

Expose/Oppose/Propose: The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Challenge of Alternative Knowledge

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Article abstract

This case study explores some of the strategies, challenges, and paradoxes of producing and mobilizing alternative knowledge in the prosecution of a “war of position” against neoliberal hegemony. Since its founding in 1980, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has become the key labour-supported “think tank” of the left in Canada, contributing to the process of social democratization by acting as a collective organic intellectual for a wide range of oppositional groups and networks that, we suggest, make up a social democratic community of practice. The ccpa has developed a number of strategies aimed at democratizing knowledge production, perhaps unique in the context of Canadian policy groups. Nonetheless, it faces a number of challenges in following through with these strategies and potential paradoxes in simultaneously engaging both the mainstream (general public and policymakers) and the various counterpublics that make up its community of practice.

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ARTICLE

Expose/Oppose/Propose: The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Challenge of Alternative Knowledge

William K. Carroll and David Huxtable

Introduction

OVER THE COURSE OF THE 20TH CENTURY, as industrial capitalism morphed into advanced capitalist democracy in the global north, think tanks gained increasing importance as sites for research and policy development, independent of direct control by states and corporations. Typically, these centres of knowledge production and mobilization (KPM) have been funded by and inclined toward the principal propertied interests – the corporate sector.¹ For a century, the United States has been the epicentre of such initiatives, but since the 1960s such agencies have taken root in other capitalist democracies.² In recent decades as capitalist globalization eroded the basis for Keynesian-style national regulation, corporate-sponsored “advocacy think tanks” proliferated as champions of neoliberal policy and market-driven politics.³ By the early 21st

1. Jamie Brownlee, *Ruling Canada: Corporate Cohesion and Democracy* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2005); William G. Domhoff, *Who Rules America?* 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2014).

2. James McGann, “The Global “Go-To” Think Tanks 2010,” accessed 16 July 2013 (Philadelphia: International Relations Program, University of Pennsylvania, 2010), www.gotothinktank.com.

3. D.E. Abelson, “Public Visibility and Policy Relevance: Assessing the Influence and Impact of Canadian Policy Institutes,” *Canadian Public Administration*, 42 (June 1999): 240–270; Gary Teeple, *Globalization and the Decline of Social Reform: Into the Twenty-first Century* (Aurora, Ontario: Garamond Press, 2000); Colin Leys, *Market-driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and*

century, neoliberal hegemony was losing some of its lustre to a rising “social investment” paradigm in Europe and Latin America,⁴ but in North America its reign continued; and in Canada, the site of this study, it actually strengthened, at least at the federal level.

The field of think tanks and policy planning, however, has not been entirely monopolized by the right. Alternative policy communities have also developed, nationally and transnationally, responding to the needs of labour and critical social movements for alternative frameworks of knowledge that might enable collective action to go beyond the immediacies of strikes, protest, and resistance. However, reflecting the difficulties in moving from subalternity to counter-hegemony, *alternative* policy groups (APGs) – think tanks of the left – have been slow to emerge and have tended to focus on national theatres of political contention.⁵ In the United States, for instance, it was only in 1963 that two refugees from the Kennedy administration founded the first left-leaning centre, the Institute for Policy Studies. In Canada, it was not until 1980 that an APG with a broad national mandate formed that could be considered comparable in any sense to well established conventional think tanks such as the C.D. Howe Institute and the Fraser Institute. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has since become the key APG in Canada.⁶ In the process, it has helped form what we will term a social democratic community of practice, committed to reforming and possibly transforming Canada into a more just, ecologically sustainable society.

This case study of a reasonably successful APG sheds light on the possibilities and challenges of producing and mobilizing knowledge for social change. We explore how the CCPA has participated in a Gramscian “war of position”⁷

the Public Interest (London: Verso, 1999).

4. Jane Jensen, “Diffusing Ideas for After Neoliberalism: The Social Investment Perspective in Europe and Latin America,” *Global Social Policy*, 10, 1 (2010): 59–84.

5. William K. Carroll, “Alternative Policy Groups and Transnational Counter-Hegemonic Struggle,” in Yildiz Atasoy, ed., *Global Economic Crisis and the Politics of Diversity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 259–284.

6. In May of 1980, a group of progressive academics and union activists met to discuss the socioeconomic crisis and ways that the rise of the new right could be countered. Initially convened by Bob Clarke of the National Union of Provincial Employees, a number of meetings were held in Ottawa over 1980, culminating in a founding convention in December of 1980. It is clear from recollections of those involved that the CCPA was initially a *defensive project*, designed to counter the emerging trend of neoliberal economics by pressing to retain the basic terms of the post-World War II accord between capital and labour, as institutionally condensed in the Keynesian welfare state. See Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Twenty-fifth Anniversary* (Ottawa: CCPA, 2005).

7. For discussions of the war of position and the struggle for hegemony see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. and ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971); see also Peter D. Thomas *The Gramscian Moment* (Boston: Brill, 2009).

to win space, both within the mainstream public and in movement-based “counterpublics,”⁸ for alternative social visions, policies, and practices. The war is not fought for physical territory with bullets and bombs, but on cultural and institutional terrain with ideas and structures of feeling. It is a struggle for hegemony that involves a succession of ideological and cultural battles for the hearts and minds of the public – to win the broad and active consent for a policy paradigm that embodies an overarching social vision. Think tanks of the left and right provide intellectual leadership in this struggle. The CCPA and similar APGs can be viewed as contributing to a process of *social democratization*, theorized by Mouzelis as a left political project for “the deepening of democratization – understood here as both the further spread of rights downwards, and as the progressive decolonization of social and cultural spheres by the economic one.”⁹ The challenge facing such groups is to produce and mobilize alternative knowledge in ways that strengthen social democratization, thereby shifting the balance of cultural and political forces in civil society and within the state.¹⁰

Both conventional groups and APGs produce and mobilize knowledge, but they differ substantially in ends and means. Conventional groups are organized along elite, professionalized lines, to produce expert knowledge primarily for political and economic elites, and for the mainstream media. All this is well suited to state-centred politics; indeed, the practices of conventional

8. Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text*, 25/26 (1990): 56–80.

9. Nicos Mouzelis, “Reflexive modernization and the third way: the impasses of Giddens’ social-democratic politics,” *Sociological Review*, 49 (August 2001): 454. Note that our invocation of *social democratization* as a broad process that deepens and extends democracy to new fields is distinct from the conventional and narrower notion of *social democracy* as a political current favouring state provision of social welfare and trade union rights.

