

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

1845 or 2023? Friedrich Engels's insights into the health effects of Victorian-era and contemporary Canadian capitalism

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Abstract

The Condition of the Working Class in England (hereafter, *CWCE*) by Friedrich Engels is a masterpiece of urban research not only for its explicit descriptions of the living and working conditions of members of the Victorian-era working class and their effects on health but also its insights into the sources of these conditions through a political economy analysis. For Engels, the capitalist economic system, with the support of the state apparatus, prematurely sickened and killed men, women and children in its unrestrained pursuit of profits. Our reading of *CWCE* in 2023 concludes that Engels identified virtually every social determinant of health now found in contemporary discourse with his insights into how their quality and distribution shape health clearly relevant to present-day Canada. Revisiting *CWCE* directs our attention to how the same economic and political forces that sickened and killed members of the English working class in 1845 now do so in present-day Canada. Engels's insights also suggest means of responding to these forces. We place these findings within Derrida's concept of spectre and Rainey and Hanson's concept of trace to show how ideas from the past can inform the present.

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Friedrich Engels, political economy, public policy, social determinants of health

I have now to prove that society in England daily and hourly commits what the working-men's organs, with perfect correctness, characterise as social murder.

(Friedrich Engels, 1845/2009)

INTRODUCTION

There is renewed academic and mainstream media interest in the writings of political economist Friedrich Engels driven by increasing social and health inequalities in many nations resulting from the acceptance of neoliberal approaches to governance and the imposition of austerity by ruling authorities (Govender et al., 2022; Medvedyuk et al., 2021). In *The Condition of the Working Class in England* written in 1845 (hereafter, *CWCE*), Engels laid out the fundamental cause of premature mortality among the working class as being the capitalist economic model and its sending workers prematurely to the grave to serve the profit motives of the bourgeoisie (Engels, 1845/2009).

The mediating links between these processes and adverse health outcomes are harmful living and working conditions experienced by a significant proportion of the population brought on by problematic public policy (Bryant & Raphael, 2020). Previous work has considered insights from Engels's contemporaries Rudolf Virchow's work as to the importance of democratic practices for health and Edwin Chadwick's on sanitary conditions, but Virchow and Chadwick did not consider how the structures and processes of capitalism threaten health (Brown & Fee, 2006; Lange, 2021; Waitzkin, 2006).

We draw upon Engels's 1845 insights into the health effects of capitalism to consider the public policy environment in Canada. We apply Derrida's (1994) concept of spectre and Rainey and Hanson's (2021) concept of trace to illustrate how work from the past can inform analyses of the present. We are particularly interested in the similarities between Engels's descriptions of the condition of the working class in 1845 England and the social determinants of health experienced by many Canadians in 2023. We also consider the similarities between the political economy of health—the societal structures and processes driving health outcomes—then and now. While the condition of the working class in 1845 England and 2023 Canada are of course on different scales, in both cases we see governmental authorities and ruling elites creating living and working conditions that sicken and kill many. Finally, we consider the relevance of Engels's recommendations for dealing with these issues in the Canada of 2023.

Background

In 1842, Friedrich Engels, at the age of 22, was sent by his father from Barmen, Germany to Manchester, England to work for his family's textile business (Hunt, 2009). Engels spent the next 2 years collecting reports, documents and newspaper articles about workers' living and working conditions. Importantly, he also interacted and spoke with these workers. In 1844, upon returning to Barmen, he wrote *CWCE* in 6 months to warn Germans of the stark consequences

of unrestrained industrial capitalist practices. It was published in German in 1845; an English edition was released 42 years later in 1887. Much of what Engels reported about the factory process and the conditions of workers served as the basis for Marx's *Capital* (Hunt, 2009). Engels's analysis of the economic and social forces behind these processes and their toll on workers' health remains relevant today.

1845: The condition of the working class in England

Hyman (1962) called Engels's *CWCE* 'A Neglected Masterpiece', and this was the case for most of the 20th century. Since 2000, and especially from 2010, there has been a resurgence of academic and popular interest in *CWCE* brought on by the growing social and health inequalities wrought by the structures and processes of 21st century capitalism (Govender et al., 2022; Medvedyuk et al., 2021).

CWCE applied a political economy analysis to explain how ruling economic relations of 19th century capitalism—abetted by governing authorities—created living and working conditions that sickened and killed members of the English working class. Engels applied a multi-method approach to both describe and explain the circumstances of labouring men, women and children in England with reference to similar situations in Scotland, Wales and Ireland. His *Results* section sees the outcomes of proletarian living and working conditions as constituting social murder. Sections on labour movements and the attitudes of the bourgeoisie detail the struggles of workers against those creating these conditions.

2023: The condition of Canadian public policy

Raphael et al. (2020) detail how Canada's public policies fall well behind most members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). On various social determinants of health such as employment security and working conditions, income, housing and food security—Canada's performance is troubling, reflecting low levels of redistribution, social spending and management of the employment market (Bryant & Raphael, 2020). These conditions have health effects across all levels of income, but they are especially salient among those living in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty, estimated at close to 30% of Canadians (Angus Reid Institute, 2018). Statistics Canada estimates that 40,000 excess deaths per year can be attributed to Canadians not experiencing the living and working conditions of the top 20% of income earners (Tjepkema et al., 2013). Neoliberal approaches to governance contribute to these excess deaths by commodifying necessities, increasing stratification, and reducing the state's provision of economic and social resources and management of the economy (Bryant & Raphael, 2020).

Spectre and trace

The past can inform present understandings. For Derrida (1994), the spectre (his focus was on Marx, while ours is on Engels) is the reified spirit of past discourses. A spectre is therefore 'a deconstructive figure hovering between life and death, presence and absence, and making established certainties vacillate' (Davis, 2005, p. 376). Derrida (1994) writes '... a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back' (p. 123). Derrida urges:

If he loves justice at least, the "scholar" of the future, the "intellectual" of tomorrow should learn it and from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to

make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak, or how to give them back speech [...]

(p. 221)

Spectral figures like Engels re-emerge through the relevance of their ideas to current times. Another concept informing our work is trace. Referring to the contemporary relevance of two statues of Engels now located in Manchester, Rainey and Hanson's (2021) use the trace as: '... the details of place and social life that tell stories of change, putting into motion the dialectic and with it a whole set of epiphanies and realisations' (p. 266) also applies to a rereading of the *CWCE*.

