



CITIZENS *for* PUBLIC JUSTICE



ELECTION BULLETIN

Love. Justice. Stewardship. What would Canadian public policy look like if viewed through a public justice lens? What principles would guide decisions around the economy? What would social security look like? What about taxes? What sort of welcome would we offer newcomers? Would well-being trump growth? Equality outweigh competitiveness? Would ecology triumph over development? Would we value our public services? Would we know our neighbours?

As we prepare for a federal election, these are the questions we need to be asking ourselves – and our candidates. By basing our political decisions on our values – and encouraging politicians to do the same – we can, and will, build a better Canada.

The Earth... Not Ours to Spoil

Our earth is not healing itself as fast as we're hurting it. Every day we learn about another flood or drought which has left thousands of the world's population displaced or dead. Climate change has resulted in rising global temperatures and extreme weather conditions. Our own Arctic polar ice caps are melting. Heat-related deaths as well as the spread of tropical diseases and air pollution have all increased. How can we stop and heal our world?

It's obvious Canadians are concerned about their environmental impact. We are using fewer plastic bags and recycling more than ever. However, Canada does not have a good track record internationally and it almost seems like it doesn't matter: we've won the Colossal Fossil award four years in a row at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. It's meant to shame a country when this award is handed down, as it is bestowed on the country that performed the worst at climate change negotiations. Apparently it doesn't shame our government.

Leading members of both scientific and faith communities have repeatedly stated that if the earth is to continue to provide for us we must change. Opposition to this comes from a belief that implementing strict environmental policies would harm the economy.

However, research has shown that a failure to act will cause greater long-term financial and societal harm.

Canadians are currently debating a range of issues related to the environment:

- What steps can Canada take to become greener while remaining economically competitive with the rest of the world?
- Should a national carbon tax policy or a national cap-and-trade system be imposed?
- What is the role of the Global North in supporting those in the Global South with mitigation and adaptation measures?

As faithful stewards of creation, it is our duty to ensure that the candidates we elect will effectively care for God's earth.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES:

What initiatives would your party undertake to help reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions?

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

Canada consists of less than 0.5% of the world's population, but is the world's 8th largest producer of carbon dioxide, a principal greenhouse gas (GHG) attributed to climate change.

2002: Canada ratified the Kyoto Protocol to set GHG target levels to 6% **below** 1990 levels by 2012

2008: Canada's GHG levels were 24% **higher** than 1990 levels.

2009: Canada signed the Copenhagen Accord which would raise GHG levels 2.5% **above** 1990 levels by 2020

2010: The Climate Change Accountability Act (an agreement to reduce GHG levels to 25% below 1990 levels by 2020) was defeated in the Senate after being passed by the House of Commons.

Dignity for All

All Canadians need to be concerned about poverty and inequality, for it affects us all. The numbers are astounding: in the wake of the latest recession, over 4 million Canadians live in poverty.

And that isn't all. High levels of poverty in Canada are part of a larger problem that includes income inequality. Since the mid-1990s, income inequality has risen sharply, with more and more wealth concentrated at the top. Combined, poverty and inequality have severe consequences for all of us.

We are all created in God's image and it is our moral imperative to reduce poverty. Our governments need to respect the rights of the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. We all need to consider our own affluence. Action is essential.

All of society benefits when policies and programs are put in place to reduce the impact of poverty and improve levels of income equality. Canadians – both rich and poor – become healthier, communities become more cohesive and productivity improves.

Reducing poverty has a positive impact on the economy. There is

improved labour market stability, increased consumer spending, and more taxpayers. Policies to reduce poverty can be less expensive and more effective than traditional approaches to social security.

Yet previous governments preferred to take a rising-tide-lifts-all-boats approach to poverty. Some gains were made in times of economic growth, but our recent economic downturn pushed down wages and replaced many full-time positions with part-time. So as before, employment does not guarantee a path out of poverty.

In recent years a number of extensive studies on poverty have been conducted by parliamentarians and civil society organizations alike. Significant clarity and consensus has now been reached with regards to what is required to reduce and eventually eliminate poverty in Canada.

This corresponds with growing momentum across the country. Citizens and civil society organizations have sounded the call for action. By and large, provincial leaders are listening. Almost all provinces and territories (with the exception of British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan) either have, or are in the process of developing poverty reduction strategies. And they are achieving results. Despite the calls from provinces and territories for federal support, and the

many clear federal responsibilities (e.g. First Nations, Employment Insurance, health and social transfers to the provinces), Ottawa often presents jurisdiction as a barrier to action on poverty.

Let's tell our federal government it is time to move from avoidance to action. Poverty in Canada can be eliminated and our vision of a just and caring society can be realized.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES:

Have you signed on to *Dignity for All: The Campaign for a Poverty-Free Canada*?

Do you support a comprehensive, integrated poverty reduction plan, supported by legislation and resource allocation? Is this reflected in your party's platform?

Do you support a national housing strategy? A national early childhood education and care strategy? And improved income supports for Canadians living in poverty?

Effective and enduring approaches to reducing – and eventually eliminating – poverty require:

A federal poverty elimination plan that:

- ✓ is timely and accountable,
- ✓ includes a human rights framework,
- ✓ supports provinces and territories taking action against poverty, and
- ✓ addresses key areas, including income security, housing, child care, and health care.

A federal Act to:

- ✓ eliminate poverty,
- ✓ promote social inclusion,
- ✓ strengthen social security, and
- ✓ ensure that even with a change in government, the commitment to results remains.

Federal investment in poverty elimination that:

- ✓ is sufficient and sustained,
- ✓ contains a tax policy which benefits all Canadians, and
- ✓ ensures our government bases its priorities on promoting the common good.