10. The groups engaged in this process of social democratization constitute the social democratic community of practice referred to throughout the paper. This community does not necessarily constitute a coherent political ideological framework or program. Rather, it can be seen in similar terms to a Polanyian countermovement, the broad array of social groups within civil society that act to protect society from impacts of unrestrained market forces. See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957); see also Ronaldo Munck, “Globalization and Democracy: A New Great Transformation?” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 581 (May 2002): 10–21 and Ronaldo Munck, “Globalization, Labor and the ‘Polanyi Problem,’” *Labor History*, 4, 3 (2004): 251–269, and Michael Burawoy, “For a Sociological Marxism: The Complementary Convergence of Antonio Gramsci and Karl Polanyi,” *Politics & Society*, 31, 2 (2003): 193–261. As an intermediating structure between civil society and the state, Canada’s New Democratic Party (NDP) plays an ambivalent role vis-à-vis this community of practice. Members of the community of practice engage the NDP sometimes as outsiders and sometimes as insiders, through individual membership; however, the relationship between centre-left political parties such as the NDP and social movements is complex, particularly when the former formed the government. See William K. Carroll and R.S. Ratner, “Ambivalent Allies: Social Democratic Regimes and Social Movements,” *BC Studies*, 154 (Summer 2007): 37–62.

think tanks run entirely in the grooves of those politics. But such a *modus operandi* contradicts basic values and visions of social democratization, of grassroots empowerment within civil society, of a left war of position. APGs, then, cannot simply replicate practices that have proven successful for conventional think tanks. For means to serve ends, their KPM practices must erode hegemony while strengthening counter-hegemonic currents and movements. For instance, a think tank of the left might, in contrast to conventional KPM, employ participatory research strategies to empower marginalized groups and promote dialogical communicative practices with allies. Yet, neither can APGs ignore the governing norms of the liberal “marketplace of ideas.” In the war of position, they compete with conventional think tanks for influence within policy networks and in the mainstream media. Hence, an APG intent on influencing the mainstream public while vivifying counterpublics on the left might be expected to employ a combination of conventional and alternative KPM practices. A central challenge, then, is to develop effective practices that point toward a radically transformed future while dealing with the exigencies of a hegemonic formation inhospitable to such change. This discussion provides us with a research question:

How, in its actual practices, has the CCPA functioned as a “think tank” of a different sort, combining research and analysis with democratizing practice, and what challenges has it faced in producing and mobilizing alternative knowledge?

To explore this question, we adopted an ethnographic case study method. Between May and July 2012, the first author interviewed a dozen CCPA staff, seven based in the Ottawa head office and five based elsewhere. Participants included CCPA Director Bruce Campbell, *Monitor* Editor Ed Finn, CCPA-BC Director Seth Klein, CCPA-Ontario Director Trish Hennessy, five senior researchers, and three key administrative and social media personnel.¹¹ Interviews (which ranged from 1 to 2.5 hours in duration) consisted of open-ended questions that probed the practices of KPM at CCPA and the political values, strategies, and visions predominant among staff. The interviews with Ottawa staff were conducted in person; others were conducted via Skype or telephone. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview data were managed using the software program NVivo 9. Quoted statements without bibliographic references are from our interviews.

Our ethnographic case study carries with it definite strengths as well as limitations. Although classic anthropological ethnography employs long-duration field visits, our “focused ethnography” involved less time in the field

11. As of May 2014, the CCPA website listed 17 staff at the national office and 23 at five provincial offices. Eleven staff had technical functions (as in office managers, development, financial/accounting, graphic design, and membership officers). Many of the latter, although integral to the organization, were not of direct interest to this study. Our interviews with 12 staff represented 41 per cent of staff directly engaged in KPM practices.

but greater intensity in the scrutiny of interview transcripts.¹² The ethnographer's assumption is that "people in the social scene being studied are the ultimate authorities concerning what is happening there and what it all means to them and others around them."¹³ Our objective was to learn how CCPA staff produce and mobilize alternative knowledge, and how they think about their practices in the context of creating social change. Beyond documenting KPM practices, we were interested in how these illuminate a neo-Gramscian theoretical perspective. In this sense, we conducted a "disciplined interpretive case study," as distinct from a purely descriptive one.¹⁴ A central attribute and strength of case study methodology is its *holistic* approach, "aimed at in-depth knowledge of patterns, structures and processes."¹⁵ In a focused way, this is what our study sought. In addition, the qualitative approach we take here, based on interviews with insiders to the life of the CCPA, offers a high degree of descriptive validity (*i.e.*, factual accuracy). Moreover, use of verbatim interview transcripts as opposed to selected notes is known to produce "rich and thick data, which correspond to data that are detailed and complete enough to maximize the ability to find meaning" in participants' accounts.¹⁶ Our use of "member-checking," a practice described as "the most effective way of eliminating the possibility of misrepresentation and misinterpretation of [informants'] 'voice'" also safeguarded the quality of our data.¹⁷

Notwithstanding these virtues, our reliance on CCPA insiders produced a specific body of detailed knowledge distinct from what we would have learned had we relied on "outsiders" – *e.g.*, movement activists who may or may not form part of the CCPA's larger community of practice, other policy researchers, and journalists, etc. A comprehensive investigation might advantageously incorporate such perspectives to gain a fully contextualized view. It is also well to note our lack, in this article, of sustained attention to the historical

12. In focused ethnography, "analysis of data may be said to be utterly time-intensive since it focuses on a massive amount of data collected in a short time in contrast to field notes which cover long durations." Hubert Knoblauch, "Focused Ethnography," *Forum: Qualitative Research*, 6 (September 2005): para 16.

13. Raymond L. Gold, "The Ethnographic Method in Sociology," *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3 (December 1997): 395.

14. "The disciplined interpretive case study interprets or explains an event by applying a known theory to the new terrain." John S. Ordell, "Case Study Methods in International Political Economy," *International Studies Perspectives*, 2 (May 2001): 163.

15. Piet Verschuren, "Case Study as a Research Strategy: Some Ambiguities and Opportunities," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6 no. 2 (2003): 136.

16. A.J. Onwuegbuzie and N.L. Leech, "Validity and Qualitative Research: An Oxymoron?" *Quality & Quantity*, 41, no. 2 (2007): 244.

17. Onwuegbuzie and Leech, "Validity," 241. Each participant verified the quotes that were to be attributed to them and was given a draft of the research report on which several of them commented. The report was revised in light of their comments.

dimension of the CCPA. In a companion piece¹⁸ we analyze how the centre has developed from early years, which it barely survived, to become a leading anglophone voice for left policy in Canada.¹⁹

Our in-depth interviews with core CCPA staff probed how meeting the challenges of producing and mobilizing alternative knowledge has enabled the centre to advance a project of social democratization but has also constrained what the CCPA can be and do. There are two intertwined threads to this history: the *outreach to mainstream publics, policy networks, and state agencies*, via corporate media and other institutional channels, and the *development of a social democratic community of practice* centred mainly in a configuration of counterpublics that share a skepticism toward neoliberal capitalism and a desire for democratic alternatives. There may be tensions between these, but as we show below, each is indispensable to the centre's project of alternative KPM and to its role as an exponent of social democratization within an ongoing war of position that includes organized labour as a key constituent.

Alternative Practices and Strategies of KPM

COY, WOEHRL, AND MANEY note that "changing dominant political discourses" is critical to the efforts of social movements to promote change. To do so, movements must "regularly and systematically provide the populace with new ways of talking and writing that mix criticism of conventional thinking with alternative ways of making sense of the world."²⁰ In these senses, the CCPA's KPM has been integrally linked to the work of movements pressing for change; indeed, the CCPA has served as a kind of organic intellectual to progressive movements. Yet its "primary mission," in British Columbia (BC) Director Seth Klein's words, "is to have a conversation with the public at large about what kind of society we want to live in and how we take care of one another and rise to the climate imperative" (SK²¹). Our interviews revealed

18. William K. Carroll and David Huxtable, "Building Capacity for Alternative Knowledge: The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives," *Canadian Review of Social Policy*, 70 (2014): 93–111.

19. The CCPA's counterpart in Quebec is Montreal-based L'Institut de recherché et d'informations socio-économiques (L'IRIS). The Centre has refrained from opening an Alberta office, given the presence of Edmonton-based Parkland Institute. Both L'IRIS and Parkland have collaborative relationships with the CCPA and are represented on its board. We should also mention the Ottawa-based Broadbent Institute, formed in 2012, which hews more closely to a traditionally centrist, social democratic line. See <http://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/>.

