



# The Brief

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## CERB is a subsidy to the banks

By MATTHEW HAYES



Toronto's Financial District. Photo by Arild Vågen/Wikimedia Commons.

Canada's projected \$343 billion deficit will draw a great deal of ink from traditional budget hawks, but Canadians should know what the effect has been: it prevented a financial crisis—at least for now.

This is important to bear in mind because ratings agencies are already clamouring for evidence that the Canadian government has a repayment plan. Accordingly, working Canadians would have to endure another decade of slow growth and austerity.

Though much of the emergency coronavirus stimulus was paid out directly to individuals or private firms, its benefits accrue disproportionately to the banking sector, which is disproportionately owned by the wealthiest one per cent of Canadians.

The effects of an economic crisis are different than the effects of a financial crisis. Thus far, during this COVID-19 era, we have been experiencing an economic crisis that has mostly affected workers, many of them young. We have yet to endure a financial crisis, which would affect the banks and their ability to lend money.

Despite the bank bailouts of 2008, and even before coronavirus, the financial sector remained unstable, with significant risks of a new crisis, caused by a build-up of debts that can't be paid back. A sluggish recovery in the 2010s made the problem worse.

This is why the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) is so important. The government did not do you or any of your friends a personal favour by "taking on debt so you wouldn't have to." That only makes sense if you are the only person going into debt. But with Canada's big six banks offering deferrals on \$180 billion in mortgages by the end of May, it is clear the risk of defaults is much more systematic.

If enough workers can't pay their rent or mortgages, and if businesses can't meet their loan obligations, the crisis could spiral into a banking or financial crisis, with the potential to do much more damage over a longer period.

Therefore, every major Western country has implemented something like Canada's CERB—ensuring that workers are able to keep making credit card, rent or mortgage payments—and governments have bailed out or provided emergency funding to major industries like airlines and hotels, who have been plowed under by the reduction in travel.

The CERB is a subsidy to Canada's big banks, enabling

cash-strapped individuals to continue paying their debts—debts that have grown significantly since the 1992 reforms to the Banking Act, which unleashed new leveraging practices (lending out the same dollar more than once) and risk taking in the financial sector.

That also means, of course, that the stimulus helps banks maintain risky, anti-social lending practices that have helped push the price of housing and overall indebtedness to record highs. These practices, a product of financial deregulation in Canada, are immensely profitable (the big six Canadian banks made above \$45 billion in net profits last year), but pose systemic risks that the public eventually will have to pay for.

Canada's stimulus packages are certainly helpful for the people who receive them, but they are no charity or government hand-out. They are a lifeline to the banks, Canada's most profitable industry. They are designed to keep those profits rolling.

### Who takes in those banking profits?

Banks in Canada are owned mostly by an array of other financial companies that we all depend on—including other banks, insurance companies, and pension funds. Many of us own a small piece of them, and no one would want these institutions to fail. It would mean the loss of our savings and security.

But the profits of banking are not shared equally by all Canadians. Some pensions are larger than others. Some shareholders hold more shares. Canada is, after all, a very unequal society. The Parliamentary Budget Office estimates that the richest one per cent of Canadians owns 25.6 per cent of all the wealth in the country.

That wealth depends on banking, and if the economic crisis became a financial crisis, it has the potential to hit the wealthiest Canadians hardest.

Every \$1 billion the Canadian government spends on CERB supports a system that disproportionately benefits the richest one per cent of the population (that is, people with portfolios north of \$9 million CAD, according to one calculation).

When it comes time to figure out the political question of how we are going to pay for all this debt, let's not forget: the ones who should pay most are the ones who most benefitted.

Matthew Hayes is a sociologist and Canada Research Chair in Global and International studies at St. Thomas University.

## Clinic 554 seeks last-ditch meeting with Premier Higgs as it lets patients go

By JUDY BURWELL

Clinic 554's Medical Director Dr. Adrian Edgar has the heartbreaking task of telling his patients they are losing their family doctor. He blames Clinic 554's inability to stay open on the government of New Brunswick's refusal to fund abortions performed at the Fredericton-based clinic.

Dr. Edgar is seeking an urgent meeting with Premier Blaine Higgs to discuss the matter as Clinic 554 remains up for sale.

Dr. Edgar and before him, Dr. Henry Morgentaler, spent a total of almost three decades appealing to the New Brunswick government to respect the Canada Health Act and provide Medicare funding for abortions done at the clinic.

For the past five years, the award-winning Clinic 554 has operated as a family practice that also provides abortions and specialized services to the trans community who come from all over New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI.

The closure of Clinic 554 is a particular blow for trans health care. More than 70 trans people are on a waitlist to see a doctor and very few doctors provide trans health services in the Maritimes.

In a letter sent to Higgs on July 16, Dr. Edgar said the patients he talks to are distraught: "They, like myself, cannot understand why New Brunswick is the only province in Canada that withholds Medicare coverage from community-based abortion providers, knowing that hospital abortions carry increased risks and cost more."

