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# **FIGHTING** for **CLIMATE** **JUSTICE** and **JOBS**

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# ABOUT SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

## What We Stand For

- An end to poverty wages; raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, as a step to a living wage
- A 35 hour working week without loss of pay
- A living income for those unable to work
- Reverse the cuts and privatization of public services
- Fully funded, high quality, free public education from early childhood to university
- Massive public investment in health care, child care, education, affordable housing, clean energy and mass public transit
- Phase out the tar-sands and nuclear power, with retraining and good union jobs for displaced workers
- Higher taxes on the rich and corporations
- Democratic unions run by and for the members, with elected union officials paid the same wages as those they represent
- End discrimination – full equality for all
- Equal rights for immigrants and refugees
- The right to self-determination and self-government for all Indigenous peoples, and respect for historical treaties and resource rights
- Defend the right of Québec sovereignty; for a socialist Québec in a voluntary socialist Canadian association
- Scrap USMCA and other exploitative trade deals
- Democratic public ownership of key sectors of the economy
- A socialist transformation of society to allow for the democratic planning of the economy based on the interests and needs of the overwhelming majority



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## Youth Strikes

### *Socialist Alternative Youth*



In 2019 waves of young people took to the streets across Canada, as part of a worldwide movement, demanding decisive government action on climate change. March saw strikes, from a huge strike of 150,000 in Montreal to gatherings of hundreds in many cities. The movement swelled to over a million (3% of all Canadians) marching in nearly 100 towns and cities on September 27. Vancouver had another large demo of 20,000 in October, when Greta Thunberg spoke. Numbers were lower at November's rallies, but still drew thousands to demos across the country demanding real action – not just more talking at the UN Climate Conference in Madrid.

The climate strikes, and the Ontario student walk-outs of over 100,000 at 700 schools in April against Doug Ford's attacks on education, mark an important change. Young people know that they are inheriting a world of worse living conditions and environmental disaster. Wages for workers under 25 are half of those for workers over 25. Canadian students collectively owe over \$28 billion in student loans. It is significant that young people are looking to more radical tactics like strikes to make change.

Socialist Alternative Youth participated in all Vancouver's marches. We talked to hundreds of young people about the link between climate disaster and capitalism, and why we need a socialist alternative. We held a lively public meeting on this. We have established a club at Simon Fraser University. A Toronto member founded a social justice club at her high school and joined the marches. We want to strengthen the climate movement and debate what kind of world is both possible and necessary: a socialist one that puts planet and people before profit.



# Ontario: Struggle Needed

David Holmes and Tim Heffernan

In 2019, Ford's government tightened austerity. A modest but growing fightback has developed, with some successes in slowing Ford down. The Tories justified austerity by exaggerating the deficit, claiming a \$15 billion shortfall, double the true figure according to the auditor-general.

Conservatives (and Liberals) exaggerate deficits, or create them with tax cuts for the rich and corporations – cutting revenues. They “solve” this “crisis” by slashing programs and services. Ontario now has the lowest personal and corporate taxes, and also the lowest per capita revenue, of any province.

The Tories' cuts target the poor and low-paid, cutting \$1 billion from children, youth and social services. They will end pharmacare for youth, throw people off social assistance by restricting access to disability, and force people on disability to jump through hoops to keep their assistance. They've capped pay increases for public service workers at 1% - below inflation. Library funding is slashed 50%, 3,500 school teachers are being cut, funding per student has been cut and class sizes are increasing, and they've removed rent control from housing built after November 2018.

In the 1990s, when the Harris Tories were in power, pressure from workers and community members forced unions to form labour-community coalitions province-wide, which organized Days of Action. These involved one-day rotating general strikes that shut workplaces and brought out hundreds of thousands of workers, including 250,000 in Toronto, Ontario's largest demonstration ever. The Days of Action were leading to a province-wide general strike but union leaders and the NDP saw radical labour and community militancy as a threat, so killed the movement in favour of a purely electoral strategy,



which failed.

Since Ford's election, the labour movement has been asleep at the switch. At the 2019 Ontario Federation of Labour convention, the leadership blocked any reference to a general strike, preferring a court challenge to Ford's 1% wage cap. Rank-and-file frustration doubled the 2018 vote for the left-wing slate's presidential candidate, Barry Conway, to 36%.

Labour leaders betray workers by failing to mobilize mass action against Ford's cuts. Legal action may be useful, but is no substitute for mobilizing workers. Growing popular resistance has blunted some of the attacks with teachers and education workers refusing to accept rollbacks. In an attempt to placate and demobilize them, the government has made half-concessions like raising class size limits to 25, instead of 28. Teachers aren't backing down, 95.5% of secondary school teachers voted for a strike. There have been a series of one-day strikes, which could lead to a full-scale strike unless the government backs down. The rest of the labour movement needs to follow this example to defeat Ford's attacks.

## Canadian Options for Humanity

Rocco Trigueros

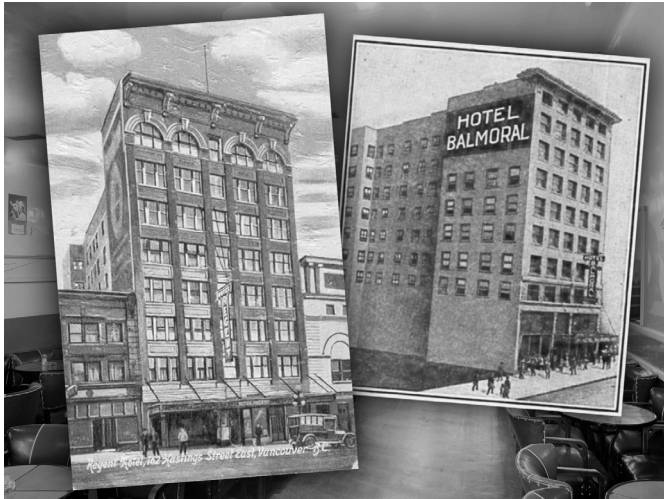
In December, Carlos Gregorio Hernandez, a 16 year-old Guatemalan migrant died in a small Texas holding cell, after lying on the floor unconscious for almost five hours. Nobody offered medical help or seemed to notice how he initially was shaking and stumbling desperately. A few hours earlier a nurse had checked him and confirmed that he had severe flu and a high fever, and strongly recommended constant supervision and, if necessary, he be taken to hospital. Carlos died unattended and even worse, simply ignored. The lack of medical attention, basic hygiene practices, mistreatment of minors and sexual abuse of detainees that has plagued the 200 new detention centres opened during Trump's administration,

contradicts the international standards described by the Canada-United States Safe Third Country Agreement. Carlos is the 26th fatality.