Present study

In our examination of the relevance of Engels's 1845 insights to the Canada of 2023, we adopted various sensitising concepts—concepts or ideas that give the 'user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances'—to guide our inquiry (Blumer, 1954, p. 7). Since we applied a political economy lens concerned with the economic, political and social structures that distribute power and resources in a society (Bryant & Raphael, 2020), our sensitising concepts were the capitalist economic system, public policy, and the living and working conditions that shape health. These sensitising concepts guided our analysis but did not restrain us from identifying additional concepts that emerged from our inquiry (Bowen, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

Historiography of the political economy of health and social medicine has a rich history in Western work with some of the most prominent examples being George Siegrist's (Fee, 1989) and Erwin Ackerknecht's (2016) histories of disease and medicine, which showed how diseases were consequences of social and economic conditions. We relied upon Marxist historiography, sometimes referred to as people's history or 'history from below,' to understand how class, capitalist relations of production, and economic inequality determine health outcomes now and then. In this study, we used thematic analysis as a method for 'identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79) from Engels's *CWCE*. Because *CWCE* provides a detailed analysis supported by factual evidence about the working and living conditions of the English working class in 1845, we were able to thematically categorise these findings to draw comparisons between the past and present (Sandelowski, 2010).

We identified seven themes—using consensus among the three authors—linking 1845 England to 2023 Canada. We did this by examining how contemporary statistics and related background documents mapped onto concepts apparent in Engels's *CWCE*. We provide instances of these themes and then similar instances of the same themes from *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts* (Raphael et al., 2020), which provides an overview of the contemporary Canadian scene. We appreciate the structure of inequalities in capital, power, and financial and social resources are different between 1845 and 2023; however, there are similarities that render Engels's observations applicable, relevant, and comparable to present-day experiences of disease and mortality for many Canadians.

Findings

The seven integrative themes linking 1845 England to 2023 Canada are (1) the nature of capitalism; (2) public policy; (3) the bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie philanthropy; (4) epidemics; (5) social inequalities; (6) health inequalities; and (7) the labour movement. A later section considers social determinants of health then and now.

The nature of capitalism

England, 1845. For Engels, the capitalist system placed ownership of the means of production in the hands of the elite few. Technological advances such as the harnessing of steam and water to power new machinery and centralised industrial and agricultural production established two groups: the bourgeoisie and the workers. Engels introduces the concept of the 1% and how its domination of the economy drove out independent tradesmen.

Hence, too, there exist here only a rich and a poor class, for the lower middle class vanishes more completely with every passing day. Thus the class formerly most stable has become the most restless one. It consists today of a few remnants of a past time, and a number of people eager to make fortunes, industrial Micawbers and speculators of whom one may amass a fortune, while ninety-nine become insolvent, and more than half of the ninety-nine live by perpetually repeated failure.

(pp. 34–35)

Canada, 2023. The concentration of power and influence, accompanied by growing income and wealth inequalities is one of the defining features of Canadian society in 2023. Carroll and Sapinski (2018) state:

Canada is ruled by an organised minority of the 1%, a class of corporate owners, managers and bankers who amass wealth by controlling the large corporations at the core of the economy...More recently, capitalist globalisation and the consolidation of a market-driven neoliberal regime have dramatically enhanced corporate power while exacerbating social and economic inequalities. The result is our current oligarchic order, where power is concentrated in a few corporations that are controlled by the super-wealthy and organised into a cohesive corporate elite.

(book description)

The distributional effects upon income and wealth of this concentration of power and influence in Canada echo Engels's 1845 description of the demise of the middle class. Over the last 30 years, income for the bottom 60% of Canadians stagnated, while the top 20%'s incomes grew by 40% (Curry-Stevens, 2016). Regarding the middle 60%: 'New research... exposes the changing class structure of Canada, moulding us increasingly towards the poignant image of a rotten apple, eroding the middle class and growing the rich and the poor' (Curry-Stevens, 2016, p. 60).

The Canadian Parliamentary Budget Officer documents growing inequality in wealth: '(T)he top one percent's share of (family) net wealth in Canada has increased by approximately 5% points over the period of 1999–2019...the top one percent's share of family net wealth in Canada is 24.8%, whereas the bottom 40% of families own 1.1% of total wealth in 2019' (Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, 2021, p. 3).

Public policy

England, 1845. Engels describes how difficult it was to form unions, the abysmal wages, and lack of support if employment was not taken: ‘Naturally, the workers are perfectly free; the manufacturer does not force them to take his materials and his cards, but he says to them... “If you don’t like to be frizzled in my frying-pan, you can take a walk into the fire”’ (p. 206).

The Poor Law of 1601 addressed the increasing impoverishment of the working class by allowing the unemployed to apply to their parish for financial aid. The bourgeoisie was unhappy with this law and, in 1834, most of it was reversed. Engels states

All relief in money and provisions was abolished; the only relief allowed was admission to the workhouses immediately built. The regulations for these workhouses, or, as the people call them, Poor Law Bastilles, is such as to frighten away every one who has the slightest prospect of life without this form of public charity.

(pp. 291–292).

The bourgeoisie increased their power and influence through the Reform Bill of 1831, which cemented major changes in England’s electoral system. In the 1887 *CWCE* preface, Engels stated that while the Reform Bill ended the political monopoly of the landed aristocracy, bankers, and usurers by giving greater electoral representation to citizens paying rent of more than 10 pounds in towns and 50 pounds in counties, it further marginalised the proletariat and petty bourgeoisie and gave greater power to manufacturing capitalists: ‘...the Reform Bill had legally sanctioned the distinction between bourgeoisie and proletariat, and made the bourgeoisie the ruling class’ (p. 222).

The Factories’ Inquiry Commission’s report of 1833 documented what Engels described as ‘Women made unfit for childbearing, children deformed, men enfeebled, limbs crushed, whole generations wrecked, afflicted with disease and infirmity, purely to fill the purses of the bourgeoisie’ (p. 175). In response, the Factory Act of 1834 ‘forbade the employment of children under 9 years of age (except in silk mills), limited the working hours of children...provided for an hour and a half as the minimum interval for meals, and repeated the total prohibition of night-work for persons under 18 years of age’ (pp. 180–181). Of course, behind these Acts were classist motivations related to hygienic issues and stabilised conditions for capital accumulation rather than any real motivation to improve the conditions of the working class (Moos, 2021; Szreter, 2003). Interestingly, opposition to the Factory Acts was strong among what Szreter (2003) termed a ‘shopocracy’ of small property holders, a parallel to today’s opposition to reforms by the small business sector (Aivales, 2021).

Canada, 2023. Many instances of Canadian public policy resonate with Engels’s observations. Social assistance rates in Canada are well below the poverty line as are rates for those unable to work due to disability. Rates for a single person considered employable are set at absurdly low levels ranging from 35% of the poverty line in Alberta to 41% in Ontario. For a person with a disability, benefits range from 44% of the poverty line in Alberta to 66% in Quebec (Tweddle & Aldridge, 2018).