"Today, it was an elderly patient approaching dialysis. Last week it was a young parent on the organ transplant list. The week before, three families with newborns learned they are losing their family doctor. Two more families this week joyfully welcomed the news they are expecting, only to find out they are losing their family doctor, too," said Dr. Edgar.

On July 23, CBC reported that four family doctors are leaving the Fredericton region for positions elsewhere. The closing of Clinic 554 will only make the waitlist for a family doctor even longer.

### New Brunswick behind other provinces on abortion care

New Brunswick is the only province that continues to not fund abortion services in settings outside a hospital, such as community-based clinics.

In response to calls to fund abortion services at Clinic 554, the Higgs government and previous Gallant Liberal government argued that it would be a slippery slope to private health care, which Reproductive Justice NB (RJNB), an organization that formed to restore abortion access in Fredericton and fight for health care for all, calls hypocritical given that successive Conservative and Liberal governments have allowed the creeping privatization of various health care services.

RJNB has argued that Clinic 554 is not a private clinic; it is a family practice that also provides abortion services and just like any other health care that is accessed and funded by Medicare at a family doctor's office so should abortion services. The advocates want what they call misogyny in New Brunswick's health care system to end.

"Clinic 554 is not a private clinic by choice, this government denies us public funding. Yet, Mr. Higgs and Mr. Flemming try to reverse these facts. Private healthcare providers don't write their public officials dozens of times seeking public funding," said Dr. Edgar.

Reproductive Justice New Brunswick, the Campaign to



Fredericton's Clinic 554 is up for sale. Photo by Carina Trasmundi.



# “We know what you are against, but what are you for?” Farming and permaculture in Bayside

By AMY FLOYD



Mike Humble’s FoodsGood Farm in Bayside, New Brunswick. Photo by Drew Gilbert.

On June 27, 20 people met at Mike Humble’s FoodsGood Farm in Bayside to learn about using permaculture for food production.

Growing up, Humble lived on a dairy farm near Stanley. He took the long way around to get back into farming. For many years he worked as a musician and in the food and entertainment industries. After a show one night, Humble was talking with another musician, Ian Griffiths of Tequila Mockingbird Orchestra. At that time New Brunswick was embroiled in divisions over shale gas development. As Humble explained his anti-fracking position, Griffiths asked this: “I know what you are against, but what are you for?”

Sometimes, someone asks just the right question to change a life. Humble was curious enough about permaculture that he took a Permaculture Design Certificate course with Ben Falk in Vermont in 2015. Humble was sold on permaculture and after that sought out land in the St. Andrews area and began the first stages of FoodsGood Farm.

Many readers may have the same question that Humble has been asked, “What the heck is permaculture anyway?” It is a set of design principles, centered on whole systems thinking, that simulates patterns and features observed in nature to help humans live in a resilient way.

The elements of permaculture that Humble discussed at the gathering are: looking to nature to learn design patterns for our daily life, managing water on land, feeding microbes to build healthy soil, learning from Indigenous earth care methods, inviting predatory insects to control pests in the garden, working in ergonomic patterns, and using clever hand tools in the gardening.

Humble calls permaculture “ecolution, or revolution in disguise.” Permaculture isn’t complicated, but as most everyone who believes in it would agree, it takes some time and patience to learn about the many elements of permaculture and how they all fit together.

Humble is looking to inspire people to get to know the rich world of permaculture. He is offering five sessions throughout the 2020 growing year. They will give learners a total of 15 hours of workshops with optional additional hands-on projects. The first workshop was on permaculture and food production, an important topic in 2020.

In addition to getting permaculture theory, learners can see it

all in action on the seven-acre property, formerly a cow pasture near St. Croix Island in Bayside. The homestead is a cabin with 300 square feet of living quarters above and a workshop below. The cabin is heated by a small amount of wood that comes from the property. This living space is attached to a greenhouse dug into the ground to extend the growing season. The property is filled with a wonderful diversity of perennial flowers, vegetable greens, shrubs, trees, berry canes and trellis work.

Permaculture is about slow and simple solutions, and it takes time to establish these holistic systems. This season marks year four of life on the farm for Humble. “In the beginning I lived in two tents under a maple tree, one for me and one for my stuff. Then I got an RV. One night in November I came back to the RV and it was -10 C. That was when I knew I had to get more built on the property.” The cabin is off-grid, which Humble teaches about in the “Farming the sun” workshop.

Humble is farming with his partner Kelly and together they feed 20 households with a Community Supported Agriculture share (CSA). CSAs are purchased at the beginning of the season, helping farmers to purchase seed, tools, etc. for the coming year. The CSA household then receives a basket of fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, cut flowers, herb, etc. (depending on the offerings at each farm). The baskets generally come weekly, between May and November.

I asked Humble why FoodsGood went from market sales to a CSA: “After having a market stall at the St. Andrews market for two years we switched our model. We find growing for friends and community much more satisfying than growing for the tourist market in town. It also leads to less waste and attaches the farm to the local community.”

FoodsGood has some interesting features. The soil practice is low-till. If at all possible, the sod is broken once with a tiller and then it isn’t tilled mechanically after that. The large broad fork is the tool used to keep the soil living and breathing.