20. P.G. Coy, L.W. Woehrle, and H.M. Maney, "A Typology of Oppositional Knowledge: Democracy and the U.S. Peace Movement," *Sociological Research Online*, 13, 4 (2008): para 2.2, doi:10.5153/sro.1739.

21. Initials are used in subsequent attributed quotations. Participants were given the option of confidentiality or allowing their statements to go "on the record." Only participants who agreed to be quoted are named in this analysis and subsequently initialized. See the Appendix for a list of interviewees. Participants who were interviewed on a confidential basis are indicated by "C1"

some of the practices and strategies that mix criticism with alternatives and build integral linkages to the work of movements in ways that promote critical, forward-looking engagements with the general public.

Challenging Conventional Wisdom

IN MANY WAYS, GENERATING “alternative” knowledge is really about challenging what is seen at any given time as conventional wisdom, about refusing to accept the Thatcherite dictum that “there is no alternative” to neoliberal capitalism. Within CCPA initiatives, the challenges have taken various forms. Alternative knowledge often involves simply pulling strands of information together to show what is actually happening, rather than what dominant voices are describing as reality, as CCPA economist David MacDonald told us. His study of bank bailouts in the wake of the 2008 crisis assembled data on the scale of government financial assistance to the banking industry to dispel the commonly held myth that the federal government had provided no “bailout” to banks. MacDonald gave the study a provocative edge by calculating that it would have been less expensive to bring the banks under public ownership than to bail them out. Challenging conventional wisdom can also mean politicizing what are otherwise seen as personal troubles, enabling people to recognize their problems as systemically rooted,²² thereby practicing an “organic public sociology”²³ (DM). As one respondent put it,

I think there’s real value in demonstrating to people that their personal problems are not that personal. They’re personal to them ... but they’re systemic. And when they’re systemic, we need to start asking big questions about how we make it better for more people (C11).

Much of what the CCPA does in its research and communication connects the dots between personal troubles and policy issues, in ways that help citizens engage in political conversations and actions.

If pulling strands of information together and connecting the dots between the personal and the public offer means of disrupting “common sense,” the persuasiveness of hegemonic narratives poses a great challenge for left think tanks. These stories locate subalterns within normalized identities and trajectories – the possessive individual intent on achieving affluence; the march of progress via fair exchange, market-disciplined efficiencies, and rights conceptualized as property; the state as a neutral umpire adjudicating among many diverse interest groups. A major issue for any APG is what is the alternative narrative or family of narratives? CCPA-Ontario Director Trish Hennessy, who runs strategic “framing workshops” that challenge progressives to think and act differently, told us that, given the resilience of neoliberal common sense,

(confidential interview) followed by an arbitrary sequence number.

22. C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

23. Michael Burawoy, “ASA Presidential Address: For Public Sociology,” *American Sociological Review*, 70 (February 2005): 4–28.

creating such sparks is no mean feat. Social justice activists in Canada “are trying to understand why it is that we’re not winning the battle, why politically the discourse is a conversation that we don’t want to have, and how it is that you get Canadians to listen to the conversation that we want to have” (TH). It is at this point that a purely evidence-based approach to alternative knowledge comes up against a major barrier – the strong tendency for people to rationalize and to assimilate new information into extant cognitive-affective structures. Thus, for instance, in revealing the massive gap between average employee earnings and CEO earnings, “unless you build a bigger narrative around that, people have trouble making sense of it, processing it” (TH). We will come back to the issue of an alternative narrative later in this article.

Collaboration and Dialogue

IN 1995, THE CENTRE PRODUCED its first Alternative Federal Budget (AFB) with Winnipeg-based CHOICES. The AFB has become the CCPA’s signature initiative. Incorporating practices of participation into a collaborative and a dialogical project, it contains 23 chapters, each written by experts in the field and reviewed by other experts in consultation with activist communities. Currently coordinated by David MacDonald, it is a massive collaboration, “drawing on a network of ... people that have a disparate range of expertise ... putting that all together in one place” (TH). Not only does this teamwork create a document that’s “a go-to place for people that are interested in progressive issues” (DM), but the AFB “is the ultimate example of where we get allies from a wide range of civil society around the table and they help inform our research” (TH). In this way, the AFB comprises one of the few forums that pulls together “a whole variety of national organizations ... around a common table toward a common purpose,” enabling allies “not only to build the Alternative Federal Budget but to discuss the politics around budgeting economics federally with experts in a variety of different areas” (DM). In striving to represent the various social sectors, the AFB intrinsically involves bridge-building in a kind of “intersectional analysis of the federal budget,” as one respondent put it. “You have people coming from the labour movements, from the feminist women’s movement coming together to do those different analyses and work on this one document that services all of these different movements.” What the AFB has tried to achieve in its practice is a “national Canadian dialogue” (DM) that is as representative and democratic as possible.

Indeed, collaboration and dialogue have comprised a key strategy of the CCPA across a number of its projects. The BC office, for example, has been successful in developing community-university partnerships funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, such as the Climate Justice Project, directed by economist Marc Lee. The project has gathered “academics, environmental and non-environmental NGOs, trade unions, anti-poverty groups and others” around “a common research agenda,” subdivided into specific projects that bring “different strengths and perspectives to the

table” (ML). Similarly, the centre’s Trade and Investment Research Project (TIRP), directed by economist Scott Sinclair, has mobilized research associates from around the world. Here, it is common for speakers “from Washington and ... Brussels to talk to about fifteen or twenty of us – [to] help us map out some of the implications” of Canadian participation in arrangements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (ss). Team approaches engage broader networks of knowledge producers, and in embedding the process within those networks they also embed the product, so that it can circulate widely.

This collaborative approach has helped build counterpublics, as evident in the AFB but also in Labour Matters, a product of CCPA’s Trade Union Research Collective. Launched in 2013, Labour Matters produces and disseminates research and information in accessible form while offering a public forum on union-related issues and a platform for sharing knowledge with “the broader community.”²⁴ With a listserv network from unions and academe numbering in the hundreds, Labour Matters furnishes, in the words of CCPA Executive Director Bruce Campbell, a means “of very quickly sounding out or seeking help or ... advice on how to approach a certain issue, what research has been done” but is also “a very useful tool for bringing people together” around a wide range of issues pertaining to labour (BC). The dialogue thus benefits both sides: for the centre, it provides intelligence about the current state of play, which can inform strategy; for movements, it contributes to building collective knowledge as in the Trade Justice Network, a separate initiative that consists mostly of activists. Even in fields where no specific network has been formed, the CCPA’s contacts throughout civil society can be effective in mobilizing knowledge among activists – as in the fall of 2011, when the Occupy movement used CCPA materials from the Inequality Project and came to the centre for advice. To make its ideas known and relevant, the CCPA also reciprocally depends on visible activist agency and its impact on popular discourse. On the core issue of inequality, as Campbell reflected, “we were in the wilderness on this until the Occupy movement started. Now it’s one of the most important issues in Canadian’s minds” (BC). As this example shows, the centre’s success has hinged on its finding synergies between, on the one hand, activist initiatives that unsettle conventional wisdom and, on the other, its own critical analyses that offer interpretation and credible alternatives.

