To friends and colleagues of Kari Polanyi Levitt

Professor Kari Polanyi Levitt
receives the Order of Canada

Montreal, 30 June 2014 – The Governor General of Canada announced today that Professor Kari Polanyi Levitt, Emerita Professor of McGill University in the Department of Economics, will receive the Order of Canada for “her contribution to the study and multi-disciplined research in the field of international development as well as her research and insights into the political economy of the Caribbean”.

Brief Biography of Kari Levitt

Born in Vienna in 1923, Kari Polanyi was the only child of Ilona Duczynska and Karl Polanyi, an economic and anthropological historian, recognized as one of the 20th century’s most important political economists in the institutionalist tradition.

In 1933, Karl immigrated to London, followed by Kari in 1934 and Ilona 2 years later. Kari graduated from the London School of Economics with First Class Honours, specializing in Statistics, in 1947. She met Canadian historian Joseph Levitt, on leave in wartime London. She joined him in Toronto in 1947 and they were married in 1950. After giving birth to two sons, she enrolled in the economics program at the University of Toronto and, in 1960, moved to Montreal to teach a course at McGill University on the techniques of economic planning. While at McGill, Levitt directed an innovative 10 year research project, constructing economic “input/output” tables for the Atlantic Provinces.

It was also during this time that Kari Levitt started working in the Caribbean. In constant contact with Caribbean colleagues for over 40 years, she was visiting professor at the University of West Indies, conducted research, supervised the construction of multi-sectoral economic accounts to serve as database for an economic plan for Trinidad and Tobago, spoke at conferences and participated in public debates. Her intellectual contribution assisted the region to better understand its development, history and uniqueness. Levitt enjoys a measure of recognition, having published important works about the region, including jointly with Lloyd Best, Essays in Plantation Economy: a Historical and Institutional Approach to Caribbean Economic Development, published in 2009.

Levitt has become an important voice in various disciplines including social sciences, political economy, international relations, statistics and applied politics as it relates to development studies. A central theme of her thought seeks to show the links of dependence between the developed nations and the Third World. She has been particularly articulate about the inequality of this relationship and the imposed requirements (e.g. exporting natural resources) which foster, rather than decrease, the dependence of the Third World on developed countries.
In 1970, Levitt’s book *Silent Surrender* was published. It warned of the consequences of permitting industry to be dominated by transnational corporations (TNCs), reprinted many times over. A French edition, *La Capitulation Tranquille*, published in 1972 with an introduction by Jacques Parizeau, illustrated the influence and credibility that Kari had garnered both in Canada and among Quebec nationalists.

In the early 1980s, concerned that development economics as a distinct branch of economics was threatened with marginalization, Professor Levitt initiated a project on ‘The State of Development Studies in Canada’ in collaboration with Ayse Bugra Trak. Levitt was instrumental in the foundation of the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development (CASID), and the Kari Polanyi Levitt Prize for the best graduate essay has been awarded annually for almost twenty years.

In 1978, Kari inherited her father’s writings. As guardian of Karl Polanyi’s legacy, she began to develop new ideas based on the integration of her theories and those of her father’s. In 1987, when Concordia University opened the Karl Polanyi Institute of Political Economy, Kari made all Polanyi’s archives available, assisted in bi-annual international conferences and negotiated the publication of translations of his books and volumes of selected essays. In 2004, she was associate member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, in recognition of her role in diffusing internationally the writings of Karl Polanyi.

After 30 years in McGill’s Department of Economics, Professor Levitt retired as Emeritus Professor in 1992. She has gained international stature as a development economist and since 1989, has published 5 books, including the re-issue of *Silent Surrender* in 2002.

Until 1997, she taught and researched at the University of West Indies in Jamaica. In 2005, she published *Reclaiming Development: Independent Thought and Caribbean Community* and in 2008, she received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of West Indies and also the John Kenneth Galbraith Award from the Progressive Economic Forum, jointly with Mel Watkins.

Drawing on earlier work on transnational corporations and the Caribbean as a microcosm of a dependent peripheral capitalism, Professor Levitt has extended her insights on the power structures underlying international trade, investment and development to a global scale. In a volume of collected essays entitled *From the Great Transformation to the Great Financialization* (2013) she traces the trajectory of capitalism from its mercantilist beginnings to the financial crisis of 2008. In a final chapter on globalization and development, she concluded that the financial crisis of 2008 signaled the relative decline of the West and rise of the rest of the world, thus opening a possible future of a multi-polar world of coexistence of regions of diverse historical and cultural heritage. The volume includes a number of essays on Karl Polanyi, whose insistence on the subordination of a competitive market economy to societal values of community, cooperation and creativity assumes new relevance and importance.
The Order of Canada

The nomination of Kari Polanyi Levitt for the Order of Canada comes as a culmination of her life’s work and she is extremely honored to receive it.

Established in 1967 by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the Order of Canada is the centrepiece of Canada’s honours system and recognizes a lifetime of outstanding achievement, dedication to the community and service to the nation. The Order recognizes people in all sectors of Canadian society. Their contributions are varied, yet they have all enriched the lives of others and made a difference to this country. The Order of Canada’s motto is DESIDERANTES MELIOREM PATRIAM (They desire a better country).

Professor Kari Levitt’s website: http://www.karipolanyilevitt.co
Order of Canada website: www.gg.ca/distinctions.