Alternatives to the Low Waged Economy: Living Wage Movements in Canada and the United States

is a direct response to the expanding low wage sector in the labour market as well as the political reluctance of governments in both the United States and Canada to maintain the general minimum wage at a sufficient level of purchasing adequacy. Thirdly, and broadly subsuming the preceding point, is that these movements for economic justice are a contemporary response to the dismantling of the political Keynesianism which framed the post-war social contract between capital and labour. And particularly

employment arrangements were indeed the norm. Only with the legitimation and institutionalization of trade unions, the adoption of a range of labour protections via public policy and regulation, as well as the construction of the welfare state in the mid-20th century, was this regime of insecurity overturned, at least for a large part of the industrial working class if not the entire working class. The neoliberal counter-revolution of the 1970s started a process of dismantling of the political arrangements which constituted the core framework of the post-war capital-labour compromise. By the late 1980s it was becoming evident that the glue which made possible a limited working class but unprecedented degree of consumption was dissolving.

A 1990 study by the Economic Council of Canada put an empirical foundation to what everyone was sensing, that good jobs were disappearing and being replaced by lower quality ones. As the report put it, standard employment, that is full-time, 40 hours a week jobs with a degree of tenure, was giving way to non-standard employment, jobs that were part-time, temporary, and provided little or no opportunity for a career ladder (Good Jobs, 1990). Augmenting the direct attacks on labour laws and social protections provided through the state, were the trade and investment liberalization agreements brokered between states. The result was a new international division of labour which facilitated de-

to the working class itself. The reorganization of the working class into forms of insecure employment is not to be confused with the emergence of a class separate and apart from the working class which the term 'precariat' suggests (Jonna & Foster 2015: 22). Living wage movements of the late 20th and early 21st century are as much an expression of contemporary working class precariousness as were the 19th century demands for a living wage. In other words, it is one aspect of the reanimation of the working class as a social movement.

A key question to ask here is do these campaigns for economic justice constitute social movements? Social movements are born of 'contentious politics' which emerge "when ordinary people – often in alliance with more influential citizens and with changes in public mood – join forces in confronting elites, authorities, and opponents". It is the unique contribution of a social movement to provide the capacity to mount, coordinate, and sustain the struggle against powerful forces standing in opposition. The resulting "contentious politics leads to sustained interaction with opponents – to social movements" (Tarrow 2011: 6). Probably the most widely accepted definition of social movements proposes that social movements engage in a series of actions, undertakings or assertions made by individuals through collective action against others. Such collective actions have been expressed in three distinct ways: 1) a sustained, organized public effort making collective claims on the state (a campaign); 2) applying a variety of forms of political action including building coalitions, public meetings, rallies, and demonstrations; and 3) participants' public representations of "worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment on the part of themselves and/or their constituencies" (Tilly 2004: 3-4). The key element for comparative p p e

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by their employer (Basic Guide, 1997).[2] While workers had the right to strike, ensuring that workers were not fired subsequently remains a major issue for the campaign. Indeed, in the few cases where workers were fired, allies went into those workplaces and demanded that those fired be re-instated (Croghan 2012).

The spring strikes were followed by a large SEIU sponsored fast food meeting where workers decided to build on their momentum by calling for a nationwide day of fast food strikes in the late summer. The nationwide one-day strike on August 29, 2013 propelled the $15 minimum wage demand into the national debate. Over 60 cities saw

The movement continued to grow in 2014. A global day of action for fast food workers' rights took place in the spring in over 30 countries. Two other major coordinated strike days took place in the United States, each bigger and more militant than the last. The SEIU also organized a dramatic march on a McDonald's shareholder meeting in the summer. Building off the movement's success, the newly

In 2015 the movement faced new challenges, while also exceeding their previous accomplishments. New York City raised its minimum wage to $13 and the announcement was followed by the governor of the state raising the minimum wage to $15 for all fast food workers and state employees in the state. In all 21 states saw increases to

reflects the differences of labour law, unfair labour practices and economic strikes can be undertaken in the United States with some protections for even non-unionized workers. In Canada this is not the case. Another major difference is the ability to win legislative fights about the minimum wage at the municipal level. In the United States this is possible, while in Canada it is not. This makes building local movements easier in the US. The living wage movement in Canada is largely divorced from the broader North American movement. In the US, the momentum of the living wage movement takes place through efforts to push through state imposed increases to the minimum wage. In Canada, the NGO, non-profit arms of the progressive movement have for years been pushing an altogether different approach: the idea of voluntary agreements. Outside of some municipalities, this has been wholly unsuccessful at pushing forward a political and social movement to increase the minimum wage.