Does Canada have options other than quietly observing the abuse of refugees? Yes. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his government could immediately re-evaluate the Safe Third Country Agreement, or simply cease to implement it, due to its multiple violations. This certainly could put pressure on the US government to look after the basic human rights of detainees in the daily practices of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency. There are options for Canada other than silence. Whether there is the will or interest from the Liberal government to stand up for or look after the vulnerable migrant population, seems to be already answered with a sad complicit negligence.

# Housing Victory in Vancouver

Nancy Trigueros and Bill Hopwood



Regent and Balmoral Hotels in better days

Housing activists in Vancouver won a small victory when two slum rental buildings were expropriated at the end of 2019. “Expropriation” in Canada describes “the right of the government (the Crown or one of its agencies) to legally take real property (land), that is in private hands and apply it for a greater public use or benefit.” However, Canadian governments have been reluctant to use this legal power.

The expropriation of two notoriously dilapidated SROs, the Balmoral and Regent hotels, by the City of Vancouver was an exceptional case. The reason was decades of criminal negligence and unsafe conditions for the tenants. Despite the huge number of violations, the hotel owners continued to operate, and profit from people’s desperate need for housing. Things changed when tenants and activists decided enough was enough and demanded the city take decisive action.

Imagine if expropriation law was applied to privately-owned, not in use or misused (e.g. slum landlords) land and buildings to produce beneficial outcomes such as social housing. A good place to start would be the former social-housing complex at Little Mountain in Vancouver. The 15-acre site was home to 224 families. The BC government privatized it in 2008, a gift to Holborn developers who didn’t pay a cent until 2013. The homes were demolished and the site remains undeveloped. BC should take back the land to build social housing.

Governments don’t want to upset the big private landowners and developers. Vancouver’s hotel expropriation took years of campaigning by activists and tenants before the City acted.

There is a housing crisis across Canada. PEI’s vacancy rate is 0.3%. Toronto has 9,200 homeless people, nearly doubling in a decade. Rents are rising everywhere – faster than any wage increases. Canada has the highest housing costs compared to income of any country. One of the drivers of high housing

costs is speculation on land; in Vancouver land values have doubled in four years. Vancouver’s unaffordable housing, to rent or to buy, will get worse with Amazon’s decision to locate 10,000 jobs in the city. Amazon is one of the drivers of Seattle’s housing nightmare.

The solution is clear; use the existing expropriation law, along with taxes on the rich and developers to provide the land and funds to build social housing. Unfortunately, all levels of government – municipal, provincial and federal – remain wedded to private developers and the market. They will do nothing unless tenants, activists, unions and the community mobilize to force governments to build good quality social housing.

In Berlin there is a campaign, with wide support, to expropriate the large private rental landlords. As it becomes clearer that the market is causing the housing crisis, it is an idea that can catch on.



Little Mountain Housing - now an empty field

## Murder by Big Pharma

Jim Sugiyama

Since Purdue Pharma released OxyContin in 1996, nearly a half million Americans and Canadians have died from opiate overdoses. A coincidence?

Opiates are amongst the oldest of drugs. What’s special about OxyContin?

The difference was Purdue’s marketing, using medical professionals in the two countries’ different medical systems to essentially become legal traffickers of a dangerous product. Their strategy was a pyramid scheme, recruiting physicians through lavish information campaigns including sponsored seminars and meals, then using converts to recruit colleagues into becoming prescribers and recruiters. While opiates such as morphine have long been used to treat terminal malignant pain, marketing included creating the term “chronic non-malignant pain” to open a vast new market for OxyContin. The campaign was an overwhelming success, as prescriptions for this diagnosis grew ten-fold between 1997 and 2002. The big lie was that Oxycotin had only a 1% risk for addiction. It is now known that the risk ranges up to 50%.

# Hypocrisy towards Indigenous Peoples

Leslie Kemp

Despite all of the rhetoric about reconciliation, not much has changed in Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. It is still about the land. The state will go to almost any length to secure access to resources and land for capitalist industry.

The Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs are a traditional government structured on a matrilineal basis that predates the band council system set up under the Indian Act. They have set up checkpoints and blocked the road to prevent the Coastal GasLink pipeline going through their territories.

Many Canadians were shocked at *The Guardian's* recent revelations about the RCMP's plans in January 2019 to enforce a court injunction and remove the blockade put up by the Wet'suwet'en. However, Marxists understand that the RCMP is an instrument of state oppression and the briefing notes prepared by the RCMP make this clear. Officers were encouraged to "use as much violence toward the gate as you want" and maintained that arrests would be necessary for "sterilizing [the] site."

Shiri Pasternak, of Ryerson University's Yellowhead Institute, stated that "the Canadian government has tightened internal control over the surveillance of Indigenous peoples and more closely integrated industry and security imperatives, which has included sharing classified intelligence across law enforcement agencies and with industry actors."

Did Purdue Pharma kill? Not directly, but by flooding the market, spreading false information, encouraging indiscriminate opiate prescribing and hence, increased access to a highly addictive drug, it facilitated, promulgated and perpetuated the vicious cycle of pain, dependence and addiction. OxyContin reached the streets soon after its release. When Health Canada restricted Oxycontin, many dependent or addicted patients turned to the streets, and encountered fentanyl and carfentanyl, far deadlier.

The result – 14,000 opioid deaths in Canada over the past four years with an over representation of men between 25 and 45, many in trades, and people who are Indigenous, homeless, African-Canadian, sex trade workers and LGBTQ.

For decades, life expectancy rose in the US and Canada; opioid deaths have reversed this trend, especially for men. If such a dramatic increase in mortality was caused by any other product, governments would ensure a safe supply – but not with opioids.

But weep not for the Big Pharma oligarchs. Chastised for their role in the opiate crisis, the Sacklers of Purdue have withdrawn over \$10 billion from their company and are now happily marketing naloxone, a treatment for opiate overdose.



An illustration of government hypocrisy towards Indigenous peoples was the BC NDP's introduction, with great fanfare, of Bill 41, *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, which was passed into law in November 2019. Article 27 reads: "States shall establish and implement, in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned, a fair, independent, impartial, open and transparent process, giving due recognition to indigenous peoples' laws, traditions, customs and land tenure systems, to recognize and adjudicate the rights of indigenous peoples pertaining to their lands, territories and resources, including those which were traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used. Indigenous peoples shall have the right to participate in this process."

