

*Consent is a journal of
ideas and opinions
on
individual freedom.*

#11



Consent

POLLUTED PERSPECTIVES

By --- Greg Jones

(Mr. Jones is Freedom Party's Ontario Action Co-ordinator)

Recently, many environmental activists have been demonstrating a profound ignorance of the nature and potential of technology and free markets. How? By blaming both for our environmental deterioration.

They have gone so far as to advocate that we stop driving cars, using energy, and producing any garbage whatsoever. Pollution, they argue, is the consequence of a technological society, and in order to reverse the environmental damage caused by pollution, technology and the profit motive must be curtailed. Thus, their ideal world seems to be one in which all conveniences must be banned in order to protect the "environment" --- a vague concept that has no meaning unless you objectively define what the "environment" and acceptable pollution are.

Virtually all the current debate concerning the environment proceeds as if it was possible to have zero pollution. If you asked someone on the street for his comments on the environment and asked him to really think about the issue, he would consider this black-and-white view nonsense. It is not realistic.

What most "environmentalists" are failing to consider is the value of modern conveniences relative to the objectively measured amount of pollution created by them. Nobody says that modern conveniences don't create undesirable side-effects. The question is, rather, are the side-effects negligible when you consider the value provided? In most cases, the answer is yes.

Let's use the example of the car, which many see as a primary cause of pollution. We could have zero pollution from automobiles by simply banning all automobiles. But this would also reduce our industrial productivity and personal happiness in every area, by severely limiting our ease and range of transportation. Each individual's standard of living would be drastically reduced; individuals whose livelihood previously hinged on available transportation would be out of luck. And yet, how many of those who argue that banning cars would be "for the sake of human health" actually practice what they preach by refusing to ride in cars as a matter of principle?

"An atmosphere is worth more than a car," argue environmental cynics. (If this isn't a non-sequitur, I don't know what is!) Consider the total pollution caused by the manufacture and maintenance of automobiles and their related products---undesirable perhaps, but hardly the grave threat to the human race that some believe it to be. Consider also that cars today are far more reliable, safe, energy efficient and less polluting than those manufactured years ago. Now visualize modern society without the accumulated benefits that universally available mass transportation has provided. Can you even imagine what life would be like?

Despite their repeated denials, if the arguments of today's leading "environmentalists" are followed to their logical conclusion, we would be living in a world bereft of technology, in which we

To those who consent, no injustice is done

would be reduced to the drudgery of hacking out a meagre subsistence. All technology is devoted, by definition, to the development of time and labour-saving devices and methods, which are really life saving: if you waste time doing something inefficiently, that time is lost forever. You cannot reclaim it.

Enter: the ultimate "environmentalist" non-sequitur: "The living standard is lower for a dead race than a living one."

To this I can only answer that the average life expectancy in the Middle Ages in Western Europe, before the advent of modern technology (and its pollution) was 30 years.

To be sure, there are many specific environmental problems that have to be identified and solved; among them, the depletion of the ozone layer by CFCs and the "greenhouse effect" caused by excess CO₂ in the atmosphere, as well as the ongoing disposal of our daily garbage. But these problems have to be rationally examined in the proper context. These are technological problems and they require technological solutions. Vague, hysterical protests and denunciations of economic principles and technology will do absolutely nothing for the environment. Without economic and technological advances, no solutions are possible.

The real challenge is not "eliminating" pollution, but in establishing a method of yielding the "right" amount of pollution (i.e., an amount conducive to both the survival of

mankind and the environment): cost and benefit. Minimizing pollution is a desirable goal, but it costs something to have a clean environment, just as it costs to have other things we desire. That's precisely why the "environment" has become a political issue: everyone wants a cleaner environment --- but nobody wants to pay for it. As a result, the political process is the worst possible way to address the challenge of cleaning up the environment since voters will always be voting for the "other guy" to pay for pollution and nothing meaningful will ever get accomplished.

There is nothing inherently wrong with people wanting to save the world's forests and lakes. But this deals with the fundamental issue of property rights. The property rights to all bodies of water in Canada are held by governments. Hence, governments have control over the quality of the water and what is put into it. These same governments then grant exemptions from pollution laws to the major polluters, giving them essentially a licence to pollute publicly owned (i.e., government owned) waterways.

The only workable and long-term solution is to privatize ownership of waterways: if your property is adjacent to a body of water, you should have certain rights over it, including the right to sue polluters for damages.

Forests could be maintained and restocked in a similar way. Currently, much of the prime forest land is Crown land (i.e., the government owns it). Logging companies are simply its users. They have

Calvin and Hobbes



no direct incentive to restock the forest, knowing they don't own it and aren't responsible for it. If logging companies owned the land they operated on, it would immediately be in their own self-interest to maintain the forest stock, or else the land would lose its value as a producer of wood.