Minimum wage levels, at which 10.4% of Canadians work (Dionne-Simard & Miller, 2019), take a person close to the poverty line (Raphael, 2020). Canada’s percentage of low wage workers (less than $\frac{2}{3}$ median wage) is amongst the highest of OECD nations at 19.5% (OECD, 2022d). Canadian laws and regulations make it difficult to organise a workplace; unionisation rates (31%) (Statistics Canada, 2022c) are low compared to other OECD nations (OECD, 2022c)

with union coverage among the public sector at 77.2% versus the private sector rate of 15.3% (Statistics Canada, 2022c).

The bourgeoisie and bourgeois philanthropy

England, 1845. For Engels, the bourgeoisie was the ‘possessing class’ (p. 14), whose ownership of the means of production created the proletariat’s working and living conditions. Since the bourgeoisie were aware of the suffering and early mortality of the working class they ‘...dare not speak the truth in these cases, for it would speak its own condemnation’ (p. 38), they were committing social murder in the pursuit of profits.

Engels was appalled by ‘...a class so deeply demoralised, so incurably debased by selfishness, so corroded within, so incapable of progress, as the English bourgeoisie...’ (p. 281) such that ‘... nothing exists in this world, except for the sake of money, itself not excluded. It knows no bliss save that of rapid gain, no pain save that of losing gold’ (p. 281).

A particularly interesting insight of Engels was the role of philanthropy by the bourgeoisie. He took note of contributions to charity as such:

What? The wealthy English fail to remember the poor? They who have founded philanthropic institutions, such as no other country can boast of! Philanthropic institutions forsooth!...Charity which degrades him who gives more than him who takes; charity which treads the downtrodden still deeper in the dust, which demands that the degraded, the pariah cast out by society, shall first surrender the last that remains to him, his very claim to manhood, shall first beg for mercy before your mercy deigns to press, in the shape of an alms, the brand of degradation upon his brow.

(p. 283)

Canada, 2023. In Canada, the term 1% has come to signify a capitalist class that through its ownership of means of production, including privatised portions of natural resources, and the political power such ownership confers, skews public policy to facilitate capital accumulation. Through interlocking networks of corporations, banks, think tanks, and advocacy groups, the 1%, directly and indirectly, controls the living and working conditions of Canadians. Langille (2016) states:

[T]he driving forces shaping the social determinants of health have been the owners and managers of major transnational enterprises—the men who have defined our (corporate) culture and wielded an enormous influence over public policy. Their main instrument has been macro-economic policy, which has been used to set constraints on the role and scope of government...they have succeeded in tilting the balance to favour the top 1 percent.

(p. 470)

The rise of neoliberal globalisation in the 1970s led to further deregulation of corporate and entrepreneurial activities, restructuring of the state to promote capital accumulation, skewing of distributions of income and wealth to benefit the elite, and creating new forms of insecurity and precarity for the working class (Garrett, 2019). Interestingly, the contemporary conclusion that the world’s 1% is a transnational capitalist class which controls local and global conditions of labour (Robinson & Harris, 2000) echoes Engels’s observation that

In view of all this, it is not surprising that the working class has gradually become a race wholly apart from the English bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie has more in common with every other nation of the earth than with the workers in whose midst it lives.

(p. 135)

As noted, Engels had strong words to say about philanthropic and charitable activity by the bourgeoisie. In regards to contemporary corporate and business sector involvement in charitable efforts such as food banks and food diversion schemes, Azadian et al. (2022) documented how the same corporate sector responsible in large part for creating food insecurity and hunger has come to dominate the civil society organisations whose missions are to reduce it. Livingstone (2017) argues that such activities—which would also include corporate and business donations to Christmas gift drives and homeless shelters—serve to further entrench the capitalist economic system.

Epidemics

England, 1845. Engels documents how rachitis, scarlet fever, indigestion, scrofula, and lung disease, among others, disproportionately afflicted the working class. Similarly, epidemics of cholera, typhus, and smallpox were more prominent among the working class. Engels saw damp dwellings, unventilated houses, and lack of water supply and waste management systems as causing increased epidemic disease among the working class: ‘Typhus... is attributed by the official report on the sanitary condition of the working class, directly to the bad state of the dwellings in the matters of ventilation, drainage, and cleanliness’ (p. 109).

Canada, 2023. The COVID-19 pandemic in Canada disproportionately affected the working poor mediated through social locations of gender, race, and class (Bryant et al., 2020). Immigrants and low-wage workers in front-line, essential positions in long-term care (LTC) homes, warehouses, factories, and construction sites were at significantly greater risk of COVID-19 exposure and mortality (Statistics Canada, 2020a).

These differential effects are the result of an underdeveloped welfare system which denied essential workers sick days, generated crowded housing, and failed to adequately regulate workplace conditions (Bryant et al., 2020). The disproportionate effects on the elderly residing in LTC were due to poor working conditions, overcrowded facilities, and inadequate quality of care. These effects were worse in for-profit facilities (Béland & Marier, 2020).

Social inequalities

England, 1845. For Engels, social inequality was a by-product of the conflict between the property-owning and capital-controlling bourgeoisie and the working class whereby: ‘...control of the means of subsistence and production, is the weapon with which this social warfare is carried on...’ (pp. 37–38). Engels describes a society where ‘...the stronger treads the weaker under foot, and the powerful few, the capitalists, seize everything for themselves, while to the weak many, the poor, scarcely a bare existence remains’ (p. 37). Engels further argues: ‘Society, composed wholly of atoms, does not trouble itself about them (the working class); leaves them to care for themselves and their families, yet supplies them no means of doing this in an efficient

and permanent manner' (p. 85). Unstable employment, poor working conditions, low wages, and lack of social protection from the state caused the social murder of workers.

For Engels, the state and its legislation are '...calculated to protect those that possess property against those who do not' (p. 286) and criminalised the working class: '(B)oth casts the suspicion of every sort of crime upon him and cuts him off from legal redress against any caprice of the administrators of the law; for him, therefore, the protecting forms of the law do not exist...' (p. 287). Even when workers successfully formed unions, unionisation was up against the ruling relations of capitalism:

The history of these Unions is a long series of defeats of the working men, interrupted by a few isolated victories. All these efforts naturally cannot alter the economic law according to which wages are determined by the relation between supply and demand in the labour market. Hence the Unions remain powerless against all *great* forces which influence this relation.

(p. 224)

Canada 2023. In Canada, social inequalities in income and wealth, employment, housing, food security, and power and influence are profound, existing among those occupying different social locations of class, gender, race, immigrant status, and Indigeneity (Grabb, Reitz, & Hwang, 2017). These have been exacerbated by the growing acceptance of neoliberal ideology into all aspects of governmental policymaking (see Table 1 for details).

Corporate and business sector domination of the economic and political systems drives these social inequalities: 'There is still a high concentration of economic power in a small group of giant private sector corporations operating at the top of the ownership structure...this high level of concentration has probably increased over the past several decades' (Grabb & Hwang, 2017, p. 8). These social inequalities contribute to the health inequalities which Engels saw as constituting social murder.