Yet just two months later, on December 31, the BC Supreme Court granted another injunction allowing Coastal GasLink to access Wet'suwet'en territory, over the objections of the Wet'suwet'en chiefs. The 670 kilometer pipeline, approved by the BC NDP, will extend from northeastern BC to Kitimat, where a \$18 billion liquefied natural-gas export plant is under construction.

A fundamental contradiction exists between Indigenous views of land and those of capitalist industry. For industry, it's about private property and extracting as much value from the land as possible to make a profit. Governments, as allies of industry, structure the laws and use the police and courts to ensure profits for industry. Indigenous peoples have used the land in a sustainable way for millennia so it, in turn, can sustain future generations. A socialist world would use the land and resources sustainably so that future generations have their needs met without destroying the planet. We stand in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en and other Indigenous peoples who are struggling for their future and the future of generations to come.

# When Workers Fight they Win

Nadia Revelo

1,500 hotel workers in UNITE HERE Local 40 won dignity and job security in a battle against global corporations that rule the most luxurious hotels in downtown Vancouver. The two-month strike, the longest in the city's hotel industry, demonstrated the power of unions when they have determination to win and a fighting strategy. The workers, uniting recent immigrants and Canadian-born, defeated the corporations and their goal to transform full-time positions into precarious part-time or on-call jobs. Workers demanded "One Job is Enough" and "Contracts."

Given the panorama of precariousness, discrimination and sexual harassment, unionized workers began a year-long strategy of information, education and action that resulted in hotel workers voting overwhelmingly for the strike. Simultaneously, it activated the powerful solidarity of workers. Unions such as BCGEU, the Labour Council and BC Federation of Labour, Vancouver's left party – COPE, the NDP, Vancouver Tenants' Union, Socialist Alternative and social organizations all supported the strike. From September to November, workers and supporters held daily 12-hour pickets, held loud and lively demonstrations in front of the luxury hotels, and got organizations to cancel bookings. All this was vital for victory.



Workers at the Hyatt Regency, Four Seasons, Pinnacle Harbourfront and Westin Bayshore won in October. The Rosewood Georgia, Canada's top luxury hotel, took another month to concede. The new agreements include wage increases up to 25%, workload reductions, improvements in benefits, innovative sexual harassment protection, workplace safety reforms and job protection. Tessie, a Pinnacle hotel worker and committee leader said: "Union is not only an insurance, but also it is similar to a gym; you must pay dues, but you have to go and exercise to become strong." Socialist Alternative was proud to actively support hotel workers as part of the fight for workers' rights.

## What is Happening with Jobs in Canada?

Daniel Petrovic and Bill Hopwood

Canada's jobs are up and down like a yo-yo. StatsCan reported that there were 72,000 less jobs in November, but in December there were 35,000 more.

A year ago the Canadian economy was slowing and then in the first nine months of 2019 employment picked up, although overall growth remained sluggish. This slow growth suggests that increasing employment cannot continue. A world recession would cause major job losses.

In 2019 there was modest increase in wages, after years of no significant real growth. Between 1992 and 2019, wage growth in Canada averaged 2.2% growing just slightly faster than inflation; which averaged 1.78% over the same period.

Within the overall growth in jobs, there were continuing long-term trends of decline. Natural resources' employment was down 29,000 jobs in the year to December 2019. Utilities shed 15,000 jobs and manufacturing continued its long downward path, with the loss of another 40,000 jobs.

The main growth areas in Canada were: retail, finance and related activities, professional services, health and education. Construction was up, but it is

very dependent on the housing boom (or bubble).

Last year Ontario had the largest growth in employment, up 240,000, by 3.3%. PEI also shot up, with a much smaller population, by 6% adding 4,000 jobs. Most other provinces had modest increases (between 0.2 and 1.5%) or no change, with the exceptions of Alberta, down 0.2%, and Newfoundland, down a sharp 2.6%.

The decline in resources – which includes forestry, fishing, mining, oil and gas – hit smaller and rural communities. Both these sectors and manufacturing have traditionally had a more male workforce. These trends help explain some of the alienation in western Canada, which is more dependent on resources.

The decline in manufacturing and resources employment, and the vulnerability of construction, are good reasons for Canada to rapidly adopt a program to transition to renewable energy and energy efficiency. Such a program is vital for the climate but is also important for long-term and good quality employment. However, the bosses show no sign of caring about the climate or jobs. Perhaps a socialist Green New Deal is what is needed.

# Life of a Customer Servant

Seamus Granger

What can I say about customer service? After 13 years as a customer service rep, I suppose a lot, but I'm struggling to recall anything. Perhaps it's a coping mechanism, lose yourself and be that fake empathetic voice in the customer's ear. Sometimes they even ask if they are speaking to a robot, sometimes I have to ask myself the same.

I do know that we can't tell them their bill went up \$5 for the second time this year because the company's revenue was falling short of expectations. No, we say it's to "ensure a world-class customer experience." When the customer responds with an hour-long verbal assault, we must accept it, never raising our tone or hanging up. If we did, we would be put through an investigative meeting and asked insulting questions like: "How would you feel if you were the customer?" How would I feel? Not like I had the right to abuse a worker who had no say in the increase.

What makes things even worse is the fact our entire workday is monitored. Our screen records every call, mouse click, keystroke, and bathroom break, all timed and sifted through to find outliers.

By the end of each day I am mentally exhausted, I dread having to answer my own phone. Sometimes I even catch myself talking to my friends in that phony empathetic voice, and I have to ask myself: Have I been trained so well that I am actually becoming a customer service robot?



Not the Reality of Working as Customer Servant

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has a redesigned website:  
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# What Makes Me Angry: Serving Oil Gods



Larry Hyink

Watching the frenzied capitalist destruction of ordinary people's lives and the planet itself, I sometimes feel trapped in some old Hollywood movie where pagan priests dump a few virgins into an erupting volcano to appease the angry gods.

I'm thinking here of Alberta's Jason Kenney. The volcano in this case is the carbon tax and other pitifully inadequate climate policies of the federal government. The angry gods that Kenny serves are the owners of the oil and gas sector whose need for profit must be appeased and whose commandments must be obeyed lest they vent their wrath by giving their money to somebody else.

High Priest Jason, always sensitive to the moods of his divine masters, has responded with massive cuts to education, health and other services in Alberta thus financing massive cuts to taxes on corporations and the wealthy, plus a brand new publicly-funded temple to oil and gas in Ottawa so the industry gets more lobbying on the taxpayers tab. This is called "fiscal responsibility," an arcane term in capitalist religion meaning: "give all the money to the rich."