As a strategy of KPM that is also a community development effort, collaboration and dialogue bring together diverse groups with convergent values but different priorities or perspectives in a forum for discussion across different sectors, “having the unions speak to environmental groups and bringing in First Nation perspectives and other perspectives from different disciplines in academia” (ML), as in the Climate Justice Project. In reaching an understanding of differences, it becomes possible to agree on a common agenda for

24. See <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/projects/labour-matters/about>, accessed 15 January 2014.

moving forward. In Marc Lee's estimation, helping to build such solidarity-in-diversity is part of the centre's role "as part of a broader social movement in developing alternatives." Extending the dialogue across generations is a major CCPA initiative crystalized most recently in a special issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves* on "Re:Generation: A primer for all ages."²⁵ Inspired in part by the Next Up program for youth activists that the BC office runs and the centre's collaborative work with Leadnow.ca, the objective is to create "a multigenerational discussion" on the future of Canada with an element of community engagement – in the hope of allowing "Generation Now" a greater voice (TH).

These kinds of projects have moved the centre into the mode of *participatory* KPM, already salient within the AFB process. As one respondent told us, it is this democratic-participatory mode of intellectual leadership that distinguishes the CCPA from hegemonic groups and practices. Dominant groups "... endeavour to lead via authoritarianism and expertise; CCPA does the opposite – or endeavours to do the opposite – that is, it tries to put information into the hands of the many so they can become experts and make their own decisions and disrupt the status quo ..." (C12).

Yet, limited funding also constrains the centre's ability to break from traditional forms of knowledge production and develop more participatory models. Marc Lee noted the neoliberal Fraser Institute's practice of hosting a steady stream of conferences on a variety of topics, which act as vehicles for promulgating the institute's ideas, recruiting new affiliates, and generally developing its network. Such a practice is simply beyond the financial capacity of the CCPA, despite its solid, dues-paying membership base.²⁶ The AFB process

25. See <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/ourschools-ourselves/our-schoolsour-selves-spring-2013>.

26. See Carroll and Huxtable, "Building Capacity." For the first fifteen years of its existence, the CCPA was highly dependent upon Canadian unions for funding – one former board member suggested that up to 95 per cent of CCPA funding came from unions in the 1980s and early 1990s. This funding enabled the centre to maintain a basic level of activity, but what allowed it to develop from a fledgling, proto-organization, with one office staff person and an executive director, to its current manifestation of multiple offices and a staff of dozens was a public push for individuals to take out memberships. Prior to this 1994 membership drive, the CCPA had 238 members, 98 of them individuals; the majority of the 140 organizational memberships were held by unions. Currently, the organization has approximately 10,000 individual and organizational members. Union funding, while still significant, makes up less than a third of the CCPA's annual budget. The CCPA's financial autonomy from the usual suspects of private foundations has enabled it to avoid the pitfall of "foundation-managed protest," which afflicts some left think tanks, as noted by others. See Bob Feldman, "Report from the Field: Left Media and Left Think Tanks: Foundation-managed Protest?" *Critical Sociology*, 33 (May 2007): 427–446. Yet there is no doubt that continuing labour-movement support, financially and through membership on the CCPA board of directors, inclines the centre toward union concerns. What is impressive in this regard is the extent to which the CCPA articulates social and political interests that reach well beyond the immediate concerns of labour into ecology, gender, healthy communities and education, to name a few. On this point, see Carroll and Huxtable, "Building Capacity."

is similarly constrained by resources. Respondents noted that in some years building the AFB involves “consultation” with the leadership of various community groups, falling short of a truly “participatory, deliberative” exercise, which would unduly strain the CCPA’s limited resources, if not bankrupt the organization.

Indeed, compared to the community-based practices of participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil,²⁷ where the first participatory budgeting process was established in 1989, the CCPA’s version amounts to a dialogue-among-experts rather than an exercise in grassroots deliberative democracy. This comparison is instructive, though it must be said that scale matters: participatory budgeting within a city (as in Porto Alegre) is far easier to organize inclusively than participatory budgeting at a national level. Also, the limited overtures the CCPA has been able to make toward a robust, participatory, and deliberative democracy (on the model say of Fung or Pateman)²⁸ must be viewed in a political-cultural context. The entrenchment of neoliberal politics and consumer capitalism as a way of life is deeper in North America than elsewhere, placing sharper limits on CCPA initiatives than on developments in Latin American countries caught up in the so-called “pink tide.”²⁹

Securing Legitimacy and Credibility: Engaging Mainstream Media

ANY ALTERNATIVE POLICY GROUP faces the challenge of cultivating the institutional and public legitimacy that underwrites recognition as a valid source of knowledge. Ideas “considered outside the frame of responsible debate” are often simply ignored by the news media and policymakers, as Ed Finn, editor of the monthly CCPA *Monitor* told us (EF). Challenging hegemonic discourses is especially difficult during long booms, when most people feel they have a stake in the system. Organic crises such as the current one, however, do not automatically create traction for counter-hegemonic alternatives; they only shift the terrain of contention, and may in the process open up anxieties, fears, and nostalgic desires that can be mobilized for political reaction. “Good ideas” are not simply adopted by the public at any given moment. CCPA staff are conscious that the ideas now central to mainstream discourse, such as the public fixation with tax cuts, were once deemed “really radical and totally unacceptable” (TH). In the war of position, think tanks of the left must challenge “conventional wisdom” while presenting new frames through which transformative politics

27. Adalmir Marquetti, Carlos E. Schonerwald da Silva, and Al Campbell, “Participatory Economic Democracy in Action: Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre, 1989-2004,” *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 44 (March 2012): 62–81.

28. See Archon Fung, *Empowered Participation: Reinventing Urban Democracy*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Carole Pateman “Participatory democracy revisited,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 10 (March 2012): 7–19.

29. See Sara Motta, “Reinventing the Lefts in Latin America: Critical Perspectives from Below,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 40 (July 2013): 5–18.

seems possible. In part, this means developing the public and institutional credibility that allows alternatives to be taken seriously. When a historical opportunity arises, credibility in the eyes of the public and institutional gatekeepers, such as newspaper editors, must already have been established. The process of seeking legitimacy often involves conforming to established forms of knowledge production and following well-established strategies for gaining media attention. APGs that seek to develop and promote transformative practices of political engagement can find themselves in a paradoxical position, wherein the prospects for engaging in transformative practice from a strong, credible position depend upon having successfully engaged in a modicum of “mainstreaming” that might resemble public relations exercises.

The CCPA arose as a response to the rightward shift in elite policy planning circles and ultimately in public discourse. Its initial strategy featured policy conferences and academic papers that countered the emergent neoliberal narrative with rigorous research, promoted via press releases. This did not prove particularly effective. As Ed Finn recalled, the mainstream press “would occasionally put something in [the news] and always refer to us as a left-wing, union supported think tank.” The CCPA has come a long way since those times, but the relatively effective media strategies it has developed are not without their tensions – which need to be addressed in the evolving KPM practices.

Because those with institutionally entrenched power “have privileged access to communication and, therefore, disproportionate control over political discourse,”³⁰ APGs cannot ignore hegemonic sites of knowledge production. Responding to the orthodoxy of the day is a continuing necessity for any left think tank; however, in responding to ideas cast within, say neoclassical economics, one can be captured by that paradigm (as in arguments that assume the virtue of boundless capital accumulation).³¹ Instead of challenging the paradigm, one reaffirms it, perhaps in a kinder, gentler version.