Health inequalities

England, 1845. Engels described horrid inequalities in health and cited Dr. P.N. Holland's report on Manchester: '...mortality in the *streets* of the second class is 18% greater, and the streets of the third class 68% greater than in those of the first class' (p. 117). Difference in child mortality between classes saw '...more than 57% of the children of the working class perish before the fifth year, while but 20% of the children of the higher classes, and not quite 32% of the children of all classes in the country die under 5 years of age' (p. 118). The living and working conditions of working men, women, and children caused greater disease, improper physical development, and malformation of the body.

They are given damp dwellings, cellar dens that are not waterproof from below, or garrets that leak from above...They are supplied bad, tattered, or rotten clothing, adulterated and indigestible food. They are exposed to the most exciting changes of mental condition, the most violent vibrations between hope and fear...are worked every day to the point of complete exhaustion of their mental and physical energies [...].

(pp. 108–109)

Finally, Engels simply did not describe these health outcomes as unfortunate by-products of the industrial age. Instead, he stated: 'I have now to prove that society in England daily and

TABLE 1 Selected excerpts from *The Condition of the Working Class in England and Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts* (2nd ed.) concerning 17 social determinants of health.

England, 1845

1. Income and income distribution

The great towns are chiefly inhabited by working people...these workers have no property whatsoever of their own and live wholly upon wages, which usually go from hand to mouth. Society, composed wholly of atoms, does not trouble itself about them; leaves them to care for themselves and their families, yet supplies them no means of doing this in an efficient and permanent manner. Every working man, even the best, is therefore constantly exposed to loss of work and food, that is, to death by starvation, and many perish in this way. (p. 85).

2. Education

The few day schools at the command of the working class are available only for the smallest minority and are bad besides. The teachers, worn-out workers and other unsuitable persons who only turn to teaching in order to live are usually without the indispensable elementary knowledge [...] (p. 121).

3. Unemployment and job security

Who assures him employment, who vouches for it that, if for any reason or no reason his lord and master discharges him tomorrow, he can struggle along with those dependent upon him, until he may find someone else 'to give him bread'? [...] He knows that he has something today and that it does not depend upon himself whether he shall have something tomorrow. He knows that every breeze that blows, every whim of his employer, every bad turn of trade may hurl him back into the fierce whirlpool...He knows that, though he may have the means of living today, it is very uncertain whether he shall tomorrow. (pp. 38–39).

Canada, 2023

Canada's overall level of income inequality is above the OECD average... from 1980 to 2015, the bottom 60% of Canadian families experienced very small increases in market incomes in constant dollars while the top 20% of Canadian families did very well...Increasing income inequality has led to a hollowing out of the middle class in Canada with significant increases from 1980 to 2015 in the percentages of Canadian families who are poor or very rich [...] (p. 18).

Canada is one of a few wealthy nations where immigrant children and children of immigrants perform as well as children born in Canada to Canadian-born parents...However, the troubling aspect in Canada is that children whose parents do not have post-secondary education perform notably worse than children of more educated parents. (p. 21).

Job insecurity has been increasing in Canada during the past decades. Currently, less than two-thirds of Canadians have a regular or permanent full-time job. Only half of working aged Canadians have had a single full-time job for over six months or more. Precarious forms of work include arrangements such as working part-time (20.3% of Canadians), being self-employed (15.3%) or having temporary work (11.3%)...Canada performs very poorly on this [employment protection] index, achieving a score that was ranked 35th of 36 [OECD] nations. (p. 24).

TABLE 1 (Continued)

England, 1845

4. Employment and working conditions

[T]he number [of accidents] is still large enough, as the foregoing cases prove, to arouse the grave question as to a state of things which permits so many deformities and mutilations for the benefit of a single class and plunges so many industrious working people into want and starvation by reason of injuries undergone in the service and through the fault of the bourgeoisie. (p. 175). In the year 1843, the Manchester Infirmary treated 962 cases of wounds and mutilations caused by machinery, while the number of all other accidents within the district of the hospital was 2,426, so that for five accidents from all other causes, two were caused by machinery. (p. 174).

5. Early child development

[...] new disease arises during childhood from impaired digestion. Scrofula is almost universal among the working class, and scrofulous parents have scrofulous children, especially when the original influences continue in full force to operate upon the inherited tendency of the children. A second consequence of this insufficient bodily nourishment, during the years of growth and development, is rickets, which is extremely common among the children of the working class. The hardening of the bones is delayed, the development of the skeleton in general is restricted and deformities of the legs and spinal column are frequent, in addition to the usual rachitic affections. (p. 112).

6. Food insecurity

The food is, in general, bad; often almost unfit for use, and in many cases, at least at times, insufficient in quantity, so that, in extreme cases, death by starvation results. (p. 85). The quantity of food varies, of course, like its quality, according to the rate of wages, so that among ill-paid workers, even if they have no large families, hunger prevails in spite of full and regular work; and the number of the ill-paid is very large. (p. 84).

Canada, 2023

Statistics Canada found in a 2010 study a rather large prevalence of work-related stress among Canadians. Almost 5.5% reported work was extremely stressful, 23.3% reported it was quite a bit stressful and 41.5% reported it as a bit stressful. Canadians whose jobs were extremely stressful were three times more likely than non-stressed Canadians to have been treated for a mental health problem the past year. (p. 27).

About 30% of Canadians had jobs with positive scores on most of six job dimensions of prospects, work intensity, working-time quality, skills and discretion, social environment and income and benefits, while 26% had jobs with poor quality job scores in most of these dimensions...poor-quality jobs were likely to be non-standard or precarious. (p. 28).

A study by the Canadian Institute of Health Information found that 33% of boys and 19% of girls were vulnerable in at least one of the areas of physical health, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication skills and general knowledge. (p. 31).

The most obvious cause of [vulnerability] is whether children are living under conditions of material and social deprivation...The OECD child poverty figure for Canada of 11.6%...gives Canada a rank of 18th of 36 wealthy developed nations. (pp. 31–32).

The 2017–2018 Canadian Community Health Survey found that 12.7% of Canadian households experienced some form of household food insecurity (HFI). Of this amount, 4.0% experienced marginal HFI... 5.7% experienced moderate...and 3.0% experienced severe HFI...Figures for families with children are higher at 17.3% with rates for marginal HFI at 5.1%; moderate HFI at 8.3%; and 2.9% for severe HFI. (p. 34).

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

England, 1845

7. Housing

The dwellings of the workers are everywhere badly planned, badly built and kept in the worst condition, badly ventilated, damp and unwholesome. The inhabitants are confined to the smallest possible space, and at least one family usually sleeps in each room. The interior arrangement of the dwellings is poverty-stricken in various degrees, down to the utter absence of even the most necessary furniture. (p. 85).

