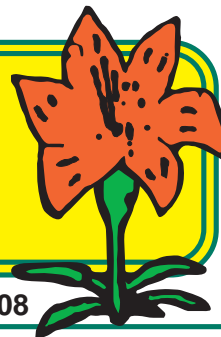


Seniors' Voice



Volume 15: No. 7

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Eternal Vigilance is the price of Liberty. Power is ever stealing from the many to the few.

Saskatchewan Beware: Folly of Energy Privatization in B.C.

Liquid Gold, Energy Privatization in British Columbia, by John Calvert, Fernwood Publishing, Halifax & Winnipeg, 256 pages, \$24.95. — Review by Roy Le Berge

Liquid Gold tells the tragic story of how British Columbians are rapidly losing control of their electricity system through privatization.

Author John Calvert validates this story with information drawn from authoritative sources, including reports and policy statements by the Government of British Columbia. Among the most quoted sources is a Year 2002 report titled *Energy for Our Future, a plan for B. C.* in which the Provincial Government established a new policy framework.

Calvert warns that over time, this plan “will transform B.C. Hydro’s role from an owner and producer of public electricity to a purchaser and distributor of private energy... The long-term impact of the current government’s policies will be to destroy the Crown utility’s historic role as supplier of affordable energy and a driver of economic development within B.C.”

Through the use of Energy Purchasing Agreements, B.C. Hydro is now required to buy power from private power developers located within the province. As a result, “it is now paying as much as double current energy-market rates under the terms of inflation-indexed, long-term contracts.

“Yet at the end of the day, despite the very high prices it pays for private energy, the public gets

no assets, no guarantee that energy will not be exported in the future, and no price protection once contracts have expired.

“In sum, the costs of this reorganization are being borne almost exclusively by the public, through fees paid by B.C. Hydro, while the benefits are almost exclusively reaped by private energy interest.”

The Government has also given private interests the option of exporting energy rather than selling it to B.C. Hydro.

The new policy also allows U.S. energy companies, banks and investors to acquire power plants in B.C. This “has profound implications for the province’s future energy security and its ability to meet its growing energy needs,” the author warns.

First Nations and local communities have been almost entirely excluded from this “corporate bonanza,” he points out. “Only a handful of the 495 water licences awarded by November 2006 went to First Nations, despite the fact that almost all the projects are on territory subject to their land claims.”

Even the future of “green energy” is now in the hands of private interests. “The government has given its friends the results of government

“The price that good people pay, for their indifference to public affairs, is to be ruled by evil men.” — Plato

research that has enabled them to identify the most promising run-of-the-river and wind farm locations in the province.” (Run-of-the-river projects divert a portion of river or stream’s water through a pipe running parallel to the riverbed down to a power-house, where it is used to generate electricity, then returned to the river below the power-house.)

Green energy projects are supposed to undergo stringent environmental reviews, but the government has weakened the environmental process in response to lobbying from private energy developers. “The vast majority of run-of-the-river projects no longer need to undergo a full environmental assessment, and, thus far, the environmental assessment process always resulted in approval, regardless of the location and impact of the project,” Calvert reports.

Environmental impacts are not restricted to the construction of a single power plant itself. They are also caused by interconnected servicing roads and transmission lines needed to move the B.C Hydro’s main grid.

The government’s friends are acquiring water licences and wind farmland tenure licences “for minimal fees on a first-come, first-served basis.” In an appendix, the author identifies 120 companies that already own or have applied for, private water licences in the province.

Liquid Gold offers its readers a history of the path to privatization and its impact on: B.C. Hydro, energy prices, local communities, the environment, future security of supply and future public control—or lack of it.

The book also shows how the government has tried to neutralize potential opposition from First Nations, whose treaty rights constitute a risk for private investors “and hence a problem for government to overcome while implementing its private power agenda.”

A final chapter discusses the overall consequences of the government’s privatization agenda for B.C.’s public system, and examine

some of the options the government could—and should—have adopted “to maintain what arguably has been one of the most reliable, secure, and low-cost electricity system in the world.

Calvert hopes that a clear understanding of the full implications of the current policy will lead to demands that it be reversed, and that “future policies will focus on restoring public ownership, control and management of the B.C. electrical system.” Reading **Liquid Gold** is an excellent way to acquire that full understanding. ■

John Calvert is an associate professor at Simon Fraser University, where he teaches public policy. He has a PhD from the London School of Economics in political science and a MA from the University of Western Ontario. He is the author of three books on Canadian public policy and economic issues.