Among this scenario's sacrificial offerings: ordinary Albertans, who will pay with reduced living standards, and perhaps their lives, as public services deteriorate. It is too bad about their pain, but it might make the gods smile.

Kenny's approval rating has dropped. Only white guys over 55 and people making over \$100,000, obviously those who are holiest and most deserving, love his holy plan. Everyone else can go in the crater. Oddly, many Albertans seem to be feeling they're getting shafted.

Let's get real. Fossil fuels are sunset industries, unless we're following Australia to the burn pile. Working people in Alberta under capitalism have two brutal alternatives: a good job now leaving their kids an uninhabitable planet, or watching their jobs disappear and their kids starving today. A transition off fossil fuels needs a plan utilizing these fuels while alternatives are developed. It also needs to make sure that saving the planet maintains or improves the lives of working people.

Anybody thinking the gods of capital will give us any other plan than; "GIMME," is missing the whole point of the capitalist system. We need to put people ahead of profit, uniting to save our world and our children. We need a Socialist Alternative.

# No War with Iran

*Socialist Alternative*

Trump's decision to order the assassination of Iranian Major General Suleimani increases the risk of a new war in the Middle East. Days after, it led to the death of 176 innocent airline passengers, including 57 Canadians. As *The Guardian* wrote (Jan 10), "Trump's decision to assassinate Suleimani had terrible unintended consequences. It set off a tragic chain of events, culminating in a disaster in which the victims were innocent civilians."

While there may be a temporary calming, Trump's action increases tensions and instability in the region and risks spilling into serious conflict. The main victims of such a conflict will be ordinary people in the Middle East. While an all-out war or invasion of Iran appears unlikely, Socialist Alternative fully opposes any form of escalation.

Murdering Suleimani continues US's ongoing offensive against Iran, including withdrawing from the nuclear accord and imposing devastating sanctions. The US has been waging war in the region since 1990, and has an even longer history of supporting dictators and coups. The people of the region are the victims of brutal battles for power and control of natural resources among imperialist powers. After 30 years of war, suffering and instability, conditions for the people of the region are worse than ever.

In 2019, the people of Iraq and Lebanon overcame sectarian divisions with mass protests, against all the corrupt politicians. Iran saw mass protests against poverty and repression. The US actions will boost support for these regimes and undermine the popular movement for change, at least in the short term. But anger against the rulers will grow.

Suleimani was no friend of the poor or working class of the region. He had a long history of repressing protests. He was part of Iran's repressive regime that murdered hundreds of protesters in November and was linked to militias in Iraq that killed hundreds in last year's protests.

The recent mass protests in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and elsewhere show the power of the working class and poor people. Socialist Alternative stands in solidarity with them.



Suleimani's Funeral

# Fighting for Climate Justice



2019 saw huge youth-led protests around the world as climate disasters mounted. In September over 7.5 million marched and protested in 4,500 places across 150 countries. As the disasters get worse, the protests will grow in 2020. Many young people are rightly fearful of a future on a cooking planet.

Carbon dioxide releases were at a new high. The year was one of the hottest ever and the ice in the Arctic and Antarctic are melting at a record rate. The world's glaciers are retreating faster. There were record-breaking hurricanes, floods, heatwaves and fires.

Australia is now engulfed in fire. In December, the start of their summer, new record high temperatures were set. 2019 was the hottest and driest year ever, creating the bushfire nightmare. The fires are expected to burn for months, until rain arrives. By early January, over six million hectares (larger than Nova Scotia) has burnt, killing over one billion animals and twenty-five people.

Meanwhile in Madrid, the annual international meeting to tackle climate change agreed to ... more talks in future years! It has been 28 years since the world's politicians agreed at the Rio conference in 1992 to act on climate change. Since then things have only got worse. We cannot rely on big business and their politicians – they continue to fail.

Canada shows both sides of the contradiction between youth demanding action and governments and big business continuing business as usual. In September, over a million people marched in nearly 100 towns and cities across the country. In 2018, Canada had the second highest greenhouse gas emissions per person in the world; only Saudi Arabia was worse.

A 2019 report from Environment and Climate Change Canada points out that average temperatures worldwide have increased 0.8°C since 1948, but in Canada the increase is 1.7°C, more than double, and in the Arctic the increase is 2.3°C. The report warns of deadly heatwaves, increased forest fires and catastrophic flooding. If the glaciers in the Rockies



# Justice and Jobs 2019: A Year of Disasters and Hope

Bill Hopwood



continue to disappear at the present rate, then summer river water will be scarce, devastating prairie farming.

According to a 2019 UN report, Canada will not meet even its current inadequate target to reduce greenhouse gases. The main driver is the oil and gas industry, especially the Alberta tar sands, where releases are expected to double between 2010 and 2030. The present policies of the federal and provincial governments are woefully inadequate – they are literally fiddling while the world burns.

The International Monetary Fund reported in 2019 that the full cost of Canadian subsidies to fossil fuels is \$60 billion a year. This includes the costs of pollution, congestion, health impacts and climate change. The International Institute for Sustainable Development calculates the direct federal subsidies to oil and gas at \$3.3 billion per year, as well as purchasing the pipeline to Vancouver for \$4.5 billion. The provinces add to this gift – Alberta over \$1 billion a year and BC \$830 million annually.

If the pipeline to Vancouver is built it will put at high risk thousands of jobs in the city and on the coast, in many sectors. Pipeline leaks and harbour spills are inevitable. A major spill or tanker collision in the port would be devastating to jobs, environment and the economy. The City of Vancouver estimates the cost of a major spill at over \$1.2 billion.

BC's NDP government is launching a huge liquefied natural gas export terminal in northern BC. This will use gas obtained by fracking, which causes earthquakes and uses huge quantities of water that ends up polluted. The government has agreed subsidies including cheap electricity and reduced carbon, sales and corporation taxes. This project will bust BC's climate targets.

There is a crucial struggle of ideas to end the incorrect view that the Canadian economy and jobs are dependent on oil and gas. This is especially true in Alberta and Saskatchewan but also true for the Canadian government.

In 2018, out of a Canadian workforce of 16.6 million, mining, oil and gas extraction employs around 200,000 workers (1.2%). Renewable energy is estimated to employ a similar number. In general, investment in renewable energy provides six to seven times as many jobs as the same money invested in fossil fuels.