Trish Hennessy framed this struggle as one involving Overton’s Window: “the notion that an idea might be completely unthinkable, radical, unacceptable in the public realm at one point, but over time ... can become a mainstream idea” (TH). At stake in the pursuit of institutional legitimacy is the opportunity to pry open Overton’s Window. An issue considered marginal within elite policy circles, such as increasing corporate taxes, could be in the process of becoming popular with the general public. As Bruce Campbell asked, “... having the banks pay their fair share of taxes ... is it marginal or mainstream? In civil society, it’s got a lot of momentum, so it may be outside

30. Coy, Woehrle, and Maney, “A Typology of Oppositional Knowledge.”

31. As distinct from human development within rich social relations or from what has been termed “genuine progress.” See, for example, the Genuine Progress Indicator developed by the group Redefining Progress, at http://rprogress.org/sustainability_indicators/genuine_progress_indicator.htm. These latter conceptions offer possibilities for redefining the interests of labour in a way that refuses the hegemonic equation, $\text{liveliness} = \text{jobs} = \text{capital accumulation}$.

what the business establishment or ... media establishment thinks is critical, but we think it's an important issue ... what is marginal today, may be mainstream tomorrow, especially if a political party picks it up" (BC).

Part and parcel of the paradoxical quest for institutional legitimacy is the issue of disciplinary credentials. Neoclassical economics is taken by the liberal mainstream to be the *sine qua non* of policy analysis. Credibility within the mainstream requires CCPA authors to follow suit. Indeed, some of the research and policy staff at CCPA have professional training in conventional economics. This accreditation has enabled the centre to exercise "voice" within mainstream policy discussions. Interestingly, a good number of CCPA analysts are *not* economists, but count sociology, political economy, industrial relations, and philosophy among their disciplinary backgrounds. This diversity enriches the possibilities for developing and articulating innovative alternatives, but it can leave the centre vulnerable to attack from the right, as when David MacDonald's credentials as an economist were challenged in response to his report on Canadian bank bailouts in the spring of 2012. In effect, the CCPA's pursuit of *standing* within the mainstream media spotlight has obliged it to emulate the methods and style of conventional think tanks.³² This strategy forms a necessary element in the toolkit, but it may backfire, and can pose problems for the counterpublic side of the centre's project. Indeed, one participant noted that the CCPA is still perceived by some subaltern groups as an "insider" to entrenched power, despite efforts to engage with marginalized communities and to "produce an atmosphere of mutual learning" (BC).

Left think tanks, like the broader movements they are connected to, "make *strategic* use of the media for various counter-hegemonic purposes which include *critique* of existing social and material conditions, *disruption* of dominant discourses ... and *articulation* of alternatives"³³ News production, as has been pointed out by a number of scholars, is a "system of power" through which hegemony is constructed.³⁴ The relationship between the news media and oppositional groups, be they unions, movement organizations, or APGs, is one of "asymmetrical dependency" in which the latter need the media far more than the media need them.³⁵ For this reason and others, left think tanks face greater hurdles than their hegemonic counterparts in breaking into the mainstream news spotlight.

32. On the strategic considerations facing social movements vis-à-vis the mainstream media, see William Gamson and Gadi Wolfsfeld, "Movements and Media as Interacting Systems," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 528, no. 1 (1993): 114–127.

33. William K. Carroll and R.S. Ratner, "Media Strategies and Political Projects: A Comparative Study of Social Movements," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 24 (Winter 1999): 2.

34. Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media and the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

35. Gamson and Wolfsfeld, "Movements and Media."

Engaging publics through traditional and new media is a critical role that the CCPA has carved out for itself in the war of position. As Bruce Campbell observed, "in some ways, we have a lot in common with the Fraser Institute, which is to say that while we certainly engage policymakers directly in our work, we don't see that as our primary mission. Our primary mission is to have a conversation with the public at large about what kind of society we want to live in" For Campbell, the central role of the CCPA "in the policy/ideas trenches, is to build momentum and credibility for an alternative paradigm" (BC). The challenge is to do that while avoiding marginalization.

Clearly, the Fraser Institute had great success in shaping the "Reagan-Thatcher-Mulroney revolution" in Canada. CCPA staff acknowledge the effectiveness of Fraser's "innovative" communications strategies and have even imitated them. *Canada's CEO Elite 100: the 0.01%*, a report released to great media fanfare near the beginning of each January (as the amount earned by an average CEO already reaches the same level as the average Canadian earns in an entire year) trades not only on the recent imagery of the 99 per cent and the 1 per cent; it replicates the Fraser Institute's declaration of "Tax Freedom Day," which recruits support for a low-tax regime. Similarly, the ranking of provinces in the Missing Pieces project (2000–2004) according to their support for equity, quality, public accountability, and accessibility was inspired by the Fraser Institute's annual school rankings, which purport to demonstrate the superiority of private schooling. The Fraser Institute has been looked to, sometimes, not only as an adversary, but also as an exemplar whose provocative rhetorical strategies can be emulated in some ways.

Such an approach is distinct from directly influencing policy, which is also part of the war of position. CCPA protagonists have drawn an important distinction between "more technocratic think tanks who are working directly for government" and organizations like the CCPA and the Fraser Institute, which are more oriented to influencing public opinion (SK). The CCPA is not completely aloof of parliamentary politics, but this is not the priority, and it appears to spend less time on such activities than in the past. From the 1980s through the end of the 1990s, the centre made fifteen presentations to Parliamentary Committee, a number that puts it near the bottom of the list of similar organizations.³⁶ It has also contributed official reports (notably the 2002 backgrounder for the Romanow Commission, which demanded, with some success, that the federal government strengthen protections for health care in trade agreements and prevent future Medicare expansions from challenge). The CCPA has engaged in "exchanges" with a number of different political parties, but the purpose of these engagements is to promote the research of the centre rather than coordinate policy or strategy.

36. D.E. Abelson, "Public Visibility and Policy Relevance: Assessing the Influence and Impact of Canadian Policy Institutes," *Canadian Public Administration*, 42 (June 1999): 261.

This focus on public debate is also why the centre has been interested not simply in *producing* research reports but in making the knowledge publicly accessible. For a left think tank committed to informing and animating public discussion, web content and media hits are a more significant measure of success than gaining the attention of policy elites. Thus, the CCPA has focused its contribution to the war of position on the two-fold project of developing a community of practice with like-minded groups while engaging the general public through mainstream news media, alternative media, and new media, all with the intent of building support for an alternative paradigm.

Successfully challenging dominant ideas is a long-term project, and this is clearly recognized by CCPA staff. Indeed, some of our respondents suggested think tanks of the right have also had to confront the challenge of winning space in the ideological field. Ed Finn compared the CCPA's early struggles with the mainstream media to that of the right-wing Fraser Institute in the 1970s, "putting a lot of stuff out, but not getting a whole lot of traction on it" until the "Reagan-Thatcher-Mulroney period [shifted the] political culture in their direction" (EF). Today, the simple narrative doggedly promulgated by the Fraser Institute since the 1970s – taxes are inherently bad, government spending is out of control – is conventional wisdom and provides the Fraser Institute credibility within the mainstream media. When the Fraser Institute proposes neoliberal prescriptions, even outlandish ones, such as the privatization of air, they are accorded space in the media spotlight for two closely related reasons. First, the institute has "much easier access to ... gatekeepers such as editorialists" (BC). Second, the policy prescriptions it proposes fall within the dominant neoliberal framework. However, the comfortable reality that the Fraser Institute now enjoys was shaped, in part, by its own efforts. The CCPA strategy to counter this dominant framework has partially involved emulating some of the media tactics that proved successful for the Fraser Institute. Yet, these have been only one element of a broader strategy.

