demand for cheap labour ensure migrants will continue to be treated as disposable workers, filling low-wage jobs in industries like agriculture, construction, and health care.

Temporary work programs, lack of pathways to permanency, and exclusion from social services keep migrants in insecure conditions, while wage suppression and limited unionization exacerbate exploitation.

The "Alberta Next" project reflects separatist rhetoric that reinforces Alberta's reliance on the global neoliberal system, which exploits migrant labour while deepening systemic inequalities. By ignoring precarious working conditions, lack of labour protections, and systemic barriers, it sidelines migrants, Indigenous communities, and low-wage workers, prioritizing corporate interests and entrenching marginalization instead of addressing structural injustices.

Alberta's resource-driven economy, tied to the global neoliberal system, perpetuates these dynamics, with racialized and gendered inequalities further marginalizing migrants. Systemic change is needed to address labour rights, resist neoliberal policies, and build solidarity to challenge the exploitation inherent in these structures.

Marco Luciano is the director of Migrante Alberta.



Haida Gwaii totem poles / iStock

Marc Lee

#### It's not you, it's us

#### British Columbia isn't into Western alienation

n article about Western alienation in British Columbia might as well start with the Rocky Mountains, that formidable natural barrier to the rest of Canada and border to Alberta, our prickly provincial neighbour, and the real hotbed of Western alienation.

The Rocky Mountains themselves are merely the easternmost of a series of mountain ranges eventually reaching the Coast Mountains, which tower over the metropolis of Vancouver, and Vancouver Island,

the last mountain range before the vast Pacific Ocean. Those geological barriers have a psychological equivalent, meaning British Columbia often looks more at itself than back to the rest of Canada.

Mountains and forests are the source of the good looks for which B.C. is internationally renowned, as well as the resource wealth that underpins the province's high standard of living. From the mountains come minerals and timber, from the iconic rivers and coastal fjords come the salmon, and in

between, the relative openness of the Okanagan delivers an abundance of fruits and vegetables (and lots of wine these days).

These represent excellent examples of the classic staples economy driven by resource extraction, first described by Harold Innis and expounded by Mel Watkins (perhaps one of Canada's most important contributions to economics). And while sophisticated service-oriented economies, including tourism, can be readily seen in Vancouver and the bigger cities of B.C., a staples

mindset still reigns over most of the province and in Victoria's halls of power. What's different is that B.C. has many different resources to sell.

The pull of export markets is in three directions: east to the rest of Canada, south to the United States, and west to Asia. That tilt in orientation has meant a much more diversified pattern of trade. While three-quarters of Canadian exports go south to the United States, for B.C., it's just 53 per cent (in 2024) with 37 per cent of B.C. exports going to Asia.

Even after crossing the Rockies, the distance "back east" to the centre of Canada is astonishingly massive, and three time zones away. A lot of public discourse this year has concerned supposedly large interprovincial trade barriers that are holding back east-west commerce. This is mostly nonsense and political theatre. The real barrier is long distances and transportation cost: from Vancouver to Calgary is a nine-hour drive, and it's about 4,400 km to the major centres of Toronto, Ottawa or Montreal.

And yet, Canada's far West, ironically, lacks a Western alienation vibe. Perhaps because it's as far west as you can go, and once here most people don't want to go back—that is, if they can afford to stay amid Canada's highest cost housing. Perhaps it's because B.C. joined Canada in its early days, and the feds built a railroad to connect Toronto and Montreal to B.C. well before Alberta and Saskatchewan were carved out as provinces.

B.C. wears Canada with a casual grace other provinces can't dream of: there's the Vancouver Canadians baseball club (a farm team of the Toronto Blue Jays) and Vancouver Canucks hockey club; it was the Trail Smoke Eaters that brought to Canada a world championship in hockey back in 1939.

I suspect that Alberta's Western alienation stems from its singular focus on oil exports, whereas B.C. is much more diversified. Periodic changes in commodity prices, world events or federal policy can drive larger economic swings in Alberta. The province's reliance on fossil fuels portends a clash when the federal government attempts to implement a National Energy Policy (as the first Prime Minister Trudeau did in the early 1980s) or to address the global collective action problem of climate change (as the second Prime Minister Trudeau did over the past decade).

When it comes to oil and gas, however, B.C. has more in common with Alberta than cosmopolitan Vancouver cares to admit. B.C.'s Northeast corner, which deviates from the Rockies into a chunk of foothills and prairie that is geologically connected to Alberta, also known as the Western Sedimentary Basin, with vast reserves of fossil fuels. B.C.'s production is more geared to gas than oil but the political grip on the provincial legislature has similar fingerprints.

B.C. only consumes a small portion of the gas that is extracted and much of it goes south to the U.S. and

east to Alberta. The Trump tariff war has advanced interest in getting gas from B.C. to tidewater for export as liquified natural gas (LNG). Canada's first LNG export terminal opened in Kitimat, B.C., in July 2025, essentially a giant refrigerator to transform gas into liquid form for loading onto tankers to ship anywhere in the world.

B.C.'s unique spirit comes alive around nature and environmental issues. The international organization Greenpeace was started in B.C. by a group of concerned hippies (outside Vancouver, other hippie and U.S. draft dodger outposts include Nelson and Smithers). In the 1990s, the "war in the woods" over clearcut forestry was centre stage, while today it's more about climate change caused by fossil fuels. B.C. was an early leader on climate action, with Canada's first carbon tax in 2008 anchoring a Climate Action Plan. Alas, these efforts to decarbonize the B.C. economy have been undermined by a B.C. government that has actively encouraged more oil and gas production.

British Columbia is perhaps the most colonial in the history of place names, and there remains a lot of British in the institutions and the core structures of society. B.C.'s oldest and racist tendencies have largely given way to the diversity of immigrant populations from around the world. As much as B.C.'s gaze has strayed over the Pacific Ocean, Asia has long been gazing back—witness the large number of Chinese, Japanese and South Asian settlers over the decades.

Yet, it is Indigenous cultures that give B.C. its deepest sense of meaning, reflecting thousands of years of continuous settlement manifested in distinctive carvings, totem poles, and languages. Leaving the orbit of Metro Vancouver and the South Coast, it does not take long before one is absorbed in the wilderness, where the pull of Indigenous cultures is strong.

B.C. has set on a pathway to reconcile with dozens of First Nations who never signed the treaties that define much of Canada's relationships with Indigenous Peoples. And as First Nations recover from decades of brutal colonization, they are increasingly flexing their muscles, generating income from new economic development to energy production and real estate development.

B.C. is Emily Carr to the rest of Canada's Group of Seven. Common threads but, ultimately, a unique proposition. B.C. does its own thing, and with a federal government that is so far away, much of the political attention is on the provincial government. And while B.C. might suffer from narcissistic impulses, there's no talk of separation. People love being part of the dysfunctional family called Canada, even if sometimes we lock ourselves in our room and complain that nobody understands us. M

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#### Whose nationalism is it, anyway?

#### On Canada's national identity, Quebec nationalism, and Western alienation

he first idea is to define oneself as a nation— therefore it requires a culture of their own," said Bloc Quebecois leader Yves-Francois Blanchet, speaking to journalists at a media scrum. A reporter had asked him if he, as the leader of a sovereignist party, had any advice for Alberta's burgeoning separatist movement.

"I am not sure," he continued, "that oil and gas qualifies to define a culture."

Casual observers may have expected that Blanchet, an ardent believer in Quebec independence who has referred to Canada as "artificial" may support the idea of Alberta's independence from the Canadian federation. Canada, he said in those same remarks, is a country with "very little meaning" with a "foreign parliament." Why, then, the hostility towards a fellow believer in breaking it up?

Really, Blanchet's glib remarks were less about delegitimizing Alberta's claims to nationhood than they were about reinforcing Quebec's. For Blanchet, like many in Quebec's sovereignist movement, Quebec's claims to independence stem from its status as a distinct society—a place that is culturally, historically, linguistically, and politically distinct from the rest of Canada. These distinctions, he argued, Alberta does not have.

The people behind Alberta's fledging independence movement, for their part, don't make their arguments primarily based on cultural distinctness. Rather, they tap into grievances in Western Canada over control of resources and perceived

federal meddling into the capacity of the West (Alberta, in particular) to extract them—hence Blanchet's quip about oil and gas.

Quebec nationalism and Western alienation have been, since at least the 1960s and 70s—but really, even longer—some of the defining malaises of Canadian confederation. Both have had major impacts on the structure of Canadian confederation. Both, too, have called into question what it means to "be" a Canadian. Canada is, after all, a relatively young political project. What does national identity mean?