8. Social exclusion

The town itself is peculiarly built so that a person may live in it for years and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working-people's quarter or even with workers, that is, so long as he confines himself to his business or to pleasure walks. This arises chiefly from the fact that...the working-people's quarters are sharply separated from the sections of the city reserved for the middle class; or, if this does not succeed, they are concealed with the cloak of charity. (p. 57).

9. Social safety net

The English bourgeoisie is charitable out of self-interest; it gives nothing outright but regards its gifts as a business matter, makes a bargain with the poor, saying: 'If I spend this much upon benevolent institutions, I thereby purchase the right not to be troubled any further, and you are bound thereby to stay in your dusky holes and not to irritate my tender nerves by exposing your misery' (p. 284).

Canada, 2023

Canada is experiencing a housing crisis (p. 38).

The 2016 Census found that 12.7% of all Canadians were in core housing need [affordability; suitability; and adequacy] with 19.1% in Toronto, 17.6% in Vancouver and 10.9% in Montreal. (p. 39).

The quality of jobs is increasingly stratified along racial lines, with a disproportionate proportion of low-income sector employment being taken by Canadians of colour and recent immigrants. (p. 43).

Social exclusion is increasing...as a result of increasing precariousness of employment, the fact that these precarious jobs are...being filled by minority Canadians and Canada's lack of universal programmes and benefits that enable greater participation in Canadian society. (p. 43).

Canada ranks 24th of 36 of [OECD] countries and spends only 17.3% of gross domestic product (GDP) on social expenditures...Canada is among the lowest public spenders on family benefits (25th of 36), seniors' pensions (30th of 36), social assistance payments (26th of 33 nations for which data is available), unemployment benefits (19th of 36), and benefits and services for people with disabilities (32nd of 36). (p. 45).

TABLE 1 (Continued)

England, 1845	Canada, 2023
<p>10. Health services</p> <p>Another source of physical mischief to the working class lies in the impossibility of employing skilled physicians in cases of illness. It is true that a number of charitable institutions strive to supply this want, that the infirmary in Manchester, for instance, receives or gives advice and medicine to 22,000 patients annually. But what is that in a city in which, according to Gaskell's calculation, three-fourths of the population need medical aid every year? English doctors charge high fees, and working men are not in a position to pay them. (p. 114). And when one reflects how little medical assistance the sick have at command, how many are without any medical advice whatsoever, and ignorant of the most ordinary precautionary measures, the mortality seems actually small. (p. 111).</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Fund ranked Canada's health-care system 9th of 11 wealthy nations...for care process (Canada ranked 6th), access (10th), administrative efficiency (6th), equity (9th) and health-care outcomes (9th) (p. 48). Thirty percent of Canadians...had difficulty paying for medications or out-of-pocket costs. Twenty-eight percent of patients reported skipping dental check-ups or care because of costs, and 16% of Canadians reported having cost-related access problems to medical care in that time. (p. 48). Canada's medicare system ranks 13th highest on health-care spending at 7.5% of GDP but only covers 73% of health-care costs...Medicare does not cover drug costs, and...home care and nursing costs vary among provinces and territories. (p. 49).</p>
<p>11. Geography</p> <p>[...] the most horrible spot...is known as Little Ireland. In a rather deep hole, in a curve of the Medlock and surrounded on all four sides by tall factories and high embankments, covered with buildings, stand two groups of about 200 cottages, built chiefly back to back, in which live about 4000 human beings, most of them Irish. The cottages are old, dirty and of the smallest sort, the streets uneven, fallen into ruts and in part without drains or pavement; masses of refuse, offal and sickening filth lie among standing pools in all directions; the atmosphere is poisoned by the effluvia from these, and laden and darkened by the smoke of a dozen tall factory chimneys. (p. 72).</p>	<p>Geography becomes an important determinant for [health] risks, as racism, colonialism and oppression enable the location of toxic waste sites, landfills and incinerators to be in close proximity to communities of colour, poor neighbourhoods and Indigenous lands. (p. 52). While the average life expectancy for Canada is 84.0 years for women and 79.9 years for men, in British Columbia, it is 84.6 years for women and 80.1 years for men, yet in the territory of Nunavut, where there is a significant proportion of Indigenous people, it is 73.4 years for women and 70.8 years for men. (p. 52).</p>
<p>12. Disability</p> <p>Distortions of the legs, knees bent inwards and feet bent outwards, deformities of the spinal column and other malformations appear the more readily in constitutions thus weakened, in consequence of the almost universally constrained position during work [...] (p. 253). Of course such a way of living unavoidably engenders a multitude of diseases, and... when the father is utterly disabled, then misery reaches its height, and then the brutality with which society abandons its members, just when their need is greatest, comes out fully into the light of day. (p. 85).</p>	<p>Canada...provided the [second] lowest compensations and benefits to its citizens with disabilities [of OECD nations]. Canada also had some of the strongest restrictions on receiving benefits [...] (p. 56). Those without disabilities had a higher median personal after-tax income (\$38,980) than those with milder disabilities (\$34,330) and those with more severe disabilities (\$19,160). In fact, the income of those with more severe disabilities was half that of those with no disabilities. Not surprisingly, the poverty rate...for Canadians without disabilities was 8.6% in 2014 but 23.2% for those with a disability. (pp. 55–56).</p>

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Canada, 2023
13. Indigenous ancestry—Engels did not discuss Indigenous ancestry in <i>CWCE</i> .	
14. Gender	
They employ a mass of young girls—there are said to be 15,000 of them in all—who sleep and eat on the premises, come usually from the country and are therefore absolutely the slaves of their employers. During the fashionable season, which lasts some four months, working hours... are fifteen, and, in very pressing cases, eighteen a day...The only limit set to their work is the absolute physical inability to hold the needle another minute. (p. 217). Of 419,560 factory operatives of the British Empire in 1839, 192,887, or nearly half, were under 18 years of age, and 242,296 of the female sex, of whom 112,192 were less than 18 years old. There remain, therefore, 80,695 male operatives under 18 years and 96,569 adult male operatives, or <i>not one full quarter</i> of the whole number. In the cotton factories, 56.5%; in the woollen mills, 69.5%; in the silk mills, 70.5%; in the flax-spinning mills, 70.5% of all operatives are of the female sex. (p. 152).	Women are employed in lower-paying occupations and experience more discrimination in the workplace than men... Women tend to earn less than men regardless of occupation. Women work fewer hours than men, and their hourly wages are only 87% of the wages of men. (p. 63). Canada is among the nations with the greatest gap between men and women's earnings at 18.5% with Canada ranking 23rd of 27 OECD nations [...] (p. 63). [...] men are more prone to accidents and extreme forms of social exclusion such as homelessness and severe substance abuse which reduce their overall life expectancy... The suicide rate of men is four times higher than that of women. (p. 64). There is also evidence that gay, lesbian and transgendered Canadians experience discrimination that leads to stress that has adverse health effects. (p. 64).
15. Immigration	
The rapid extension of English industry could not have taken place if England had not possessed in the numerous and impoverished population of Ireland a reserve at command. The Irish had nothing to lose at home and much to gain in England; and from the time when it became known in Ireland that the east side of St. George's Channel offered steady work and good pay for strong arms... It has been calculated that more than a million have already immigrated, and not far from 50,000 still come every year, nearly all of whom enter the industrial districts, especially the great cities, and there form the lowest class of the population. (p. 101).	According to the 2016 census, 21.9% of the Canadian population identify themselves as immigrants (landed immigrants, permanent residents or naturalised citizens), with 3.5% of Canadians being recent immigrants [...] (p. 67). [...] high poverty rates persist amongst Canadian immigrants even after employment is attained, and these rates are higher in Canada than other nations... 17.1% of recent immigrants report being food insecure... One study reported levels of food insecurity as high as 64% in refugee families and 45% in recent immigrants. (p. 68). [...] 18% of immigrant-led households were in this situation as were 26.6% of recent immigrants. (p. 68).