Editorial note: Saskatchewan Beware!
Could the tragic story of how the British Columbians are losing control of their electricity system through privatization, be used by a government in Saskatchewan to take control over the Saskatchewan Power Corporation? Could SPC be required to buy power from private power developers located within the province?

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Rev. Bob Gay, Wally Coates, Verda Petry,
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Comments, suggestions and contributions
are greatly appreciated

Our address is : 116 Chisholm Road
Regina, Sask. S4S 5P1

Ph: (306) 536-0756: Fax 586-8088

Email: wcoates@accesscomm.ca

Notice: Seniors’ Voice website

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Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement: (TILMA) **Stop TILMA Jeopardy!!! Private Enforcement, and Impact on Saskatchewan's Crown Corporations**

By Jim Grieshaber-Otto

Signing TILMA would pose two key threats for Saskatchewan:

TILMA's private enforcement process would threaten democratic governance in Saskatchewan.

TILMA's private enforcement process overshadows all other aspects of the agreement and cannot be justified in our form of democracy. Such a process would constitute a highly controversial separate court system where appointed panellists would use TILMA rules to pass judgment of laws that citizens elected representatives have enacted in the public interest.

If Saskatchewan signed the agreement provincial taxpayers could face a flood of expensive private TILMA enforcement suits from BC and Alberta-based companies, including from U.S. and other foreign-owned corporation registered in those provinces.

By combining broadly-worded rules outlawing government measures that can be argued to restrict trade, investment, or labour mobility with this powerful private enforcement mechanism, TILMA threatens democratic authority.

TILMA would conflict with, and could destroy, Saskatchewan's Crown corporations

Any Saskatchewan government that signed TILMA would be embarking on the destruction of Saskatchewan's vibrant Crown corporations by stealth.

The thrust of TILMA is at odds with Saskatchewan's Crown corporations and their

activities. The province's Crowns are designed to address the specific needs of the citizens of Saskatchewan in part by constraining, directing and in certain cases, curtailing the operations of market forces to ensure universal access to high quality services at affordable rates, or to meet other public interest imperatives. There is an underlying tension between these aims and the basis of TILMA, namely, to promote the freer flow of goods, services and investments throughout member provinces and territories.

TILMA's broad rules, together with its private enforcement process, would threaten Crown corporations' ability to act in the public interest.

While signing TILMA would not directly result in the privatization of Crown corporations, it would erode the ability of Crowns to meet Saskatchewan citizens' legitimate expectations – thereby undermining public support for Crown corporations – the essential political foundation upon which they rest. At minimum, TILMA would give private individuals and corporations a forceful tool to challenge and redirect the activities and regulation of Crown corporations. TILMA would enable them to use the agreements private enforcement process to seek equivalent access to publicly-owned Crown infrastructure and to challenge even the continued existence of Crown corporations in the province.

There would be scant potential for any government to fully shield its vital Crown sector from the agreement when or after it signed the TILMA. In fact, any limited protection that could be obtained initially could not be considered permanent, as the agreement stipulates that TILMA members will review such protections annually to reduce or eliminate them.

Signing TILMA would signal the beginning of the end of Crown corporations as rock-solid instruments of public policy in the province.

There is a clear choice: **Saskatchewan can opt to join TILMA or Saskatchewan can maintain and enhance the vital public interest activities of Crown corporations. The province cannot do both. ■**

Bread and Circuses:

Does political “news” belong on the entertainment pages?

—By Ed Finn

The Roman emperors had a two-fold formula for preventing popular uprisings: bread and circuses. They figured that people who were well fed and entertained would be reasonably content and disinclined to revolt. And most of the time they were right. A full belly and a good seat in the arena to watch the gladiatorial fights took most people’s minds off their rulers’ despotism and debauchery.

It’s safe to assume that today’s rulers rely on a modern version of the bread and circus recipe to keep people tranquilized. Providing bread is no problem. Even those without jobs can escape starvation with the help of social assistance and food banks. But what are to modern equivalents of the Roman circus?