#### The wretched of the earth on the St. Laurent

If you asked a French-speaking person in Montreal to describe their national identity in the 1940s, they would probably tell you they were French Canadian. In fact, self-identifying as Canadien—a term borrowed from kanata. a Huron-Iroquois word that roughly translates into "village" or "settlement"-was, originally, a Francophone phenomenon, replaced by Canadien-Français only when a significant number of anglophones began adopting the "Canadian" moniker rather than describing themselves as British. Up until the 1960s, only a minority of francophones in Quebec would refer to themselves as Québécois.

The 1760 English conquest of New France placed a small English-speaking ruling class in control of a territory overwhelmingly populated by francophones and Indigenous Peoples, further complicated by the arrival of a wave of English-speaking loyalists to the

British crown after the American War of Independence.

By the early 1960s, around two thirds of Montrealers were Canadiens-Francais, but in the glittering skyscrapers downtown and the city's wealthiest neighbourhoods, English was the near-exclusive language. The poor neighbourhoods—the slums, as longtime Montreal Mayor Jean Drapeau called them—were overwhelmingly (but not exclusively) francophone. Montreal was Canada's largest city and economic powerhouse, and Canada's ruling class was formed in its three anglophone universities (compared to only one francophone university). They met in clouds of cigar smoke in small halls like the St. James Club. In those halls of power, located on streets named after British conquerors, they spoke English.

It is this context that, in the 1960s, birthed the modern Quebec nationalist movement—and when the Québécois national identity as something distinct from *Canadiens-Francais* became dominant. No longer were francophones in Quebec simply a type of Canadian—French Canadians—they were now something different, with a fully separate national identity. The politicized actors of the era viewed Québécois as an oppressed people, and their liberation as part of a global movement of decolonization.

As the historian Sean Mill covers in *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal*, activists and intellectuals of the era theorized this new nationalism in the context of global upheaval, when colonized people across the Global South—from Cuba

to Algeria to India to Vietnam—were winning independence from their colonial masters. Québécois' nascent nationalist movement placed itself solidly on the side of these anti-colonial movements.

Aime Cesaire, the Martinique-born anti-colonial author, was famously baffled and amused when he learned that Québécois radicals were applying his concept of *negritude* to their own situation. While he found the claim to be "somewhat exaggerated," he admitted that they had not misunderstood the concept.

In the decades since Québécois nationalism became a major force in Canada, its nature has shifted. As the deep inequality between francophones and anglophones faded away-through the actions of Quebec's muscular regulatory and redistributive state-the focus of Quebec nationalists progressively shifted towards cultural demands, which has increasingly taken the form of anti-religious and anti-migrant sentiment. Such cultural chauvinism co-exists in a tense balance with the desire to preserve and expand the social-democratic wins of the early Quebec nationalists.

Today, Quebec's nationalists struggle to define Québécois identity based on this tension. Is modern Quebec nationalism ethnic, or civic? Is Québécois identity only accessible by birth, to people descended from early French settlers, or is it accessible to anyone who decides to participate in the national project?

The idea of an independent Quebec is less popular than it has been since the genesis of Quebec nationalism during the Quiet Revolution. Many of today's nationalists have accepted a truce with Canadian federalism, at least temporarily. But they still call themselves *Québécois*, not *Canadiens-Français*.

#### **Cowboys and carbon**

"If my voice is trembling, it's because I am terribly angry," the caller told the radio host, "to the point where I would be happy to



Wiki Images

fight for our freedom and I literally mean with a rifle."

It was 1980, and tensions between Alberta and the federal government had never been higher. With the National Energy Program (NEP) in effect, Ottawa had implemented an export tax on Alberta oil, created Petro-Canada as a state-owned oil company, and implemented price controls on the fossil fuel industry in the context of skyrocketing oil prices due to crises in the Middle East in the 1970s.

The program did not go over well in Alberta. Premier Peter Lougheed went to bat against the program, threatening to significantly cut Alberta's oil production. Alberta's economy faltered, the cost of real estate collapsed, and the modern Conservative dominance of the Western provinces began.

While the NEP is often referred to as the origin point of Canada's other great federal malaise, Western alienation, the phenomenon goes back much farther. When the British crown purchased Rupert's Land—the vast expanse of land that covers most of the territory of the modern Prairie provinces, as well as the area around Hudson's Bay—for \$1.5 million from the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) in 1870, it initially declared the land the North West Territories.



Reuters



Wiki Images

**Left:** former Alberta Premier William Aberhart **Above:** former Alberta Premier Peter Lougheed **Top:** mural of Réne Lévesque

Ottawa passed the *Dominion*Lands Act, giving away large plots of land, essentially free-of-charge, to men who would settle the Prairies.
Those settlers, with the backing of nascent federal organizations like the North-West Mounted Police (the precursor to the RCMP) made war on the land's Indigenous inhabitants and spread Canadian sovereignty across the Prairies.

As its settler population grew, Alberta became a province (alongside Saskatchewan) in 1905. But unlike other provinces, Ottawa retained control of the new provinces' natural resources. The federal government, in Alberta, argued that the sum of money it paid to HBC to purchase the land meant that it should retain control over the natural resources—and the money made from selling them.

As Mary Janigan details in Let the Eastern Bastards Freeze in the Dark: The West Versus the Rest Since Confederation, this created the first wave of what we now recognize as

Western alienation. After years of conflict and tension between the Prairie provinces and the federal government, the two sides eventually signed the *Natural Resources Transfer Agreement* in 1930, which gave Alberta control over its own resources.

It barely made a dent in anti-Ottawa sentiment in Alberta, though. Just four years later, William "Bible Bill" Aberhart rode to power in the province, ushering in decades of single-party rule by the Social Credit Party. In *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta*, Alvin Finket outlines how that party's initially populist (if incoherent) positions against financiers during the Great Depression morphed into a vehement religious conservatism, opposed to the growing welfare-state consensus it viewed Ottawa as imposing. Throughout the transformation, Ottawa provided a convenient scapegoat for the province's problems, even as it outspent other provinces on things like roads and infrastructure due to resource revenues.

Today's Western alienation fits squarely into that tradition and is primarily aimed at preventing any type of environmental regulation that could slow down the province's drive to extract as much carbon as possible from the ground. Just as Lougheed, Aberhart, and others have done over the years, current Premier Danielle Smith's version of Western alienation is a regional segment of capitalists pitted against those of the central government.

#### Nationalism and its discontents

In 2015, a newly elected Justin Trudeau was speaking to a journalist from the *New York Times*. He had been sworn in as prime minister just weeks ago.

"There is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada," Trudeau told the journalist. "There are shared values—openness, respect, compassion, willingness to work hard, to be there for each other, to search for equality and justice.

"Those qualities are what make us the first postnational state."

Today, of course, Trudeau's prediction of post-nationality appears particularly absurd, as Canadians around the country rally around the flag in response to the threats and dangers from the United States. But, despite the awkward phrasing, he did touch on something real about the difficulty of defining Canadian identity, and national identity more broadly.

Writing in his 1983 master work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism,* the political theorist Benedict Anderson could have been responding directly to Trudeau when he wrote that "the 'end of the era of nationalism,' so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time."

Defining a "nation," though, is a notoriously slippery task. Typically, a nation is a political unit—a group of

people with some combination of common histories, cultures, ethnicities, languages, territory, and political traditions. A nation does not necessarily require an independent state—meaning that any group of people can, in theory, make a claim to nationhood, and conjure nations into existence through the act of collective belief.

Anderson, whose work is among the most important histories of nationalism as an idea, describes the nation as an "imagined political community, imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." It is *imagined*, he says, because even in the smallest nation, not all members can know each other. It is *limited* because no nation aspires to being universal—beyond the limits of one nation, there are always others.

Defining a nation becomes even more complicated when we understand that conception of the nation is a relatively recent social invention. The concept first began to gain prominence during the Enlightenment in the 1700s, and most nation-states were created in the last 200 years. Italy, for example, only came into being as a unified country in 1861—if you asked a Roman living under Caesar whether they were Italian, they would simply not understand the question. Yet in the minds of nationalists, the nations to which they lay claim are eternal, stretching back into history and forward into the future.