TABLE 1 (Continued)

England, 1845	Canada, 2023
<p>16. Race</p> <p>For when, in almost every great city, a fifth or a quarter of the workers are Irish, or children of Irish parents [...] (p. 104).</p> <p>For work which requires long training or regular, pertinacious application, the dissolute, unsteady, drunken Irishman is on too low a plane. To become a mechanic, a mill-hand, he would have to adopt the English civilisation, the English customs, become, in the main, an Englishman. But for all simple, less exact work, wherever it is a question more of strength than skill, the Irishman is as good as the Englishman. (p. 104).</p>	<p>Racialised Canadians experience lower rates of income, higher rates of unemployment and lower occupational status that threaten not only their physical, mental and social health but also the overall health and wellbeing of Canadian society. (p. 71).</p> <p>Black Canadians experience more everyday discrimination (30.8%), than East/Southeast Asians (28.1%), South Asian/West Asians/Arabs (20.9%), Aboriginals (14.6%) and other racialised groups. Racialised Canadians report being treated with less courtesy or respect, receiving poorer services than others, treated as not smart and perceive their presence is a threat to others. (p. 72).</p>
<p>17. Globalisation</p> <p>Whence comes this incongruity? It lies in the nature of industrial competition and the commercial crises which arise from it. In the present unregulated production and distribution of the means of subsistence, which is carried on not directly for the sake of supplying needs, but for profit, in the system under which every one works for himself to enrich himself, disturbances inevitably arise at every moment. (pp. 93–94).</p> <p>The economic arguments of the manufacturers that a 10 Hours Bill would increase the cost of production and incapacitate the English producers for competition in foreign markets, and that wages must fall, are all <i>half</i> true; but they prove nothing except this, that the industrial greatness of England can be maintained only through the barbarous treatment of the operatives, the destruction of their health, the social, physical and mental decay of whole generations. (p. 185).</p>	<p>[The] richest 26 billionaires now have as much wealth (and the political power it brings) as the bottom half (3.8 billion) of humanity. Since the 1980s tax rates worldwide (on corporations, high income earners) have fallen, reducing government abilities to reduce inequalities through public programmes and health-promoting investments. Labour income as a proportion of global economic activity has declined precipitously, with most of the financial gains of the past four globalising decades going to the top 1% of the world's population. (p. 76).</p> <p>Persisting and gross wealth inequalities, entrenched poverty and climate change stresses (drought, famine, and floods) are driving mass migration and new forms of xenophobic and nationalist protectionist responses. (p. 76).</p>

hourly commits what the working-men's organs, with perfect correctness, characterise as social murder, that it has placed the workers under conditions in which they can neither retain health nor live long; that it undermines the vital force of these workers gradually, little by little, and so hurries them to the grave before their time' (p. 107).

Canada, 2023. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada (2018) men in the poorest 20% of neighbourhoods live 5 years less on average than men in the wealthiest 20% of neighbourhoods. Morbidity and mortality rates for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and respiratory illness are significantly higher among low-income Canadians (Raphael et al., 2020).

While comparisons between the ill-housed in 1845 England and the homeless in Canada of 2023 are not direct, they are illuminative: An estimated 235,000 Canadians are homeless each year (Gaetz et al., 2016) and an additional 800,000 at risk of homelessness (Norman & Reist, 2021). Compared to the general population, homeless people are more likely to die at a younger age (Bryant, 2016). In Toronto, from 1979 to 1990, 71% of the homeless population who died were under 70 years of age compared to 38% among the general population (Kushner, 1998). In another study, among 9000 men who used shelters, the mortality rate of young, homeless men was eight times higher than same-aged men in the general population (Hwang, 2001).

Similar to Engels's observations, Canada's rates of infant mortality are 46% greater in the poorest 20% of neighbourhoods compared to the wealthiest 20% (Raphael et al., 2020). Life expectancy increases in Canada, already behind other OECD nations' increases, are now stagnating (OECD, 2022a). Growing inequalities in health in Canada are likely due to increasing income inequality and decreasing coverage of social programmes (Shahidi et al., 2020).

The impact of these developments on those occupying vulnerable social locations was profoundly illustrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics Canada reports that COVID-19 mortality rates in low socioeconomic status neighbourhoods with a high proportion of seniors and institutionalised populations (148.4/100,000), were approximately five times greater than higher socioeconomic status neighbourhoods (30.2/100,000). Densely populated neighbourhoods in urban centres with a high proportion of single-parent, low-income, and immigrant families had a mortality rate (66.7/100,000) approximately two times higher than wealthy urban neighbourhoods (33.9/100,000). Gender differences in mortality rates were also reported across all neighbourhood types in Canada, with men having higher COVID-19 mortality rates compared to women (Subedi & Aitken, 2022). Finally, racialised populations had a significantly higher COVID-19 mortality rate (31/100,000) compared to the non-racialised and non-Indigenous population (22/100,000). Black Canadians had the highest COVID-19 mortality rate (49/100,000) followed by South Asians (31/100,000) (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

The labour movement

England, 1845. Engels believed that 'The great cities are the birthplaces of labour movements; in them the workers first began to reflect upon their own condition, and to struggle against it; in them the opposition between proletariat and bourgeoisie first made itself manifest; from them proceeded the Trades Unions, Chartism, and Socialism' (p. 133). Engels was writing *CWCE* during the rise of the Chartist movement which called for (1) voting rights for all men; (2) confidential ballots; (3) payment for members of Parliament; (4) annual elections; (5) equal size constituencies; and (6) removal of property qualifications for candidates. Unfortunately, Chartism lost its force by 1848. Nonetheless, the movement inspired a number of radical thinkers, helped unite workers with socialist ideologies and eventually led to the implementation of five of the six demands in 1918.