As outlined above, developing a presence in mainstream news media is a central challenge for any APG, and since the 1990s the centre has "gained much more credibility and acceptance" (EF) – to the point that the Fraser Institute no longer commands greater overall standing within the media spotlight. Our informants saw the AFB, rigorous methodologically and more accurate in its projections than the federal Finance Department, as a major factor in "legitimizing the CCPA ... in the eyes of the mainstream ... national media ..." (C13). Yet, getting media gatekeepers to take seriously the possibility of an alternative to neoliberal policy remains a challenge. Journalists will accept the CCPA's "numbers" (as in the AFB) but then ask, "we couldn't really implement this, could we? ... it isn't really workable, is it?" (DM). Such responses highlight the balance between the immediate goal of presenting critiques and alternatives to specific policies and the longer-term project of countering the hegemonic discourses that underlie conventional policy prescriptions. Engaging in the war of position through mainstream media can produce a number of paradoxes.

Media's interest in attracting large audiences has sometimes positioned the CCPA within the "polarizing discourse" of "he said/she said" radio and TV debates, which are conducive neither to articulating alternative futures nor to promoting social and political dialogue (TH).

Addressing such challenges requires that knowledge be mobilized strategically, with attention to the most appropriate audience and to how messages are framed. For example, research that is not anticipated to have much traction in the mainstream media may be passed on initially to activists in organized labour or social movements in the hope that they may be more able to motivate a public debate. A provocative idea can be floated without actually being endorsed. Putting ideas that may currently lie outside Overton's Window into public discussion is an important way of giving "ammunition" (BC) to activist communities who can take the analysis and run with it.

In other cases, particularly where stable long-term funding permits, key issues can be addressed with both short-term and long-term goals in mind. A socially conscious donor's funding of the Inequality Project enabled an ongoing initiative despite initial public indifference. Over time, through knowledge from focus groups, the project crafted a framing ("the rich and the rest of us") that proved effective, not only in raising consciousness about economic disparities, but in opening up discussion of alternatives. Focus groups help track what latitude exists for presenting alternatives without incurring self-marginalization. They allow the CCPA to test the waters, to see if its messaging resonates with the general public. One respondent suggested that focus-group consultation has been helpful both in understanding how Canadians view social inequality through the lens of their class location and in highlighting the issue of household debt as one requiring further research and public consciousness-raising (C11). However, as a technique, focus groups fall well short of knowledge coproduction through dialogical, participatory democratic engagement, and run the risk of simply massaging the message to resonate with where the public is now, rather than provoking more counter-hegemonic thinking.

Despite its successes, the centre's engagement with mainstream media presents it with a paradox. Mobilizing alternative knowledge for social change requires a shift from critiques of the status quo to proposals for a coherent alternative future. Counter-hegemonic alternatives cannot be framed simply within hegemonic discourses, nor can they be sought through hegemonic practices. A critical challenge is in developing alternative modes of KPM that take groups like the centre beyond the role of constant critic on the margins (what senior economist Armine Yalnizyan called the "professional complainer"), to that of intellectual leadership in helping to chart a credible, democratic path to a better future (AY).

Alternative Media, Social Media, Popular Education: Conduits for Counter-Hegemony

THE EXISTENCE OF ALTERNATIVE MEDIA and the ongoing revolution in new online media platforms offer APGs opportunities to break partially from traditional methods of knowledge mobilization that are often colonized by capital – indeed, the decolonization of cultural production is cited by Mouzelis as “a necessary (but not in itself sufficient) precondition” for social democratization today.³⁷ Expansion of new media, particularly via the Internet, has been crucial in enabling collective actors who seek to develop a counter-hegemonic project. Mainstream news media in Canada are owned by an ever shrinking number of corporations pursuing business agendas that tend to conflate infotainment value with newsworthiness.

Engaging alternative news and information media has allowed the centre to target sympathetic members of the general public and to counterpublics, providing them with rigorously developed knowledge that they can deploy in both activism and everyday encounters. In Canada, *Rabble*, *Huntington Post Canada*, and *Tyee* are news and information sources accessed by progressive politicians, activists, and trade unionists as alternatives to the mainstream. CCPA connections to them are strong and reciprocal.³⁸ Without doubt, the knowledge produced and disseminated by the centre is more likely to be picked up by such outlets and relayed to the movements and counterpublics that form their readership. The limitation of such media outlets, of course, is their small audience, in comparison to television news or the major daily newspapers, as our respondents pointed out.

The centre’s dual strategy – reaching out to the mainstream while nurturing a social democratic community of practice – has committed it to making alternative knowledge as accessible as possible to diverse readers and audiences. The CCPA has, for some time, made its research freely available to the public through its website. Its engagement with social media also provides new tools to disseminate its work and to engage new audiences. Social media tools and coverage in the mainstream and alternative press, have helped increase the numbers of people who access these reports. In 2011, CCPA reports were downloaded from its website 2.14 million times, according to Seth Klein. Based on monthly estimates, Bruce Campbell projected that number to climb to four million for 2012. As recently as half a dozen years ago, Trish Hennessy told us, the standard procedure for reaching a broad audience was to write a report, convert it to a pdf for uploading to the website, and disseminate it further through the mainstream media. Success hinged on how many newspapers picked up the story and whether television news stories devoted a sound-bite to the key finding. The social media revolution has not supplanted these old techniques of knowledge mobilization but has made new tools and

37. Nicos Mouzelis, “Reflexive Modernization and the Third Way,” 448.

38. Carroll and Huxtable, “Building Capacity.”

approaches available. These approaches include a Twitter strategy to keep the issue alive throughout the day and try to get it to trend nationally, a Facebook-sharing strategy through which progressives really engaged with the issues move the report through their networks and a raft of supportive, popular education tools – “an interactive online tool, an interactive poll ... a short video ... infographics, mini-postcard messages, that type of thing.” Blogging provides another layer, enabling centre staff to engage immediately with an emerging issue in “informal, accessible language ... that can be shared throughout Twitter and Facebook by the end of the day ... sometimes even affecting the mainstream news story” (TH). Articles from the *Monitor*, meanwhile, are now packaged into readings on a variety of topics and made available to educators for use in the classroom. All the while, these initiatives are counter-balanced by the continuing generation of new research-based reports aimed at policy networks, academics, and media.

There are limitations to how helpful such tools can be. The membership of the CCPA – the *Monitor*’s readership – comprises an “older” generation; engaging social media creates pathways to a “younger demographic” and allows the centre to bypass the mainstream media; but the audience that it most likely reaches is (mostly) composed of those who already know the work of the CCPA. “People who are following us on social media are coming to our website ... It’s sort of preaching to the converted, in a way,” as one participant commented (C13). The challenge here, is to continue the work of community development among progressive movements “on the margins” in ways that help those counterpublics grow into the mainstream, not by becoming co-opted but by changing what “mainstream” means.

For the other side of the CCPA’s knowledge mobilization work – engaging with the general public – the greatest value of social media may be in generating a “buzz” that grabs the attention of the mainstream news media and, therefore, a wider audience. Yet, media buzzes and hooks do not in themselves challenge the hegemonic narratives of neoliberal capitalism.

Changing the story: moving beyond critique

PART OF THE STORY OF THE ASCENDANCE of neoliberalism is its proponents’ success in portraying Keynesian economics, the regulatory regimes inspired by it, and the accompanying welfare state policies as the cause of the economic crises of the 1970s. Consigning this paradigm to the status of antiquity allowed neoliberals to change the story, to juxtapose to these “old” ideas a “new” dynamic project of “economic freedom.” This is the story that the CCPA struggles to challenge. Bruce Campbell framed this struggle well: “you have to remind people of what it was like before neoliberalism. But you want to do that in such a way that you’re not always seen as harkening back to a past.” Changing the story has two components: naming neoliberal capitalism as the problem and re-describing it as a reactionary formulation unsuited to our times; and, presenting an alternative narrative that connects these times to a better future.

