



Ontario Premier Doug Ford is pictured in Ottawa in September 2020. When challenged regarding their own record of failure, instead of taking individual responsibility, white men in charge excuse their loss of control as inevitable and gaslight the rest of us into believing it is completely and totally our fault, writes Erica Ifill. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The ‘natural order of things’ is ruining it for the rest of us

The gender entitlement to leadership and decision-making is costing lives. This patriarchal approach to who is catapulted into the position to make these bad decisions is a feature, not a bug.



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OTTAWA—Who put white men in charge? Oh yes,

patriarchy (by way of white supremacy).

White men are screwing up and their responses to the pandemic are examples of how Canada’s socioeconomic, patriarchal framework ensures that white men end up in leadership positions without the requisite merit the rest of us are subject to. The illusion of control over an ever-present global pandemic is a natural response to challenges for men in a patriarchal society. It is this illusion of dominance over this threat that has led to some of the worst decision-making

and planning in public health history. And when challenged regarding their own record of failure, instead of taking individual responsibility, white men in charge excuse their loss of control as inevitable and gaslight the rest of us into believing it is completely and totally our fault. As Helen Forsey wrote for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, “The illusion of ultimate control lies invisibly behind the relentless grasping push of the ‘global economy’ for more ‘growth,’ more power, more profits—regardless of the harm done to people and the environment.”

And that’s what’s been playing out as Canada continues to fail in its pandemic response—the economy versus the pandemic. That framing is what has led to the abysmal failure of white male leadership and why at the time of writing (April 12) Ontario has clocked in 4,456 new COVID-19 cases. Remember when

3,000 a day caused heart palpitations? We are in a race with new variants (South African, Brazilian, and U.K.) versus vaccinations. And Doug Ford can’t even devise and implement an efficient and effective vaccination strategy. Still. As I said on CPAC on Feb. 19: “we are really in a race against time in terms of how quickly those variants spread versus how quickly we can vaccinate.” In the midst of this, Ontario and Alberta decided to open back up. And now we’re closed down again. This see-saw, unbalanced approach to managing this pandemic has left the public confused as to what to do when. Businesses that have made investments—not only in costs for increased sanitation, but for staffing, supply-chain management, and operational items and procedures—have now been told that they have to close down again, while bigger players who can access their economies of scale to spread out costs, remain open. Parents were hoodwinked with incompetence by another dubious white male, Stephen Lecce, who—as Bruce Arthur recounts in the *Toronto Star*, “Sunday, the minister of education wrote a letter saying schools would stay open after the April break; Monday, the premier declared they would be closed. It’s a pattern. On April 1 the government announced restrictions, and changed them five days later as the baked-in numbers kept rising.”

We’re more than a year in and all Ford can tell us is that we’re fighting a new enemy. No, we’re not. We’re fighting the same enemy with improved powers of transmission. Before, we were fighting Clark Kent, now we’re fighting Superman. Same dude, different levels of effectiveness. If I could see the problems with the variants in February, why are the Ontario, Alberta, and B.C. governments feigning shock in April? All the while, the distribution of vaccines throughout the country has been a complete failure. (In

Ontario, this campaign was led, until the end of March, by another white man we were supposed to believe was exceptional, but just ended up as mediocre as the rest of them, Rick Hillier.)

The gender entitlement to leadership and decision-making is costing lives. This patriarchal approach to who is catapulted into the position to make these bad decisions is a feature, not a bug.

In the *Globe and Mail’s* Power Gap series, Robyn Doolittle investigated the gender structures of Canada’s public institutions, reporting: “These taxpayer-funded or government-owned entities, which have an immeasurable impact on our day-to-day lives, are dominated by men, not just at the very top, but in multiple layers of leadership below that echelon. Of the few women who do break through, almost all are white.” And this is why we have provincial governments that didn’t prioritize essential workers (who are more likely to be of colour), racialized neighbourhoods, teachers, daycare and health-care workers, or migrant workers in their vaccination plans. Had they done so, they could’ve saved lives. Equity around the decision-making table is not a nice thing to have, it has real consequences over life and death, since the planning and execution are results of who those decision-makers are. Doolittle goes on to remark that “Women’s voices, especially those of racialized women, are largely absent from many of the decision-making tables that shape nearly every facet of Canadians’ lives.” In Canada’s interpretation of peace, order, and good government, white men at the top is just the natural order of things, no matter how their ineffectiveness and failures play out the closer we get to the bottom.

Erica Ifill is a co-host of the *Bad+Bitchy* podcast.

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It’s time to deliver on infrastructure investments

The countries that recover fastest from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will better serve their citizens for decades to come.

BY JOHN GAMBLE, BRIAN MCGUIRE, MARY VAN BUREN, & SANDRA SKIVSKY

Whether by commuting to work, connecting to the internet at home, or sending their children to school, Canadians rely on infrastructure built by Canada’s construction sector. Governments past and present have invested in multi-billion-dollar infrastructure programs, because they improve the lives of all Canadians and stimulate the economy. Investing in infrastructure creates immediate employment opportunities, maintains

healthy supply chains, and generates \$2 to \$4 in return for every dollar invested. Our quality of life depends on infrastructure.

However, to truly build back better, project investment approvals must be more efficient. The Parliamentary Budget Officer continues to report that investments through the Investing in Canada Plan are behind by more than \$2-billion. Most recently, the Auditor General of Canada reported that funds through the same plan “were not being spent as quickly as originally planned,” and that a fifth of planned spending remained unspent. Furthermore, Infrastructure Canada’s online data shows that only around 1,500 projects have been approved since 2017. This despite provinces proposing thousands of projects in 2020 alone.

The construction sector believes there must be a better way forward. This could include a rapid response stream for all types of projects introduced under the Investing in Canada Plan with streamlined requirements and expedited approvals, which



The more than 1.5 million Canadians who make up the construction sector are once again ready to lead the way in supporting economic growth, but investments must be delivered to projects in order to get started. *Unsplash* photograph by Yancy Min

would help to get projects started earlier and money flowing into the economy as soon as possible. This type of funding stream under the Universal Broadband Fund is an example of an effective and expedited program. The government could also bolster resources at Infrastructure Canada to end the delays and accelerate project approvals. Another option would be a permanent increase to the Gas Tax Fund, which would give municipalities added agility and flexibility to make much-needed investments in their communities that otherwise would not qualify

for more specialized or complex funding programs. Whatever the mechanism, the delivery of infrastructure investments needs to be accelerated and predictable.

Canada is at a crossroads in its economic recovery. The countries that recover fastest from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will better serve their citizens for decades to come. A successful and robust economic recovery will allow Canada to continue its plans to invest in transformative infrastructure and leverage those investments for long-term and sustainable growth.

Every Canadian across the country benefits from safe and reliable infrastructure every day—be it new roads, clean water, hospitals, schools, parks, transit, communications networks, clean energy, and beyond. The more than 1.5 million Canadians who make up the construction sector are once again ready to lead the way in supporting economic growth, but investments must be delivered to projects in order to get started. The time to deliver on previously committed funding is now, so that Canada can emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic stronger than before and be ready to tackle the societal and environmental challenges of the future.

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