Canadian nationalists, those who identify with Canada more than any other political unit, may see Quebec and Alberta's sovereignist drives as similar. And really, there are some tactical similarities. Danielle Smith has, clearly, learned from Quebec's nationalists and is looking to apply a similar strategy. Begin with something like sovereignty-association, give chips to the more radical wings of the movement, and use the leverage to make gains in negotiations with Ottawa.

But despite surface-level similarities, they are radically different phenomena, beginning from highly distinct historical contexts and only diverging more greatly over time. The political projects they represent in the 21st century continue to be wildly different from one another. Modern Quebec nationalism is a hybrid of social-democratic developmentalism with cultural chauvinism, and Western alienation is defined, in large part, by a frontier-style drive to unlimited expansion of resource extraction.

Canada, as a relatively recent national project built as a settler colony, has difficulties in defining its national identity. Unlike France, Vietnam, or even other settler colonies like Israel, Canada has no deep history to call back to and claim (however falsely) as part of a long national lineage. Perhaps that's what Yves-Francois Blanchet was referring to when he referred to Canada as "artificial." It would be good to recognize the artificially constructed foundations of all nationalisms, not just Canada's.

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Stuart Trew

# There is life after free trade

uring President Trump's first administration, the "tariff man" shot the neoliberal rulesbased trading order in the stomach and left it to bleed out. This summer, he delivered the fatal blow.

There will be no going back. Trump is smashing multilateral institutions with the same fascist spite and paranoid style driving the defunding of the U.S. welfare state and deregulation of core public safety agencies.

Our federal and provincial governments must urgently do what they can to lessen Canada's economic dependence on the United States, focus on industrial and public services renewal, and find saner friends. We need to "pivot," as Prime Minster Carney is fond of saying.

On July 31, Trump hit play on a "reciprocal" tariff regime first previewed on April 1, "Tariff Liberation Day," but pulled back to staunch a potentially disastrous exodus from U.S. treasuries and the dollar. Trump's 90-day pause eased investor nerves and produced the TACO meme: Trump Always Chickens Out.

Well, 90 days later, about half the world is paying a fee—tariffs ranging from 10 to 50 per cent—to sell goods into the U.S. market. Whether those fees will be borne by U.S. consumers or foreign producers, or a combination of both, is still not clear.

Trump's desires are crystal clear: do what his administration and its crypto-fascist tech-bro funders want and find favour in the MAGA court; resist and face economic ruin or worse.

There was always a coercive core to the neoliberal rules of the

World Trade Organization and deals like NAFTA, which restricted local economic development and the expansion of public services to benefit U.S. corporations. Trump is a symptom of decay and inequality this system generated.

That said, the world Trump is building also favours U.S. capital above all else—but with a dangerously anti-multilateral, anti-democratic, anti-social edge. The highest U.S. tariffs were reserved for Brazil—to pressure the government to stop a Brazilian supreme court case against former president Jair Bolsonaro, Trump's fascist Latin American ally, for the latter's alleged role in an attempted coup.

As if to underline the death blow for the World Trade Organization, Trump hit Switzerland, home to the multilateral trade body and United Nations, with a 39 per cent tariff, among the highest. The European Commission agreed to buy hundreds of billions of dollars in fracked U.S. gas, undermining its conservation efforts, simply to get its tariff rate down to 15 per cent. Trump's new world order is exterminist to boot.

Behind much of Canada's response seems to be an assumption, shared by big business, that the Trump imperium will end, and free trade will pick up where it left off. This is wishful thinking. Even if were true, we should strive for better.

Future U.S. governments will inherit the kingmaker role assumed by Trump. Democrats largely share Trump's trade and security policy beefs with Canada. As former U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai used to say, on inheriting Trump's

first-term China tariffs, "a trade negotiator never walks away from leverage."

While the federal government has no choice but to keep talking to Trump and may accept quotas on softwood lumber, automotive and metals exports, the "pivot" needs to steel our economy (pun intended) for future shocks. Where to start? There are some modest proposals on the table.

In July, Ontario paid a fee to cancel its contract with Elon Musk's Starlink to provide satellite internet to Northern and remote communities. Whatever the state of Musk's relationship with Boss Trump, the tech braggart was a dangerously unreliable steward for such a sensitive piece of infrastructure and the personal data it would move.

There are good public and private sector replacements for Musk's satellites in Canada. Helping these firms expand and test new features through public contracts across Canada would give them the benefit of scale, lowering costs while connecting people in all provinces.

Ontario's proposal to replace government fleets with Canadian-made vehicles is another good idea. A Buy Canadian plan for all new federal and provincial vehicles would create a baseline demand for new domestic EVs, spur the installation of charging stations, and support downstream services jobs in all provinces and territories.

Another world is still possible. Let's not waste a crisis. There is life, a good life, after Trump and after free trade. **M** 

Stuart Trew is director of the CCPA's Trade and Investment Research Project.

#### The Omatsu Files



iStock

Changiz M. Varzi

# Open Canada's borders to get greater independence from the U.S.

s during Trump's first term, the number of immigrants and refugees crossing into Canada from the U.S. will likely rise, although it may take on a different form this time due to the expansion of the Safe Third Country Agreement.

Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Global Public Affairs, warns that Canada lacks a clear strategy to accept immigrants and refugees. At an immigration policy seminar earlier this year, Bricker stressed that while the challenge is real, the right policies could turn it into an opportunity.

Experts and academics who study immigration agree. They argue that as the U.S. tightens its immigration policies, Canada could attract newcomers to help address its aging population and strengthen its economy, making

it less dependent on its southern neighbour.

Even before Trump's return to the White House and imposing new tariffs on Canada and Mexico, some Canadian experts were already calling for such a strategy. In his 2017 book, Maximum Canada: Why 35 Million Canadians Are Not Enough, Doug Saunders argued that Canada should triple its population to 100 million people as an explicit and planned nation-building effort.

In 2018, Canada faced an immigration wave unlike anything in its recent history. Trump's strict policies, such as deporting immigrants and separating children from their parents, pushed more people north. That year, Canada resettled 28,100 refugees, more than any other country, including the United States.

Andy Rodriguez, a regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant in Ottawa, believes Canada must prepare for a similar situation.

Professor Chedly Belkhodja, co-director at Concordia University's School of Community and Public Affairs, agrees. Having studied Roxham Road, Quebec's main unofficial crossing point, he believes a repeat is possible. But he also highlights that Canada has changed.

"At that time, Canada had a different context," he explains. "The Liberal government was firmly in power, and the prime minister portrayed Canada as a welcoming nation. We were prioritizing diversity. Now, the focus has shifted to border security and control."

Both Rodriguez and Belkhodja point out that even before Trump's presidency, Canada had begun tightening immigration policies. The government plans to reduce permanent resident admissions by 21 per cent in 2025, with further cuts in the years that follow.

The new immigration targets are expected to slow Canada's population growth, leading to 1.4 million fewer residents by 2027. A Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) report found that this decline would result in 1.3 billion fewer hours worked and lower nominal GDP by an average of \$37 billion over the next three years. This means less economic activity, a smaller tax base, and potential impacts on public services and job opportunities for Canadians.

In the context of a trade war with the United States, Canada can't afford to take these unnecessary economic hits. The federal government needs an explicit growth strategy that is based on building up its own domestic capacity—and immigration is a key way of doing so, regardless of which way the political winds are blowing.

Immigrants make up nearly a third of all business owners with paid staff. Between 2016 and 2021, more than 40 per cent of newcomers to the health care sector took on essential roles in nursing. In 2022 alone, international students and their visiting families contributed \$37.3 billion to the economy.

Syed Ather Hussain Akbari, chair of Atlantic Research Group on Economics of Immigration, Aging and Diversity, explains that Canada has long recognized the economic value of immigration, particularly as a response to its aging population.

"As people retire and the labour force shrinks, economic growth slows," he says. "One way to address this is through incentives to increase fertility rates, but that hasn't worked in Western economies. The other tool is immigration."

According to Akbari, boosting immigration has been Canada's most effective solution for strengthening its labour market and attracting investment. "Over the past 20 years, Canada has increased immigration inflows because it understands that a shrinking workforce creates challenges. Immigration is the key to filling those gaps."

With immigration already playing a crucial role in Canada's economy, Trump's restrictive policies could open new opportunities for the country.

"Trump could be a big opportunity for Canada," says Rodriguez. "If he doesn't want people who are willing to work, those with talent, or individuals with economic strength, Canada should create a path for them."

He says he has recently worked with clients, immigrant business owners in the U.S., who are now looking to move to Canada because of Trump's immigration policies.