The lack of a pipeline is not the main cause of Alberta's relative woes. Oil prices are down worldwide due to the boost in US production. The Alberta Heritage Savings Fund was set up in 1976 to provide for the future and diversify the economy. It was supposed to receive 30% of the royalties from fossil fuels. Although the revenues from 1980 to 2014 were \$190 billion, of which the Heritage Fund should have received at least \$57 billion, it was only worth \$17 billion. The Fund did next to nothing to diversify the economy away from the boom and bust of oil and gas.

Tar sands companies are shedding jobs, with automation and technology. Drilling rigs are moving from a crew of five to three. Suncor Energy is planning to get rid of 400 jobs by introducing driverless trucks.

Canada faces a choice of climate disaster with declining jobs in oil and gas or a healthy environment with good jobs in renewable energy. Canada has abundant wind, solar and geo-thermal energy sources. To achieve the later goal will take a major struggle as it requires breaking the grip of the oil industry on much of Canada's economy, politics and public outlook.

Delivering a safe future requires taking the energy industry, with its huge wealth, into democratic public ownership so that the skills and knowledge of the workforce are no longer used to make profits for a few but for the good of people and the planet. A strong campaign for a just transition with good jobs by unions and environmental groups is a vital part of the struggle.

The youth strikes show the way forward. If unions linked with youth for a joint day of protest and strikes for "Climate, Justice and Jobs," it would shake the Canadian government and big business. This is a defining issue for the next decade.



# 2020: Where is the Women's Movement in Canada?

Leslie Kemp



1970 Abortion Caravan

Fifty years ago, Canadian women joined an uprising of women around the world. Feminists were active in a range of issues: mobilization against the Vietnam War, nuclear disarmament, employment equality, birth control, abortion rights and ending violence against women. This second wave of feminism spanned 1960 to 1985.

There were hard-fought victories for birth control and abortion. After a decades-long struggle, birth control was removed from the Criminal Code in 1969. In 1970, the Abortion Caravan, Canada's first national feminist protest, travelled from Vancouver to Parliament Hill in Ottawa, declaring "war on the Government of Canada." A historic battle led by the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics and the Canadian Association for the Repeal of the Abortion Laws culminated in victory in 1988 when the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the abortion law. Yet even now, women in parts of the country lack access to abortion services.

It was strong feminist unionists like Madeleine Parent who were early fighters within the feminist movement on class oppression and for the rights of Indigenous women. Parent, active in the Canadian Textile and Chemical Union, passionately fought against women's oppression in both the workforce and in unions. Grace Hartman campaigned for pay equity as the first female president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees in 1975. Yet, women in Canada still earn just 65% of the average annual earnings of men, among the biggest gender pay gaps in OECD nations. However, 32.6% of women work in unionized jobs, slightly higher than men at 30.3%.

In 1981 the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, after a 42-day strike, won postal workers paid maternity leave, becoming the first national union to win this benefit. They were inspired by the Common Front of public sector workers in Québec who had won paid maternity leave in 1979. Today, half of collective agreements in Canada include some form of paid maternity and/or parental leave.

The movement to end violence against women is not new. In 1982, NDP MP Margaret Mitchell's declaration to the House of Commons that "1 in 10 husbands beat their wives regularly," was greeted by laughter and ridicule. In 1983 it became illegal for a man to rape his wife. However, the #MeToo movement has raised awareness in a new generation of women of the pervasiveness of violence against women.

Indigenous women persistently fought for a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The testimony of these courageous women opened the eyes of many in Canada to the endemic violence perpetrated against Indigenous women and girls.

So, where is Canada's women's movement today? Internationally, women are rising up against oppression of all kinds: rape, harassment, violence and the gender wage gap. Women have won victories: the struggle for abortion rights in Ireland, inspiring the victory in South Korea and the struggle of women workers at Google and McDonald's against violence and harassment at work. Women are at the forefront of struggles on the climate crisis, affordable public housing, public services and health care.

In Canada, we have seen glimpses of such struggles, but thirty years of neoliberalism have pushed back the movement, dividing women on issues of race, class and gender identity. It is Indigenous women, in the Idle No More movement, those who have fought for their Indian status and against violence, who are the most visible fighters in the women's movement today.

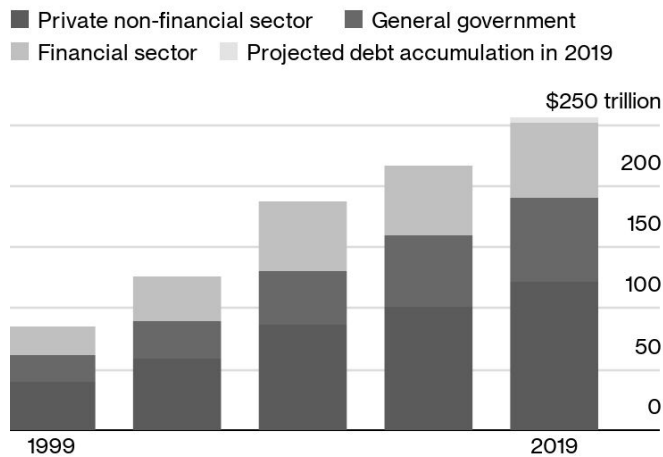
The history of class struggle shows that it is often the less organized layers of the working class – women, youth, immigrants – who are first drawn into struggle. Women make up close to half of the workforce and can play a key role in the struggles for childcare, pay equity and against workplace harassment. Winning victories on these issues, like the UNITE HERE hotel workers in Vancouver, will inspire confidence in other struggles. Socialist feminists can raise policies that point to the need for fundamental changes in society. The building of a socialist society and the program for women's emancipation are intertwined.



# Economic Storms: Trade War and Recession

Martin LeBrun and Bogdan Knezevic

Global debt on track to surpass \$255 trillion in 2019



The world faces a historic power struggle between two capitalist giants. The US-China conflict has been compared to the Cold War or the Hundred Years' War. The last time the world's dominant economy was eclipsed was Britain's decline and the US's rise. This struggle included Germany, also trying to become dominant, and caused two World Wars, the great depression and waves of revolution.

Trump and Xi's recent trade deal is only a temporary truce in this struggle for supremacy that will define world relations in the coming years.

In 1990 US capitalism stood triumphant with the collapse of Stalinism, gaining access to Chinese and ex-Stalinist markets and cheap labour. Fukuyama claimed it was the "end of history," with liberal capitalism the victor. Flush with arrogance, capitalism accelerated neoliberalism's drive to ruthlessly boost profits by attacking wages and public services, slashing taxes on corporations and the super-rich, and moving production to low-wage countries.

