



CITIZENS *for* PUBLIC JUSTICE



Election Bulletin

Public Justice: A Leadership Lens for Election 2008



We Canadians, facing a federal election, have a lot to think about. With so many compelling issues competing for our attention, wouldn't it be nice to be able to view the political scene with one helpful vision to guide our way?

CPJ thinks that a public justice lens can provide that vision. This short pamphlet provides a glimpse into four major election issues through this public justice lens, encouraging you to delve into these issues with your candidates, family and friends. Visit our website www.cpj.ca for further coverage of these and other important issues.

Whether as individuals or as a country, we act from the values and beliefs we hold. Values shape our decisions, our actions and our tone. Public policy should reflect the core values we profess as Canadians, allowing us to engage our differences respectfully. A public justice framework challenges us, as Canadians and people of faith, to express love for our neighbour and to seek the common good. Public justice doesn't offer a

recipe for good government policy, or a formula for partisan preference. But it prioritizes norms for decision-making that focus on the values of justice, compassion and care for the marginalized and the earth.

And yet election hype attempts to attract our votes to a vaguely-defined concept: "Leadership."

Real leadership, we are told, is all about overwhelmingly personal qualities: decisiveness, strength, getting your own way, triumphing over your adversaries.

But leadership should not be mistaken for the mere exercise of authority. Having power over people might make you the boss, but it doesn't make you a leader. Rather, leaders inspire people by creating commitment to a common purpose and vision. Good leadership means knowing the people, communicating with them, listening to them, and inspiring them to join together for a common vision of the future. Alone, no one is a leader.

Good leadership does not shrink from addressing the significant issues on Canada's policy horizon. It has been said that doing things right is management, while leadership is doing the right things. That's why public justice addresses both the style and content of the leadership we should demand from our politicians on the most important issues.

Leadership seen through a public justice lens shows how we might promote just relationships, sensitivity to injustice, compassion for the marginalized and care for the environment. Read on to imagine what Election 2008 could look like through a public justice lens... 

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for in-depth coverage
of pressing election issues
during the entire campaign!

Envisioning Canada Without Poverty



A poverty reduction strategy would provide us with new ways to approach poverty—it is neither a tax cut approach nor a simple spending program. Instead, it is an integrated plan that targets multiple initiatives towards solving poverty. Like a combination lock, it requires a series of actions rather than opening to a single key. After consulting with citizens, decision makers can respond with measures to directly improve quality of life.

eral government has certain tools that it can use, including tax credits and government transfers like the Work Income Tax Benefit and the Canada Child Tax Benefits. It also has responsibility for policies and programs that impact poverty, from Employment Insurance to federal income taxes. It can provide support for provincial strategies and efforts as well.

During this election campaign, ask your candidates about their vision for a Canada without poverty. By making poverty reduction a collective priority, together we can make our public justice vision a reality.

1 in 10 Canadians live in poverty. Poverty undermines the dignity of people, which is their right as human beings, created in God's image. It also challenges their ability to carry out their God-given responsibilities as full, contributing members of our society.

It's time for a federal poverty reduction strategy. Successful anti-poverty strategies rest on four pillars: a vision with specific targets and timelines, a cross-government action plan and budget, mechanisms of accountability and agreed-upon poverty indicators to monitor progress.

Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador have already adopted their own poverty reduction strategies. Ontario and Nova Scotia are in the process of developing provincial strategies. But addressing poverty requires the involvement of every level of government, as well as contributions from citizens, businesses and other organizations.

Within Canada's federal system, leadership from the federal government is important for developing a comprehensive and coordinated strategy to solve poverty. The fed

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Will your party commit to adopting a poverty reduction strategy?

What actions will your party take to ensure a living wage for all workers in Canada?

What will your party do to ensure that every Canadian has access to affordable housing?

Taxes and the Common Good

Taxation has loomed large in recent discussions about economic management and the future of the Canadian economy. But the talk is just about numbers, focused solely on tax cuts. This could jeopardize the government's ability to pay for existing programs and to come up with new policies.

Taxes are not a single-sided issue about how much Canadians contribute: taxes are equally about government programs and services, poverty and inequality. Taxes provide the revenues that maintain our democratic institutions, that fund our public education and our public health care, and that provide parks and public spaces. They also create crucial social infrastructure for our communities and

our families, reduce inequalities and ensure that no one in our financially prosperous country is left behind. Taxes are an important tool, helping the government carry out its public justice tasks.

In a country without taxes, there is little we could collectively create and maintain. In modern societies, taxes are a major contribution to the common good. They are an investment in our shared future. This investment benefits us all, but it also reflects our shared responsibility toward one another. When devoted to programs and services that promote the common good, taxes are an investment in our economic, environmental and social well-being.

If the Environment Could Vote...

The call to care for creation is growing stronger daily as we see clear evidence of climate change in melting ice caps, warmer winters and the rapid loss of forests and biodiversity. Preserving and protecting all creation is an unmistakably important role for citizens to play.

