

American Association for the Advancement of Science (On National Population Policies) Muffles ‘Obnoxious’ Canadians Too

By DAVID SCHINDLER, MADELINE WELD, AND STUART H. HURLBERT

If the UN Conference on the Human Environment, to be held in Stockholm in 1972, faces this issue [human population as “the basic cause of environmental problems”] squarely, there will be hope for the future. If it does not, then those individuals, agencies and governments that feel strongly on the matter, should become obnoxious in bringing the issue into uninhibited discussion.

— J.R. Vallentyne (1972)¹

[T]here is no shortage of censors and axers of truth out there in the scientific community. They normally work quietly, speak softly and euphemistically, and have a wide variety of pretexts for wielding the red pen, declaring certain topics taboo, and keeping the politically incorrect off the program. When challenged they are prone to embarrassing themselves.

— S.H. Hurlbert (2011)²

Introduction—the CAPS-AAAS saga

The first episode of the CAPS-AAAS saga was published in the Fall 2011 issue of *The Social Contract*. Stuart Hurlbert related how CAPS (Californians for Population Stabilization) had applied for, been granted, and then was denied an exhibitor’s booth at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) annual meeting to be held in Vancouver, Canada, in February, 2012.³ The reason? CAPS apparently

did not “align” with AAAS. Further enquiries as to what exactly that meant revealed that CAPS was considered to have “a concerted political agenda and lobbying effort around immigration issues that impact the state of California and are of interest to its residents.” More unsuccessful rounds with the AAAS meetings manager, to whom it was explained that CAPS’ interests include the impact of population growth not only in California but throughout America and the world, led to an appeal to the AAAS Board of Directors. Alas, AAAS Chief Executive Officer Alan Leshner, on behalf of the Board, supported the meetings manager, saying that AAAS did not “provide space to organizations with as direct political and lobbying intent as CAPS has on issues that go beyond the multidisciplinary membership and meeting audience.”

Not surprisingly, CAPS noted that that response was a bit disingenuous, given that other organizations allowed to exhibit at the AAAS meeting have political agendas and engage in educating and lobbying. Furthermore, in July, two months before the exchange with CAPS, AAAS had published an issue of its flagship journal *Science* on population. One would think that AAAS might therefore considers the point of view of an organization such as CAPS, concerned as it is with population stabilization, to be of interest to its multidisciplinary membership.⁴

All key correspondence referenced here between CAPS and AAAS may be found in the appendix. This also includes key exchanges between PIC and AAAS during the former’s attempt, described below, to arrange for an exhibitor booth at the Vancouver meeting.

The saga continues, with a new player, PIC

In the early stages of this saga, while CAPS was applying for and getting (or so we thought) a booth, CAPS secretary Stuart Hurlbert contacted the Ottawa-based Population Institute of Canada (PIC), the only organization in Canada whose focus is specifically on population. A shared CAPS/PIC booth seemed like a fine idea for an American science meeting being held in Canada. PIC president Madeline Weld responded enthusiastically

David Schindler is Killam Memorial Professor of Ecology at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and Fellow of the Royal Society (UK); Contact: d.schindler@ualberta.ca
Madeline Weld is President of the Population Institute of Canada and a Toxicologist Evaluator for Health Canada, Ottawa; Contact: madweld@rogers.com
Stuart H. Hurlbert is Emeritus Professor of Biology, San Diego State University, Fellow of AAAS, and secretary of Californians for Population Stabilization; Contact: shurlbert@sunstroke.sdsu.edu

to the idea of a joint booth. She and PIC member David Schindler of the University of Alberta (Edmonton) even agreed to help man the booth. Naturally, all shared CAPS' disappointment when the offer was rescinded.

But the battle against censorship was not over! We contacted scientists in the U.S. and Canada and asked them if they would sign a document protesting the AAAS rejection of CAPS' application for a booth. One hundred people agreed to do so, many of them senior scientists or leaders of NGOs. Schindler and Weld also wrote a letter to AAAS, expressing their disappointment at its decision, and informing AAAS that PIC had been invited by CAPS to help design and provide material for its booth, and that both had volunteered to help staff it. Schindler and Weld asked AAAS to reconsider its decision regarding CAPS, but failing that, to allow PIC to have the booth that had been denied to CAPS. Schindler and Weld concluded their letter by saying that, with the planet's population reaching seven billion within a week [officially on October 31, 2011], and the populations of both the U.S. and Canada still growing at exponential rates, it was time to make population stabilization a visible issue within the scientific community. The "We Protest" letter signed by 100 scientists and the Schindler-Weld letter were included as attachments in an email sent to the AAAS Board on October 26, 2011. The "We Protest" letter is reprinted at the end of this essay.

Adding a little bit of fire to the issue, on November 9, Hurlbert notified the AAAS board of publication of the first article on this saga in the Fall 2011 issue of *The Social Contract*.³

On November 11, AAAS CEO Leshner replied to Schindler and Weld, informing them that PIC was welcome to submit an application for an exhibit booth. He reiterated that AAAS was a "rigorously nonpartisan and nonprofit association" and that the meeting was not intended as "a platform for promoting the political agendas of any individual organizations." CAPS' activities related to limiting immigration, whether legal or illegal, were primarily political in nature, he said. He informed PIC that only duly registered exhibitors could exhibit at the AAAS meeting, that a booth could not be shared, and that exhibitors who violated the agreement terms could be removed without refund.