The successful framing of the welfare state as *passé* obliges the centre to present social democratization, not as a nostalgic look backward but as a future-oriented political project rooted in longstanding traditions of the left. In part, this involves popular education: informing the public as to how progressive policy and practice work well today. Examples our informants volunteered include resource policies in Norway, the social economy in Quebec, pharmacare in Newfoundland, and the cooperatives of Mondragon. In part, it requires ethico-political vision: tying the critique of commodification and hyper-individualization to an insistence upon solidarity, public spaces and services, and healthy communities as the basis for each person's welfare. It entails discerning what may lie within the "adjacent possible," as an achievable alternative, in a given conjuncture³⁹ – not what people think now but, as Seth Klein put it, "where ... they'd be prepared to go *soon*, and how ... we expedite that." (SK)

Connecting a troubled present to an alternative future is indeed one of the greatest challenges in alternative knowledge production. As Trish Hennessy argues, there is a danger in not "taking the critical analysis somewhere":

... we're very good at analyzing what's wrong with the situation; and what our research shows is that can be very immobilizing and disempowering for people. The more we're showing them what's wrong, the more they're going "wow, what can we do? I mean, I guess that's globalization or whatever." So our challenge ... [is] to move the conversation ... [to show] we actually do have answers that are very different than the ones on the table today (TH).

Formulating the answers and helping to give them life within civil society is the CCPA's biggest challenge.

Armine Yalnizyan characterized the basic template for CCPA interventions as Expose/Oppose/Propose (which we have borrowed for this article's title): "expose the role of the 1 per cent and what is happening to the middle and what is happening to the bottom, oppose the mechanisms that are making these trends worse – forget about fixing them," and propose alternatives. But, she continued, "we're not very good at the proposal stage ... and I have to say this has got to become increasingly our focus" (AY). Others agreed with her diagnosis. As mentioned earlier, evidence-based critique is inadequate to change the story. Seth Klein recounts how easy it is to illustrate serious weakness in the neoliberal narrative: there is no denying inequality is on the increase, and that inequality has an economic, social, and climate cost. "And [neoliberals] don't have a response to any of that." Yet, Seth continued, "... I don't think we've been terribly good at then positing what the alternative is" (SK).

39. As Unger reminds us, "the possible that counts is not the fanciful horizon of possibilities but the *adjacent possible*: what is accessible with the materials at hand, deployed in the pursuit of movement in the desired direction." R.M. Unger, *The Left Alternative* (London: Verso, 2009), xxi, emphasis added.

Supporting a social democratic community of practice: concluding thoughts

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES facing a left think tank that seeks to facilitate development of a community of practice is the diversity found among contemporary counterpublics and movements. This diversity can be seen as both a problem and a strength. On the one hand, the “siloing” of issues into distinct movements, each with an identity to be valorized, is to some degree a product of “postmodern fragmentation” whereby “the commodification of everyday life fragments collective identities” into a variety of subcultures.⁴⁰ As Ed Finn observed,

one of the problems that we have is the divisiveness between all these groups – all the NGOs and the unions and others ... focused on their particular concern ... and the way they were addressing them would be to point out the problems that these individual groups were facing ... and then go to governments ... and try to pressure them to provide remedies.

Such organizations, he suggested, have been “set up in such a way as to try and help the victims, not try to prevent people from becoming victims” (EF). Ironically, the right today might in some ways be less siloed and more Gramscian in its sensibility toward creating common ground.⁴¹ One respondent recalled that a CCPA intern, reporting back from a conference organized by the far-right Manning Centre, found the evangelicals, libertarians, social conservatives, and fiscal conservatives in attendance “were all there under the same tent.” In contrast, the contemporary left is often fissured by “environmental issues,” “labour issues,” “Aboriginal issues,” and other focused concerns, and sometimes the left gets mired in petty squabbles over issues such as carbon tax vs. cap-and-trade. The right, our informant suggested, seems to be able to put aside minor differences, to be much more strategic and “big picture” in its thinking (C13).

Yet, ideological diversity was seen by some CCPA figures as potentially beneficial. Seth Klein acknowledged that “one of the great challenges of the counter-hegemonic [project] of the last two decades is that it’s less coherent than the neoliberal project. That said, I’m not sure it can be any other way ... the other world that we seek is not some monolithic thing; it’s much more diverse. So, that’s a strength, but it also presents challenges” (SK). Scott Sinclair observed that “the CCPA is probably home to most kinds of reformist and radical perspectives and I think it is probably a pretty healthy synergy between them” (SS).

The countermovement building against neoliberalism needs to put up its own big tent. This is reflected in the views expressed by CCPA staff. While almost all of our respondents saw the centre’s mandate as generally guided by social democratic principles, there were diverse understandings of what

40. William K. Carroll, “Crisis, Movements, Counter-Hegemony: in Search of the New,” *Interface*, 2 (November 2010): 172.

41. Susan George, “How to Win the War of Ideas: Lessons from the Gramscian Right,” *Dissent: A Quarterly of Politics and Culture*, 43 (Summer 1997): 47–53.

this meant. Some saw the contemporary social democratic project as one of completing unfinished business, such as the development of a universal pharmacare program, the expansion of public childcare, or providing better supports for the marginalized. Several added an urgent concern for transitioning to ecological sustainability. Others suggested that the current historical juncture calls for an analysis that challenges the power of capital in society. Marc Lee summed up the range of perspectives quite succinctly:

For some who are involved with the CCPA, it's just about getting ... more funding for health-care initiatives, and for education, or for development of a childcare program, but it's still very much versed in that broader capitalist economy. It's social democracy, not democratic socialism. Whereas others are more radical and would anticipate opportunities for nationalization or a much more concerted attack on capital (ML).

To date, the two strains seem to have coexisted without major difficulty. As Scott Sinclair commented, "I don't see a big contradiction between structural reforms – reforms that lead us to further progress towards perhaps a more radically – or truly – egalitarian ecologically sustainable society, and focusing on achievable steps in the current political conjuncture" (ss). This coexistence reflects the diversity across the community of practice, including various social movement organizations and unions, as well as the NDP, which takes up some of the "achievable steps" within the parliamentary arena.

What appears to bind this amalgamation of social democracy and democratic socialism is a shared commitment to a *process* of social democratization. In a context in which neoliberalism is both dominant and weakened, social democratization, broadly construed to encompass the various CCPA initiatives we have reviewed here, may offer a basis of unity for a diverse coalition that includes both the labour left and the new social movements. The challenge in sustaining the process lies in identifying and advocating what Trotsky called "transitional demands" and what Gorz termed non-reformist reforms.⁴² Unlike reformist reforms (which are always geared toward the preservation of the system), non-reformist reforms prioritize social needs, making "a positive difference in people's lives," while challenging power structures in a way that moves society toward greater democracy.⁴³ As McEwen notes, both method and substance are important:

Regardless of the content of reforms, if the method of reform does not challenge the alienation of most people from control over their economic lives, its positive, democratic implications will be limited. Democratic initiatives, non-reformist reforms, cannot simply be for the people; they need to be of the people and by the people as well.⁴⁴

42. Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Program* (1938), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/index.htm>; André Gorz, *Strategy for Labor: A Radical Proposal* (Boston: Beacon Press 1967), 6–8.

43. Arthur McEwen, *Neo-liberalism or Democracy? Economic Strategy, Markets, and Alternatives* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 16.