Humble is passionate in his delivery: “People treat soil like dirt! That is no good. Soil is so much more than dirt!” In fact, the soil is a living entity in the eyes of this farmer who jokes about his “micro-herds” of animals: “There are billions of living organisms in every teaspoon of soil. I don’t feed compost to the soil, I feed compost to the micro-herd who break it down and turn it into substances that are biologically

available to plants.” Even *Forbes* magazine, not your typical environmental advocate, writes that 24 per cent of the planet is undergoing extreme erosion, at a cost of eight billion dollars annually. It is no wonder that soil building and water management are at the heart of all permaculture design.

There are no pesticides, herbicides or synthetic fertilizers at FoodsGood. Insectaries line the edges of all garden beds. These are tall, wild flowers like Queen Anne’s Lace that attract pollinators. A diversity of insects means more predators higher up the food chain to eat the pests in the lower part of the food cycle (the plant eaters).

The gardens contain a healthy variety of perennials, including nitrogen and mineral fixers like lupins and comfrey. The side hill is the beginnings of a “food forest” which will someday be five to seven levels of food production.

People-power predominates the daily work routine. All of the production this year was done by Humble and his partner, with help from a few friends. On occasion a car, tractor or tiller will do some light work on the land to save time, but the broad fork, hoe and hand tools are all that are needed.

Could this way of growing food be the future of farming in New Brunswick? Hayes Farm in Fredericton is teaching this model and it is highly accessible to young farmers, new immigrants and people looking at farming as a career transition.

Since these farms typically produce on anywhere from a half-acre to 10 acres, people may even convert their existing property into a “micro-farm.” Very little inputs are required to get started, so most new farmers can get by without a loan from the bank. After all, should we mortgage our food security? Let’s think more about small and simple solutions for our food future.

Amy Floyd is the Senior Food Security Policy Analyst for the RAVEN project. Amy and her partner Drew live in Taymouth and love their rural community in the beautiful Nashwaak Valley.

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## Clinic 554 seeks last-ditch meeting with Premier Higgs

- Save Clinic 554 and thousands of signatories to a petition
- have called on the province of New Brunswick to amend the
- Medicare Services Payment Act to allow abortions in non-
- hospital settings, which would enhance access to services in
- the province.
- In March, the government of Canada finally took action on
- New Brunswick’s unwillingness to comply with the Canada
- Health Act and withheld \$140,216 from New Brunswick’s
- annual health care transfer payment. However, the Trudeau
- government decided to make the payment when COVID-19 hit
- in Canada.
- In a reply from Health Minister Ted Flemming to a letter from
- Julia Hansen of the Campaign to Save Clinic 554 on May 29,
- the Minister said, “the Province of New Brunswick’s position
- on abortions remains unchanged.”
- In 2017, Higgs spoke to his personal objection to abortion at
- a March for Life Rally. His personal views aside, Dr. Edgar’s
- message to the Higgs Progressive Conservative government
- is clear: “It is time to leave your personal views at church and
- stop this crusade of unlawful discrimination against gender
- minorities and patients seeking abortion. You have a duty to
- serve the public and uphold the law of this land.”
- Judy Burwell is a member of the NB Media Co-op
- board of directors, the former manager of the Morgentaler
- Clinic in Fredericton and a lifelong advocate for women’s
- health rights.

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**NB MEDIA CO-OP**

PRESENTS

**NORA LORETO**

FIGHTING COVID AUSTERITY FOR A JUST WORLD

Thursday, Sept. 17  
7:00pm  
By Zoom



Journalist, activist and author Nora Loreto will deliver the NB Media Co-op’s annual keynote address, “Fighting COVID Austerity for a Just World” on Thursday, Sept. 17 at 7:00pm by Zoom.

Nora Loreto is the editor of the Canadian Association of Labour Media, author of *Take Back the Fight: Organizing Feminism for the Digital Age* (Fernwood), and writes regularly for *The National Observer*, *The Washington Post* and many other publications. With Black Lives Matter Toronto co-founder Sandy Hudson, Nora hosts the popular podcast *Sandy and Nora Talk Politics*. She is also the author of *From Demonized to Organized: Building the New Union Movement*.

This talk is co-hosted by the Canada Research Chair in Physical Culture and Social Life and Solidarité Fredericton.

Register for the Zoom link at [info@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:info@nbmediacoop.org).

### NB Media Co-op’s 11<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting

The NB Media Co-op’s Annual General Meeting (AGM) will occur on **Thursday, Sept. 17 at 6:00pm ADT** at the **Charlotte Street Art Centre in Fredericton**. Register for the meeting at [info@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:info@nbmediacoop.org).

The AGM is a time for NB Media Co-op members to review the milestones and challenges of the past year, discuss the future of the NB Media Co-op and elect our board of directors and editorial board.

Everyone is welcome to our annual meeting but you must be a member to vote!

Not a member yet?

Annual memberships are \$30. Join via PayPal or send a cheque to NB Media Co-op at 180 Saint John St., Fredericton, NB E3B 4A9. *We need your membership to sustain our work.*

For more information, contact [info@nbmediacoop.org](mailto:info@nbmediacoop.org).