The first Canadian living wage campaign emerged in British Columbia in 2001. It was organized in response to a provincial government attack on health care sector workers which saw the government cut the pay of 8000 members of the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU) by 40 percent. The union and the BC Office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives turned to the example of London Citizen's living wage campaign as a means to give greater profile to the need for meaningful wages. In 2006, First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, started engaging in research into community support for a living wage in British Columbia. The impetus for this research was the momentum of the US living wage movement. First Call partnered with the BC Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) office to deveao1-Au4-3(v(a)e(t)L4(i)-(n)-1(g)-4)1(v)C fp-3(e)-3(l2(a)2(m)-6[(of)-6

communities that sought a living wage. In response, Living Wage Canada, a network for all of these different campaigns emerged and has helped to shape and organize the movement across the country.

The BC CCPA, various unions, and community groups came together to establish the [illegible] in 2008, which put forward $15 as a basic living wage. In 2011, the City of New Westminster, a municipality within the Greater Vancouver Area, became Canada's first government to adopt a living wage policy that requires all firms that are contracted directly or subcontracted by the City to pay a minimum of $19.62 an hour, nearly double the provincial minimum wage. Soon after, the tiny township of Esquimalt set a living wage of $17.31, but it has yet to be implemented. In addition, a voluntary accreditation campaign aimed at employers had, by Fall 2015, signed on fifty BC employers. There are a number of living wage campaigns currently in BC. A number of the smaller centres do not necessarily have full on living wage campaigns. Instead, many of these living wage campaigns are within larger anti-poverty campaigns. A number of others simply provide a calculation of the living wage in the region as a comparison to the minimum wage or to illustrate the growing income gap in the province. The areas that have well-established living wage campaigns in BC are Victoria, New Westminster, Metro Vancouver, and Esquimalt.

New Westminster represents the first, and until recently, the only municipality in Canada to have passed a living wage policy. The New Westminster campaign was very organized right from the beginning when it launched in 2009. ACORN Canada, whose sister organization ACORN US has played a key role in living wage campaigns around the US, was based in New Westminster and saw the community as a prime place to attempt to implement a living wage policy in the Metro Vancouver regional area. The campaign approached a city councilor in New Westminster about the possibility of a living wage policy in 2009. The councilor was very receptive of the idea and put forth a motion at city council for living wage to be studied by staff, which was passed by

the rest of council (Keddy 2015). As staff were preparing a report ACORN used its institutional resources to recruit other organizations to join the campaign. Most importantly, ACORN was able to secure the support of the New Westminster District and Labour council, which brought along with it the support of most of the local unions in the area. With a strong team of community partners supporting the campaign, ACORN went about

the campaign argues that it is "in [the employers'] interest that employers advocate for programs that would ensure that as a society we collectively address the needs of families with children… [Increased public programs] would decrease the income families require from employment, and therefore reduce the living wage" (Richards, Cohen, Klein, & Littman 2008: 37). Thus, it also advocates for change to public

strategy is to convince private business to agree to pay a living wage "out of the goodness of their hearts" rather than pursuing a living wage policy at the municipal or provincial level. As the CSPC explains, its goal is to "conduct outreach activities to inform employers in the Capital Region of the program and how they can become living wage employers" (Living Wage and Living Wage Employers 2016). The outreach activities also include public education on the purpose of a living wage in general and what living wage employers can do to support their employees facing rising costs of living. The campaign has had moderate success in this regard with a number of businesses in the greater Victoria committing to be a living wage employer moving forward.