Most people think that the modern television, movies and hockey games serve this diversionary purpose, but I suggest that is a much more insidious opiate: the political process itself. Our governments don’t just provide entertainment. They *are* the entertainment.

In ancient Rome, the politicians were also the plutocrats—the owners of most of the land, slaves and wealth. The emperor and senators exercised economic as well as political power. The laws and decisions they made originated with them. They were not being manipulated or controlled by powerful interests “behind the throne.”

In Canada today, we are also ruled by plutocrats, but [apart from the business executives taking a

fling at politics] they are not the politicians. Our rulers are the unelected and unaccountable corporate leaders, bankers and money traders who now set the political agenda for all governments of all political stripes. Prime ministers and premiers do their bidding. The policies favoured and the laws enacted are those that enhance the wealth and power of the plutocracy.

(It’s no coincidence, surely, that the most generous contributors to the mainstream political parties are the big banks and investment firms. The banker doesn’t live who’s willing to part with a dollar without expecting to get at least \$10 back, in one form or another.)

Canada’s political system, thus subverted, has become little more than a puppet show. The politicians posture and pontificate, actors on the legislative stage, following the scripts written for them by the Bay Street barons’ PR specialists. Their debates, their hearings, their consultations, press conferences are about as realistic as professional wrestling matches—and as meaningless.

Unfortunately, while most people know that wrestling matches are a form of amusement, they haven’t yet come to realize that the political system has fallen into the same category. Even the Press Gallery journalists continue to write and talk about what the politicians are doing as if the politicians’ antics really do belong on the front page instead of in the entertainment section.

The real power-wielders in their executive suites benefit enormously from this kind of political theatrics. They can count on the media to cover political developments as if they really mattered. They can count upon citizens who are unhappy with their government to blame their government instead of the governments corporate overseers. They can count on dissident voters wasting their time lobbying the politicians in the mistaken belief that it is the politicians they elect who are running the country.

I would go so far as to argue that those who continue to trouble the politicians with frequent demands, are unwittingly helping to legitimize the charade that now passes for democracy in Canada. If they are free to lobby, to protest, to demonstrate, to vote in elections once in a while, they assume the system must be democratic.

The reality, of course, is that the politicians who form a government in our prevailing undemocratic election process, regardless of their party, will not respond—will not be permitted to respond—to the wishes of the majority of citizens. Our governments now govern on behalf of the 5% of the population who comprise the ruling class and who hold cabinet ministers on a short leash. To talk of such politicians being “in

power” when they have virtually no power is ludicrous. The laws they pass and the policies they adopt—at least the most important of them—are dictated by the business executives who have hijacked our political system.

As long as most people remain unaware of this reality, as long as they keep blaming the political puppets instead of the corporate puppeteers, the modern political “circus” will serve its intended purpose: It will divert people’s attention from their real problems, and their real enemies. It will focus their anger and frustration against the servants instead of the masters. It will reinforce people’s belief that working through the electoral system and favouring one gang of political “wrestlers” over the others is still the only way to bring about needed changes and reforms.

The only difference that I can see between the circus in ancient Rome and our parliamentary circus is that the gladiatorial fights were real and some of the gladiators really did get killed. ■

[The above opinion-piece was written 10 years ago. You can judge for yourself whether the cynicism it reflects about our political system was justified, is still justified, or was and remains an exercise in hyperbole.]

The Ten Countries with the Most Billionaires

1. United States	269
2. Japan	29
3. Germany	28
4. Italy	17
5. Canada	16
6. Switzerland	15
7. France	15
8. Hong Kong	14
9. Mexico	13
10. U.K	12
Total	428

How is it as corporate investments and foreign aid and international loans to poor countries have increased dramatically throughout the world over

the last half century, so has poverty? The number of people living in poverty is growing at a faster rate than the world’s population.

Over the last half century, U.S. industries and banks (and other western corporations) have invested heavily in those poor regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America known as the “Third World.” The trans nationals are attracted by the rich natural resources, the high return that comes from low-paid labour, and the nearly complete absence of taxes, environmental regulations, worker benefits, and occupational safety costs.

Could this be a cause of “Terrorism”?

Fight the causes of terrorism, not the symptoms.