According to Rodriguez, welcoming international students, business owners, temporary workers, and entrepreneurs could offset some of the economic losses caused by Trump's tariffs. By doing so, Canada

could boost its economic resilience while protecting itself from the impact of U.S.-imposed tariffs.

Rodriguez proposes Canada introduce new immigration programs that attract workers and entrepreneurs. He stresses that these new Canadians should be permanently integrated into the economy in order to fully realize the benefits of immigration.

"Immigration creates the producers and consumers of the future. Its impact on the economy is huge. For example, if international students find a path to permanent residency, they will become long-term economic contributors," he said.

Other immigration experts also emphasize the need to create pathways for temporary residents and work permit holders to gain permanent status. They argue it would allow Canada to fully benefit from the talent and potential of immigrants already in the country.

Belkhodja acknowledges the challenges of immigration policy but believes Canadian policy-makers must be "innovative" and develop "flexible policies" that adapt to the country's changing needs. He also highlights that making the most of immigrant talent requires proper investment.

"It's not just about policy, it's also about resources," he explains.

"Settlement programs need funding to offer strong integration support. Canada has built a solid settlement model, but as immigration grows, the system must remain agile and responsive to different immigration pathways. Providing services to immigrants helps them feel part of society, which is key to long-term integration."

Despite the ongoing need for immigrant labour, talent, and financial capital, public attitudes toward immigration in Canada have shifted. In recent years, anti-immigrant policies have gained more support.

Akbari says that part of the problem lies in how politicians approach the issue and communicate with the public. "They need to explain why they increased immigration in the first place clearly; because the country needed these people and their positive economic impact."

Experts like Akbari warn that misleading narratives about immigrants, including unproven claims that they take jobs from Canadians, have fuelled negative perceptions.

Yet, despite shifting rhetoric and policy changes across North America, Akbari, who has studied immigration to Canada for over three decades, believes a policy reversal is inevitable. Canada's long-term economic stability, especially in the face of trade tensions with the U.S., depends on immigration.

"This country needs more people," he says. "No matter what politicians say now, in three or four years, they will have to increase immigration inflow again."

Changiz M. Varzi is a journalist and photographer covering the direct and indirect impact of conflicts around the world.

#### **Viewpoint**



Gina Gill Hartmann\_Adobe\_GoldenDome

Steven Staples

# Why is Mark Carney backing Trump's Golden "Doom" space weapons plan?

onald Trump's announcement in May stunned Canadians. He declared that the U.S. would build a "Golden Dome" continental missile defence system featuring "next-generation technology across land, sea, and space," including space-based sensors and interceptors. He also revealed that "Canada has called us and they want to be a part of it."

In one sentence, Trump unveiled a sprawling, untested, and enormously expensive plan to place weapons in space—and claimed Canadian support, presumably secured in undisclosed calls between him and Prime Minister Mark Carney.

It's no surprise Carney didn't break the news himself. Supporting Golden Dome signals a major reversal: instead of pursuing economic and strategic independence, as promised, Carney appears ready to deeply integrate Canada's military with the U.S. Pentagon.

Former Liberal Foreign Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy called Golden Dome a "cockamamie" idea and condemned Carney's pivot. "After winning an election on a clear promise to assert a more independent foreign and defence policy...it's a betrayal of the vision Canadians voted for," he wrote in *The Globe and Mail*.

#### Defending free trade, not Canada

Golden Dome is less about protecting Canada from nuclear threats and more about securing access to the U.S. market. Since taking office, Carney has linked trade and security in negotiations to remove U.S. tariffs—a strategy past governments avoided for good reason.

Canada has seen this before.
After the 9/11 attacks, the U.S.
closed the Canada-U.S. border
and intensified security, sparking
panic among Canadian businesses.
Corporate lobby groups joined
with pro-defence organizations
and pushed for a "Fortress North
America" concept: harmonize
Canada's security policies with the
U.S. in exchange for border access.

Today, similar forces are backing Golden Dome. The business-friendly C.D. Howe Institute says, "Canada can enhance its sovereignty and restore the tariff-free trade that is vital to both economies by committing to increased defence spending with a portion directed to U.S. procurement. This would create leverage in both security and trade negotiations."

#### Less sovereignty, more risk

Trump's May revelation suggests Carney is prepared to abandon Canada's decades-long commitment to nuclear disarmament and peaceful space use—an approach maintained by both Liberal and Conservative governments for over 40 years.

Golden Dome is essentially the rebirth of President Ronald Reagan's "Star Wars" from the 1980s. Canada's Prime Minister Brian Mulroney declined to join over concerns about an escalating arms race, especially in space.

Reagan's proposed system was shelved after the Cold War until President George W. Bush revived the idea in 2004, sinking 40 interceptors into Alaska and California to try to intercept a limited number of missiles fired by Iran or North Korea.

Prime Minister Paul Martin, once again, declined Canada's participation over the prospect of space weapons, but allowed radar data from Canada's NORAD radars to be used by the American system.

Now, Trump's Golden Dome aims to shield the U.S. from full-scale nuclear attacks by Russia and China. The scale is enormous. Many technologies it depends on, like AI integration and space-based interceptors, don't yet exist.

Trump cites Israel's Iron Dome as inspiration, but the comparison is flawed. Iron Dome is designed to stop short-range rockets in a small region. North America is vastly larger, and Russian or Chinese missiles are faster, more advanced, and deployed in far greater numbers.

Despite the uncertainty, Trump promises deployment within three years, with costs estimated between \$175 billion and \$500 billion USD.

Critics argue missile defence systems like Golden Dome don't make the world safer—they destabilize it. They undermine the concept of deterrence that has kept nuclear conflict at bay for decades.

When one country builds a shield, others build better swords. Golden Dome could trigger a new arms race in space, encouraging Russia and China to develop more advanced, evasive nuclear weapons while derailing disarmament talks.

Indeed, President Bush's limited system 20 years ago spurred today's generation of hypersonic missiles and upgraded warheads in both Europe and Russia. Arms control treaties have faltered, while new war-fighting technologies expand.

Even worse, Golden Dome gives President Trump or any future president—the ability to consider a first strike against Russia or China, knowing America might intercept any counterattack and escape "Mutually Assured Destruction."

Yet the reliability of missile defence remains doubtful. Over 25 years, the U.S. Missile Defense Agency has spent over \$250 billion on interceptors, with only a 50 per cent success rate in controlled tests. If decision-makers rely on this system in a real-world crisis, they could be dangerously misled.

#### Will Golden Dome protect Canada?

Canada's inclusion would require expanding Golden Dome's coverage—more interceptors, radars, and tracking systems—at substantial cost. With a limited number of interceptors, would Canadian cities be protected equally to U.S. cities? Would interceptors be reserved exclusively for Canada? Who decides when to launch interceptors?

We might be asked to provide land or infrastructure: a new radar site in Newfoundland, missile-equipped naval vessels, or an interceptor base located in Canada. Yet operational control would likely remain entirely American. As one U.S. general bluntly told me, "I am responsible for the defence of the United States—including Air Force One. I can't hand that responsibility to any other country."

#### How much will it cost Canada?

The United States cannot put forward a reliable cost figure, rendering the price for Canada equally ambiguous—but one thing is for sure: it will be unimaginably expensive.

On May 27, Trump declared Canada's share of the project would be \$61 billion USD (\$83 billion CAD). But just weeks later, he upped the ante to \$71 billion USD (\$100 billion CAD).

As for a discount? Trump quipped that the cost would be zero if Canada became the 51st state.

Trump has also stated the project will be built in America, offering minimal economic benefits for Canada.

Even the trade payoff is uncertain—Trump insists any deal to join Golden Dome would be separate from broader tariff negotiations.

#### Carney should say "No" to Golden Dome

Joining Golden Dome is a bad deal for Canada. The system risks escalating global tensions by putting weapons into space, undermines Canadian sovereignty, offers little economic benefit for us, and costs more than the country can afford.

Rather than bankrolling a space arms race, Canada should recommit to its longstanding position: no weapons in space and a world free of nuclear weapons. The future lies not in golden domes, but in global cooperation and arms control. **M** 

Steven Staples is a long-time policy analyst and author of "Missile Defence: Round One. An insider's account of how and why Canada said No to George Bush—and why this issue won't die," published by Lorimer. He is also on the CCPA's Members' Council.



**Viewpoint** 

1919 Winnipeg General Strike / Wikilmages

Mark Hudson, Ian Hudson, Anupam Das

# Unions are good for you (even if you're not in one yet)

n Winnipeg, "No Benefits? Get a Union" billboards bluntly tout the benefits of unionization. Union organizing leans heavily into the "union advantage"—better pay, benefits, and protections are commonly highlighted as areas where union members tend to do better.

