

Long-Forgotten Policies, a Long Forgotten Vision

A Social Democratic Party that lost its way

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Once-upon-a-time members of Canada's Social Democratic party, the NDP (New Democratic Party), knew that there were Limits to Growth. They knew about the Club of Rome, about *Silent Spring*, and about *The Population Bomb*. They knew that resources were finite and that their unrestricted extraction would cause irreparable damage. They knew that "growth" was the ideology of the cancer cell. Yes, in the 1970s the environment was very much on the agenda. Party academic and scholar Charles Taylor spoke of "the politics of the steady-state," and John Harney ran his federal leadership campaign on those kinds of issues.

Here's what the British Columbia NDP stated in 1972:

A. "An NDP government will undertake a study of the effects of continued exponential growth in the Province of B. C.

B. "Such a study of the exponential growth in B. C. would investigate the possibility of taking all steps deemed necessary to deal adequately with the situation.

C. "The Environmental Control Committee of the provincial NDP will study the adoption of a steady-state economic policy, the concept of progress and limited growth, and the party's stand on this matter."

D. "It is recommended that a federally-sponsored permanent research group be established to investigate all aspects of growth and to submit recommendations for action. Such a research group would be required to submit reports within two years of its establishment, and at subsequent two year intervals."

E. "An NDP government will give top prior-

ity to environmental problems with particular emphasis on population control."

F. "An NDP government will encourage all means which will bring about voluntary limitation of population."

G. "Immediate steps will be taken to educate the public in the urgent necessity of halting population growth."

(From *Policies for People, Policies of the B.C. NDP 1961-78*, p. 30)

So what happened to all of this? Somehow the NDP lost its vision. Its prescient grasp of the impending ecological crisis slipped away into the hands of those who would have us believe that we can "have our cake and grow it too." That we can have Economic Growth, "development," and environmental integrity at the same time. They reconcile these contradictory goals with self-delusional, trendy oxymorons like "sustainable development" and—my personal favourite—"smart growth." My God, there is even such a creature as "sustainable mining" in the lexicon. The NDP has become a party not just about dividing up the economic pie more equitably—but about "growing" the pie too. "Grow the pie" to grow the revenues, and increased revenues will allow us to fund and maintain an endless laundry list of social services. Growth is not the problem you see. The problem is that the poorer among us are not in on the action. The "benefits" of growth must be more evenly distributed. Apparently the younger generation of social democrats hadn't heard the terrible news: We're living on a finite planet.

As I wrote in 2008, when the NDP was led by the late and charismatic Jack Layton,

In this—the enthusiasm for growth—they are not to be distinguished from any other party. Even the Greens, beneath their rhetoric, are committed to Economic Growth, because their leader Elizabeth May shares Layton, Harper, and Dion's goal of boosting Canada's population to 40 million plus via immigration (www.greenparty.ca/index).

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php?module=article&view=85). That's right folks. Greens and so-called "environmentalists" somehow believe that you can add another Metro Toronto to Canada's population every decade without negative ecological impacts! Yeah, and you can eat a liter of ice cream every day and lose weight too. Immigration accounts for two-thirds of the country's population growth, and it is that, coupled with per capita consumption rates, which drives economic growth. And economic growth is eclipsing wildlife habitat and spurring greenhouse emissions.

No Jack, it's not about driving Green cars, or building windmills, or retro-fitting houses. It's about stabilizing our population level, limiting economic growth, and finally establishing what we talked about 35 years ago — a steady-state economy.

Well that was then and this is now, when the country is in the grip of what will essentially be a 10-month election campaign. A campaign where, once again, contending leaders employ histrionics and fake outrage to give the impression that each offers the voters a radically different choice than their rivals. And once again, many voters are buying it. Trudeau is the devil incarnate or he is the one man who can be trusted to guide us through challenging economic times. The fate of the world hinges on stopping Justin Trudeau or re-electing him. That is what rhetoric can do to people's brains.

But if there is indeed a difference, it is, as Freud would have put it, "the narcissism of small differences." The differences are so petty that each leader feels obliged to inflate them to stake out a distinctive position. All parties support continued hyper-immigration-driven rapid population and economic growth, but some are careful to couch it in those aforementioned oxymoronic euphemisms like "sustainable growth," "sustainable development," and drumbeats, "smart growth" (smart extinctions? smart clear cuts? smart carbon emissions?).

The only difference between the Opposition Conservatives and the centre-left trio aligned against them is that the latter are more adept at Greenwash. Nothing better illustrates this point than the absurd contention of the former NDP leader Thomas Mulcair that he was committed to getting the Alberta oil sands oil to market, but would ensure that it will be extracted and delivered safely and responsibly in accordance with tougher environmental regulations. What he didn't get was that it is not *how* the oil is procured and shipped to market that is of crucial importance, but the fact that once "marketed" and received, customers are going to actually *burn* it. How were this leader and his party going to "green" that? And this is the party that accused the Prime Minister and

the former Prime Minister of not being serious about tackling climate change?

No doubt the federal NDP leader took his cue from the newly elected NDP Premier of Alberta, Rachel Notley, who shortly after assuming office three years ago, declared that the oil sands project was a "tremendous asset" and an "international showpiece." That's quite an abrupt transition for a party that once regarded it as the planet's most conspicuous environmental blight, and insisted that the oil sands was in reality the "tar" sands. Funny how that works. Funny, except that Mother Nature is not laughing.