This is where free market forces and technological advances play a vital role in giving people better, cheaper ways of doing things with fewer and fewer harmful side effects.

Free markets and technological advances are not the cause of environmental pollution, as many environmentalists (ignorant of either process) keep insisting. Rather, they are our only means of reclaiming the environment from the hands of irresponsible politicians and governments who, because they clearly do not appreciate or understand the technological and economic value of the environment, wish to shield the environment from the very processes and forces that would protect it.

I have yet to meet any individual who does not claim to "value" the environment. Unfortunately, very few are open to the possibility that the environment can be both protected and utilized to improve the quality of life --- and that these two objectives are indeed mutually consistent.

As more research is done into the causes of specific types of pollution and this information is disseminated, industries and companies that do not follow good pollution control practices will be penalized by the marketplace in two different ways: (1) consumers aware of the facts will simply refuse to purchase the offending company's products; (2) property owners (through the privatization process) will have the power to sue for damages caused by pollution. Conscientious companies will be rewarded and those companies whose pollution practices leave much to be desired will have to change or risk bankruptcy.

The end result will be a cleaner environment --- without banning anything.

FOR THE RECORD

By --- Murray Hopper

(Mr. Hopper is a founding member of Freedom Party now in charge of special projects.)

Over the course of my advocacy of "free minds and free markets", I have noticed that many people are quite uncomfortable with talk about "the absoluteness of individual rights." This is unfortunate, given that the concept of individual rights needs and merits the widest possible discussion, since a clear grasp of this principle is essential to understanding what it means to live as a rational being in a free society.

For the record, our rights are threefold: life (the primary right); liberty (complete freedom of peaceable thought and action); and property (the enabling right).

Note how these rights form a continuum: liberty results in property, which not only supports life but gives people the means to implement their values and fulfill their dreams. Note also that there is no right to initiate violence.

Let those who are uncomfortable with the concept of absolute rights consider the alternative to absolute rights: conditional rights. Surely such a concept has no place in a free society. If our rights can be legislated away from us, they are little better than no rights at all.

Perhaps it would be more comfortable to use the term "inalienable" as it was used by Thomas Jefferson, the author of the American Declaration of Independence, to refer to "that which may not rightfully be taken away".

In any event, we ought to be seeking to enlarge our rights, not diminish them. Think of how wonderful it would be if every Canadian could make the following statement and know it to be true: "I am the owner of my life, my mind, my effort, and the products thereof."

Think about it. And talk about it.

"The trade of governing has always been monopolized by the most ignorant and the most rascally individuals of mankind." - Thomas Paine

PASSING THE "BUCK"

By --- William Frampton

(Mr. Frampton is Freedom Party's Regional Vice-president, Metro Toronto. The following edited article originally appeared as a submission to Halton Regional Council on the subject of municipal policy options regarding Sunday shopping (November 1989).)

Once again, the subject of Sunday shopping has been placed in the limelight. With the recent applications (to allow supermarkets to open on Sundays) by the Committee for Fair Shopping to various municipalities, it is clear that our municipal representatives are as unwilling to deal with the issue as are their provincial counterparts.

Despite their protestations to the contrary, the municipalities have not been given significantly greater control over Sunday openings than they had before. For many years municipal governments have had the authority to designate "tourist areas" in which stores could open. The size and number of "tourist areas" in any municipality has always been up to municipal councils.

Politicians at both provincial and municipal levels share the same intolerant attitude towards Sunday shopping: namely, that government should decide who is open on Sundays and who is closed, not retailers and customers. Yet they are alarmingly reluctant to accept responsibility for the consequences of their attitude as they pass the buck back and forth.

As the debate has ebbed and flowed, the fundamental question involved has usually been overlooked. The root of the issue is whether Sunday closing laws are just, and if so, upon which principle of justice they are based. Examined from this perspective, Sunday closing laws reveal themselves to be fundamentally unjust, and consequently there is only one

"policy" open to anyone concerned with justice: freedom of choice.

The principle at stake in any political debate is essentially this: do we want to live in a society based on the principles of consent, or do we want to live in a society based on the principles of force? Is it morally acceptable for some of us to be able to force our choices upon others, or should all individuals be free to make their own choices for themselves?

There is only one policy open to anyone concerned with justice: freedom of choice.

These alternatives are not open to compromise. Force and consent are opposites, and therefore they cannot be mixed. Making judgements or creating laws based upon the use of force in our social and political relationships will inevitably lead to political conflicts. After all, how is it that something as innocent as shopping could ever have become a political issue?