Precisely because unions have been an effective means for workers to fight back against employers, there's a long history of governments working to restrict union strength. Some of it is bloody and violent, and some of it occurs with the stroke of a pen.

The Trump administration order to deny collective bargaining rights to a broad swath of the federal workforce is one example. It accentuates an already treacherous landscape that unions have to navigate, including a thriving industry of union-busting consultants (LaborLab 2025).

Violent suppression of the 1918 Vancouver General Strike, the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, the 1919 Alberta Coal Strike are some of the bloodier Canadian restrictions in our history. Legal limitations on the right to strike are a bredin-the-bone aspect of Canadian labour legislation, with such limits proliferating during the neoliberal period (see Tucker 2020; Panitch and Swartz 2003; McInnis 2002).

In Manitoba, pro-labour legislative changes introduced by the governing NDP provide a counterpoint to the anti-union drift of the recent past. First, single-step union certification (card check) has been reinstated. Card check means that the labour board will certify a union as the collective bargaining agent in a workplace, without requiring a vote, if a specified percentage of workers (in this legislation 50 per cent plus one) sign union membership cards. The second change bans scabs.

Employer groups were, unsurprisingly, opposed to the changes. The Retail Council of Canada (RCC) opposes both aspects of the legislation. It argues that a secret ballot should be preferred to card check because, "lunchroom peer pressure to sign a card may not reflect the true wishes of the employee." It maintains anti-scab provisions are damaging because, "replacement workers are typically engaged to protect the business" and that prohibiting them is, "generally considered anti-employer, and tipping the scale in favour of unions." (Retail Council of Canada, 2023).

The RCC's complaint relies on the idea that government shouldn't "unfairly" advantage the union side. But what if things that are broadly recognized as social goods—improved health, a clean environment, greater equality—benefit from a more unionized workforce? If unions are welfare-enhancing beyond the union advantage of their own membership, governments should be actively facilitating unionization, especially as economic and political forces during the neoliberal period have exerted downward pressure on union membership and power.

If unions are good for society, governments *should* be "tipping the scales in their favour."

The connection between unionization rates and broader measures of social well-being, such as environmental quality, income distribution, and health outcomes can be traced to two pathways of union influence: collective bargaining and political advocacy and action.

First, unions can improve social well-being through the collective bargaining process. The "union advantage" actually exists. Unionized workers have been able to win higher pay and greater benefits than their non-unionized counterparts.

It is worth noting that many of the benefits unions win from their employers improve the well-being of workers beyond higher wages. They regularly bargain for health and safety protections to minimize injuries and illness, and supplemental health care for dental, vision, physiotherapy, or mental health.

These better terms of employment spill out beyond the unionized workplace, exerting pressure on employers to raise the wages and benefits of non-union members in an attempt to compete for workers and discourage unionization altogether—a phenomenon Scrimger (2020) describes as 'the threat effect.'

Second, unions do more than negotiate collective agreements; they serve as political actors. Because individual unions often lack the capacity for political action, much of this advocacy is conducted through labour federations or councils. They help shape public opinion, lobby for legislative changes, promote public spending priorities, and support political parties.

In Canadian provinces, where political parties bundle various policies, union political actions can also have an indirect effect. For example, if unions support a "left leaning" political party because it tends to push for pro-labour policies, that party may also be more inclined to support environmental protection, anti-poverty measures, or public health care.

In journal articles (Das, Hudson, and Hudson 2023; 2024; 2025), our research team looked into the histories of union involvement in fighting better health care and improved socio-economic determinants of health, environmental protections, inequality and anti-poverty measures, and the empirical association between unionization and these indicators of well-being.

There's no question that unions have been active political forces on all of these issues, with a rich history of advocacy for expanded and improved public health, cleaner and safer workplaces, environmental

protections (including not just anti-pollution measures but also wilderness and conservation measures), anti-poverty measures like improved minimum wages and social safety nets, and a more equal distribution of wealth and income.

Unions do try. But is a more unionized workforce actually associated with better outcomes on these fronts?

As summarized in a CCPA-Manitoba report launched in September 2025, we used unionization data across the 10 provinces from 2000-20 and tested the association of unionization rates with excess mortality (health), greenhouse gas emissions and total particulate matter (environment), and poverty rates and income distributions. We used a multivariate approach to account for potential impacts due to confounding factors (unemployment rate, economic activity etc.).

It turns out there is a positive association between unionization and social outcomes in Canadian provinces.

Specifically, the results show that increases in unionization in Canadian provinces are associated with:

- Fewer deaths from treatable and preventable causes, and fewer deaths overall.
- A decrease in both greenhouse gas emissions and particulate matter (air pollution) per capita.
- The very richest take home a smaller percentage of total income and the overall income distribution across all income groups is more equal.

The one result where unionization wasn't associated with a positive outcome was on poverty. Contrary to earlier findings on this (Haddow 2014), poverty was not statistically related to unionization rates. A possible explanation for this is that unions tend not to represent workers at the lowest end of the income spectrum. In part, this can be viewed as a success of the union movement in increasing the wages of their members.

However, it speaks to the difficulties unions have in organizing low-wage workers, including the strong resistance of low-wage employers to unionization drives. It might also mean that unions may not be working effectively as political actors—say, on minimum wage campaigns or welfare spending.

Overall, the findings suggest there is a perfectly good rationale for governments to make it easier to unionize more workers. Unions are good for members. But they are also associated with better health, a cleaner environment, and less inequality—good things for everyone.

Mark Hudson is professor of Sociology and coordinator of the Global Political Economy Program at University of Manitoba. Ian Hudson is associate head of the Economics and Society Stream in the Economics Department at University of Manitoba. Anupam Das is a professor of Economics in the Department of Economics, Justice, and Policy Studies at Mount Royal University.

# YOUR CCPA Get to know **Katie Loftus**

POSITION: DEVELOPMENT
OFFICER, MONTHLY
AND LEGACY GIVING
YEARS WITH THE CCPA: 12

Your main role with the CCPA is to work with legacy donors. What's that like? I have always been drawn to more mature donors who are at a point where they're thinking about their capacity to have a positive impact on the future financial stability of organizations they've invested in during their lifetime. If an organization has good leadership, legacy gifts are truly valued (legacy gifts are just future donations that donors set up during their lifetime that are realized after death, such as a gift in your will or life insurance). CCPA leadership recognizes the power of these incredible deferred donations. I absolutely love working with donors and making sure they feel appreciated now for their future generosity and can rest easy that their legacy gifts to the CCPA are set up properly—it fills me up!

How did your family influence the path you've taken? When I was 10 years old, I was shovelling watermelon into my mouth on a very hot day at the cottage as my dad transplanted TINY pine seedlings. Surrounded by tons of towering pines, it seemed like a waste of time. I asked him why he was bothering and he said that he wanted to help ensure that there would be shade for my kids if I chose to become a parent. Now 45 years later, my daughters are 13 and 17 and those seedlings that he moved closer to the cottage are keeping it cool by taking over from older trees that have fallen down



over the years. Without realizing it, my Dad instilled and nurtured this mentality in me, which is probably why I was drawn to legacy giving 30 years ago when I started my career in this sector. It takes time to build a substantial legacy revenue stream that is consistent. Thanks to my dear old dad, I find it extremely satisfying to know I'm helping donors have an impact on the future stability of organizations they care about.

What are you reading or watching these days? I just finished *The Bees* by Laline Paull. I grabbed it from my friend Karen's community library on her front lawn. These little creatures are one of nature's heroes. It was an interesting read about a beehive as a dystopian society

where obedience is essential and what happens when someone dares to think differently. I love a book with an underdog hero, even if it's a bee!

When you're not at work, how do you decompress? Being outside in any season is my happy place and I'm a massive extrovert so social time of any kind charges me up. I was a competitive swimmer growing up and still love to hit the pool or river regularly. One of the highlights of my year is participating in the long distance swim at our cottage every August. I love walks with my chocolate lab Ginger, my hubby, daughters and friends. It doesn't take much to make me happy—sipping on a glass of wine while my hubby makes hot sauce or connecting spontaneously with friends and family is always fun.