If the NDP was serious about fighting climate change, or environmental degradation of any kind in this country, it would break from the herd and advocate deep cuts in the currently insane immigration quotas that the Trudeau Liberal government has set, which will give Canada the highest per capita immigration intake in the world, leaving Australia in the dust. As it stands now, mass immigration is responsible for roughly twice the amount of GHG emissions as the Alberta Tar Sands project, as well as the alarming growth of urban sprawl in all major urban centres, most worrisome of which is Greater Toronto Area and the "Golden Horseshoe" of Ontario.

But the NDP, the party whose British Columbia wing voted for steady-state economics 46 years ago, is a fully paid-up member of the all party consensus for runaway growth. In real terms that means that the NDP—like the big business parties—favours an annual immigration intake amounting to one percent of the national population. Exponential growth in other words. By that measure then, the current target of 340,000 immigrants is still insufficient! How far has this party fallen from grace! Yet, looking at its sister parties in the Socialist International, it is par for the course. Social democracy ain't what it used to be. Not only have Canadian social democrats failed to understand the negative ecological impact of immigration-driven population growth, but in recent decades, they have failed to succeed in what should be their primary mission: fighting growing inequality in wealth and income. And mass immigration has a lot to do with it. Let's begin with some pertinent stats.

One of the standard measures of inequality is the Gini coefficient. A lower number indicates a more equal distribution of income, so that a score of zero, for example, would show that everyone made exactly the same amount of money, while a jurisdiction with a Gini coefficient of one would show that all income went to just one person. By that yardstick then, Canada's inequality has steadily and incrementally worsened in recent decades, from 0.31 in 1991 to 0.34 in 2013.

The year 1991 is significant. For it was in October of 1990 that the federal Progressive Conservative

government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, in accordance with the recommendation of his then Minister of Immigration Barbara McDougall, announced a new policy of “mass immigration,” where annual immigration intakes would be substantially increased from modest, traditional levels. The motive was purely political. McDougall presented it as a way for the Conservatives to win the bidding war for the ethnic vote. Having upped the ante, it was not surprising that rival parties quickly adopted the same policy as their own. Hyper immigration became the new normal, a life sentence for its hapless victims, the voters who never gave any government a mandate to embark on such a course.

However, a quarter century later, Liberal Prime Minister Trudeau ramped up annual immigration intakes well beyond the already high benchmark. While Mulroney took immigration to the moon (250,000/year), Trudeau has taken it to Pluto (340,000/year). And he’s not finished yet.

As a result, from 1991 to 2018, Canada’s population grew by 10 million people, from roughly 27 million to 37 million. About 7 million are foreign born. Canada has long had the highest population growth rates of the G7 group, and along with Australia, the highest per capita immigration numbers. It is noteworthy that Canada (no. 12) and Australia (no. 14) rank poorly in income gap statistics for the top 17 of developed nations. www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/Details/society/income-inequality.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1 Again, not a coincidence.

There are of course many reasons why income inequality is rising so dramatically in Canada, but a salient one is the staggering cost of paying for shelter in the country’s major urban centres. It should be expected that immigration magnets like Vancouver or Toronto would experience greater upward pressure on land values, and in fact 75 percent of immigrants go to those two cities and Montreal. Notwithstanding the denials of immigration lawyers, UBC Statistics Professor David Ley provided incontrovertible proof that immigration is responsible for unaffordable house prices. Additionally, veteran real estate researcher Richard Wozny demonstrated that Vancouver’s housing prices had risen to levels as 37 times the incomes of Canadians in some Metro Vancouver suburbs. A November 2014 RBC report on housing affordability found that someone earning a typical Vancouver wage who wanted to own an average home would have to pay 84.2 percent of his pre-tax income to cover the cost of utilities, property tax, and mortgage payments. In Toronto the figure was 55.6 percent, and in

Montreal 38.3 percent. Ottawa, 33.7 percent. In the case of Vancouver, almost half of households pay more than the 30 percent of income that is considered prudent and affordable. For too many Vancouverites and too many Canadians, making a mortgage payment or paying the rent means cutting back on the food you buy or postponing a needed visit to the dentist. Mass immigration has proven to be an effective way to redistribute wealth. In the wrong direction.

Naturally, politicians and developers alike insist that the housing crisis is a supply problem. The advice is always “build up, build out, and build in.” Since ours is a “welcoming” sanctuary city, we must simply move over and squeeze tighter. And tighter. But when 60,000 plus migrants are pouring into your city each and every year, it is obvious that endless rezoning, densification, and social housing construction cannot keep pace nor solve what is in fact a demand issue. There are limits to growth, and to repeat, there was a time when progressive politicians understood that.

In the mid-1970s, for example, Vancouver’s centre-left Mayor Art Phillips once remarked that “I maintain that the primary approach to solving the housing problem in the Great Vancouver area lies in the immediate reduction and future control of immigration.” His understudy and subsequent Mayor Mike Harcourt said: “First, it is essential that we relate both the local and the national housing problems to our immigration laws. Are we in fact merely trying to create new housing, as well as new employment opportunities, just to keep pace with the yearly average of (hundreds of thousands) of immigrants that Canada is admitting every year? Perhaps we should seriously consider whether we can continue to admit so many immigrants.” This is the same Mike Harcourt who went on to become the NDP Premier of British Columbia.

Would Harcourt ask the same questions today, forty years later, when the housing crisis is so much worse, and the city so much more crowded? Not a chance. And that fact speaks to the bewilderment that all progressives or former progressives of my generation feel who remain faithful to the insights of people like Gaylord Nelson and David Brower and Denis and Donella Meadows and Jorgen Randers. We see that things are worse than they have ever been, but we wonder as Peter, Paul, and Mary would have asked, where the no-growthers are, and “when will they (growth boosters) ever learn?”

So where did those sensible socialists go? What happened to their vision? Why did their party desert them? Don’t their successors know that runaway population growth and equality don’t mix? ■