44. McEwen, *Neo-liberalism or Democracy*, 18.

This study has focused less on content⁴⁵ and more on method – the commitment to popular education and to challenging conventional wisdom on the basis of rigorous research; the extensive use of dialogical methods in collaborating with movement allies; the forays into alternative budgeting, social media, and other participatory approaches to KPM; the engagement, through mainstream media, with the general public, in an ongoing conversation – both fact-based and ethico-political – on what kind of society Canadians want to have; the fledgling attempts to “change the story” by responding in kind to neoliberalism’s TINA mantra. Through these social democratizing forms of KPM, the CCPA has provided leadership in the war of position, engaging with both mainstream and counterpublics, helping to build a community of practice that encompasses a diversity of progressive movements. The style of leadership has been dialogical and educative, not directive: the centre has offered research, arguments, and “ammunition” to movements and has initiated public conversations about what kind of society Canada might become. In this way, the CCPA serves as a collective organic intellectual: it articulates a project that incorporates the interests of labour within a broader vision that resonates with other progressive movements, yet is not so discrepant from public opinion as to court marginalization.

The latter consideration has, of course, shaped what the CCPA can be and do. Absent from CCPA public policy discourse (with the exception of *Monitor* articles that are read almost exclusively by CCPA members) is a vision of *democratic socialism* – the notion that it is not only neoliberal policies, but capitalism itself that needs to be replaced with a democratic alternative.

What the centre can be and do is also shaped to a certain degree by Canadian laws that regulate tax exemptions.⁴⁶ Like most Canadian think tanks, the CCPA is registered with Revenue Canada as a charitable organization and, therefore, able to offer its donors receipts that can be applied against their income tax obligations. As such, it is limited in its ability to promote or criticize particular political parties and must ensure an arms-length relationship. Think tanks in Canada take different steps to ensure that they are not seen as affiliated with a particular political party or to be spending resources beyond the legally prescribed limit on policy advocacy.⁴⁷ The Manning Foundation, for example, has created the Manning Centre, through which it engages in overt political advocacy; however, the Board of Directors for these two organizations overlaps significantly and is largely made up of prominent members of

45. Reforms proposed by the CCPA can be perused on its website: <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/> See especially the “Projects and Initiatives” tab.

46. D.E. Abelson, “Do Think Tanks Matter? Opportunities, Constraints and Incentives for Think Tanks in Canada and the United States,” *Global Society*, 14, 2 (2000): 213–236.

47. See Abelson, “Public Visibility and Policy Relevance,” as well as Abelson “Do Think Tanks Matter?”

the Conservative Party of Canada.⁴⁸ The new Broadbent Institute also has a Board of Directors that illustrates a clear link to the NDP.⁴⁹

In contrast, the CCPA, while clearly overlapping ideologically with some elements within the NDP, has a Board of Directors made up of academics, union leaders and staff, and other progressive policy groups.⁵⁰ The board clearly reflects the most organized and prominent elements of the social democratic community of practice in Canada; however, it also likely reflects the concern that the centre has with ensuring it is not seen as partisan. Anxieties expressed by staff during interviews about a Canada Revenue Agency attack on charities on the Conservative government's "enemy list"⁵¹ appear to have been well founded, as the organization is currently being audited, along with a number of progressive environmental and social movement charities.⁵²

As for actual influence on public policy, the centre's detailed critiques of neoliberal proposals may have contributed to political moderation in some instances, yet very few CCPA proposals have been directly adopted as actual reforms. Canada has never had a social democratic federal government. In the provinces, which are accorded considerable powers within the federated state, rather than engage in robust processes of social democratization, left-leaning governments in the past three decades have tended not to stray far from a neoliberal line.⁵³ For the most part, the CCPA has remained an outsider to state power. That political reality has obliged it to embrace dialogical and democratizing practices centred upon civil society. No longer dismissed in the media spotlight, yet perennially on the sidelines of state-centred policy formation, the CCPA is "waiting for the wave" to invoke a characterization of Canadian neoconservatism, first popularized a decade before the "unite the right" movement culminated in a hard-right federal government.⁵⁴ The same might be said, in varying degrees, of APGs elsewhere, whose social democratizing

48. As found at <http://manningcentre.ca/about-us/> and <http://www.manningfoundation.org/about-us/our-people>.

49. As found at <https://www.broadbentinstitute.ca/en/about-institute/broadbent-team>.

50. As found at <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/offices/national/board-directors>.

51. As found at http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/07/15/cabinet_shuffle_2013_new_ministers_given_enemy_lists.html.
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/harper-tories-facing-heat-for-compiling-enemies-lists-for-new-ministers/article13240082/>.

52. As found at <http://behindthenumbers.ca/2014/02/11/who-will-they-come-for-next/>.

53. 53. William K. Carroll, "Social Democracy in Neoliberal Times," in William K. Carroll and R.S. Ratner, eds., *Challenges and Perils: Social Democracy in Neoliberal Times* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2005), 7–24.

54. Tom Flanagan, *Waiting for the Wave: The Reform Party and the Conservative Movement* (Montréal: McGill-University Press, 2009).

efforts build platforms beyond narrow policy networks for alternative futures – in Britain, South Africa, Germany, Thailand, and so on.⁵⁵

Indeed, the centre's own community of practice increasingly reaches beyond national borders. Although the CCPA is a national organization, the issues it takes up are implicated in a global political economy and political ecology, and the publics and movements it addresses are often transnational. Over time, the CCPA has developed alliances and collaborations with transnationally oriented policy alternative groups – with Ottawa-based Polaris Institute early on, with Focus on the Global South, the Third World Network and other groups through TIRP, and with Social Watch, whose Canadian operation the centre hosts. These relations of mutual aid connect the CCPA into a fledgling global left and place its own aspirations into a global perspective on social democratization and a green transition. Beyond our substantive findings, this study points to the need for comparative research on the development of APGs in varying national contexts and for explorations of the roles transnational APGs play in both national and global policy fields.

Appendix: Participants Interviewed

AY	Armine Yalnizyan, Senior Economist
BC	Bruce Campbell, Executive Director
DM	David MacDonald, Senior Economist
EF	Ed Finn, Editor of <i>The Monitor</i> (retired Spring 2014)
ML	Marc Lee, Senior Economist, BC Office
SK	Seth Klein, Director of BC Office
SS	Scott Sinclair, Director of Trade and Investment Research Project
TH	Trish Hennessy, Director of Ontario Office
C11	Confidential interviewee 1
C12	Confidential interviewee 2
C13	Confidential interviewee 3

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55. In Britain Compass (<http://www.compassonline.org.uk/>) and CLAss (<http://classonline.org.uk/>) and in South Africa the Alternative Information Development Centre (<http://www.aidc.org.za/>) offer intellectual leadership to the left opposition in a manner similar to the CCPA. In Thailand, the Philippines and India, Focus on the Global South (<http://focusweb.org/>) intervenes, with movement partners, in national-level policy debates while also maintaining its transnational purview. Like the CCPA, these alternative policy groups typically operate at some distance from mainstream policy networks and state organizations, yet they furnish intellectual resources within the war of position. In Germany, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (<http://www.rosalux.de/english/>) and particularly its Institute for Critical Social Analysis is the brain trust of the democratic-socialist Left Party, which has been able to implement some non-reformist reforms at the local level when it has participated in governing coalitions. Interestingly, some *transnational* APGs, notably the Amsterdam-based Transnational Institute, have been extensively involved in helping governments of Latin America's 'pink tide' to formulate policy alternatives (see Carroll, "Alternative Policy Groups and Transnational Counter-Hegemonic Struggle"). Their innovations reflect the quite different terms of engagement that emerge when shifts in state power open space for social democratization.