Esquimalt, near Victoria, passed a living wage motion but has never implemented this. The entire process was started by a city councilor and led by city staff with no other organizations actively involved. There was little campaigning in Esquimalt leading up to the decision to adopt a living wage policy. In August 2010 a city councilor put forth a motion for City staff to report back on the possibility of implementing a citywide living wage in Esquimalt (Minutes Special Meeting 2010). The motion was passed unanimously and City staff reported back in December 2010 with a recommendation that "all full-time, part-time and casual workers for the city" be paid a living wage and "suggested that a policy that included a living wage provision within the tendering process for contracts from private firms be developed" (Keddy 2015). Before city council voted on the recommendation they opened the debate up to public consultation. The response from the public was overwhelmingly negative, and city council retreated from the recommendation and directed staff to work on new recommendations which were less binding and restrictive on local business. City staff reported back that it would be impossible to develop a policy based on the new requirements set forth by council. Therefore, the original recommendations made to council were finally put to a vote in April 2011 (Keddy 2015). The recommendations were voted down by council and the living wage debate died in Esquimalt as quickly as it had started.

To date, there is no local movement attempting to continue the campaign.

In Ontario, there is a similarly strong living wage movement happening in cities and regions across the province. Like BC, the smaller centres have campaigns functioning within larger poverty reduction campaigns. In many of these the living wage work consists of calculating the living wage for the area and comparing it to the current minimum wage. There has been some success in convincing employers to voluntarily adopt a living wage policy. At this point, nearly 60 Ontario employers have done so (Living Wage Employers 2016) and several cities including Toronto, Waterloo, Cambridge and Hamilton either have or are in the process of adopting a living wage policy for the municipality.

Of the three provinces in Western Canada, Alberta is home to the most developed living wage campaigns. The community-based non-profit, Vibrant Communities Calgary (VCC), contributed its resources to establish campaigns across the province. The living wage idea first appeared in Calgary when Vibrant Communities established a Community Action Team in 2003. The Team was essentially a network of other community and labour organizations including the Alberta Federation of Labour, the "No Sweat Coalition", Calgary Health Region, The Calgary Chamber of Volunteer Organizations, and United Way, and the YWCA. An official campaign was launched with a multi-pronged strategy that included engaging four broad sectors: (1) public (municipal government); (2) private; (3) non-profit; and (4) quasi-governmental (health, education, and post-secondary institutions) (Bulthuis 2007). Although there is the focus on engaging local government, most of the campaign is voluntarism in the sense that the strategy is to convince private business to agree to pay a living wage. The living wage for Calgary in 2015 was estimated to be $18.15 per hour by Vibrant Communities (Cormier 2015). The campaign has been successful in getting more than 50 local businesses in Calgary to sign on as living wage employers (Living Wage Leaders, n.d.). The campaign came very close to a major victory in 2009 when Calgary city staff recommended that the city should adopt a

living wage policy, however council voted down the recommendation later that year (Living Wage Advocacy, n.d.). It is worth noting that most labour organizations in Alberta have chosen to focus on minimum wage rather than living wage, however Alberta Federation of Labour has given its support to the Calgary living wage movement.

Manitoba has a smaller living wage movement where campaigns are located in Winnipeg, Brandon, and Thompson. The campaigns are a shared venture between the three cities and the CCPA, Social Planning Council of Winnipeg (SPCW), Winnipeg Harvest, and the United Way of Winnipeg. The CCPA calculation determined the living wage was $13.44 in Winnipeg, $11.10 in Brandon, and $11.18 in Thompson (The view from here 2009

in Saskatchewan and is based in and mostly focused on the city of Regina. The campaign is being spear headed by the provincial CCPA. As with many other Canadian campaigns, the focus is on convincing the private sector to pay their employees adequately instead of directing advocacy efforts at the municipal and provincial governments to enact living wage policy.