To use force simply to attain some desired personal or social benefit is not only unjust, it is morally unprincipled. And because it's wrong, it never works.

Free governments supposedly exist to protect the natural rights of every citizen, not to grant special privileges to favoured groups. Justice demands that

WHAT A GUY



every citizen be treated equally before the law. This clearly is not the case with a law that forces most retailers to close while exempting some of their competitors. No one can deny that those businesses favoured by these exemptions have been granted an unearned advantage over others.

Sunday closing laws undermine respect for the law by creating an absurd and dangerous legal environment. Once each week the law treats people like criminals for earning an honest living that is not a crime at any other time of the week. It is no surprise that the law continues to be flouted by many retailers across the province. It is unreasonable to expect people to respect a law that does not respect them.

Sunday closing laws violate fundamental principles of private property rights. Every Sunday, selected retailers are being told that they will not be permitted to exercise their right to the peaceful use of their own property. Like homes, retail stores belong to their owners, not to anyone else.

The Charter of Rights states that freedom of religion is a "fundamental" freedom. Sunday closing laws discriminate against everyone who does not worship on Sundays. This is a terrible injustice, yet in December 1986 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that this acknowledged violation of rights was "reasonable and justifiable". Even today we see the disturbing spectacle of church groups lobbying for laws that violate their own freedom of religion!

It is important to reject the argument that anyone would be "forced" to open if present Sunday shopping restrictions were simply repealed. The fact that someone's competition is open does not "force" him to open as well. Should he not choose to open, there will be no police officers knocking at his door the next day, nor will anyone fine him for not opening his store. Such are the consequences of force. This ludicrous argument is being used to hide the truth behind who is really using force: let's face it, the retailers who don't want the law changed are simply unwilling to give their customers what they want. They recognize

that this decision has a cost, but they want to force their neighbours and competitors share that cost.

I have similarly heard it argued that retailers who sign leases with malls stipulating hours of operation are being "forced" to open when they otherwise would be closed. But this argument makes no sense at all: Since mall leases represent a contractual agreement between two parties, mall retailers are simply complying with terms to which they have voluntarily agreed. Indeed, what advantage would retailers gain from locating in a mall if each store in that mall operated on its own, non-uniform hours? If retailers don't like the terms of mall operations, no one is forcing them to sign the contracts.

This principle of private voluntary contract would be self-evident in most instances, but special interests in the Sunday shopping issue have done everything in their power to cloud the issue. For example, other terms in lease agreements require retailers to pay their rent on a specified day each month. Would it therefore be equally logical to conclude that the rental payment has been "forced" from the retailer simply because the contract requires it? Should we pass laws forbidding the payment of such rents?

Municipalities around the province, which have the authority to pass bylaws allowing retail businesses to open Sundays and holidays, now have a unique opportunity to remove all of the negative effects of the province's Sunday closing legislation. By simply passing bylaws exempting their respective jurisdictions from Sunday shopping laws, they could allow every citizen to make his or her own decision about whether or not to shop on Sundays. In this way, constituents would be able to exercise the freedom of choice that is theirs by right, free from the arbitrary whims of municipal and provincial politicians alike.

To do otherwise would suggest motives unbecoming of representatives elected in a free and democratic society. It's time to end all the municipal-provincial buck passing; the only buck being passed should be the one between retailers and their customers.

THE BUCK STOPS HERE

By --- Robert Vaughan
(Mr. Vaughan is managing editor of Consent.)

Combating inflation begins with precisely defining what it is and what it is not. Inflation is an increase in the volume of money and credit relative to available goods, resulting in higher prices. A rise in the price of consumer goods is not inflation. It is a symptom of an inflated currency.

The process of inflation relates to the economic law of supply and demand which applies every bit as much to currencies as it does to widgets. A greater supply of money decreases its value. We must therefore spend more money to buy the same amount of goods, hence higher prices.

The Central Bank is providing the government with a hidden tax.

Justifying increased interest rates to combat inflation is the result of a belief that if the cost of borrowing money is high, people won't borrow but will save and pay off their debts which will supply the banks with more money, meaning, in turn, that the chartered banks will borrow less from the Central Bank. This should also reduce consumer spending which should lower prices.

This method is correct --- to a point. People will spend less, but the money they save will go to the bank. The bank however doesn't put that money in a huge sock under a mattress. It continues to provide loans, invest, and expand operations. Money is always in circulation regardless of interest rates. It is just that in a period of high interest rates the ones spending the money are not consumers but the banks and investment brokers. Any bank which sits on its liquid assets will quickly go bankrupt.

Less Central Bank borrowing by banks should be an indication for the Bank of Canada to print less money. It doesn't, and for one reason: the government still continues to borrow money, and unlike a wise consumer, it will continue to do this regardless of the interest it must one day pay back.

