

# Ontario: Debunking the Conservative Party Policy of Ford and Scheer

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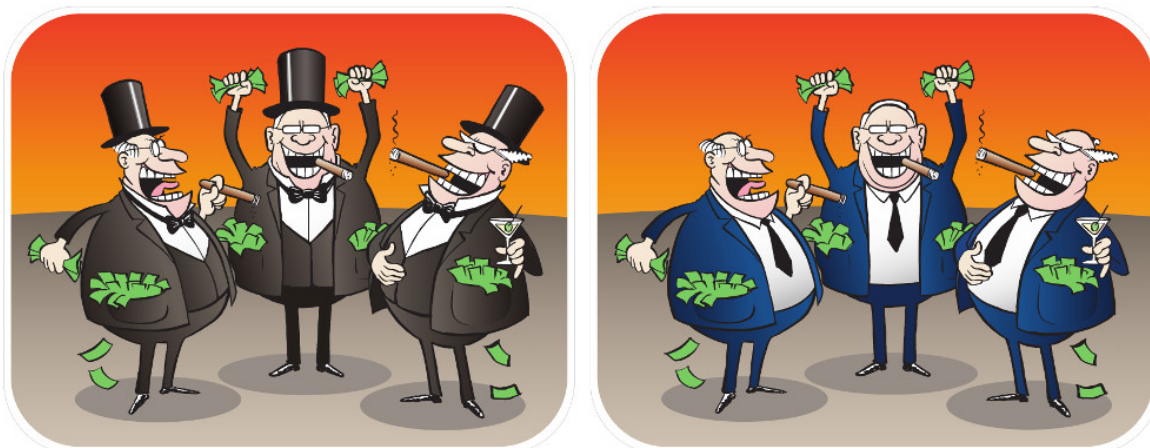
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Region: [Canada](#)

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*We learned many lessons in fighting the Conservative governments in the past, and personally in our long battle to block the privatization of Ontario Hydro One. The government of Doug Ford in Ontario, and the policies that Andrew Scheer is putting forward as federal Conservative Party leader going into the coming election, is forcing us to learn some old battles and take up a new round of struggles in the Canadian labour movement. Beware of any party promising free tax cuts with more prosperity and saying things like ‘tax cuts pay for themselves’. There is no free money. Strip away the smoke-and-mirrors show, and you’ll see that the only thing that Conservatives do is transfer wealth to the private few.*

Tax cuts are the central policy pillar of the Ontario Conservative Party, and the current government of **Premier Doug Ford**. The Conservatives inevitably promise that tax cuts will be good for everyone. Former Conservative Premier Mike Harris, with his so-called Common Sense Revolution, promised that ‘all boats would be lifted by the rising economy’. During the last provincial election, Doug Ford made the same promise; [he said](#) that his government’s policies would bring in many great paying jobs and “prosperity and progress the likes this province has never seen before.”



The reality of Tax cuts and trickledown economics. When the wealthiest 1% have crammed as many dollars as they can into their pockets the rest of us will get the odd \$20 bill that falls out.

## Tax Cuts

However, since Reagan’s and Thatcher’s time, trickledown economics has been completely discredited. It was a completely ridiculous theory, in the first place. It’s like believing that as the wealthy cram as many \$100 bills as they can into their pockets, everyone else will get

the odd \$20 bill that falls out. Over the last 25 years, we've had so many tax cuts, mostly to the wealthy and their corporations, we should be awash in great well-paying jobs. Just ask any young person who is caught in the job churn from one low wage contract to the next. Trickle-down is not working for them.

The other ridiculous claim made by the Conservative Party is that 'tax cuts pay for themselves'. The Tories are practitioners of the big lie, telling the same lie over and over again for years until it becomes accepted as conventional wisdom.