What gives you hope? Seeing the world through the eyes of my daughters. There is so much work to be done to make the world a better place and it must be very overwhelming to their generation but I feel a strength in them around feeling they have the ability to be heard and I love that. My husband and I have worked very hard to encourage them to be good people and I'm proud to see them slowly evolve into what we hope will be caring and participatory adults who see beyond their own small worlds and recognize that they're part of a much bigger community on this beautiful but fragile planet of ours.

# Meet Jim Stanford

#### Progressive economist and long-time CCPA monthly donor

You've been a donor for 23 years, but also a long-time CCPA research associate. What brought you into the CCPA fold? I first connected with the CCPA in the late 1980s, when I was starting out as a progressive economist. The CCPA published some of my early research on the threats of Canada-U.S. free trade. So the CCPA was very important in starting my career. It's ironic that 35 years later we're still dealing with the threats of free trade.

What has the CCPA done lately that's made you feel proud to be a supporter? As a source of credible progressive research, the CCPA is utterly essential right now. On one hand, we face an existential threat to Canada's sovereignty from Donald Trump. On the other hand, we currently have weak progressive representation in parliament. Enter the CCPA: we'd be lost without it.

Tell us about someone who was a big influence on you early in life. I've been thinking a lot lately about Buzz Hargove, former Canadian Auto Workers President and a great mentor to me, who passed away in June. He and then-CAW Research Director Sam Gindin hired me as a fresh PhD graduate in 1994 to do economic analysis for the union (which later co-founded Unifor). Buzz was passionate, strategic, controversial, and effective. He built



a stronger union and won incredible victories for CAW members and all workers. From a personal perspective, he was extremely generous in supporting my role as a left economist in broader public debates, beyond my direct CAW work. He also strongly believed in family, and always cared deeply for the families of his fellow unionists.

Tell us about someone you find particularly inspiring right now.

Speaking of families, I get amazing inspiration from my spouse (Donna) and my two kids (Ché and Thea).

All three have important day jobs which contribute to positive change in society. But all three also commit volunteer time to progressive projects in their communities. I

learn from, and am inspired by, their personal commitments to building a better world.

What have you read or watched to keep your mind busy and your soul fed lately? I am such a nerd, I am literally never happier than when buried in a spreadsheet, compiling economic evidence to support a progressive campaign. So I don't actually read much beyond economic literature and newspapers. How pathetic! I do like the occasional action movie-preferably at Vancouver's Dunbar Theatre, which has the world's best popcorn.

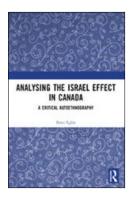
What is your hope for the future? Name one policy the government should adopt today that would make people's lives better. As a labour economist, I've always argued that human labour—anything we do with our brawn and our brains to produce the goods and services we need—is the engine of economic and social progress. If government committed to a genuine vision of full employment, whereby everyone willing and able could quickly find decent work that used their skills and energies to the fullest, we'd enter a new era of abundance and fairness. Rejecting engineered unemployment, and committing to decent employment as the right of every worker, would turn society upside down.



A life insurance gift is a charitable donation that you can arrange now to help the CCPA in the future. Making a life insurance gift is not just for the wealthy or the elderly. It's a legacy gift that makes a special impact. To ask about how you can leave a gift of life insurance 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.

Clare Mian

# 77 years after Palestine partition, Palestinian lives still don't matter



# ANALYSING THE ISRAEL EFFECT IN CANADA: A CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY PETER EGLIN

Routledge, 2024

eter Eglin, professor emeritus of Sociology at Wilfrid Laurier University, combines the rigour of academic research with the impassioned force of investigative journalism in his book, Analysing the Israel Effect in Canada: A Critical Autoethnography.

He is observer-participant as he documents and analyzes his 30-year experience (1990-2020) with Canadian news media and universities, where public criticism of Israel's oppressive treatment of Palestinian people is systematically silenced.

Listening to Noam Chomsky's 1988 Massey Lectures, Eglin experienced an epiphany. He realized that the tragedy unfolding in Palestine-Israel was not a symmetrical conflict of equals, but the "murderous oppression of the Palestinians" by the overwhelmingly superior power of the state of Israel.

He opens his book with the question "What is the life of a Palestinian

worth?" and builds a persuasive case that "Palestinian lives have no value for the guardians of truth, freedom and justice, of morality, order and good government, in this country."

Eglin locates the source of the "Israel effect" in a three-tiered model of "propaganda production" known as *hasbara*. Unique to the Israeli government in its form and focus, hasbara is a communications network that creates and controls news and opinion regarding Israeli politics.

Tier One of hasbara encompasses the Israeli state apparatus, from the prime minister to key cabinet departments, such as the Ministry of Strategic Affairs and the Department for Jewish Zionist Education. These agencies curate the hermetic image of Israel as a democratic Jewish state that lives under constant threat and must, therefore, use its considerable military and geopolitical strength to secure its existence.

Eglin reserves his harshest condemnation for his own colleagues.

Tier Two is what Eglin calls the "Canadian Israel advocacy nexus" (CIAN), which includes B'nai Brith, the Canadian Council for Israel and Jewish Advocacy (CIJA), the Jewish Defence League, the Anti-Defamation league and the Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC). The work of the American version of CIAN was powerfully documented in the film, *The Lobby USA*.

Tier Three is the focus of Eglin's book and receives his most excoriating criticism: administrators and faculties of Canadian universities and managers, editors and columnists of Canadian media organizations—"the intellectuals in short".

He identifies two levels of complicity: active complicity, which simply reproduces hasbara messages, and passive complicity (or self-censorship), which remains silent in the face of messages it knows to be false.

His first case study recounts his experience with the *Waterloo Record*, where the editor felt compelled to write a signed editorial in defence of an article Eglin had written for the paper. Eglin had described and condemned Israeli attacks on Palestinians, especially children.

In it, Eglin struck what should be, but is not, a dominant theme in Palestine reporting: the staggering difference in the numbers of deaths and casualties between Palestinians and Israelis.

Columbia Professor Rashid Khalidi has said: "In sheer numerical terms, in brute numbers of bodies and properties destroyed there is absolutely nothing to compare between what the Zionists have done to Palestinians and what, in retaliation, Palestinians have done to the Zionists."

Eglin goes on to document his correspondence with the editors of the *Record* and coverage in the *Globe and Mail* to show a clear example of Tier Three complicity with *hasbara*: minimizing the horrific destruction perpetrated on Palestinians while calling on Hamas to learn lessons from it.

The murder of Dr. Izzeldin's Abuelaish's three daughters in their own home while he was calling for assistance as Israeli soldiers raided his neighbourhood did not elicit the international outrage that such a horrific act deserved.

Eglin reserves his harshest condemnation for his own colleagues. He finds them shockingly wanting in their responsibility to tell the truth and expose lies. In supporting Palestinian students on American historian Norman Finkelstein's appearance at Laurier and Palestinian students' protests against Israeli occupations of Gaza, Eglin was the target of attack by the university administration, which used the undefined concern about "public safety" to censor Palestinian students.

Few colleagues spoke in his defense. The conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism, enabled by the International Holocaust Remembrance Association's definition of antisemitism, is used in place of rigorous study of key historical events that clearly demonstrate the continued oppression of the Palestinian people by the Israeli state (eg. 1948, 1967, the failure of Oslo Accords).

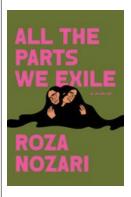
Eglin's tone is blunt, sarcastic, sad and angry. By his admirable standards of moral and intellectual integrity, it could not be otherwise. His courageous book should give courage to Canadians to speak up against a genocide that must be stopped.

Clare Mian is a retired educator, and is now a writer and student in Toronto.

#### **Book review**

E.R. Zarevich

# A first-generation Iranian Canadian tells all



### ALL THE PARTS WE EXILE ROZA NOZARI

Knopf Canada, February 2025

was born in Canada. I was raised in Canada. I identify as a Canadian and I've never known any other country as home. When I picked up Roza Nozari's memoir of Iranian-to-Canadian immigration All the Parts We Exile, I questioned how much I would be able to relate to this author, as I imagined our experiences are vastly different. When I finished the book, I realized we meet somewhere in the middle.

Although I have never been challenged to assimilate into another culture, I do understand the process of struggling to establish an identity outside of the family unit and familial expectations. That is universal rite of passage. The book starts out with Nozari at age 26. She is a first-generation Iranian Canadian woman and she is about to break from the family and move into her first Toronto apartment. Her conservative, hard-working mother has a very rigid idea of how her daughter should live and is appalled by the grubby homebase Nozari has chosen, "You'll wait until something better comes," Mom says to her adult offspring, leaving no space for argument. But Mom doesn't understand that "you'll wait" doesn't have the same authoritative power it might have had years before. Nozari has already decided, it's time to be herself and not just an extension of her mother, as much as she loves her mother.