Thus, the Central Bank continues to print money at a quicker pace than the expanding economy in order to provide government with a hidden tax. To add insult to injury, governments blame consumers for inflation and punish them in the form of higher interest rates on mortgages, personal loans, and credit cards, and through the loss of opportunity, jobs and progress in an economy forced to slow down.

We pay over 50% of our hard earned pay to feed the government and its debts today. I shudder to think what tax rate our children will be forced to pay.

The short term solution to inflation would be for the Central Bank to be more responsible in the printing of money, only printing sufficient supplies to keep up with the expanding economy. At present count the printing presses should be slowed down by 5.1%.

The dollar should be linked to the price of gold and the levelling forces of the market place.

The long term solution, and an admittedly radical one, is to put the production of money back where it belongs, out of the hands of government and one man at the Bank of Canada and into a privately run banking system linked with the price of gold and the levelling forces of the market place, exactly where it was long before anyone heard of inflation.

RAILROADED!

By --- Marc Emery

(Mr. Emery is a founding executive member and action director of the Freedom Party of Ontario.)

As I write this article, it is freezing cold, and I and many of my fellow inmates are losing the circulation in our feet.

There is no heat in this dim, motionless room, and we are incarcerated here without any permission to leave. Our jailer will not tell me when I will be permitted to re-enter the outside world and he can give me no news of what is going on outside my frigid little cell. The food they serve us here is cold and hard, inedible, and it is discreetly stacked up in unopened plastic containers. We are hungry, tired, and crave a friendly voice from the outside world, but we are political prisoners made of sterner stuff, and not ready to beg for mercy --- yet.

We beseech Canadians to help us.

Where are we? Romania? Beijing? Albania?

No. Even worse: We are trapped on a Toronto to London Via Rail trip!

I lined up and pre-boarded a 4:00 pm departure from Toronto at 3:30 pm. There was no heat in the train. The 4:00 pm departure finally left Toronto at 6:18 pm, a cold wait of just under three hours. The trip itself took just under three hours (usually less than two by car or bus), and still our car had no heat.

We are political prisoners made of sterner stuff, and not ready to beg for mercy--- yet.

The staff was uniformly surly and hostile, and the passengers all responded appropriately; VIA staff were heckled, booed, jeered, and cursed. No apology for the delay was offered. No courtesies or complimentary drinks were extended despite our extreme discomfort. When asked how long the delay would be, our stone-faced

VIA conductor always added "15 minutes" and it became sort of amusing to ask this every half hour or so. Weather conditions were fine, and not the cause of delays.

I asked if this rude, arrogant VIA staff behaviour was typical or whether these barbarians impersonating VIA staff were upset at losing their jobs (due to government cutbacks), but none of them on this trip were facing any imminent layoffs, so I could only conclude that this is a typical "the customer is always dirt" VIA Rail policy.

I have seen the service sector Gulag, and it is VIA!

After reading so many letters and articles on why we should "save VIA", I must ask what is there left to save and why would anyone want to save it as it is? It is a laughingstock. Six months from now, VIA will be the butt-end of jokes just like the post office has always been, much, I am sure, to the post office's delight. I have seen the service sector Gulag, and it is VIA. Let the remaining VIA rail staff lose their jobs as they so richly deserve and give them the ultimate punishment: make them get jobs in the real world, where "the customer is always right".

Hear the anguished sobs of spoiled unionized rail workers having to put "Previous work experience: VIA Rail" on their job resumes! See them face daily rejection as potential employers howl in derision! Smell the sweat of former VIA Rail workers actually working for a living! Witness former VIA Rail executives at Dale Carnegie training seminars on winning friends and serving fresh food! Learn of a de-programming "VIA-Anonymous" self-help group that assists former VIA Rail employees lead useful lives --- in the private sector where customers expect results!

"Force always attracts men of low morality." - Albert Einstein

Yes, the transition will be tough, but necessary. We must save VIA Rail workers from themselves!

Privatization of this low-rent, no-morale government sink-hole must proceed immediately if Canadians can ever expect to have any competent level of passenger rail service at all. Most of the passengers who shared our gruelling VIA

Rail ride with us swore never again to return, except perhaps to dance on VIA's grave. Politics, unions (more politics), and a rail service whose purpose in the past has been primarily a political one has finally run passenger rail transportation in Canada into the ground.

Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden, do we ever need you now!

TANK MCNAMARA



"The typical lawmaker of today is a man devoid of principle --- a mere counter in a grotesque and knavish game. If the right pressure could be applied to him he would be cheerfully in favor of polygamy, astrology or cannibalism." - H. L. Mencken

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