## Deficits

The Conservative Party constantly decries and criticizes deficits, when, in fact, tax cuts, including tax freezes, have added greatly to municipal, provincial and federal deficits. Great damage has also been done by funding reductions to healthcare, education, social services and infrastructure to pay for tax cuts. Reductions to funding for healthcare have also hurt many people, and I'm one of them. Cuts to healthcare almost killed me, and put my family and I through hell.

The former Conservative Party Prime Minister, **Stephen Harper**, [once said](#), "I believe that all taxes are bad," and this is exactly what the Conservative Party and its leaders believe, that all taxes must be reduced or removed. The current Conservative national leader, Andrew Scheer - a Harper clone, has already promised such tax relief; tax cuts are a core policy of his platform, while at the same time, he promises to reduce the deficit. Absolute baloney. There is no free money. They never say how they are going to pay for their tax cuts.

Deficit financed tax cuts should be completely illegal, as should tax cuts financed by reductions to healthcare, education, social services and infrastructure, or by turning public sector jobs into low-wage contract and part-time work with few or no benefits. Working people and the poor have to labour and struggle for years and years and still end up having less access to services and a reduced or eliminated social safety net, all to pay for tax cuts that only benefit the wealthiest 1%.

The net result of tax cuts is massive transfers of public wealth to the wealthy. When was the last year that you can remember when there weren't any cuts? No one can answer because only the luxury liners are rising, and everyone else is sinking in their wake. There's a reason why rich people use a healthcare system paid for by a progressive tax system: so healthcare would be good for everyone.

It's long past time for an adult discussion on taxes. It would be a very interesting to see just how much of the total of all deficits are caused by tax cuts, including tax freezes. And where has all the money gone? It's gone into the bank accounts of the wealthy, including many offshore accounts used to avoid taxes altogether. As Charles Dickens is reputed to have said in the 1830s: the rich will take the widow's mite and the orphan's crumb.

## Deregulation

This is what the Conservatives call 'cutting red tape'. In Ontario, developers and loggers are salivating at the prospect of getting their hands on Ontario Place, and on the Green Belt lands, as well as ridding the province of those pesky regulations on endangered species and restrictions on cutting down very valuable 300 and 400-year-old trees in, of all places,

Algonquin Provincial Park. This is what Ford's promise of cutting red tape really is. This is what Ford means when he says Ontario is open for business! Come on in and help yourselves. There won't be any rules in your way, so you can maximize profits.

However, chopping down all the grandfather trees is just wrong, as is developing as much of 'green spaces' as they can just to make a buck and add to their already outrageous fortunes. It should be illegal for private companies to profit from public wealth! Kathleen Wynne just paid the ultimate price and was completely humiliated in the last provincial election for selling Hydro One, also part of our public wealth.

There's a reason why regulations were made in sectors like finance, construction, mining, manufacture and the environment: to protect people from the excesses of business and markets. Our financial regulations largely protected us from the 2008 financial meltdown in the USA. While politicians promise that private-sector discipline will lead to 'increased efficiencies' and lower taxes, what really happens is that public wealth and profit-making opportunities get transferred to the private few.

In fact, the private sector has been very anxious to gain control of public assets for a long time. Since the crash of 2008, there has been a 'flight to quality' for investors, and now is their big chance to obtain public assets at fire-sale prices. Ford is promising \$6-billion in 'increased efficiencies'. Do we really want private sector discipline and increased efficiencies like Enron, Worldcom, Nortel, Lehman Brothers, Fannie May and Freddie Mac, whose financial frauds caused the crash of 2008, and the savings and loan scandals of the 1980s and 1990s.

### **The Holy Words**

'Competition' and 'market' are the holiest words in Conservative policy, which promotes the idea that competitive markets can solve problems much more efficiently than any government. The Conservatives are very eager to introduce competitive bidding systems throughout the public sector, including healthcare. They use code words like 'monetization' and 'modernization' to justify their drive for smaller government and the privatization of public services. According to them, private owners in deregulated, competitive markets will result in 'increased efficiencies' and lower cost.