Yet, this triumph carried the seeds of its own crisis. Inequality exploded: 26 billionaires now have as much wealth as 50% of humanity. Living standards deteriorated. Simultaneously, total world production and productive capacity increased as economies, especially in Asia, expanded. Workers increasingly relied on credit to maintain living standards. US and Chinese economies integrated as Americans bought China's goods. China's annual growth between 1989 and 2019 exceeded 9%, while the US averaged 2.5%.

Debt triggered the 2008 recession. US, China and European governments cooperated to rescue the economy, with massive injections of state funds, estimated at \$14 trillion. In the US and Europe the money went straight to the banks and then to the 1%. China invested in a huge infrastructure program, and sucked in raw materials from many countries.

The world economy grew sluggishly after 2009, with widespread mass unemployment, endless

austerity and no real increase in wages. China, with its policy of heavy state investment (and piling up of debt) in manufacturing and infrastructure, as well as aggressive lending and construction internationally, through its Belt and Road Initiative, rose to a global power.

The International Monetary Fund and World Bank estimate that 90% of the world economy is slowing down, as the world is on the verge of a new crisis.

None of the underlying causes of the 2008 recession have been resolved. There is still massive global overcapacity and overproduction, as working people are increasingly unable to buy the products they make. China's overcapacity in steel is over 325 million tons, equal to the annual output of the next largest steel producers – India, Japan and the US. Global debt, of countries, corporations and individuals, is over \$255 trillion, much at risk of default.

Chinese economic growth is the lowest in 30 years. Its total corporate, household and government debt is over 300% of GDP, partly due to an exploding housing market, valued at US\$65 trillion, almost five times China's GDP.

The US and China clash is about more than the balance of trade, as China moves from producing cheap goods into high-tech, threatening US domination. The clash over 5G networks and Huawei are part of this. Trump has threatened to block any new technology imports deemed a "national security threat." The EU has declared China a "systemic rival."

The China-US rivalry, with increasing economic nationalism and protectionism, is contributing to the slowing world economy and trade. The US and Chinese economies are decoupling. Since 2017, bilateral trade is down 9% and direct investment is down 60%.

China, US and Europe took coordinated action after the 2008 recession. This time they will try to off-load the problem onto each other, adding to the economic woes.

Capitalism's future is increasing austerity, insecurity and conflicts. Yet, the working class is now larger and potentially more powerful than ever. 2019 saw upheavals around the world. A new recession may temporarily stun workers but this will turn to anger and struggle.

The prolonged crisis at the start of the 20th century sparked revolutions. Capitalism again faces a historic crisis, with an ecological disaster on top. A new wave of upheaval and revolution looms.



# World of Struggles

Simon Schweitzer and Chris Fofonoff



2 Million March in Chile

2019 was a turning point – a year of dramatic, continuing mass uprisings and strikes against authoritarian regimes, injustice, austerity and the climate crisis. It was a year of inspiring youth-led protests and strikes for climate justice. Women's struggles continued all year.

The worldwide scope, radical demands, and sustained pressure of these risings are unprecedented in recent times. After decades of austerity, burning anger and hatred of governments is waiting to erupt, often lit by a small spark. Working people around the world are beginning to resist the neoliberal behemoth that has had its way for most of our lifetimes. The protests involve millions of people with widespread strikes and general strikes. These struggles are internationalist, learning and being inspired from one country to the next.

2019 started with the largest general strike of all time – up to 200-million in India on January 8 and 9 against Modi's right-wing government. The year ended with more anti-Modi protests against unemployment and religious discrimination.

France's gilets jaunes protests against the Trudeau-like president Macron continued all year, winning concessions. At the year's end, huge protests and strikes led by transport and energy workers resisted attacks on pensions. In Switzerland, 500,000 marched in a women's strike.

Hong Kong's massive demonstrations, with amazing determination over many months, have shaken the Chinese government. November's elections were a further rebuff with anti-Beijing candidates winning 87% of the seats on a record 71% turnout. Repression has failed; it has pushed the movement further.

Sudan's protestors refused to be satisfied with the overthrow of Bashir's thirty-year dictatorship, learning the hard lessons of neighbouring Egypt's 2011 removal of Mubarak but not the regime, leading to the current dictatorship. Sudan's workers have maintained mass pressure on the current military-led "caretaker" government.

Mass movements in Algeria and Lebanon forced out hated rulers. Iran and Iraq both ended the year with huge anti-austerity protests. In Lebanon and Iraq these protests overcame the deep religious and sectarian divides with the slogan that "all must go."

Latin America saw continent-wide political turmoil and mass protest. At the start of 2019, with the election of Bolsonaro in Brazil, the ruling class thought they had defeated the left. Instead they have suffered setbacks. Argentina's Macri, darling of the right, was booted out after one term. Ecuador's president was forced to apologize and reverse cuts. President Piñera bragged about Chile being an oasis of stability. A week later, a small increase in transit fares provoked huge protests and a general strike with the slogan "It's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years." Piñera withdrew the fare increase and made further concessions. Colombia, long dominated by the right-wing, has mass strikes and protests.

Coups were engineered in Venezuela (unsuccessfully) and Bolivia (successfully, though Indigenous-led movements continue to resist the new government). The use of state violence – blinding, beating and murdering people – has largely failed to derail these movements. Of course, the state will continue to try all the tricks in its book, including escalating repression.

These protests may pause but will continue and grow in the crucial decade ahead. Our members internationally are part of these struggles, building support for socialist policies to strengthen and unify these movements, to deliver knockout blows to austerity, climate disaster and capitalism itself and forge a socialist world worthy of the future.

## Québec: Public Sector

*Bruno, Remi and Chantal*

In 2020, Québec's 500,000 public sector workers will negotiate a new work contract that will be a test for the populist right-wing CAQ government. Last fall, the government announced a \$4 billion budget surplus, after years of austerity, led by the Liberals, that have hurt public services and the workforce.

The premier didn't lose time to state that the surplus was for Quebecers, not for unions. Even with a high unionization rate, Québec's public sector workers have low wages and precarious working conditions.

The CAQ has shown its anti-worker stance and, despite electoral promises to improve health and education services, we should not expect the government to give much relief to workers. The months ahead will be crucial both for working conditions, and for access to and quality of public services.

Even though the Québec government is the single employer, there are different labour federations representing the workers. Some federations have

# Socialist beats Billionaires in US Election

Patrick Ayers

Billionaires are losing to socialists in US elections, and it's a sign of things to come.

