

COMMENTARY

ANTI-USE CAMPAIGNS AND POLICY MAKING

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IN FEBRUARY 2003, the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia read the Liberal government's Speech from the Throne. Without a hint of irony or hubris, it promised economic renewal to the BC heartland. But the political spin soon became clear. This "heartland" was the area that many habitually thought of as the provincial "hinterland." The government had cleverly inverted the terms to drive home its concern for the great swath of the province lying beyond the heavily urban and generally prosperous southwestern corner of BC. The new heartland strategy was meant to revitalize communities that are largely dependent upon the extraction and processing of natural resources. Promises of infrastructure, of a revitalized forestry industry, of new partnerships with Aboriginal communities, of offshore oil and gas development and of support for growth in tourism were central to the plan.¹

Neither the strategy, nor the speech itself, emerged from ideas formulated in Victoria. The ideas came directly from the Project 250 report commissioned by the BC Progress Board.² The Progress Board was created in July 2001 and given the task of "benchmarking BC over time and relative to other jurisdictions, and with providing strategic advice to the Premier on measures to improve provincial economic performance and the well-being of British Columbians."³ Using the term 250 to signify the territory covered by the telephone company's 2-5-0 area code that encompasses all but the urban southwest of the province, the report noted "just how dedicated Region 250 communities are to their own survival." They believe, it continued, in a vision of a prosperous future

¹ <http://www.legis.gov.bc.ca/37th4th/4-8-37-4.htm>.

² See *Restoring BC's Economic Heartland: Report of the Project 250 Regional Economies Expert Panel to the BC Progress Board*, <http://www.bcprogressboard.com/2002Report/RestoreBCEH.pdf>.

³ See the Progress Board home page at <http://www.bcprogressboard.com/index.php>.

and are ready to make the tough choices necessary to realize it. With abundant resource endowments, a high quality of life, and a population committed to using their knowledge to solve problems and spur growth, Region 250 has the tools necessary to succeed in the 21st Century.⁴

The region may not have the tools. If it did, the Report would probably have been unnecessary. Instead, the report set out a long list of regional needs and called for nothing less than the restoration of the social contract between urban and rural communities.

A social contract is a hypothetical agreement between a state and its citizens. It denotes the rights and responsibilities of the citizen to the state (and vice versa). In Canada, the social contract between rural communities and the state has traditionally been instantiated by government policies, such as appurtenancy (the policy that required harvesters to process logs in local facilities) and the Crow Rate, designed to protect and support resource-based communities and what might otherwise be boom and bust industries. But, the social contract also meant more than this. It implied a relationship between groups and individuals.⁵ The reciprocal relationship between rural and urban citizens was once broadly acknowledged; it was widely accepted that the northern and rural regions of Canada represented an essential part of the economy and the Canadian identity. Today, rural and northern areas still provide much of the wealth that supports the richer urban centres of Canada's southern regions. But as the concept of the city-state gains popular support among residents of southern metropolises and politicians who recognize that this is where the votes are, there appears to be less concern for the rural way of life and for the benefits that are provided by a strong resource economy.

For the most part, the Throne Speech was the Progress 250 report. Judged by this document, the state seemed to be declaring the renewal of its social contract with rural areas. The Throne Speech was heavily focused on the rural agenda and promised little, beyond infrastructure for the 2010 Winter Olympics, to the Vancouver region. Yet a throne speech is little more than rhetoric and the budget that followed singularly failed to change the urban/rural dynamic. The Progress 250 task force had recommended that resource rents be returned to the communities from which resources were extracted but this provision was missing from the government's commitments.⁶

⁴ Progress 250 Executive Summary at <http://www.bcprogressboard.com/2002Report/P250ExecSumm.pdf>.

⁵ See http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Social_contract.

⁶ *Restoring BC's Economic Heartland*.

It would be easy to blame the government for failing to revitalize the rural and northern economy, for speaking the rhetoric of renewal and recognition without acting to achieve it. But this is not a problem unique to the government of BC, or, quite frankly, to any government at all. The problem is a breakdown in the dialogue between urban and rural citizens and a growing tension around their differing values. Governments used to try to mediate these tensions and to foster dialogue. Yet, we know that citizens have become less deferential to authority and that elite accommodation has, for many, become antithetical to the democratic process. Whereas governments once sought to bring individuals and groups together and worked to find common ground among their interests, this role has been largely delegitimized over the past twenty years in Canadian politics. Moreover, governments have not simply failed as mediators; their failure has allowed some groups to drive a wedge between urban and rural communities largely to advance their own interests.