The Harris/Eves Conservatives endlessly promised that 'increased efficiencies from a deregulated electricity market would result in lower rates', but everyone knows what a deregulated competitive market has done to their hydro bill. Ask anyone who has paid a hydro bill in the last fifteen years. Ford's promises to lower hydro rates are bogus. He will never reverse deregulation or close the electricity market, which is what would be required to lower rates. The Conservative Party of Ontario needs to be held accountable for that colossal mistake.

Watch for Ford and Scheer to tell us that they have to sell public assets to pay for infrastructure like transit instead of raising taxes. Privatization and deregulation of our public services and assets is presented as a painless way to solve the debt crisis. Meanwhile, there are no demonstrations or protests by Canadians demanding that their public institutions be deregulated or privatized.

### **Inaction and Denial of Climate Change**

Both Scheer and Ford claim fighting climate change through a carbon tax is a job killer and makes us uncompetitive. There's that holy word again. Everyone knows the global environment is in big trouble! Doing nothing is just not an option. *There are no jobs on a dead planet!* And no money or wealth either! Both Ford and Scheer promise to fight a carbon tax. That only acts in the interests of the wealthy and of corporate profits. We have less than ten years to collectively change our behavior, to aggressively fight and invest heavily against climate change. Will it cost money? Yes, but the cost of doing nothing has already been extreme and every climate scientist says it is going to get much worse. We can't afford not to act, and do it right now!

Here's a scientific fact that should make everyone concerned enough to act. If the permafrost melts and releases all that methane and stored carbon dioxide and the oceans warm to reach a tipping point, it could result in runaway global warming causing all the methane stored as methyl hydrates on the ocean floor to start to be released. If that happens, it's curtains for the human race.

### **Conservatives Channeling Their Inner Trump**

Ford has already called the media fake news and has promised to make Ontario great again. *He and his cronies have no problem employing the politics of division, using greed, intolerance and fear* as organizing tools. For example, Andrew Scheer is already fear-mongering about taxes and illegal border crossers, while social conservatives like the Christian right - which has far too much influence over the Conservative Party - are promoting intolerance against the LGBTQ+ community, and same-sex marriage, not to mention the elimination a woman's right to choose, always high on their agenda.

Both Ford and Scheer need to be reminded that what made Canada a great country and a competitive place to do business was our public healthcare and education system, as well as our public hydro systems.

### **This is a Crisis!**

The Conservative Party is always claiming there is a crisis, and creating one if there isn't. John Snobelen, a cabinet minister with the Harris Tories, [famously said](#), "Let's create a crisis." Ford has started down the road of creating a crisis in healthcare in Ontario with his cuts, and his claim that transformative change through competition and market-driven solutions will come to the rescue. Contracting out healthcare is just another form of privatization. Scheer is already claiming there's a deficit crisis while still promising tax cuts.

### **Policies to Serve the 1%**

Today we are busy slashing social services and letting our infrastructure crumble in order to pay for tax cuts. Families are working harder and longer hours, many working multiple jobs in part-time or contract work. Although our resources are demanded all over the world, all we hear about is that deficits are out of control and that we have to continuously tighten our belts. We've all been tightening our belts for so long now that the circulation is completely cut off to our legs and feet!

The wealthy and their corporations have held far too much sway over our governments. Conservative governments have been all too eager to deregulate labour laws and give corporations the flexibility they crave to maximize profits. What is the ultimate form of

labour flexibility? It's slavery!



Every step that governments take to improve labour legislation and regulate a 'living' minimum wage is a step away from slavery. However, successive Conservative governments have been eroding and repealing labour laws and have kept the minimum wage far too low. Look at Premier Ford's recent repeal of labour laws and his axing of the minimum wage! Isn't it great how in Ontario you can work at a reduced minimum wage for sixty hours a week with no overtime provisions, right into your eighties or until you drop dead?