In November 2019, the world's second-richest man, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, tried – and failed – to buy Seattle's city council elections, spending an unprecedented \$1.5 million. His key target was Socialist Alternative's city councillor Kshama Sawant. She won.

Sawant has been a major thorn in the side of Amazon and the corporate establishment of Seattle. She helped lead the victory for Seattle to be the first major city in North America with a \$15 an hour minimum wage and has been the strongest opponent of the corporate-led property speculation that has caused skyrocketing rents for working people.

Amazon bosses churned out masses of propaganda claiming she was "ineffective" and "divisive," precisely because she is effective and unites movements. Their candidate was a fake-progressive. Amazon's spending became the central issue for working people, the election being about who ran Seattle. A huge turnout – 9% higher than the 2015 election – defeated Bezos and re-elected Sawant for a third term with 52% of the vote.

Bernie Sanders, the socialist who is on record saying "billionaires should not exist" and he would be "organizer in chief," is gaining support in the presidential race. As the Democratic Party establishment realize that Biden is failing as their candidate they are looking for some other pro-big business candidate to block Sanders.

In November, Bezos, after losing to Sawant,



successfully encouraged the billionaire Bloomberg, New York City's former mayor, to enter the Democrats' elections. Another billionaire, Steyer, is in the race, claiming to be an anti-corruption reformer. Despite spending \$200 million of their own money to plaster the internet and television with campaign ads, neither Bloomberg or Steyer have polled higher than 5%. If either of them were to win, then both the Democrats and the Republicans would have billionaire presidential candidates.

Sawant's victory over Bezos and Sanders having a credible chance to win the Democrats' nomination, shows the deepening support for socialist ideas in the US. There is also a small, but important, uptick in strikes led by teachers and GM autoworkers.

Since Sawant was elected in 2013 as the first socialist to win a major US election in decades, over 60 self-described socialists have been elected. With 2020 promising record voter turnout, it could see the biggest wave of socialists elected yet.

The biggest barrier to Sanders winning the nomination is the rigged democracy dominated by big business, corporate media and the elite's domination of the Democrats. However, given the anger in society and support for his policies such as Medicare for All, free public college education and a \$15 minimum wage, it cannot be ruled out.

The bottom line: socialists are winning in the US. The anger at the billionaire class, the upsurge in labour organizing, the Sanders' campaign and Sawant's victory are helping to prepare the way for a historic rebirth of a mass socialist movement in the US. Crucial to success is the launch of a party for working people.

For information on the US and Socialist Alternative:  
[www.socialistalternative.org](http://www.socialistalternative.org)

## Workers Prepare to Fight

*Alternative Socialiste Québec*

put forward a fixed amount salary increase as well as a minimum automatic indexation of wages to the increase in the consumer price index. Alternative Socialiste union members play a key role pushing this demand.

Unfortunately, the federations have differing claims and negotiating strategies. A strong mobilization of the workers is essential to put forward the needs of the many. Union members are angry, and have high hopes for the upcoming negotiation. Even if the leaders of the different federations are divided, the rank and file members and local unions talk to each other and can be organized to work towards a common goal.

That's why Alternative Socialiste calls for a local inter-union action committee. This may well be the best way to fight any special laws the government could put forward to stop a work conflict.

**For more information on Québec and Alternative Socialiste: [alternativesocialiste.org](http://alternativesocialiste.org)**

# Canadian Government Used Thugs to Smash a Union

William LeBlanc



In 1949, the Canadian government and big business destroyed the Canadian Seamen's Union (CSU). It was one of the best examples of a fighting union for seafarers and its demise is still felt in the industry today.

It grew rapidly during World War Two, as Canada had a large merchant fleet. Its members were hardened by their grim experiences in the Merchant Navy on the North Atlantic crossing. By the war's end they were desperate for change. A massive month-long strike in 1946 won conditions unheard of for seafarers: an 8 hour day, a 20% pay rise, overtime pay and seniority. The union also supported and helped struggles across the world. In only a decade of existence the CSU showed how seafarers could win and organize solidarity worldwide in the maritime industry.

Ship owners were furious. They immediately set out to crush the CSU. They found their answer in the US-based Seamen's International Union (SIU), a corrupt product of the Red Scare. Although the union barely existed in Canada, a series of backroom deals saw shipping companies signing en masse to the SIU.

The CSU was forced to retaliate. In 1949, they struck in ports across the world, in 26 countries, and in Canada refusing to sail and appealing to dockworkers to blacklist their ships. This would become one of the largest international strikes of the 20th century.

Back home CSU members picketed docks across Canada, blocking scabs from manning CSU ships. Ship owners found that the federal Liberal government was eager to help. The government illegally allowed a convicted criminal, Hal Banks, into Canada to oversee the smashing of the CSU.

Armed thugs and the RCMP collaborated in assaulting pickets and then arresting them to clear the picket lines across Canada. CSU members were murdered but in many places the pickets held. Canada's right-wing union leaders pressured other unions not to support the CSU. Slowly but surely the union was isolated.

Eventually, after 13 months of battle, a solidly democratic, tested union had been destroyed by an alliance of Canada's politicians and big business.

# Planned Injustice We Can Plan for Justice



R.A. Costeau

Review of *People's Republic of Walmart*, Leigh Phillips and Michal Rozworski

Every socialist is sure to be told that planned economies are "great in theory, but not in practice." Really, the opposite is true. Certainly, economic planning does not work within the theories and models present in a first year economics textbook. However, the titanic logistical operations of behemoths like Walmart and Amazon prove these books wrong.

Large corporations plan in great detail, coordinating production and distribution across the globe. Internally, they avoid the duplication and overproduction that plague the overall economy – unplanned as it is. *People's Republic of Walmart* takes this as its premise to show that economic planning does work. Maybe too well.

*People's Republic* is a tour through the history of economic planning, dissecting examples to make its points. The reorganization of Sears into the right-libertarian ideal with internal markets and interdepartmental competition is a poignant case. Refusing to plan brought the degradation of Sears' products, facilities, and profits – and ultimately massive job loss as it collapsed.

Socialist Alternative calls for a democratically planned economy. Reading *People's Republic*, it is easy enough to see by historical example that the "planned" part of that demand is possible. But what about democracy, which is vital for a just system? Phillips and Rozworski deliver on this too. One standout chapter delves into the Cybersyn program of Salvador Allende's Chile, where teletype networks and a supercomputer were utilized by workers to share the information necessary to meet both the immediate needs of their democratic enterprises and the big picture concerns from Santiago, the capital. In this way they show that such broadly democratic control is not just possible, but advantageous to a planned economy.

