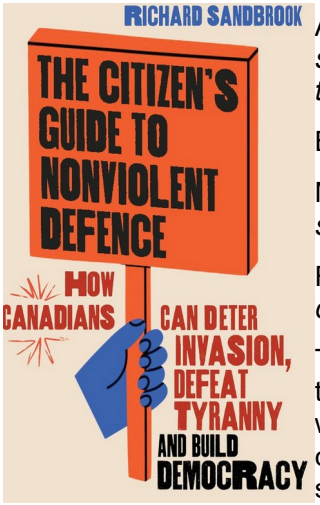
Time for bettering democracy – now! ~ by Bruna Nota

Bruna Nota experienced WWII in Italy. From a very early age she was aware that her safety, security, livelihood were provided not by the Italian or German or Allied armies that rolled over her little town, but by the courage and determination of her family, neighbours, and the citizens working together to protected each other.

In her editorial in the Spring issue of *Briarpatch*, meera eragoda invited her readers to slow down and reflect on the effect an article has on us before moving on and maybe take action. I repeat this invitation. The four books I propose for your consideration are disturbing. They offer a harsh critique of Canada's present political-socio-economic situation. But they also offer perspectives that break away from the dominant doctrines and give us tools to effectively address the drama now occurring in our country (and in the world).

The four books are:



Alex Himelfarb: "*Breaking Free of Neoliberalism in Trump Times: How Canada can strengthen our sovereignty and address the American challenge, inequality, and the climate crisis." (2026)*

Bob Rae (editor): "*Reclaiming Canadian Sovereignty in a Ruptured World"* (2026)

Max Cameron: "*Divided We Fall: How we can resist polarizing pressures and strengthen our identity as citizens"* (2026)

Richard Sandbrook: "*The Citizen's Guide to Nonviolent Defence' – How Canadians can deter invasion, defeat tyranny and build democracy" (*2026)

The 2026 much acclaimed speech by Prime Minister Carney in Davos declaring that we are facing a rupture in the world order is nothing new. What is new is that it was proclaimed in the Davos setting by the respected leader of Canada. It did contain an important warning: "*if you are not at the table you are on the menu*". It is surprising that the policies and actions Mr. Carney proposes and enacts may leave most Canadians on the menu.

Alex Himelfarb's book reminds us that, since the 1970 government priorities have increasingly shifted away from ensuring the wellbeing of citizens to the pursuit of macro-economic growth. Himelfarb writes that while Mr. Carney "*was elected on a wave of anxiety and patriotism*", in his agenda "*social and cultural priorities were put on the waiting list... the environment and democratic norms took a back seat. The government also shifted to the right on crime and immigration policy." Mr. Carney's* proposals seem to be a continuation of the neoliberal order that has taken the world to the brink of economic, environmental, social, moral ruin. There appears to be more pragmatism than principle in Mr. Carney's actions. Speed and de-regulations give short-shift to precautionary principles, environmental concerns, or democratic consultation. While Mr. Carney has pledged to reduce Canada's reliance on the U.S., as of Oct. 2026 the Department of National Defence has doubled its contracts (to $67.7 million) with Canadian subsidiaries of American companies. Canadians elected a powerful, competent, well respected, well connected, confident Prime Minister and have given him a wide berth. We are offered a ballooning military, increased extractive projects, unbridled AI, and other technological 'marvels'. Is that we need or want?

Himelfarb writes "*governments are at their best when they are challenged. Democracy is at risk when they are not."* Maybe it is time for citizens to provide the challenge that is presently lacking in Parliament.

Such challenge to Canada's doing "*more of the very things that caused the crisis in the first place"* is provided by most of the contributors to Bob Rae's book. Armine Yalnizyan asks that Canada stop relinquishing strategic control by relying on subsidiaries of foreign corporations to supply what we need, and to extract raw resources. She writes: "*A country that cannot or does not feed and house its people, educate its youth, pay its workers a living wage, or provide care for children, seniors, and adults alike is not sovereign in any meaningful sense."* Margaret Atwood asks us to open our imagination and Ketty Nivyabandi advocates for the rules based international order to go beyond what is she calls the '*rules of the ruling*' and repair the fraying "*rules meant to protect us all*.' both presently very much under stress.

Similarly, Steven Wang says: "*The deepest part of AI question is not technological but civic: who develops expertise, who shares in productivity gains, and who believes the future has still a place for them*."



Sabreena Delhon says: "*The key question that has emerged from this challenging moment is: How do we leverage this new awareness of the vulnerability of our democracy so that we are not just settling for the democracy we have, but are instead ambitiously setting the course for the democracy we want?*"

Why is it not a priority to adopt a national project to retrofit the buildings from coast to coast to coast to withstand the forthcoming climatic upheaval? With minimal efforts Canada could put to full use all the necessary workforce, wood, steel, etc. With no tariffs to contend with, total domestic control, effective response to the employment, housing, environmental crisis, and income disparity, why is such a PONI (Project Of National Interest) not in the race? The same resources could respond to the need for a country-wide electric grid dependent on wind, solar power and storage batteries provided at a fraction of the cost and time-to-delivery of the much wanted nuclear power and incurring none of the safety and security problems nuclear has throughout its life cycle, from extraction to transportation to production to waste management. Why is a totally renewable electric grid not a PONI? Where is the PONIs to bring adequate health care to every Canadian? Why are these projects that could advance Canada towards net-zero emissions not top of the pile? The proposed Bill C-39 (also called the 'dangerous bulldozer's bill') goes in the opposite direction.

The lack of imagination prevalent in the way Canada's future is envisaged by the present government is also present in the consideration of national security provisions. If Canada is under threat of US invasion, as the Prime Minister said on Sept. 23, 2026 to the New York Times, it would indeed be "*irresponsible*" not to prepare to confront such threat. It is also irresponsible to be dependent from the potential invader for the armaments and not to train the citizens in the nonviolent practices that alone could offer a meaningful defence in densely populated parts of the country. Richard Sandbrook's book gives us reasons and tools to urgently engage in the preparations needed to defend, without excessive collateral damage, the large and crucial part of the country that should be defended by citizens well trained in demonstrably successful nonviolent practices. Max Cameron's '*Divided We Fall*' provides further motivation and means for Canadians to navigate conflicts and assume the collective self-government and practice active citizenship that real sovereignty, and democracy, require. Violence or military force is the defence mechanism our society pivots to when threatened. It is less durably effective and more expensive in blood and treasure than nonviolence which requires effective training, is more difficult to practice than violence but has a better record of success (*). Tearing things apart is easy that's why violence is the privileged response to challenges. Repairing relationships and things is more difficult, and need more imagination, creativity, resources, preparation, skill. But the fact tis that investing in training for collaborative work and nonviolence is the only reasonable and effective response.

The four books reviewed are a must read toward this vision. Basir Bita, Afghani refugee and sage, encapsulates it with these words: *"Depending on the situation, nonviolence may involve dialogue, refusal, protest, noncooperation, disruption, protection, withdrawal, truth-telling, reconciliation, institution-building, or collective care. Its methods may change across places and over time while remaining answerable to a central question: Does this response resist injustice while avoiding, as far as possible, the reproduction of domination, humiliation, coercion, and dehumanization?"* (**)

(*) Erica Chenoweth's (https://www.ericachenoweth.com/) research on nonviolence and its effectiveness (https://www.ericachenoweth.com/research/wcrw). Chenoweth, with Zoe Marks, is also the author of the forthcoming book "Bread and Roses: Women on the Frontlines of Revolution."

(**) Basir Bita: https://basirbita.substack.com/p/nonviolence-critical-thinking-and