Canada, 2023. In Canada, new businesses start off non-unionised (Warner, 2013). Therefore, workplaces need to individually unionise, a factor contributing to labour's low unionisation rate of 27% (OECD, 2022c) and lack of power and influence (Coleman, 2013). Organising a workplace is challenging due to changes by provincial and territorial governments (Muller & Raphael, 2021; Ross & Savage, 2018) which replaced card-check authorisation with an electoral process by which employers in the private sector can mobilise to prevent certification (Warner, 2013). Canada's low unionisation rates and collective bargaining agreement coverage are implicated in its social and health inequalities (Muller & Raphael, 2021).

Social determinants of health in 1845 England and 2023 Canada

Although the term social determinants did not exist during Engels's writing of *CWCE*, Engels was documenting the very social determinants of health now permeating the health policy discourse in Canada. Raphael et al. (2020) compiled material on 17 of these in present-day Canada. While direct comparisons are fragile between 1845 England and 2023 Canada, the similarities are illuminating. Table 1 presents excerpts from *CWCE* and *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts* (Raphael et al., 2020) in regard to these social determinants of health. There are certainly many more instances of similarity we could have provided.

DISCUSSION

Linking the past with the present

Engels's style of writing was influenced by traditions of romanticism common during the early industrial revolution (Hunt, 2009) such that the differences in rhetoric presented in Table 1 between then and now are apparent. This does not make the issues we have identified any less important today.

It is always difficult to make direct historical comparisons across centuries and geographies. Despite this qualification, we identified themes of (1) the nature of capitalism; (2) public policy; (3) the bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie philanthropy; (4) epidemics; (5) social inequalities; (6) health inequalities; and (7) the labour movement for which similarities between 1845 and 2023 are rather striking. *CWCE* informs present analysis and action through the concepts of spectre and trace.

Spectres

What spectres does *CWCE* conjure? The first is misery, illness, and death brought on by capitalism, its public policies, and the living and working conditions it creates. Engels does not resort to neutral language such as disadvantaged groups, excessive morbidity, and premature mortality common in contemporary usage. Instead, he calls the situation many experience one of 'social murder' committed by the bourgeoisie (i.e., the wealthy) and their accomplices in government who, despite knowing what the health effects of their policies are, still carry them out. Raphael et al. (2022) suggest that such language can energise movements for social justice and health equity.

The second spectre is socialism. In 1848, Marx and Engels declared ‘A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of communism’ (Marx & Engels, 1848, p. 1). The Regina Manifesto of 1933 issued by the forerunner of the New Democratic Party (NDP), the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), stated: ‘No CCF Government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialised planning which will lead to the establishment in Canada of the Cooperative Commonwealth’ (CCF, 1933). This spectre, however, does not arise within the CCF’s successor, the NDP but rather in the platform of the new *Green Left* organisation founded by a former Green Party of Canada leadership candidate, Dimitri Lascaris: ‘Replacing exploitative capitalist economic systems with ecosocialist solutions is the primary objective of our political activities’ (Green Left, 2022).

The third spectre is unrest as a result of the first two spectres. Engels stated in the last paragraph of *CWCE*:

It is too late for a peaceful solution. The classes are divided more and more sharply, the spirit of resistance penetrates the workers, the bitterness intensifies, the guerilla skirmishes become concentrated in more important battles, and soon a slight impulse will suffice to set the avalanche in motion.

(p. 302)

In the Canada of 2023, unrest is a concern. Osberg (2016) states timidly: ‘Greater macroeconomic, political and social instability is therefore a likely implication of more inequality over time’ (p. 227). Statistics Canada (2022a) states more strongly: ‘Social unrest has been linked to income inequality. In March and April 2020, 40% of Canadians were very or extremely concerned about the possibility of civil disorder.’

Parsons (2022) suggests ‘A wave of mass social unrest lies on the horizon’ (p. 49) as the pandemic is ‘intensifying ongoing injustice all over the world’ (p. 51). Instead of progressive movements coalescing around these injustices, we see a rise in reactionary populist movements such as the ‘Freedom Convoy’ with its calls to end vaccination and masking mandates and the anti-pro-choice ‘March for Life’. Unprecedented increases in inflation, unaffordable housing, and precarious working conditions are widening the wealth and health gap, generating greater similarities between 1845 England and 2023 Canada.

Traces

The concept of trace refers to the geography of places, ruins, buildings, and other messages from the past, but can also refer to past writings. Rainey and Hanson (2021), in their discussion of the placing of two statues of Engels in Manchester, state

Crucial to our analysis, with its emphasis on the particular, is the notion of “trace” (Hanson, 2014: 18–25). Traces are the details of place and social life that tell stories of change, putting into motion the dialectic and with it a whole set of epiphanies and realisations.

(p. 266)

CWCE contains many traces with relevance for Canada. Canada’s economic and political systems are offsprings of the UK. Both nations are firmly in the liberal welfare state tradition, share the Westminster electoral system, and maintain the British Monarchy as head of state

(Esping-Andersen, 1990). In both nations, the business and corporate sector dominate public policy. These links to the UK make revisiting the *CWCE* less foreign for Canadians than for Americans.

These traces from *CWCE* allow for the process Rainey and Hanson (2021) evoke in regard to the two statues of Engels in Manchester: 'By invoking Engels in this way, we want to reckon with our past as well as our future, both of which are entwined with circuits of capital accumulation, forms of concealment and the twisted, nostalgic turns that we have mapped out here' (p. 272).

The capitalist economic system

Like George Rosen who wrote that 'the strictly medical aspects of disease are no longer isolated phenomena but rather aspects or functions of a greater social whole' (Rosen, 1940, p. 665), we see our findings as functions of England's and Canada's political economy organised around capital accumulation by what Engels termed the bourgeoisie. Movement of liberal welfare states such as Canada towards social democratic welfare state status would certainly improve the circumstances of many. Yet, even social democratic welfare states appear unable to withstand capitalism's drive towards capital accumulation with its adverse effects (Raphael & Bryant, 2022).

And while Engels's believed reforms were possible under capitalism, we agree with him that the contradictions inherent in capitalism will lead to its demise: 'In the present unregulated production and distribution of the means of subsistence, which is carried on not directly for the sake of supplying needs, but for profit, in the system under which every one works for himself to enrich himself, disturbances inevitably arise at every moment' (pp. 93–94).

Critiques of capitalism and its effects upon health are not new (see the body of work by Vicente Navarro) (Google Scholar, 2022), yet such critiques are experiencing a resurgence (Das, 2022). One of the strongest critiques of capitalism in Canada is coming from the environmental movement which sees capitalist accumulation and its stranglehold on environmental policies leading to a climate catastrophe; therefore requiring a ecosocialist state: 'a coherent narrative (is emerging) about how to protect humanity from the ravages of both a savagely unjust economic system and a destabilised climate system' (Klein, 2014, p. 8).