The Growing Health Gap: Greatest Threat to Health: Economic Insecurity — Dennis Raphael

What is the No. 1 public health threat facing the people of Canada? Most Canadians would probably cite smoking, poor diet, pollution, AIDS, or government under funding. But none of these factors, though serious, is the greatest threat to our health. The No. 1 threat is increasing economic inequality.

Economic inequality is the degree to which wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small minority of citizens, as opposed to being distributed equitably across the population.

Scientific studies have found that people live longer and healthier in nations with an equitable distribution of income.

Even within nations, inequality of income is related to health. The most unequal American cities and in states, have been found to have the highest rates of death and illness. Wealth has traditionally been distributed more fairly in Canadian cities and provinces than in the United States, explaining in part why we tend to live longer than Americans. But economic inequality is on the rise in Canada, as recent studies by the CCPA and statistics Canada have documented.

Economic inequality leads to poor health in three ways: 1. Unequal localities have higher levels of poverty, an important precursor of death and illness. 2. Unequal localities have less money available for services and safety nets, shortages that also contribute to ill-health. 3. Unequal societies produce alienation between rich and poor, thereby weakening social and community ties and leading to poor health.

Why should Canadians be concerned about economic inequality? Researchers estimate that the years of life lost in Canada due to differences in wealth is close to the time lost from major killers such as cancer and heart disease. And British studies show that health levels within localities parallel the degree of inequality. As

inequality and poverty increase, so do death and illness.

Since inequality and poverty are rising in Canada, worsening health problems can be expected to strain our health care system. The greatest threat to health care is not from inadequate funding, but rather from government policies that concentrate the greatest wealth in the hands of a privileged few. And one way the rich get richer is through income tax cuts that favour them over most other Canadians.

Why are the health-related effects of economic inequality ignored by the media—even by the health and medical reporters? Why is there so little concern among policy-makers about economic inequality?

Politicians and governments, of course, understandably ignore the growing gap between the rich and poor because they are the ones whose policies have created and are still widening the gap. But the reason for media neglect of such a major health issue is less clear. Could it be because the same rich and powerful people who profit from economic inequality also own or control the media?

Whatever the explanation, it is clear that, while the affluent minority profit from economic inequality, the increasing level of illness it causes has weakened Medicare and opened the door to private for-profit health care.

Ah, who among us also profit from private health care? None other than the same wealthy few who also profit the most from economic inequality. ■

*(Dennis Raphael, PhD—draphael@yorku.ca— is the undergraduate program director at the School of Health Policy and Management at York University. He is the author of more than 100 health-related scientific publications, including his latest book, **Poverty and Policy in Canada.**)*

The Bright Side of the Boomer Bust

A rush of retirees could be sweet Salvation for non-profit groups.

— By Jordan Timm

As the baby boom generation inches closer to its white-pants and-shuffleboard years, the anticipated talent crunch—the sudden lack of skilled and experienced workers in the workplace that will result from that generation’s retirement—seems ever more imposing. It gets fretted about at the largest Bay Street firm, and in the smallest mom-and-pop operation.

But the exodus of experienced talent from the private sector could be a boon for Canada’s not-for-profits and charities. More and more boomers, for whom earning potential is no longer a top priority, are retiring for a way to give back. “As the boomers are retiring, they’re not necessarily going out on the golf course.” Says Georgina Steinsky-Schwartz, CEO of Imagine Canada, a research and advocacy group for Canadian non-profits. “They’re going off to do things in a volunteer way, or some of them are in fact taking jobs in the not-for-profit sector.”

Imagine Canada has just released a new study that highlights the challenge non-profit organizations can face in staffing. “It’s really the whole aspect of human capital,” Steinsky-Schwartz says. “That includes not only paid staff, but also volunteers and members of boards of directors.” Imagine Canada canvassed the opinions of 32 leaders across the non-profit sector, in fields like the arts, the environment and health, and found increasing concern. According to the study, the sector—comprising about 11 per cent of Canada’s workforce faces particular difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified, experienced staff who are motivated, skilled, and gifted with business acumen. What’s more, the leaders surveyed expect huge turnover at the top of their organizations, and are worried about the readiness of younger workers in their 20s and 30s to fill those seniors roles.