Weld and Schindler responded by thanking AAAS, saying that PIC would assume full responsibility for the booth, and that all the people staffing it would be PIC members. They informed Leshner about PIC's objective of raising awareness about population growth in Canada and around the world. They also informed him that PIC interacted and collaborated with many other groups and

made use of available educational material that reflected PIC's point of view. In addition to PIC's own material, it would have material from about a dozen other organizations and individuals who shared PIC's concern about overpopulation, the letter said.

PIC duly filled out its online application. Exhibitors were required to put in a short description of their organization. PIC's seemed anodyne enough:

The Population Institute of Canada is an environmental and educational organization dedicated to informing the public about the causes and dangers of overpopulation and to encouraging governments to take steps to slow population growth. Stop by our booth to see books and displays on this topic and for free literature from our own and many other organizations.

On December 1, PIC received notification from "AAAS Meetings" that its application had been accepted. Information about payment and contacts was included.

So far, so good. Or so it seemed.

PICing a fight with a science powerhouse?

Strangely, although the acceptance notice from AAAS had said that PIC would be contacted "shortly" by the sales manager to confirm a booth number, shortly seemed to be taking a while. Nor did the PIC treasurer receive a reply when he contacted the name provided in the acceptance notice about paying by check.

The reason for the silence was revealed on December 9, when PIC received an email from the meetings manager, Barbara Rice, referring to the PIC exhibitor blurb that said we would provide "free literature from our own and many other organizations." This was counter to Section 3 of the Terms and Conditions, the letter said, and we would have to amend our description to adhere to exhibitor policies.

On December 13, Weld and Schindler responded to Rice's letter, saying they found it puzzling, reiterating that all the people staffing the booth would be PIC members, and that they did not see how providing literature from other organizations could be interpreted as sharing the booth. As PIC is a small organization with limited publications, it uses educational materials from many sources to promote awareness of population issues. Paying the large fee for a booth under such a restriction would not serve PIC's purpose, they wrote.

Weld and Schindler asked two questions. The first was whether all the material presented at the booth had to be written by a PIC member or under PIC's imprima-

tur (e.g., from PIC's website). If the answer was Yes, then PIC asked to withdraw its application for a booth.



If the answer was No, then PIC had a second question: If there was a limited number of authors, publishers, or organizations whose materials were proscribed, PIC wanted to know who they were. In that case, PIC would decide if it would choose to operate under the conditions imposed. Weld and Schindler concluded their letter

by reminding AAAS that the delays were hampering PIC's ability to prepare.

Receiving no reply, on December 20 Weld and Schindler cut to the chase and wrote to Rice:

It has now been 35 days since we informed Dr. Leshner that our PIC booth planned to distribute literature from many organizations, and a week since we requested clarification, in response to your message of December 9, as to what kinds of non-PIC materials, if any, would be allowed at the PIC booth. Given the lack of a response, the implicit threat that any non-PIC materials could result in the closing down of our booth, and the very late hour, we hereby withdraw our application for a booth.

Conclusions (and warnings!)

To summarize this sad tale: CAPS' application for a booth was rejected by AAAS because CAPS was considered (incorrectly) to be focused only on immigration and California and therefore perceived to be too political. On the other hand, PIC's application was rejected because it proposed to present literature from a wide variety of organizations and authors on population issues on national and global scales. Garrett Hardin, not a member of PIC, published *Tragedy of the Commons*⁵ in a non-PIC venue (*Science*), so the tender sensibilities

of AAAS meeting attendees had to be protected from seeing a stack of that still relevant essay. Jack Vallentyne was not a PIC member either, so distribution to attendees of hot-off-the-press copies of his posthumously published essay on *Consumption: The Other Side of Population for Development*⁶ was similarly proscribed. Go figure.

This article, the second (and presumably final) chapter of a sad tale, should serve as warning to other organizations to save their energy if they think they'd like to have a population booth at a AAAS meeting. We can hope that the culture of the AAAS evolves on this matter—for which it will perhaps need new leadership.

“Facing the issue squarely” indeed! If only Jack Vallentyne knew. ■

Endnotes

1. John R. Vallentyne. 1972. Freshwater Supplies and Pollution: Effects of the Demographic Explosion on Water and Man. In: N. Polunin (ed.), *The Environmental Future*. Macmillan, London, pp. 181-211.
2. Stuart H. Hurlbert. 2011. The North American Lake Management Society: Axing Truth, Threatening Lawsuits. *The Social Contract* 21(3): 37-46.
3. Stuart H. Hurlbert. 2011. Is the AAAS Oblivious to U.S. Overpopulation and Its Consequences: Or Is It Just Another Censor? *The Social Contract* 22(1): 64-68.
4. In this regard it is worth noting that of the 18 articles published in the *Science* issue devoted to population, not one mentioned the rapidly growing U.S. population, which is driven primarily by immigration. CAPS lobbies for a reduced California and U.S. population, which can only be achieved by a reduction in immigration. Apparently, AAAS considers the sensitive subject of immigration to be off limits.
5. Garrett Hardin. 1968. The Tragedy of The Commons. *Science* 162:1243-1248.
6. Francisco J. Mata, Larry J. Onisto and John R. Vallentyne. 2011. Consumption: The Other Side of Population for Development. *Ethics in Science and Environmental Politics* (in press). [Originally prepared for and presented at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Cairo, Egypt, September 5-13, 1994].