

Citizens Bark While The Growth Caravan Moves On

Meanwhile Politicians And Media Clap and Environmentalists Remain Silent

BY TIM MURRAY

[Editor's note: Tim Murray reports on a recent Canadian census and the public reaction in a voting poll to uncontrolled population growth. He asks why politicians seem to do the opposite of what the Canadian voters actually want. This article was posted in March, 2012, on <http://candobetter.net/node/2823>]

In the wake of the just released Canadian Census Report, the Vancouver Province asked readers what they thought of continuing and rapid growth in their community.

Eighty-three percent said that either growth was “ruining” their communities or that growth “was not something they were crazy about.”

That is 83 percent who said “No!” to growth.

Yet we have all four main federal political parties and all three provincial parties saying “Yes!”. Yes, let's throw more coal into the furnace and keep our runaway growth train hurtling toward the cliff. Of course, there are some civic parties who want to “manage” growth by packing more and more people more and more tightly together. They even are so deceitful as to call this project “green”. But how do you “green” a city by reducing per capita consumption, waste and land consumption while adding more and more newcomers? Cut consumption and waste in half but double the population? How much sense does that make? How much sense does it make to grow Canada's population by deliberate government policies? Does population growth make us wealthier? If it increases the GDP does it increase our *per capita* GDP?

If growth creates more jobs does it actually reduce the unemployment rate? If it expands the tax base does the extra tax revenue offset increased infrastructure costs of servicing more people?

If 80 percent of New Canadians are unskilled, do they earn a high enough income to pay the taxes necessary to offset the cost of social services they consume? If the answer is no, then what does that say about the commonplace belief that immigration is needed to “support the

aged”? And what happens when the immigrants we accept to allegedly support the aged themselves become aged? Do we bring in yet more immigrants to support *them*? Canada already has the highest per capita intake of immigrants in the world (sorry Australia) and the highest population growth rate of all G8 countries. Do we increase this rate exponentially ad infinitum to chase the tail of increased tax revenue?

Do we need more and more immigration to fill the shortage of skilled labour so we can grow the economy? Does not a growing economy create even more skilled labour shortages? Are we sure that we need to import skilled labour? Have we taken a proper inventory of our labour requirements? Have we done enough to train our own youth, particularly Aboriginal youth, many of whom live on reserves with unemployment rates over 75 percent? Why do we seek foreign labour while we turn our backs on this vast untapped pool of potential talent, wasting away in despair and hopelessness?

Do we need population growth to grow the economy? And if continuing economic growth is desirable, or necessary, is it possible? What if advancing resource constraints make continuing economic growth *impossible*? What if there are *limits to growth*?

These are the questions that policy-makers and politicians won't answer. They won't answer because their jobs depend on avoiding the questions. And they are not the only ones who refuse to face the raging monster of growth.

Do you hear that? Listen. Listen carefully. Do you recognize that sound? It is the sound of silence. No one is talking about growth, no one, that is, except those ordinary citizens who have had enough and cannot take it anymore, but whose complaints cannot get a hearing on the CBC or with any political party in Canada.

The *public* silence about growth in Canada is *deafening*. And, oddly, when the topic of population growth threatens to make itself heard, the quietest place you would find in Canada would be in the offices and meeting rooms of Canada's mainstream environmental organization—who remain *mute* about the manifestly negative and massive ecological impact of our country's population explosion. Their silence is stunning given that over the last two decades, mass immigration has generated four times as much Green House Gas emissions and despoiled three times as much land as the Alberta oil sands project—not

Tim Murray is a writer and researcher on Quadra Island of coastal British Columbia who focuses on environment, population, and research issues.

boreal forest one might add, but for the most part, prime farmland.

Ah, but greens say, urban sprawl is not a function of population growth but “bad planning”. The problem though, is that, to the contrary, on average half of sprawl is driven by population growth, 70 percent which in turn is driven by immigration. And since land-use planning is under the control of developer-controlled local councils, stopping sprawl must require stopping growth, not managing it. That is the raw reality that the talking heads of Green

Inc. will not acknowledge.

The release of this latest Census report should have given the environmental establishment the opportunity to blow the whistle on the government’s immigration policy. It would be the ideal “teachable moment” to restore “population” to the position it once held in the environmental discussion, and to resurrect the call for the development of a population plan for this nation. But once again, as happened in 2007, they have nothing to say. Not a word. Not a peep. Just what their corporate benefactors want to hear. ■