But older workers who are “re-careering” into the non-profit sector might be a buffer against an awkward generational transition for this country’s charities. Imagine Canada’s research found many non-profits already have retiring boomers in their crosshairs as they look for new sources of senior staff. As one anonymous respondent said, “We should target junior seniors (late 50s) from the for-profit sector who would like to do something more meaningful with their lives.” According to Toronto writer and consultant Julia Moulden’s new book, *We are the New Radicals: A Manifesto for Reinventing Yourself and Saving the World* – which explores the phenomenon of re-careering into pursuits clear closer to the heart than earning the biggest paycheque possible — 50 seems to be the magic age at which people are making the leap. “Perhaps the saying ‘don’t trust anyone over 30’ has evolved into the boomer-friendly ‘your new life begins at 50’, she writes.

So “junior seniors” might help bridge the gap between the non-profit sector’s retiring leader class and its younger recruits. Steinsky-Schwartz is herself an example of someone who made the switch, having previously worked for Bell Canada and as a federal deputy minister, among other roles. “It’s a shift in values,” she says, “and a lot of my peers, although I personally don’t like the term, talk about giving back.” Their willingness to work in the non-profit sector may be even more valuable than a willingness to open their chequebooks to it. As one respondent to the Imagine Canada survey put it, “The scarcest resource in the sector in leadership, not donations.” ■

One of the deep secrets of life is that all that is really worth doing is what we do for others.
Lewis Carroll

How to Improve Your “ Watcha Call It?”

Many older people worry about becoming forgetful. In the past, memory loss and confusion were considered part of aging. But now scientists know most people remain alert and able as they age; however, it may take a little longer to remember things — normal memory lapses.

Memory lapses have multiple causes, and are often curable. Feeling sad, lonely, worried or bored — or life-changes such as retirement or loss of a spouse — can leave some people feeling confused or forgetful. Prescription or over-the-counter medications can also affect memory, as can poor nutrition, lack of exercise and sleep deprivation.

People concerned about memory problems should see their doctor, who can assess memory loss appropriately. If dementia is not present, or the causes are reversible, then you may simply need to use your memory more efficiently. Two effective techniques for remembering are *association* and *visualization*.

Association means connecting a new piece of information to one already in your memory. For example, if you want to remember your dentist appointment is at 2 p.m., think of the office location. You know that it is on the Second Floor. Floor 2, 2 p.m.— association.

What if you can't think of an association? Use visualization. Visualization means forming pictures in your mind; it is a tried-and-true method for remembering. Let's say you're planting a garden and want to remember that tomatoes and carrots grow well near each other. Create a mental picture of Bugs Bunny with a carrot in one hand and a tomato in the other.

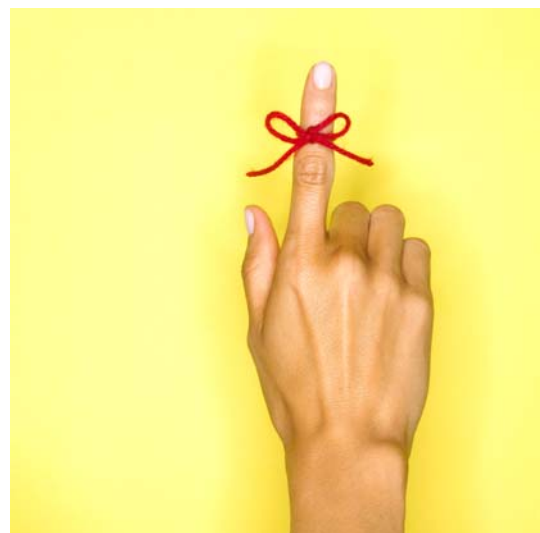
One memory challenge for people of all ages is meeting new people and remembering their names. Several methods can help us to

remember names. When you hear a person's name for the first time, use it right away to address them. Then:

1. If it is 'unusual', ask about it. Is it a family name? How is it spelled? Discussing the name more will help you remember it.
2. If it is a common name, like Bill or Mary, visualize the name floating in the air above the person's head. Or, think up a silly rhyme that ties the name to their appearance or job, like Bill counts pills (he's a pharmacist).
3. Share your intent to practice memorizing names and make a game of it with others.

If you practice memory techniques, you will find those that work best for you. Be confident, keep trying. You'll improve your memory so much you'll surprise yourself!

Submitted compliments of Donna St. Onge, Certified Senior Advisor, Conexus Credit Union, 780-1584



Never despair about getting older. It is a privilege denied to many.