In the Atlantic Provinces, living wage movements are only just emerging and have only a small footprint at this point. There are only two emerging living wage campaign in the entire region. One is in Saint John, New Brunswick, while the other can be found in Nova Scotia. The campaign in Saint John is led by Vibrant Communities Saint John (VCSJ). The goal of the campaign is to develop a framework for a living wage (Greater Saint John 2013). This includes participating in research on low waged work and workers – who are they, where do they work and what are the trends (Greater Saint John 2013). Important to note, New Brunswick labour organizations, including CUPE New Brunswick and the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, do not appear willing to lend support to the campaign; instead they have focused on the issue of raising minimum wage in the province.

The Nova Scotia Living Wage Coalition officially launched in February 2015 and led by ACORN Nova Scotia, also includes partners such as the Canadian Federation of Students – Nova Scotia, the Halifax Dartmouth District Labour Council, and Solidarity Halifax. The goal of the group is to obtain a $15 minimum wage in the province for all workers (Nova Scotia Needs a Raise 2015). The campaign has provincial aspirations, however, the focus has been completely local with the only campaigning happening in Halifax. Interestingly, dating back to 2007, the CCPA's Nova Scotia office had been advocating for a living wage in the province (Jacobs 2007).

Prince Edward Island (PEI) does not have any living wage campaigns

accounts for a more detailed breakdown of transfers received and paid by households, as well as a revised definition of household income, including the value of goods produced for own consumption as an element of self-employed income, we find that income inequality has been increasing in Canada and the U.S., but the pace of growing inequality is much more accelerated in America (OECD 2016a). OECD data details that the gap between rich and poor for disposable income in Canada has been increasing over the last decade from 2000-2013, which expressed as a percentage change has increased by 2.2% (OECD 2016a). In the U.S. on the other hand, from 2000-2014, the gap between rich and poor for disposable income has increased by 10.4% (OECD 2016a). What this tells us is that although Canada is steadily becoming a more unequal country, inequality has been growing at an unparalleled pace in the United States.

Another measure is the extent of poverty. The OECD defines poverty as 50% or less of the median of disposable income (after-tax income, after receiving transfer payments). In 2000, poverty in Canada was at 11.4% of the total population, and by 2011 that had expanded to 11.7% according to this measure (OECD 2016b). We find that from 2000-2011 poverty in Canada has increased 2.6% (OECD 2016b). In the U.S in 2000, poverty was at 16.9%, and by 2012 was at 17.4%, showing that poverty in the U.S. has increased 2.9% (OECD 2016b). This shows that poverty has been increasing in both countries, but that poverty in the U.S. has been growing at a slightly faster level and is more widespread. A key factor affecting wage income and therefor income inequality is the significant difference in trade union density. While trade union density in the Canadian private sector has been declining, it has been doing so at a much slower rate than is observed in the United States. For example, in 1999, union density in the Canadian private sector was 19.9% but by 2015 that had declined to 16.7% (Statistics Canada, n.d.). In the US, in 1999, the density was 9.4% and by 2015 ha0 -1(n)2(6Cl(6Cl(6C1t)-i-1.35 T0 -1.35 TD

the density rate is substantially higher at 75.5% in 2015 (Statistics Canada, n.d.

decreasing in value and vary significantly from state to state. For example, TANF in New York tops out at $789 a month. Washington, South Carolina, New Mexico, California, and Wisconsin all cut their payments in 2011. In 2016, families of three are entitled to a maximum of $409 in New Mexico, and $285 in Texas, while many states did not increase their payments (Stanley, Floyd, & Hill 2016). Canada's payments also vary, but tend to be slightly higher for families than payments in the US. Ontario's payments are capped at $1004 ($342 for basic needs and $662 for shelter costs) a month for a single parent family with two dependents under 18. British Columbia's total for the same family unit is $1035.58, while Alberta's payment maximum is $826 (Government of Alberta, n.d.; Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, n.d.; Ministry of Community and Social Services, Government of Ontario 2016).

