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POLI 4390 – Reflection

March 30th, 2021

For my practicum placement with POLI 4390 I have been working with Christine Saulnier at the Nova Scotian office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). CCPA is an independent, non-partisan think-tank focusing on the Canadian issues related to social, economic and environmental justice through policy solution. Founded in 1980 the National office in Ottawa, and provincial offices in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia produce the essential, external research for informed decision making and social change pressure.

CCPA aims to go further than issue identification but analyzing underlining problems and seeking practical solution entrenched in fundamental driving principles: human dignity, respect of life, fairness, equality, the right to housing, work, play, and a sustainable future. This is presented in a manner accessible to all and written in the interest of all to show Canadians the possibility for a better future and the economic gains possible in such a model.

The Nova Scotian office opened in 1999 and continues to facilitate conversation and propose policy alternatives to reach a more equitable, and sustainable province and Atlantic region. Christine Saulnier is the current Director of the Nova Scotian office coordinating key projects such as the CCPA-NS “signature publication” *The Alternative Budget Report*.

Additionally, she is the co-author of the chapter *Working for a Living, Not Living for Work: A living wage for Halifax and Antigonish* in the recently released book *Rising Up: The Fight for Living Wage Work in Canada* (2021) among numerous other academic and literary publications.

Both of these projects have contributed to the work which I dedicated my time to during my placement: the development of the Housing for All working group's, *Housing We All Deserve: Providing the keys to a housing secure future for all Nova Scotians*.

Modelled after the Alternative Federal Budget, the NS Alternative Budget reanalyzes or proactively proposes alternative prioritizations and approaches for reallocation for fostering a socially and economically just and strong Nova Scotia. Providing "...organizations and individuals on the Left with tools to advocate for social, economic, and political alternatives" (CCPA, 2021). Underpinning the alternative budget is the motivation to demonstrate how inequalities are harmful; particularly, as has been highlighted during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic how the instability of the employment sector is a critical issue. Income inequality is bad from the economy, the environment and democracy (Saulnier, 2021, unpublished).

The current report *Housing We All Deserve* poses the question:

"What would it take to ensure that everyone has access to safe, affordable, and adequate housing in Nova Scotia? The goal for this project is to outline recommendations that would see the development of a different housing system. These recommendations will be costed by considering the fiscal impacts for the provincial government" (Saulnier, 2021 – unpublished).

The objective of the report is motivated from the pandemic's highlight of – and not creation of - systemic and structural failure to protect basic rights such, as the right to adequate housing and employment stability. Housing is an interconnected element of human wellbeing deeply connected to income justice, growing wealth inequality, and lacking essential social

services. Thus, it is essential the moving forward is not a return to the “normal” but a re-structuring process to address said issues through prevention and early intervention.

While addressing critical issues in our community the project also developed out of response to the formation of the Housing Commission developed by the province of Nova Scotia. The commission was created by the province of Nova Scotia to engage experts and stakeholder in the housing market, to discuss the increasingly lacking supply of affordable housing in Nova Scotia. However, with representatives of numerous developers (among other shortcomings in representation: lack of academic experts, diversity of perspective and regions, those with vested interests) it is expected the report will take a conservative approach to critiquing of broader present issues that have created such conditions. “Going back to normal” following COVID-19 is not a solution nor should it be a want.

The official role I have held in the project’s development is defined by “[sic] continuing to support the work and continuing to support the research (lit review document) and bring together key documents and background research” (Saulnier, 2021, unpublished). My involvement has allowed me to take part in sitting in on board meetings, working group consultations, and team meetings discussing the project. Over the 11 weeks of my involvement, I dedicated a great portion of my time to an extensive literature review for the team to prepare for the great task of writing such an extensive project.

The research I have conducted aimed to answer, “what marks the housing crisis in Nova Scotia”. Evidence I have uncovered showcases the unique Nova Scotian housing situation. Firstly, the unaffordability of housing creates inaccessibility, the acceptance of unsafe housing, the interference with other basic needs, the insecurity of housing, and the unsupportive nature of housing means that social housing is seen as a place of transition rooted in individual

responsibility rather than a supportive means addressing the right to affordable housing and human wellbeing.

But importantly and what the report aims to capture outside of the typical governmental scope has been the promotion of social inclusion. How housing policy solutions can work to address the underlining and deeply rooted systemic barriers that people of colour, women, the elderly, children and families, young people, people with disabilities, newcomers, people who use drugs, and those in poverty face. My research has further highlighted wealth inequality, the need for living wages, and more social supports because affordable housing is not enough to tackle the reasons why people require it.

In identifying the need to address housing for the most vulnerable I also developed a research document on the importance of early childhood intervention. Supporting children and families breaks the system of poverty that is perpetuated. For example, without adequate nutrition children struggle to focus, have behavioural problems, and as a result do not perform as well in school. Homeless youth are likely to have experienced housing instability when young. Previously fostered youth are significantly more likely to experience homelessness, low educational attainment, and lessened career development stemming from trauma, and childhood instability of education both formally and from a parental figure.

The final report will be released the end of May with the contribution of numerous community members and the CCPA staff, with a possible summer student position.

A weekly schedule in this role may look like:

- Tuesday: Meet with supervisor Christine to discuss the progress of the project, my work, reflections on the last week and plans moving forward. This time also was open

to conversation, reflections on the work I'd been looking at and meetings I was able to attend.

- Wednesday: I may spend time working on the literature review. Christine would regularly send me documents to review, and I would look into discussed topics to find further research to support writing.
- Thursday or Friday: I would attend an internal meeting, external meeting, or a recommended lecture, public discussion, or book launch for further learning and connection building.
- Saturday or Sunday: May be used to complete hours that week if necessary, in further literature review, small tasks, or independent reading or interest events.

Some additional events I was able to attend included:

- The Child Welfare Commission of Nova Scotia.
- The Conservative Caucus meeting with CCPA.
- The book launch of *Rising Up: The Fight for Living Wage Work in Canada*.
- Attending a class where Christine was guest lecturing
- The Research Advisory Council meeting.
- *The Supporting Basic Income in Canada* panel discussion.
- And more.

The flexibility of the schedule and diversity of events I attended allowed for my own development as both a student and professionally. Being in the final term of my graduating year I was also offered advice for my career moving forward, and my plans for further education. This

supported my decision in deciding between law school or a Master's in Public Policy, where to attend, and long-term decisions. As well as summer employment and the possibility of continued placement with CCPA-NS.

In reflection of my experience at CCPA and in my concluding meeting with Christine I feel grateful for the opportunity and I note my development in many significant ways as demonstrated in this reflection. Moving forward I hope to carry these skills with me. I could not recommend the placement more highly. Christine and the numerous others I made contact with were passionate in their work and encouraging of mine. I felt supported by the practicum leadership and valued as a participant in work I genuinely loved. Communication was always quick, opportunities were offered every week for additional learning, I was introduced to many people in the community and offered further, continued connection to these spaces. As noted, I would recommend to position to any student interested in social justice non-profit work or alternative policy.

I would also like to note I am grateful for the work of Dr. Denike and the Teaching Assistant of POLI 4390 in their effort to find suitable positions for all students and for offering this course.

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Please note that all sourced information is currently unpublished but the intellectual property of CCPA-NS.