Though *People's Republic* stops short of a program to achieve a democratic economy, it is a page turner of a theory text. It describes the reality and history of economic planning in accessible language that many readers will find invaluable for drawing upon when their loud uncle starts mouthing off about Bernie Sanders next Thanksgiving. Recommended.



# Instability Rising: Workers Need to Fight (Continued from back page)



There is real pain in Alberta; however, the cause is neither Trudeau nor environmentalists. Rather, it is Alberta's over-dependence on oil and gas and the provincial government's failure over decades to use the oil wealth to diversify the economy. Oil prices dropped in 2014 and are unlikely, unless there is a Middle East war, to return to their previous highs.

A new pipeline will not raise the price of bitumen, given its higher cost of refining and shipping, up to the level of crude oil or back to pre-2014 levels. Instead it locks Alberta into future dependence on oil as the world transitions to renewable energy.

Kenny seeks to divert blame onto Trudeau, but it is his government that has cut taxes on big business by \$4.5 billion and at the same time reduced the minimum wage for young people, attacked public sector workers' pensions and wages, and slashed 7,000 jobs, many in the public health service. Alberta's woes are largely home grown or due to the world economy.

## Economic Outlook

At the end of 2018, Canada looked to be heading to a recession. Then, over the first nine months of 2019 there was further growth in employment and a small up-tick in wages which helped Trudeau's re-election.

However, there are looming clouds for the Canadian and world economy. Most Canadians are up to their ears in debt, owing 176% of their income. Personal insolvencies are the highest level since the 2009 recession. 47% of Canadians do not expect to get through the next year without taking on more debt.

The housing boom has fuelled much of the recent economic growth, but there is a large bubble in housing that may yet burst. From PEI to Vancouver and most places in between, housing is unaffordable. The OECD found that Canada has the highest housing costs compared to income of any country.

Much of Canada depends on exporting resources and in a recession demand for these raw materials will shrink. Investment by Canadian businesses has dropped 20% over the past five years, the worst performance in more than five decades.

## Fighting Back

On top of the uncertain economic news, several provincial governments are engaged in austerity policies and attacks on public sector unions. Ontario's Ford government has cut services and is going after teachers and education workers. Workers are striking

to defend public education and their jobs.

Kenny's attacks on workers and gutting health care, education, and other vital public services has provoked widespread anger and a sharp loss of support, with majority (53%) disapproval of the government. Union leaders have openly discussed the possibility of a general strike in response to these cuts.

In BC in 2019, there was a rash of labour disputes, generally unconnected, but having a common theme of workers being frustrated at wages not keeping pace with the rising cost of living.

In September, over 1 million Canadians marched for climate justice. No government, federal or provincial, has policies to significantly shift Canada from fossil fuels to renewable energy. 2020 could see a rise in labour militancy and climate action across Canada.

## A Socialist Alternative

The NDP thinks it can manage capitalism better than the other parties. However, economic crises and ecological disaster are not management failings, they are rooted in capitalism. The looming world recession and the global ecological crises means that managing capitalism is not an option.

The NDP, if it is going to effectively represent Canadian workers, needs to realize that it has to campaign all year round in communities and workplaces across the country.

Canada Revenue found that only 28% of Canadians believed the wealthy pay their fair share and only 27% believed corporations were paying an appropriate amount. After decades of tax cuts for the wealthy, taxing the rich would be popular and socially fair. The path to winning elections is bold socialist policies that would give hope to workers, including in the resource industries, of good jobs based on a just transition to clean energy paid for by the rich, not workers.

A recent report from StatsCan found that Canadian corporations held a staggering \$353 billion in tax havens in 2018. This, if taken into public ownership, would fund huge investment in renewable energy, the upgrade and insulation of homes and buildings, and provide good public transit in cities and between cities and towns – all of which provide good jobs.

Many Canadians are alienated from present society. An Ipsos poll released in September found that 67% of Canadians think the economy is rigged for the rich and powerful and 61% agree that traditional political parties don't care about people like them. These views can feed support for either right-wing populism or bold socialist ideas. Another study found that 58% of Canadians have a positive view of socialism.

There is an opportunity for a confident and campaigning left-wing party. Socialist Alternative members are working hard to win support for socialist ideas. If you are interested, join us!



## *Socialist Alternative*

Canada enters 2020 with growing instability. The Federal election raised more questions than it settled. Tensions between provinces are increasing. The economy is slowing down as the world faces a new recession.

The Liberals held their own in Ontario and Québec, exploiting dislike of Doug Ford and fears of Scheer's right-wing policies, and managed to remain the largest party. However, now a minority government, they are weakened and less able to deal with the tensions and crises that are looming.

Right-wing populism, both Ford's in Ontario and Maxime Bernier's People's Party, was dealt a blow. The Tories failed to make significant gains outside of western Canada; 71 of their 121 seats, 59% of the total, are from these four provinces that have just 31% of the population. The Tories' poor performance forced Scheer's demise as leader.

The Greens finished with three seats, up from one in the last election, but well below expectations.

Only the Bloc Québécois were winners in the election, coming from almost nowhere to 32 seats. The victory of the right-wing Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) in the province in 2018 on a program of nationalism and identity politics opened a door to a rebirth of the Bloc. The CAQ's high profile legislation that bans the wearing of religious symbols for many public employees, was echoed by the Bloc. It focused on

Francophone identity and strong Québec nationalism within the Canadian state, rather than pushing for sovereignty as they did in the past.

With the Tories widely disliked and the Liberals much tarnished, the New Democratic Party (NDP) should have been soaring. Yet, only in the last few weeks of the election did the NDP gain ground in the polls as Jagmeet Singh started to campaign with policies to significantly improve and extend public healthcare, tax the super-rich and corporations, and make university more affordable. However, the NDP started from a very low base, having been almost invisible for the previous four years. In 2011, the NDP won 103 seats, 59 in Québec. It failed to consolidate a base in Québec, and in 2015 it dropped to 44 seats in Canada, with 16 in Québec. In 2019, it dropped again to only 24 seats, with 1 in Québec.

## **A Country Divided**

The election revealed a sharply divided country. The reemergence of the Bloc shows the nationalist aspirations of many Quebecers are strong while in western Canada, with the Tories having virtually a clean sweep, there is deep alienation even if talk of "Wexit" is exaggerated.

This will see the provinces jostling for more resources, both from the Federal government and each other. After the election the Bloc and CAQ are confident to defend their interests and push for resources.