These calls are merging with other pleas for a post-capitalist economy (Bush, 2019; Jackson, 2021). Canadians are generally positive towards socialist solutions: A 2019 poll found 58% had a positive view of socialism, with only 40% holding negative opinions (Bañares, 2019). In 2021, 53% of Canadians supported the radical transformation of the economy and 35% for shifting away from a capitalist model (Innovative Research Group, 2021). There is a growing public recognition of the failings of the capitalist economic model, yet the unwillingness of all major political parties to question capitalism and its adverse effects blocks progress (Lexier, 2021).

Public policy

For Engels, the power of the bourgeoisie was responsible for the public policies that allowed working-class exploitation. Canada's basket of public policies does little to dissuade such processes. As one glaring example, on an OECD-generated index of rules and regulations that protect employment and provides benefits to temporary workers, Canada ranks 35th of 36 nations (OECD, 2022b).

Canada's public policies, already deficient in relation to most other OECD nations, have been further degraded by the increasing acceptance of neoliberal ideology and austerity measures

advocated by the business and corporate sector. The reduced role of the state in resource management and provision results in growing income inequality, deepening poverty, lessened affordability of housing, and increasing food insecurity and precarious work (see Table 1).

Canada's failure of public policy to provide support for citizens unable to gain employment has stimulated discourses accusing governing authorities of social murder against those on social assistance (Nicoll, 2022). Similar accusations are made in regard to the lack of housing availability and food insecurity (Crowe, 2021; McGibbon, 2021).

Living and working conditions

CWCE documented the poor living and working conditions the working class experienced in the Victorian-era. Unaffordable and inadequate housing are still apparent in modern-day Canada. According to Statistics Canada (2020b), over 1.6 million Canadian households are in core housing need, defined as living in inadequate, unaffordable, or unsuitable housing.

Low wages and precarious work undertaken by the working class as described by Engels are present in contemporary Canada. Less than two-thirds of workers have a full-time or permanent job (Raphael et al., 2020). Workers are becoming less likely to receive benefits such as paid sick leave, employment insurance, employer health and dental plans and pension plans.

Moreover, as in 1845, technological advances are creating new forms of work. Workers in the gig economy are usually self-employed, micro-entrepreneurs, or freelancers working full or part-time positions often with no participation in Employment Insurance or the Canada Pension Plan. The insecure and intense work, typical of the gig economy, is associated with adverse health outcomes (May, 2019).

The labour movement

In *CWCE* Engels noted worker opposition to degraded and harmful working conditions. The Chartists, socialists and trade unions stood in direct opposition to the bourgeoisie and the public policies supporting the capitalist economic and political order. However, increased competition between workers and outright violence against the labour movement suppressed Victorian-era movements, leaving workers to their conditions.

The 2022 May Day labour protest organised by the Ontario Federation of Labour called for a twenty-dollar minimum wage, affordable housing, paid sick leave, liveable income support, climate justice, decent work, and an end to racism and oppression (OFL, 2022). Like many other demonstrations, it received sparse news coverage.

The business sector, abetted by mainstream media, resists such activism. Regarding construction workers unions striking, the Residential Construction Council of Ontario president stated: 'The continuing strikes are not really productive for anyone involved, including the workers who are involved in the strike. It's not good for anybody' (D'Andrea, 2022).

Responding and moving forward

Engels recognised within the proletariat a desire for 'solid education' and working men's uncanny intellect: '...whose fustian jackets scarcely held together, speak upon geological, astronomical, and other subjects, with more knowledge than most 'cultivated' bourgeois in Germany

possess' (p. 246). Proletariat reading rooms open to everyone provided texts on 'modern philosophical, political and poetical literature' (p. 246) for the working class: 'Here the children receive a purely proletarian education, free from all the influences of the bourgeoisie; and, in the reading-rooms, proletarian journals and books alone, or almost alone, are to be found' (p. 245).

In contemporary Canada, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (2022) offers critical labour education for union activists: 'This workshop explains the role that capitalism plays in workers' lives, and examines the links between local and global issues.' Similarly, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers offers a (2022) 4-week residential Union Education Programme that educates workers about issues of capitalism, colonialism and neoliberalism, and other structures of oppression. The Canadian Labour Congress (2022) offers an Action Network Basics Training course. These efforts pale however against the control of public policy and public discourse by the corporate and business sector (Carroll & Sapinski, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Reading *CWCE* in today's Canada is to experience the contemporary relevance of Engels's analysis of the causes of human misery, suffering, illness, and death. In addition to his analysis, Engels's language which describes these insights is refreshingly polemical. Indeed, Marx commented, upon rereading *CWCE* in 1863: 'What power, what incisiveness and what passion drove you to work in those days! That was a time when you were never worried about academic scholarly reservations!' (Marx, 1863, p. 103).

By analysing the writings contained within *CWCE* as literary traces left by Engels which conjure the spectres of misery, illness, and untimely deaths of the working class, we were able to identify how past living and working conditions imbedded in class conflict and capitalist modes of production are relevant to current-day issues in health equity and social justice. The spectres of suffering, socialism and social unrest are now haunting Canada.

While the public health and health-care communities are now well aware of the importance of economic justice, progressive public policy, and enhancing the quality and equitable distribution of the social determinants of health, there is no core agency or institution—including the main political parties in Canada—mobilising the public around an anti-capitalist agenda that would address these issues. This is the case despite almost three-in-five Canadians expressing a positive view towards socialism (Bañares, 2019). Suggestions for moving forward are, however, available (DuRand, 2016; Jackson, 2021; Wright, 2019) such that Engels's words from *CWCE* still ring true: 'Much remains to be undergone; be firm, be undaunted — your success is certain, and no step you will have to take in your onward march will be lost to our common cause, the cause of Humanity!' (p. 11).

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Piara Govender: Conceptualisation (Supporting); Data Curation (Equal); Formal Analysis (Equal); Investigation (Equal); Methodology (Supporting); Project Administration (Supporting); Writing – original draft (Lead); Writing – review and editing (Equal). **Stella Medvedyuk:** Conceptualisation (Supporting); Data Curation (Equal); Formal Analysis (Equal); Investigation (Equal); Methodology (Lead); Project Administration (Supporting); Writing – original draft (Supporting); Writing – review and editing (Equal). **Dennis Raphael:** Conceptualisation (Lead); Data Curation (Equal); Formal Analysis (Equal); Investigation (Equal); Methodology (Supporting); Project Administration (Lead); Writing – original draft (Supporting); Writing – review and editing (Equal).

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No data was used for the research described in the article.

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