We contend that differing views about the environment and about traditional cultural practices are among the greatest sources of rural-urban and north-south tension in Canada. Anti-harvesting (trapping/sealing/logging) movements which reflect changes in values, attitudes to authority, and accepted behaviours, illustrate this. Anti-use campaigns (AUCs) drive a new type of colonialism that allows groups purporting to represent the public good to demonize resource extraction. Anti-use campaigners find their way into the policy network both domestically and internationally, and when they fail to make headway through the democratic process, they use marketing campaigns to convince urban dwellers that something nefarious is happening in the pristine north.

Narrowly focused anti-use campaigns should not be confused with an environmentalism that balances broader views and that encompasses the idea of ecosystems made up of multiple parts and processes including human communities and their economies. Most environmental groups understand the need for the balance between humans and the environment. This is the essence of sustainable development. Moreover, people who live and work in northern and rural communities see resource use and extraction as a part of their culture. Their use of the resources is not necessarily antithetical to environmentalism. The environment supports their lifestyle and values as well as their material interests.

Thirty years ago the same AUCs that now clearly affect public policy would have argued that their access to the public policy process was limited or non-existent. Public policy networks in most policy com-

munities were dominated by “captured” or “clientelistic” networks, in which the state either dominated or served business elites.⁷ It could also be argued that most resource-based policy was dominated by one major idea, namely extraction. However, a clear shift in public opinion that began in the 1960s recognized that governments should be responsible for environmental protection. For individuals interested in affecting public policy, democracy was “opened up.” Obviously, this was an improvement. Environmental concerns have, at least in part, been added into the public policy process and in many ways improved the quality of life in BC and the rest of Canada. “While there is strong evidence of the continuing negotiative character of the policy network, restricted primarily to state and industry members, environmental interests have nudged the existing bilateral [policy] network into an emerging triadic form [state, industry and environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS)].”⁸ Without a doubt there is still a long way to go in order to achieve sustainable development, and without a doubt environmental ENGOS are crucial to pushing changes in public policy. What is problematic is that some anti-use campaign groups have managed to gain access to the policy process. Although most environmental groups that favour balanced sustainable development understand their impacts upon communities and work to ensure public input and representation of stakeholder interests, AUC groups often misrepresent cultural practices to influence public opinion. And politicians and bureaucrats translate this public opinion into policy without real input from the communities affected by the policy.

The tactics of anti-use campaigners often leave little recourse for northern and rural communities, which simply lack the resources to respond to harmful campaigns. As in the Atlantic anti-sealing campaign, the interests of people and economies are often sadly neglected or dismissed. Indeed, according to Michael Kendu of the Sea Shepherd Society: “If a few people are hurt for the good of the global society, then that’s not our problem. It happens all the time.”⁹ When

⁷ Using the taxonomy in M. Hessing and M. Howlett, *Canadian Natural Resource and Environmental Policy: Political Economy and Public Policy* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 1997), 88.

⁸ Hessing and Howlett, *Canadian Natural Resource*, 221.

⁹ *Nunatsiaq News*, 10 October 1997, 7. When Greenpeace was first involved in the anti-sealing campaign, they were conscious of the potential bad image that could be generated by the “elitism” of the environmental movement and the agony of those who were at the bottom of the working class. When confronted by an angry crowd in St. Anthony, in 1976, Patrick Moore said “We don’t want to interfere with your livelihood. We want to stop the Norwegians from killing the seals. Join with us in stopping the Norwegians so there’ll be more seals for you in the future.” Greenpeace argued then that the issue was conservation, not that the whitecoats were cute. (Alan Herscovici, *Second Nature: the Animal Rights Controversy* [Toronto: CBC

the International Fund for Animal Welfare organized the boycott of Canadian fish in 1983, its rationale was that fishermen earned more from fishing than from sealing, so they would be willing to abandon the latter to save the former. Stephen Best of the IFAW even told the Native Brotherhood of BC, many of whose members are salmon fishermen, that the boycott was “intended to cause as much serious social and economic hardship on the numerous families dependent on the BC salmon industry as possible . . . that is why economic boycotts are called.”¹⁰

AUC groups get a kind of “double whammy” access to the policy process. First, they have access to the policy network as stakeholders; second, when they are unhappy with public policy outcomes, they circumvent them by appealing to international bodies and by organizing market boycotts to gain their objectives. AUC groups have frequently mobilized interests in other countries for both financial and positional support.