As I read on, it became clearer that it took the author a lot of time and a lot of soul searching to reach a point where she could feel secure entwining her Iranian identity with her Canadian one. Then, as she aged, she had to weave in her queer identity as well. It must have helped that she was a mature, observant individual growing up, and acutely aware from a young age of the survival skills she would need to obtain to live in society and avoid persecution. At the Canada-U.S. border, an adolescent Nozari and her father were stopped by an officer who singled them out for their skin colour and interrogated them both. Somehow, Nozari knew exactly how to answer, while her socially tactless father didn't. After 9/11, Nozari's family, along with thousands of other Muslim families, faced public hostility for their religion. Nozari endured that, too, with grace.

And then there were the years of coming to terms with her looks, as every adult (me included) has to do at some point, unless they have the resources to change their face or body. Through all the adversities they face, including the pain of being abandoned by Nozari's wayward father, Nozari and her mother consistently share one thing

in common in their difficult relationship: they have both been cruelly rejected for their "unattractive" appearances, by both Iranian and Western society. Before realizing she liked women, Nozari yearned for positive male attention, but didn't get it because of her ethnic features. Her mother, meanwhile, was still hurting by the rude comments made by relatives in her childhood. As Nozari deducts, political history is chiefly to blame for their despair:

"For Iranians, the legacy of modernization, imperialism, and colonialism—amongst other intersecting systems—had shifted our beauty standards to align with Europeans and whiteness during the 1900s. But before then, there was a radically different aesthetic. During the Qajar dynasty in the late 1800s, women with thick eyebrows and moustaches were deemed so beautiful that those with only faint moustaches would paint darker wisps of hair above their lips."

This is, overall, a brave book, and I commend Nozari for including numerous awkward episodes that other authors might purposely omit to save face, like the time she catfished a girl while pretending to be a boy on MSN Messenger. She also doesn't shy away from describing her encounters with misogyny and racism with unfiltered truth. There is no sense that she is exaggerating anything. I believe her stories about sexist men especially. I've met these men too.

I can imagine it took the author immense courage to assemble a share-all like this that encompasses everything. Imperfect family dynamics, the quiet brutality of homesickness, chaotic emerging adulthood, messy sexuality exploration, and the countless safety rules required to function as a woman, a targeted minority, and a LGBTQ+ person in an adopted country. When she titled this book *All the Parts We Exile*, she really meant all the parts, of the body and the mind.

E.R. Zarevich is a journalist and cultural critic from Burlington, Ontario.

#### **Book excerpt**

Nora Loreto

# Sky's the limit on oil and gas projects



#### CORPORATE CONTROL: CANADA IN DECLINE BOOK TWO NORA LORETO

Dundurn Press, May 2025

ifty years after Mel Watkins's work on Harold Innis's theory, Rabble.ca celebrated with a series of articles that examined how staple theory was still relevant in the Canada of 2013. While Watkins was writing in a moment when Canada's economy was not so reliant on natural resources, writers in the series could not as easily say the same thing.

In fact, [Thomas] Gunton, who collaborated with Watkins, argued, "Canada is currently embarking on one of the largest staple-based economic expansions in its history: including the rapid expansion of bitumen production in Alberta, and the planned development of liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports from B.C. The magnitude of this expansion is dramatic. Oil production is forecast to more than double from 2010 to 2020...and B.C. is contemplating at least five new LNG facilities involving \$98 billion in investment and a three-fold

increase in natural gas production by 2020."

Indeed, Canada boosted its oil exports from 1.7 million barrels per day in 1990 to 4.7 million barrels per day in 2019. Lending legitimacy to applying staple theory today, Canada's crude oil exports reached a record high in 2023. The largest increase was for bitumen—oil that comes from the tar sands and is too viscous to be easily flowed into a pipeline. A total of 65 per cent of Canada's bitumen is diluted with light oil to get it into a pipeline where it is sent to refineries, often overseas.

But the world is changing. Despite Canada's enthusiastic support for TMX, it isn't clear that China wants to pay to ship heavy crude from so far away. Oil executives are skeptical that oil infrastructure, like pipelines, are viable.

Cenovus CEO Jon McKenzie said on an earnings call on May 1, 2024, that he wouldn't be surprised if TMX was the last pipeline ever built in Canada.

The latest estimates are that peak oil, the highest level of oil production before it starts to decline, will happen sometime around 2030. If oil demand starts to decline, that is bad news for those tax projections that say we'll see \$2.8 billion from TMX by 2045.

But there's nothing to worry about for shareholders in the short-term. Cenovus posted a massive profit jump in the first quarter of 2024: \$1.18 billion, up from \$636 million in the first quarter of 2023. And that was without the expanded capacity of the TMX.



Excavating oil sands in Alberta / iStock

The sky's the limit on oil and gas projects and companies can thank the steadfast support of the Canadian government.

If history repeats itself first as tragedy and then as farce, we are squarely in the farcical economic period. Canada's economy has swung dramatically back to exploiting natural resources, bringing us back to a time when staples dominated our economic activity.

Economist Jim Stanford argues that this swing back toward dependency on staples was the final step of Canada's adoption of neoliberal economic policy. But where a national transportation line like a railway was built as tragedy upon tragedy, today, the TMX is far closer to farce. It is a joke that we have come so far as a country only to fall back on ripping things out of the earth and selling them to foreign markets.

Stanford connects this shift to free trade as the wave of mass deindustrialization was not met with renewed industrial or research-driven industries as had been promised. With economic changes in the post-9/11 period and China's rapid industrialization, expanding oil production in Canada meant fast money. The price surged past \$100 per barrel and oil companies had a renewed lease on life: they dramatically increased the output and processing capacity of Alberta's heavy crude and, voilà, Canada's economy had its natural resources engine back. This necessitated updating transportation infrastructure, created spinoff jobs around the tar sands, and made some people unimaginably rich.

There have also been booms in mining, agriculture, and other staples while sectors like tourism, transportation, and business services were in decline. Stanford puts it like this,

At the turn of the century, value-added products (including transportation equipment, machinery and consumer goods) accounted for over 60 per cent of total Canadian exports. A decade later, that share had fallen to under one-third. Unprocessed or barely-processed resource products once again accounted for the lion's share of total exports (over two-thirds). Whereas for several post-war decades (including the 1990s) Canada had gradually escaped its legacy as "hewers of wood and drawers of water," our staples reliance was strongly reconstituted —with the additional moniker "scrapers of tar" added to our list of national job descriptions.

Stanford argues that this triggered a political transformation. The dominance of oil and gas in Canada has fundamentally transformed politics too. Oil and gas has built around it a culture that instills pride and support from people connected to it. The industry has convinced people that oil and gas can actually be an identity, and cultureless communities, hollowed out by a lack of an industrial policy that includes cultural production, are more than keen to adopt the identity.

This has become critical in people's political formation, and oil and gas—the industry and the identity—has become a political kingmaker. The influence is most acute in Alberta, but it's also strong in the rest of Canada, and it stands in for a coherent political orientation that might demand something more than just the right to empty the earth of bitumen and calling that a cultural identity.

Nora Loreto is a writer and activist from Quebec City. She is also the CCPA's board chair.

Joseph Fantauzzi

# How Gramsci's Modern Prince could inform radical change in Canada



ERICH FROMM AND LEFT STRATEGY: NEW PATHS TOWARD RADICAL TRANSFORMATION EDS: JOSEPH FANTAUZZI, MAOR LEVITIN, TERRY MALEY

Palgrave Macmillan, 2025

n 2022, I participated in a conference dedicated to reflecting on the role of Marxist and humanist psychoanalyst Erich Fromm's body of work, and its relevance for Leftist strategy today. Psychoanalysis is not a primary research focus of mine, but Fromm was a prolific writer and throughout his work, he used his knowledge of social psychology as a lens to critically analyze the politics and problems of modern society.

My research, for years, however, has drawn on theories developed by Marxist theorist and Communist Party of Italy Leader Antonio Gramsci, and comparing how Fromm and Gramsci critically examined capitalist society, and what to do about it, seemed productive. Ultimately, an edited volume emerged from that conference.