Canada has a dismal environmental record. In 2002, Canada formally ratified the Kyoto Accord, agreeing to reduce emissions by six per cent below 1990 levels by 2012. But after making this momentous commitment, successive governments failed to act.

In fact, 2006 emission levels were 32.7 per cent higher than our Kyoto targets. If we don't fulfill our Kyoto commitment now, the question becomes: how much more difficult will caring for creation be in the future? On the world stage, Canada is far from being seen as a global environmental leader. The withdrawal from Kyoto and reticence to sign a new international agreement at the Bali Climate Change Conference last December are clear evidence of this.

At home, Canadians continually rate environmental action as a primary concern. So the political parties are catching up—several are insisting that the environment should be


a central debate in this election.

Christians believe that the earth and all life in it is a gift from God. As part of creation, human beings need to recognize our place within it, and that we have no right to terminally destroy what was meant to exist for all, and for all generations. A public justice lens sees the common good as including effective action for environmental protection.

No candidate would argue for environmental destruction. But opponents of strict environmental measures fear that these measures will hurt our economy. Proponents argue that environmental policies can encourage innovative economic reforms, and failure to act could cause economic harm. Environmental issues are now closely linked to economic development and debates about fair taxation.

Given our poor environmental record, the rising levels of pollution and the complication of the debate, it can be difficult to see when and where real change will occur.



Let's hold our candidates to past commitments and call them to a future that includes active care for creation. 

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES


How could economic management better ensure environmental protection?

How would your party fight climate change?

How would you integrate environmental concerns with economic and social policy?

Cutting government revenues through tax cuts also means reducing the government's ability to respond to crucial challenges that confront Canadians, such as environmental protection, affordable housing, food safety, access to early childhood development programs, the growing income gap, and even the competitiveness of Canada's economy.

Tax cuts might have short-term appeal, but real leadership takes the long-term view. What kind of Canada do we want to live in? And how do collective programs and services contribute to that? We need to go beyond the narrow approach that looks at tax cuts

as an isolated set of numbers, and recognize the contribution that government revenues make to our entire society. 

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

How would your party use the tax system to promote the common good and protect the most vulnerable Canadians?

What kinds of investments do you think should be paid for collectively, rather than through personal payments?


Public Justice for New Neighbours

The United Nations reported 16 million refugees fled the violence of their countries in 2007, and over 50 million other people were displaced in their own countries by conflict or environmental disasters. A public justice lens questions the causes for so many people to be on the move—including how Canada's role in global warming, deepening the rift between rich and poor, and neglecting international strategies to promote peace contributes to this global problem. In response, Canada accepts a tiny percentage of the world's refugees: less than one-tenth of our total immigration.

Canada has enacted national security policies to counter the fear of terrorism, which unintentionally often hamper refugee rights. Persons who have been trafficked to Canada from overseas find it difficult to get the protection and help they need. Church and citizen groups sponsoring refugees encounter backlogs and other policy diffi-

culties threatening their ability to receive refugees. Refugees who feel their case was not adequately heard by the Immigration and Refugee Board do not have an accessible appeal process and have taken sanctuary in churches—even though Canada's 2001 Citizenship and Immigration law specifically provides for such an appeal process.

Newcomers also face increasing challenges integrating into Canadian society. Statistics Canada reports higher poverty rates and lower earnings among more recent immigrants. The government could help newcomers integrate by streamlining processes so professionals trained abroad can work in Canada. Raising the minimum wage, increasing training opportunities and strengthening Canada's labour standards to better protect migrant and recently-arrived workers would also improve the situation for newcomers who are over-represented in low-paying jobs.

We all need to do our part to become better neighbours. But we also need to encourage politicians to enact policies that do not penalize newcomers. This election could allow public justice advocates to raise our voices for and with marginalized newcomers—our neighbours. 

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Will your party grant a special status visa for victims of human trafficking?

Will your party immediately establish the Refugee Appeal Division as the law requires?

What will your party do to reverse higher poverty rates and lower earnings among newcomers?

This isn't all. Public justice calls us to look at more than just these four issues discussed in this bulletin. Aboriginal issues, restorative justice, affordable housing, livable incomes and more—**stay up-to-date on election issues as they emerge by visiting our website www.cpj.ca.** You'll find more questions for candidates along with links to the political parties.

Sign up for our e-newsletter Ola! for special weekly bulletins—stay engaged and informed on a diversity of issues throughout the entire campaign.

And don't stop once the election is over. Citizenship doesn't end once your vote has been cast—the call to active citizenship continues between elections. **Join your voice to ours and keep public justice front and centre on Parliament Hill.**

www.cpj.ca

About CPJ

Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) is a national organization that promotes public justice in Canada by shaping key policy debates through research and analysis, publishing and public dialogue. CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society and governments to support policies and practices that reflect God's call for love, justice and stewardship.

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