

# ENVIRONMENT

## Identifying The Issue

It goes without saying that the **environment** is important to everyone. Whether you speak to representatives of government, business, labour or just to the average Canadian citizen, you'll probably have a pretty tough time trying to find someone who's advocating an unclean, polluted environment. So why is "the environment" an issue?

Unfortunately, like everything else in politics, the "issue" is not really about the specific subject being discussed (i.e., the "environment"), but rather about the political philosophy that should be applied to government policies regarding that subject.

On one side of the issue we have the "PRIVATE PROPERTY/CAPITALIST/FREE MARKET" approach to the environment, while on the other side of the issue exists the "STATE PROPERTY/SOCIALIST/STATE CONTROLLED" approach to the environment.

We already know that socialism doesn't work in economics --- and that capitalism does. But does the same principle hold true for the environment? We believe it does. The recent revelations of environmental conditions behind the now open "iron curtain" countries are a testament to the failure of government ownership and government-directed policy with regard to the environment. However bad we may think pollution is in the developed industrialized countries, it is far worse in government-controlled under-developed societies. The extent to which we have environmental problems is a reflection of the extent to which we have followed the same policies as those countries.

Yet, despite this glaring comparison illustrating which is the best approach to the environment, many people are still swayed by the socialist approach to the issue, even though it results in more pollution than its alternative. Why? We can suggest a few reasons.

On the concrete level, we can still see existing pollution --- usually our own. The media continuously brings photographic evidence of pollution right into our homes to remind us of the threat to our environment. We

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are told, directly or indirectly, that most of our pollution is the result of our industrial production and of our capacity to create powerful economies.

For many people, this image translates into a popularly accepted notion that the producers in our society are, as the ugly, meanspirited phrase suggests, "greedy capitalist pigs." After all, the pollution they produce is a visible sign of their greed, isn't it?

Far from it. We contend that our worst examples of pollution are a direct result of socialist-minded government policy. Consider that wherever pollution is at its worst, it is always a direct result of one of two possibilities: (1) that the pollution is on or in government-owned land, air, or water (euphemistically called "public" property), or (2) that private pollution has been allowed by politically-motivated government pollution standards. Either way, private citizens are effectively denied their proper right to sue for environmental damage to person or property.

**Freedom Party** believes that the purpose of government is to protect individual freedom of choice, not to restrict it.

A government that fully protects private property rights is the government that protects the environment best. A government's primary duty is to act as an impartial arbiter to settle disputes and claims for damages. But if government owns the polluted property, how can we expect it to act as an impartial arbiter?

This is the tragic, unavoidable flaw in the socialist approach to the environment. Under a capitalist, free-market system, injured parties can sue for actual damages. Under a socialist, state-controlled system, polluters are fined only when they breach regulations. But the pollution levels that meet regulations still cause measurable environmental damage to neighbouring properties, there's nothing anyone can do about it.

As citizens of a relatively productive nation, we must never avoid the responsibility of acknowledging that we are all consumers and that producers only create the goods that we are willing and able to buy. We must understand that in order for us to survive as a human society, some pollution is inevitable. Therefore, a rational environmental goal is MINIMAL pollution within an environment of free market controls (of which government is an integral part), not ZERO pollution with politically-imposed restrictions and sanctions.

Of course, this is just a starting point, but once some common sense principles are in place, the task of protecting our environment becomes that much easier.

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