In my chapter of that book, I argue that Gramsci's vision of the socialist political party, 'The Modern Prince' as he called it (alluding to Machiavelli's political treatise, *The Prince*), remains the best organizing tool for the working class. Gramsci's Modern Prince is not simply an electoral vessel. It is an instrument to develop robust political practice, informed by an explicitly socialist ideology, and grounded in a consciousness of, and for, the interests of the working class.

Fromm had an alternative vision: one that de-emphasized the importance of the political party in favour of the development of more autonomous organizational forms he believed would permit greater individual self-actualization.

If we understand the state as a concentration of class interests, both economic and intellectual, which are reproduced through processes of consent and coercion, effective political counter-strategy has to simultaneously act to develop socialism in the present, with an eye to toward what could be a very different socialist future.

While it must have a comprehensive social organizing role, I argue a Modern Prince in Ontario could not eschew participation in elections today, and the potential concessions that could be won for the workers from the province's capitalist state.

I think this is where Fromm's optimistic ideas about re-humanizing society by de-commodifying existence, and refusing the alienating misery that accompanies marketizing everything necessary to thrive, can help us. A Modern Prince could provide the organizational capacity to transform such ideas

into practice, while at the same time deeply adhering us to each other.

The transition from today, in which working people find it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, to a realm of freedom in a socialist future, is not, in sober assessment, a one-day project. But such a change could emerge from the building up of work and culture that both captures the hands and minds of those who want a more equitable life and are willing to contest capitalist imperatives.

I argue a Modern Prince in Ontario, with socialist intellectuals drawn from the working class's ranks playing a prominent role, could be an effective organizational influence on the development of province's working class, as workers become increasingly aware of their own historical mission to lead humanity into the realm of freedom:

"As for the concrete lessons we can draw from Fromm and Gramsci's work, in the specific case of Ontario, the neoliberal consensus that has swallowed all of the parties that have formed government in the province's history has left the working class at an intersection—it must determine whether it wishes to be led or to lead. If the latter is chosen, intellectuals can and must play a role in the movement toward a different future and the rejection of an unleashed and intensifying capitalist barbarism that seems to know no limit. Multi-faceted fronts in a conscious war of position are urgently needed to undermine the crises facing workers in Ontario. Fromm's arguments that people should not face starvation as

coercion to work, and for de-commodifying necessities and transportation as initial steps, are solid and could actually be introduced through existing policy instruments by electing governments friendly to such reforms. These are issues that the working class has historically taken on (e.g., emergency deliveries of free food during the COVID-19 pandemic in southern Ontario) and, if the capitalist state refuses to move on them, there is no reason why disciplined workers could not increase the scale of this type of provisioning. Such ideas advance a more human society at the social level, and potentially capture a wide range of subjective reasons why people are unable to work. If coordinated by the organizational capacities of a Modern Prince, initiatives such as these could also form the basis of dual power, and ultimately social transformation. At present, Gramsci's Modern Prince emerges as a more robust political organizing form than Fromm's autonomous Groups and Clubs for the working class, both in Ontario and societies elsewhere in which the state remains the primary political organizing form. While working to build counterhegemony, the working class cannot abandon existing state institutions as a terrain of political contestation—even if only to extract reform. Workers need to critically examine their options to determine which parties will actually move toward a more humanized society. The Modern Prince must work to be a rock for the working class, and yet open, conscious, and disciplined enough to de-prioritize historical ideological conflicts that do not run counter to larger aims in the collective will, so that workers will willingly direct energy into it."

As we know, the desperate need for transformational politics does not only trouble Ontario. The reconstitution of economics and politics since the 1970s toward neoliberal regimes of accumulation and state policy

has resulted in significant realignments around the world and reshaped everyday life.

This neoliberal moment totally permeated societies it was allowed to infiltrate—Ontario included. Yes, there have been periodic flashes of resilience by the organized Left and progressives. However, containment by reactionary ruling forces bent on maintaining the status quo—or intensifying its effects—along with the abandonment by some organizations of confrontational tactics has left many social movements in retreat.

This book emerges from the contributing authors assessing the present conditions around the world and insisting that radical change is of the utmost necessity. The authors, who span the disciplines of political science, psychotherapy, critical public policy, and sociology all work to advance this ethos by grappling with ideas for transformation advanced by the contemporary Left; by interrogating the psychological and ecological damage done by neoliberal capitalism; and by subjecting Fromm's ideas for transforming society to critical scrutiny.

The contributors do not all agree about how helpful Fromm's work is today. Those differences work to distill the best of what Fromm, his interlocutors, and those placed in conversation with him can offer for radical transformation at the present point. The book will appeal to people who are dismayed by a necrotic neoliberal capitalism, people who refuse to concede despite the dire conditions facing workers, humanity and the Earth, and people who a demand a better future for everyone.

Joseph Fantauzzi is a PhD candidate in the Department of Politics at York University, where he researches the consequences for the Ontario working class of state-encouraged financialized capitalism. He is a former research assistant with the CCPA's Ontario office, and previously worked as a newspaper journalist.



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# THE GOOD NEWS PAGE

#### **Compiled by Elaine Hughes**

## These Canadian rocks may be the oldest on Earth

Scientists have identified what could be the oldest rocks on Earth from a rock formation on the eastern shore of Hudson Bay in Quebec. The Nuvvuagittuq Greenstone Belt has long been known for its ancient rocks—plains of streaked gray stone, but researchers disagree on exactly how old they are. Work from two decades ago suggested the rocks could be 4.3 billion years old, placing them in the earliest period of Earth's history. The Associated Press. June 26, 2025

## First shots of the universe from largest camera ever built

Located on a mountain top in Chile, the Vera C. Rubin Observatory—the largest digital camera ever built—recently released its first shots of the universe, revealing colourful nebulas, stars, and galaxies. The observatory will survey the southern sky for the next 10 years, hoping to image 20 billion galaxies, and discover new asteroids and other celestial objects.

The Associated Press, June 23, 2025

## Solar mini grid brings light and hope to Congo

Despite widespread poverty and the city's violent takeover by Congolese rebels early this year, new businesses are taking over in several Goma neighbourhoods as a small solar network takes root. Using renewable energy to benefit those most vulnerable to climate change, advocates believe it's a model that can be successful throughout the

Democratic Republic of Congo and beyond to electrify places where conflict and poverty have left people behind.

The Associated Press, July 2, 2025

## High Seas Treaty gains momentum

Eighteen additional countries have ratified the High Seas Treaty. Formally known as the Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, the treaty is the first legally binding agreement focused on protecting marine biodiversity in international waters which, beyond the jurisdiction of any single country, make up nearly two-thirds of the ocean and almost half the surface of the planet.

The Associated Press, June 12, 2025

### Chimps found treating each other's wounds

Chimpanzees in Uganda were found treating the injuries of other, unrelated chimps, including those caught in hunting snares. While chimpanzees have previously been found applying medical care, the practice has rarely been recorded in the wild. The new research, published in Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution, suggests mutual care is more widespread than was thought. Yale Environment 360, May 14, 2025

# How gardening can help you live better for longer

Research shows gardeners seem to experience gains in the nerve levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein that plays an important role in the growth and survival of neurons. They also receive boosts to their vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), a protein associated with improving cognitive functioning. One 2006 study from the University of New South Wales found that men and women in their sixties who gardened on a daily basis had a 36 per cent lower risk of developing

dementia than those who didn't. Gardening has also been shown to improve attention, lessen stress, reduce falls and lower reliance on medications.

BBC News, May 16, 2025

## California's Yurok Tribe gets back ancestral lands

According to a recent land-back conservation deal along the lower Klamath River, roughly 73 square miles of ancestral homelands, once belonging to California's Yurok Tribe, have been returned to them, more than doubling the tribe's land holdings. It's the largest such deal in California history.

The Associated Press, June 6, 2025

#### More than just baseball

On the last June weekend, 50 Indigenous baseball players representing 31 American tribes and one Canadian athlete gathered in Atlanta, Georgia for the fourth annual Native American All-Star Showcase hosted by the Atlanta Braves. Over the course of the two days, the athletes took part in a pro-style workout, heard from former professional players and coaches, and played in a showcase game. The players got an opportunity to be in front of coaches and scouts who may not otherwise get a chance to see them. ICT, July 4, 2025



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"When regional alienation festers, it can distort our national unity. Reactions to separatist talk in Alberta across Canada is likely to generate a host of reactions: indifference, sympathy, hostility and everything in between. The way Canadians respond to Alberta now may shape how strong this country will be a generation from now."

—Eric Adams, constitutional scholar, University of Alberta