

Karl Polanyi Institute of Political Economy, Concordia University

Call for Papers 15th International Karl Polanyi Conference

“The Role of the State in the post-COVID 21st Century”

April 21-24, 2021, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

The 15th International Karl Polanyi Conference April 22-24, 2021 will exceptionally take place entirely online. As we live through a major global upheaval, we invite participation in a broad and open discussion on the current consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and how governments around the world, international organizations and social movements are responding to the crisis and what this may mean for the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic requires urgent and immediate response and cooperation. It also requires a reset and retooling of the state. It requires greater coherence between all levels of government and a reconfiguration of roles and responsibilities with the active participation of civil society. It requires greater international cooperation and a concerted action to fight rising nationalism.

Despite the diversity of governments in power, from authoritarian to liberal democracies, the global economic shock triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has led to active forms of state intervention, both piecemeal and more coordinated. Are we witnessing a “pendulum swing” from minimal state intervention to a publicly led social and economic transformation? As governments in liberal democratic states inject vast sums of money into public health, economic life support and stimulus strategies in response to the pandemic, does this signal the end of decades of savage cuts to public spending? And even if such actions by governments are diverse and fragmented, do they prefigure a deeper transformation toward state re-centralization and a commitment to restore public service provision, or even a different configuration and role of the state altogether? Will populist and authoritarian regimes resist the increasingly acknowledged need for the global management of health crises? Countries in the global South burdened with the high cost of servicing foreign debt, falling commodity prices and economic chaos have little or no capacity to invest in health care. Will there be increasing international pressure for debt forgiveness?

For the 15th International Karl Polanyi conference, we invite participants to reflect on questions such as:

- In liberal democracies, will post-COVID state intervention prioritize an equal, fair and just recovery or will today's active crisis management quickly fade as governments face unimaginable budgetary deficits and public debt?
- Will this global pandemic result in greater international cooperation between nations? Will an eventual vaccine be equitably distributed as a global public good with the pooling of patents?
- Can we envisage greater international cooperation, a global Green New Deal, in response to the warnings of the UN IPCC that the world has ten years to avoid the irreversible impact of climate change? Or will governments return to national agendas as countries struggle to rebuild their economies?

- At the supra-national level, will the current increased coordination within the European Union be eclipsed by reclaiming national sovereignty?

- Within countries, will the increasing role of regional and local governments be considerably diminished by the re-centralization of power taking place in many countries managing the pandemic crisis? This is especially true for cities with greater responsibility for “*habitat*” that are important sites of resistance to “*improvement*”, in Polanyi’s terms. Cities and local governments were given greater responsibilities pre-COVID and have demonstrated their capacity to act as catalysts for a just transition. In many cases, collaboration with citizens movements has accelerated this process. Witness the growth of the city as commons movement internationally. Will these trends be threatened by re-centralization of decision-making and a reduced role for civil society and local governments?

- What role will counter-movements play, social movements and communities of mutual support for the common good in co-designing strategies for economic democracy, the decommodification of work and nature? Or will right wing populist movements continue to gain ground as they are in many parts of the world?

- As events unfold, how will states address the pre-COVID realities of climate crisis, deepening, racialized and gendered inequality, food insecurity, a migration and refugee crisis that has laid bare the cruelty of humanity?

- Pre-COVID, we were concerned with the impact of the digital economy on all aspects of work and life, the growing number of precarious gig workers, zero hour employment with no access to social protection. We still are. Is basic income the answer?

- Will the domination of the digital economy and violation of privacy, security and basic labour rights by tech giants be met by coordinated international action?

Please join us and **keynote speakers Sheila R. Foster, Robert Kuttner, Ann Pettifor and Quinn Slobodian** in addressing these and other issues and challenges raised by the pandemic with a view to the role that existing institutions are playing and how they may transform in a post-COVID world. As with all past Polanyi conferences, we also welcome proposals on Karl Polanyi’s life, work and thought, and his influence in many disciplines including economic history, economic anthropology, economic sociology, to name those in which his influence has been significant. Polanyi’s greatest influence, however, has been on dismantling disciplinary boundaries to help us understand the reality of contemporary society. The COVID-19 pandemic respects no boundaries, geographic or political, nor those that Polanyi argued were artificial, separating economy and society. We invite reflections on the great transformation currently under way that neither Polanyi nor we could ever have imagined.

We invite proposals for individual papers or for panels. In the case of panels, please identify topic and participants. Please send an abstract of no more than 250 words to polanyi.institute@concordia.ca by December 1, 2020. Be sure to indicate clearly your name, the names of speakers in the case of proposed panels and institutional affiliation(s).