People labouring at minimum wage and in part-time contract work are virtual slaves. Young people caught in the job churn of part-time and contract work are told to just get used to it. They generate a lot of wealth for a very wealthy country. Surely they deserve to share in a small part of that wealth for \$15 an hour and permanent full-time jobs. Is this the prosperity the tax cut crowd has been promising for more than twenty-five years?

While everyone else's wages have stagnated over the last thirty years, the top 1% have seen their pay and wealth increase dramatically but still don't like paying all those extra taxes. Governments have been all too happy to accommodate them. Since 1980, the top federal tax rate has been cut by almost 50%. If the progressive tax system had not been changed, there would be no deficits, and we would have a national surplus.

Inequality is at an all-time high. A massive concentration of wealth is in the hands of the few. We don't have a wealth-creation crisis; we have a severe distribution-of-wealth crisis. This concentration of wealth in the hands of the few is simply not sustainable. The wealthy would do well to remember that since the French revolution in 1789, and in every revolution, before every war and before every financial collapse since then, there was a huge concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. We're there right now.

The fall 2019 federal election will soon be here. The logical conclusion of Conservative Party policies and beliefs is this: let's cut taxes as close to zero, let's eliminate all rules and regulations, let's transform our whole society into a competitive, privatized market, including air and water as commodities, and that way we'll have so many 'increased efficiencies' that we'll have prosperity.

### **Where is the Leader and Party with the Following Promises?**

Where is the promise that they will deal aggressively with the distribution-of-wealth crisis and narrow the huge gap between the haves and have nots? Where's the promise to restore

a progressive tax system where everyone pays their fair share of taxes? Where's the promise to restore and rebuild our public sector and public infrastructure? Where's the promise to bring in regulations so that everyone can share in Canada's prosperity? That means regulations to end job churn and mandate that full-time work is full-time work that cannot to be cut up into pieces of part-time or contract work with few, if any benefits and no pension! Where's the promise to deal with climate change realistically and effectively based on the facts, even if it means a tax on carbon pollution.

*Reversing tax cuts is not raising taxes: it's restoring funding to build a civil, more just and equitable society!* If it was seen that everyone was paying their fair share, no one would mind paying taxes.

As voters, we must stop believing and voting for the Conservative tax-cut-and-red-tape lie. You will not like where that takes us. Tax cuts and deregulation have never delivered on their promise of prosperity for all – in fact, quite the opposite. You just can't build a civil society and a country on tax cuts and deregulation. Never have, never will! Tax cuts and deregulation are making the majority of us poorer and the top 1% much richer and crippling government's ability to govern. It is time to end this insanity.

Be aware that once upon a time we proudly invested in our schools and hospitals, our libraries, and our electricity, water, sanitation and transportation systems. We are long past due to get back to making those investments! What are we going to do, return to creating a huge underclass of people waiting at the company gate, desperate to compete for a few hours work so we can solve our cash crisis?

When you cut and carve out public services by privatization, all you get is hollowed out cities and a lot of poverty. Look south of the border, and at Britain, to see what happened when they went down this path. We all don't like paying inequitable taxes. But I hate stepping over people in the street more. I hate gridlock and potholes more. I want my schools, hospitals, libraries, firefighters, police and paramedics to be there. I want my son and young people and their children to have a future. I'm willing to pay more for these things so we can truly have a more equitable, livable society in which prosperity is shared by all. But we also need to shift the tax burden and attack and limit corporate power. The labour movement in Canada needs to be again, as it once was, at the forefront of these battles today.

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**Paul Kahnert** was a Toronto Hydro worker and CUPE Local One member for 33 years. He was a spokesperson for the Ontario Electricity Coalition from 2001 to 2010. The Ontario Electricity Coalition and its members CEP and CUPE stopped the sale of Hydro One in a Province wide campaign and court case in the Spring of 2002.

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