We certainly are not the first to argue that interest groups can act outside the normal channels of the public policy process.¹¹ What is interesting is that most argue that these groups represent minority interests and that they affect the state’s decisions to act against majority wishes by using, for example, the Courts to advance their causes. In the case of anti-sealing and anti-fur campaigns, the reverse is true. AUC groups purporting to educate the public have changed consumer practices and destroyed the livelihoods of a minority of individuals even though the cultural practices of that minority had little or no effect on the majority. As indicated above, when the policy process itself does not suit AUC groups, they can leave the table for more forceful approaches. In BC, AUC groups have seldom participated in multi-stakeholder land-use planning processes, often walking out when it became clear that the final report would entail some compromise. They have made little effort to engage in the normal democratic process, through preparing submissions to cabinet, committees or public enquiries; they refused to participate in the discussion of standards. Boycotts and blockades are their tactics of choice.

The combination of greater access to the public policy process with the power of appearing to work for the greater public good allows AUC groups to have a great deal of influence in areas that most lay observers

Enterprises, 1985], 80). By 1983, Greenpeace had changed its position to opposing any harvest - Patrick Moore questioned the morality of the harvest, saying we need to change our basic attitude to nature (Herscovici, *Second Nature*, 91-2).

¹⁰ Herscovici, *Second Nature*, 106.

¹¹ F. L. Morton and R. Knopff, eds., *The Charter Revolution and the Court Party* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2000).

know little about. Take, for example, an article by Margaret Wenté that appeared in the *Globe and Mail* with the title, "Ashamed to be a Canadian" with *de rigueur* pictures of a sealer skinning a seal, and of a seal pup looking dolefully into the camera. Aptly capturing the attitude of the comfortable urbanite, the article begins:

As you read this paper over your morning latte, hundreds of hunters are hard at work on the ice floes off the shores of Newfoundland.

They're shooting and clubbing as many harp seals as they can find....¹²

The article decried the hunt for a number of reasons, including the ridiculous idea that it should be halted because seal meat "tastes terrible" (both of the authors of this article dislike the taste of green peppers but we hardly think that is a reason to eliminate green pepper production). The second more shocking comment in the article was the author's note that some have criticized the anti-sealing campaigners for their fundamental lack of understanding of the relationship between sealers and nature and that "these people exist in harmony with their natural surroundings." On the contrary, chirps Wenté; "in fact, these people exist in harmony with EI cheques."¹³

The normative overtone is clear, beginning with the article's title and latte comment: urban elites have a more civilized existence. Further, while Wenté appears to cite the ideas of an "expert scientific advisor to an animal welfare group," she fails to question the motives of the group or the advisor – they are simply assumed to be promoting a greater public good. If this article in a major national newspaper is part of the so-called public education provided by or resulting from AUCs, or part of the political socialization by urban media, then it provides a very disturbing picture indeed. Wenté portrays a complicated socioeconomic situation that exists outside the urban centres of Canada in very simplistic ways.

Similarly, the CBC ran a piece on "the war in the woods" in British Columbia that implied that consumers were driving the call for forest certification.¹⁴ The "new era of 'good wood'" which was broadcast on January 2nd, 2001, shows the Forest Stewardship Council as driving the agenda.¹⁵ There was little follow-up to find out if consumers are willing to pay for certified wood or, for that matter, whether they know what certification means.

¹² Margaret Wenté, "Ashamed to Be a Canadian," *Globe and Mail*, 4 May 2002, 15.

¹³ Wenté, "Ashamed," 15.

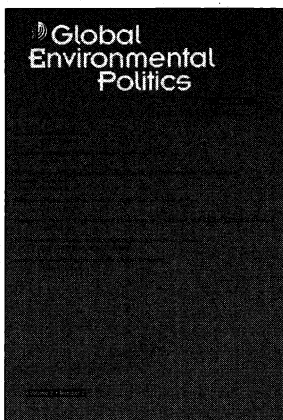
¹⁴ The "war in the woods" refers to the conflict in BC forests between anti-logging activists and forestry companies, which really came to a head in protests in the 1990s.

¹⁵ http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-75-679-3927/science_technology/clearcutting/clip12.

In promoting a greater public good, AUCs have clearly made the connection between capitalism and liberal democracy. The market is a powerful force that can allow interest groups to circumvent the policy process by making the market the target of their campaigns. If AUCs can convince consumers of the rightness of their position, they do not need to work through public policy in order to outlaw or curtail certain activities.

The so-called “war in the woods” was not just a war of competing values. It marked the beginning of the end of the social contract between urban and rural/northern citizens in Canada. If it is true that Canadians are less deferential to government and more likely to find empowerment through other means (like market choices), then governments may not be able to take back the role of mediator. In the end, their success and the future of resource dependent communities will turn on the willingness of all Canadians – northerners and southerners, rural and urban, natives and newcomers – to engage one another sensitively in dialogue intended to achieve mutual understanding rather than to advance stereotypes, impose value systems and to be dismissive of difference.

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