While both countries restrict access to insurance support, workers in the US are far more likely to run out of unemployment support than Canadians. Canada's employment insurance is available for between 14 and 45 weeks, depending on regional employment rates, while Unemployment Insurance in the US is available for 26 weeks and can be extended for up to another 20 for people in states experiencing high unemployment. In Canada, the time limit depends on a province's unemployment rate. Once people run out of their insurance benefits, they can turn to welfare payments in both countries. However, unemployed people in the US are far more likely to end up without any entitlement to income support: the US cuts off access to welfare after five years of receipt across a person's lifetime. The five-year period includes any month in which a claimant receives another similar welfare payment, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. States can also implement more severe time restrictions. Both Arizona and New York cap access to Safety Net Assistance to just two years (New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance 2011, 9-10; Schott & Pavetti 2011). California and Maine moved to four-year time limits, while other states including Washington tightened the criteria under

which families could apply for extension policies. In comparison, only British Columbia in Canada places time restrictions on access to welfare. In all other provinces, Canadians can continue to receive welfare as long as they are otherwise eligible.

Many workers, of course, in both countries, are entirely excluded from insurance payments and are likely to need welfare payments if they experience unemployment. In the US, 23.1% of jobless workers were receiving benefits in December 2014, a record low (McHugh & Kimball 2015). A report by the National Employment Law Project highlights research that shows that in the US, "low-educated and racial minority unemployed workers—those who may need financial support most during periods without work—are doubly disadvantaged in accessing unemployment insurance: not only do they report lower application rates, but the unemployed who do apply also report lower rates of receipt" (Gould-Werth & McKenna 2012: 2). Similarly in Canada, many are excluded from accessing Employment Insurance: coverage of Canada's population has decreased from 96% in the 1970s to about 37% in 2013 (Doorey 2016: 397-398). Both countries also make use of workfare policies, requiring welfare recipients to take the "shortest path to work" (Luccisano & Romagnoli 2007; Mitchell & Herd 2005, 65-66, 72), While both countries introduced workfare as part of 1990s reforms, Mitchell and Herd argue that in Canada, the country's earlier 'commitment to community and collective responsibility' meant that voters helped to steer in governments that acted to dull the harsher aspects of workfare (Mitchell & Herd 2005, 73). Prior to the 1990s, Canada's welfare provisions were much more generous, suggesting Canadians perhaps have not experienced the harshness of limited welfare for as long as Americans. Unemployment Insurance coverage in Canada, for example, was 96% in the 1970s but dropped to 37% in 2013 (Doorey 2016, 397-398)

Finally, there is a gap in the overall support that unemployed families are provided with in the two countries. Both countries use a tax credit to supplement the income of families with children under 18 who

have limited household earnings. In Canada, families with dependent children and an annual income of less than $25,921 can receive both the Canada Child Tax Benefit and an extra Employment Insurance family supplement, though provinces can distribute these payments in different ways (Canada 2015). For example, Alberta provides a tax credit to working families only, and a reasonably generous child benefit to all families who earn less than $41,220 per year (“.36079 14 0 TDr163 Tw 4.4 Ale (ACB),” n.d.). However, in the US, only people whove earned inco
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with those for higher minimum wages. The two aspects remain distinct. In this sense there is an ideological counter narrative presented in the US which contributes to the mobilization from below.

Overall, the living wage movement in Canada varies considerably. The majority of the campaigns are made up of different community partners, mostly from the non-profit and social justice sectors. For the most part the campaigns are not affiliated with labour organizations, although a few exceptions to this generalization have been noted. Instead, in most of the provinces, the labour movement has chosen to focus on the minimum wage rather than the living wage. There are a few campaigns in different parts of the country that are headed up by the actual municipal or regional governments, however this is only in a few small cases and for the most part these campaigns have been less visible and active. The primary strategy for most of the campaigns in Canada is to rely on voluntary acceptance and implementation where the campaign is anchored around recruiting private businesses to voluntarily pay their employees a living wage. There are a few campaigns that have focused more on municipal government and policy, however these have experienced mixed success.

That said, there are a number of emerging campaigns across the country and the already established campaigns continue to make inroads recruiting private business and lobbying local government. There are no contemporary cases of worker mobilization but rather these campaigns take the form of rational policy advo1rucesl gN3(ti)1(o)e hsncsc-6(n)-1(tp5(co)

conditions, struggles for economic justice in Canada may come to resemble those in the United States in terms of tactics and mobilization.

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