These goals are supported by Dignity for All: The Campaign for a Poverty-Free Canada, a collective endeavour, coordinated by Canada Without Poverty, Citizens for Public Justice, and Make Poverty History, seeking concrete action by the federal government to combat poverty in Canada. For more information and to sign-on, visit www.dignityforall.ca.



Canadian Immigration - A Chilly Reception

The number of immigrants permitted into Canada in 2010 is at a historic high. It sounds like our country, built on immigration, is providing a warm welcome. However, certain shifts in recent years paint a different picture: our welcome is chillier than it seems.

Over the years, our welcome has increasingly become based on money. Since 2006, we've welcomed 18,000 **fewer** refugees and family members. However, we've welcomed over 91,000 **more** economic class immigrants and temporary foreign workers (TFWs).

Economic class immigrants have to have skills Canada needs and be considered able to contribute to Canada's economy. Unlike most TFWs, they can apply to stay in Canada. The incredible increase in TFWs (up over 43,000 since 2006) also suggests greater emphasis on economic considerations.

Today, fewer refugees can even apply to come to Canada because of:

- the imposition of visas,
- the removal of several exceptions to the Safe Third Country Agreement and

- the new policy of "designated country of origin."

On top of this, the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) has imposed time limits in an attempt to reduce the enormous backlog of cases. These time limits make it very difficult for refugee claimants to make an effective case or to appeal a negative decision. The effect of this is seen in refugee claims' success dropping substantially: 56% lower in 2009 than in 2005. Furthermore, although the vast majority of refugees are forced to use human smugglers, previously proposed legislation threatens punishments of up to a year in detention for refugees arriving in the country through this means.

Our welcome includes how well we help our immigrants integrate. Here, too, we've fallen down. In December of 2010, over \$50 million in cuts to integration services were announced, forcing many agencies to close their doors. Those cuts were made even though 41% of immigrants under the age of 14 live in poverty (according to the 2006 census) and immigrants who arrived in the last five years had an extremely high rate of job loss: 12.9%.

We don't appear to want to talk about it either. While hostile voices accuse

refugees arriving in boats of being "queue jumpers" and "bogus refugees," dissenting voices are dismissed.

Public justice demands that we, as Canadians, do our part to welcome the stranger: our neighbours. It demands that we take action to ensure that newcomers to our country are met with a warm welcome.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES:

What actions will your party take to better integrate newcomers and reduce their marginalization?

What actions will your party take to reduce the backlog and wait times of the IRB without reducing the fairness of the process?

What actions will your party take to ensure that those who arrive in Canada seeking asylum are properly welcomed?

The land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. Throughout the land that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land (Leviticus 25: 23-24).

A Good Deal about Taxes

The only things you can count on in life are death, and...taxes. Right? Nope.

Believe it or not there are wealthy Canadians who actually pay no income taxes. On the other end, some very poor people are also exempted from many taxes. How we decide to levy taxes can determine how we live together, build community services and design a legacy for our children.

One study showed that middle-income families in Canada consume an average of \$41,000 of public services each year. How many of us could afford to pay those extra costs on our own? Just think about the alternative: living without clean drinking water, healthy food, safe transportation systems or doctors to turn to when our kids fall ill. Hmmm... taxes begin to sound like a good deal!

In election campaigns, some parties compete to offer the largest tax cuts – but at what cost? Do they offer transparent explanations for what services the population stands to lose as a result? For example, have you really noticed the GST reductions when you went to the cashier? Would

it have been a better idea to use that money to lower hospital waiting times?

Tax cuts increase our debt: last year alone, we added \$33.9 billion to our debt because of tax cuts since 2006. One of the largest single contributors to our debt is the corporate tax cut. It added \$8.6 billion to our deficit in 2010-2011. If the annual tax cuts for corporations continue (and they are slated to), by 2012 the corporate tax rate will be only 15%, among the lowest in developed economies.

As taxpayers, we have every right to question the various political parties' priorities for spending and demand transparency and accountability – for example, how many billions of dollars will 13 new prisons or F-35 fighter planes actually cost – and does Canada need them? But simply suggesting that all taxes are already too high masks the necessary debate about what spending is for and who is responsible for the common good.

Taxes can be seen as an investment in the shared prosperity of neighbours, and one crucial way to promote the common good. Sufficient public investments are needed to redistribute income and provide services to give Canadians in need a hand up. Promotion of a more equitable society

– one that limits the chasm between rich and poor – relies on a fair and progressive tax system, one where all citizens pay taxes as they are able.

The way we think about taxes tells a great deal about who we are – as individuals, as a community of citizens and as believers in public justice for all.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES:

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

Would your party redirect revenues from corporate tax cuts towards ending poverty, decreasing Canada's social deficit, or protecting the environment?

But wait, there's more!

This Election Bulletin highlighted four issues CPJ sees as central to the election campaign: poverty eradication, the environment, taxes, and our treatment of newcomers.

These are not the only important election issues. Aboriginal concerns, Afghanistan, Arctic sovereignty, criminal justice, and electoral reform also deserve our attention. We'll be exploring these and many more as the campaign continues.

Want updates? Visit our website for CPJ's views. Subscribe to OLA! You'll get CPJ's thoughts right in your computer's in-box.

We invite you to join CPJ in examining the key issues. Throughout the election and beyond, a public justice lens can help you hold your elected representatives accountable.

Contact CPJ for more copies of this bulletin.

About CPJ

Citizens for Public Justice's mission is to promote public justice in Canada by shaping key public policy debates through research and analysis, publishing and public dialogue. CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society and governments to support policies and practices which reflect God's call for love, justice and stewardship.

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