

The Tories should stand firm against eco-alarmists

If the Conservatives give up and throw in with the Liberals, NDP and Greens, they will be squandering a political opportunity and dis-serving the country.

by Conrad Black



Conservative party leadership front-runners Erin O'Toole, left, and Peter MacKay

It is disappointing that the principal candidates for the leadership of the federal Conservative Party of Canada have fallen in with such docility behind the conventional wisdom regarding carbon's threat to the environment and that it is already changing the climate adversely. This is the source of the hackneyed truism of "settled science" that has already been thoroughly debunked by the facts. This technique of a mindless repetition that "98 per cent of scientists" agree on

the terrifying proportions and imminence of global warming is an attempt to gain momentum for a cause by falsely proclaiming that all people qualified to have an opinion agree with the cause.

This practice is becoming familiar in other fields, such as the penchant for a lot of American rudimentary polling organizations, many of them emphatically partisan, to proclaim every few days that the American election campaign is a lopsided runaway for Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden. Most of this is really just political advertising in disguise. Essentially the same can be said of those who announce that the time of climate risk assessment is over and that if we do not abolish the internal combustion engine and reduce our beef consumption drastically, Venice will be underwater in five years and all of Manhattan within 15.

The climate issue has arisen because two roughly parallel but very differently motivated trends suddenly fused about 30 years ago. A group of organizations that had generally been known as conservationists, such as the Sierra Club, which was concerned with the preservation of nature, and Greenpeace, which was preoccupied with nuclear weapons, and a large number of smaller groups devoted to the protection of certain animals and habitats, gradually gained ground, co-ordinated their efforts and, especially as the Cold War ended, attracted from the rejected international left a great deal of alarmist energy, collective worry and hostility toward capitalism. They were all pre-emptively worried and full of radical people in search of a new cause to which they could fasten their fervour. The process was energized by the international left, reeling from defeat in the Cold War, and routed decisively in the domestic politics of the major Western countries, especially the United States (President Ronald Reagan) and the United Kingdom (Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher). They were almost stateless, like political refugees wandering aimlessly about; they were seeking a new angle from which to pursue

their socialistic objectives.

Severed from the Soviet Union, practically disowned by the People's Republic of China, rejected throughout the West, the international left, despite its dogmatic history, responded to this existential crisis with a formidable sense of improvisation. The whole ramshackle and traumatized structure of the left almost spontaneously saw the opportunities presented by the ecological movement both as a refuge and as a platform from which to attack its capitalist foes. Instead of the hammer and sickle and the legacies of Vladimir Lenin, Josef Stalin and Mao Tse Tung, they devised a new vocabulary of peaceful world salvation. In place of world revolution, the breaking of chains, all the cracked omelettes and broken crockery of the class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat, or more moderate versions of Marxism, there would be the salvation of the planet and the triumph of the holy virgin nature.

It was in its way inspired. As in almost all voluntary organizations, the most spirited and ambitious lead and the comparative passivity of those earnestly resisting the shrinkage of wetlands for water foul and such unexceptionable goals yielded to the militants clambering up the anchor chains of American aircraft carriers when they called at Vancouver or Halifax. The vast range of groups and objectives fused almost seamlessly, the birdwatchers and the butterfly collectors with the nuclear disarmament marchers and the militant syndicalists. They would deliver a grateful world from the spoliation and avarice they imputed to capitalism. (The communist industrial states were the greatest polluters of all.)

The climate change alarmist argument progressed rapidly until it became irreconcilable with the economic interests of large sections of the public. Every sane person in the world wishes to protect the environment and objects to its pollution, and most reasonable people are also prepared to dilute a counsel

of perfection somewhat to allow for increased prosperity and comfort. The political systems of the democratic countries have been grappling with this problem for many years, and the threat that the world and everything within it is doomed unless we adopt a radical green agenda at once is wearing thin. It is disappointing that none of the principal contenders in the federal Conservative leadership race has taken any discernible distance from the frightening Hansel and Gretel ecological panic that is the principal public policy of the current Canadian government. There is clearly no unanimity on this issue. Four of the world's most important countries – the United States, China, India and Russia (representing 40 per cent of the world's population and almost 50 per cent of global GDP), all dissent from the helter-skelter scramble to suppress carbon.

The reason for the discord over climate change is that it is so difficult to measure the world's temperature and condition. An astonishing number of monitors at every point from 15,000 metres below sea level to 9,000 metres above sea level and at intervals around the world and into the stratosphere, all of carefully determined shape and responsiveness, is required. We will not know what is happening nor what to do about it until we know enough to make informed decisions. In all serious matters there is normally a consensus based on thorough research before embarking on a decisive course of action. On this issue, because of the vindictive ambition of the defeated left to destroy its victorious adversary, the political atmosphere has become so overheated that any call for caution is treated as Philistinism, corruptly motivated obstruction, a death wish or unfathomable stupidity.

All those factors exist, but the best course now, and one that Canada because of its large size and shoreline on three of the world's oceans is well qualified to undertake, is extensive research. This should aim at coming to conclusions within a reasonable time at a reasonable cost, not to prevaricate or to

serve any special interest. The present federal government is re-enacting the Charge of the Light Brigade on this question. If the Conservatives give up and throw in with the Liberals, NDP and Greens, they will be squandering a political opportunity and dis-serving the country.

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