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## **Expose/Oppose/Propose: The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Challenge of Alternative Knowledge**

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### Abstract

THIS CASE STUDY EXPLORES SOME of the strategies, challenges, and paradoxes of producing and mobilizing alternative knowledge in the prosecution of a “war of position” against neoliberal hegemony. Since its founding in 1980, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) has become the key labour-supported “think tank” of the left in Canada, contributing to the process of social democratization by acting as a collective organic intellectual for a wide range of oppositional groups and networks that, we suggest, make up a social democratic community of practice. The CCPA has developed a number of strategies aimed at democratizing knowledge production, perhaps unique in the context of Canadian policy groups. Nonetheless, it faces a number of challenges in following through with these strategies and potential

paradoxes in simultaneously engaging both the mainstream (general public and policymakers) and the various counterpublics that make up its community of practice.

## Abstract

CETTE ÉTUDE DE CAS EXAMINE CERTAINS des défis, des stratégies et des paradoxes de la production et de la mobilisation de connaissances alternatives dans la poursuite d'une « lutte de position » contre l'hégémonie néolibérale. Depuis sa fondation en 1980, le Centre canadien de politiques alternatives (CCPA) est devenu le principal « laboratoire d'idées » de la gauche soutenu par le mouvement ouvrier au Canada, contribuant au processus de démocratisation sociale, en agissant comme collectif intellectuel organique au service d'un large éventail des groupes et de réseaux d'opposition qui, comme nous le soutenons, forment une communauté de pratique socio-démocrate. Le CCPA a élaboré un certain nombre de stratégies visant à démocratiser la production du savoir; ces stratégies sont peut-être uniques dans le contexte des groupes de réflexion canadiens. Néanmoins, il est confronté à un certain nombre de défis en cherchant à donner suite à ces stratégies et à des paradoxes potentiels en mobilisant simultanément le courant dominant (grand public et décideurs) et les divers contre-publics qui composent sa communauté de pratique.

## ARTICLE

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**William K. Carroll and David Huxtable**

### Introduction

OVER THE COURSE OF THE 20TH CENTURY, as industrial capitalism morphed into advanced capitalist democracy in the global north, think tanks gained increasing importance as sites for research and policy development, independent of direct control by states and corporations. Typically, these centres of knowledge production and mobilization (KPM) have been funded by and inclined toward the principal propertied interests – the corporate sector.<sup>1</sup> For a century, the United States has been the epicentre of such initiatives, but since the 1960s such agencies have taken root in other capitalist democracies.<sup>2</sup> In recent decades as capitalist globalization eroded the basis for Keynesian-style national regulation, corporate-sponsored “advocacy think tanks” proliferated as champions of neoliberal policy and market-driven politics.<sup>3</sup> By the early 21st

1. Jamie Brownlee, *Ruling Canada: Corporate Co-optation and Democracy* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2005); William G. Domhoff, *Who Rules America?* 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2014).

2. James McGann, “The Global “Go-To” Think Tanks 2010,” accessed 16 July 2013 (Philadelphia: International Relations Program, University of Pennsylvania, 2010), [www.gotothinktank.com](http://www.gotothinktank.com).

3. D.E. Abelson, “Public Visibility and Policy Relevance: Assessing the Influence and Impact of Canadian Policy Institutes,” *Canadian Public Administration*, 42 (June 1999): 240–270; Gary Teeple, *Globalization and the Decline of Social Reform: Into the Twenty-first Century* (Aurora, Ontario: Garamond Press, 2000); Colin Leys, *Market-driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and*

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