

Thirty Years of Environmental Politics in Canada: The “small party” Online Exhibit

Ryan O'Connor

Interest in environmental politics is at an all-time high in Canada. The Green Party of Canada, led by renowned activist Elizabeth May, received 6.78 percent of the votes cast in the 2008 federal election. Many polls suggest this figure will increase in the next election. Despite this, very little is known about the origins of environmental politics in Canada. My project aims to increase our understanding of this topic by focusing on the “small party.” The small party featured eleven candidates that contested the 18 February 1980 federal election on an anti-nuclear platform. Masterminded by Elizabeth May and drawing on the support of the Maritime Energy Coalition, the small party derived its name from E.F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* (1973). With limited resources at its disposal, the small party aimed to maximize media attention by focusing on ridings with high profile candidates. Subsequently, nine ridings were contested in Atlantic Canada, while two candidates ran in Toronto and Montreal. Although none of the candidates were elected – an outcome that the group fully anticipated – the small party has received recognition as the first “green” party established in the western hemisphere. Furthermore, in 1983 some of its candidates would co-found the Green Party of Canada.

Despite the small party's important role in the evolution of green politics in Canada, very little is known about it. I aim to rectify this by creating an online exhibit that will be completed in time to mark the group's thirtieth anniversary in February 2010. Modeled on the NiCHE online exhibit I created with Dr. Alan MacEachern, “Back to the Island: The Back-to-the-Land Movement on PEI,” the proposed project will feature a series of interviews conducted with the

small party's candidates, their campaign teams, and their supporters. Furthermore, this online exhibit will feature a narrative overview of the small party, as well as photographs and documents collected from interviewees and from various archives. I have discussed my plans with several of the small party's candidates and all, including Elizabeth May, have agreed to participate.

I believe that there is great potential for attracting attention to this project, and by extension the work of NiCHE. Given the small party's forthcoming thirtieth anniversary, as well as the lack of information available on the topic, I believe I can garner significant attention from traditional media outlets, bloggers, educators, and the general public. This belief is based on my work on the “Back to the Island” online exhibit which resulted in two articles in Prince Edward Island's largest newspaper, *The Guardian*, a CBC Radio interview, and numerous references on websites – including a hearty recommendation on writer Christopher Moore's popular blog. Given the heightened profile of environmental politics, the significance of the anniversary, and my desire to share this topic with as wide an audience as possible, I believe that this online exhibit will be a tremendous success.

I am currently completing a PhD in History at the University of Western Ontario. My dissertation is “Toronto the Green: The Origins of the Environmental Movement in Canada.” I first came across the small party while conducting research on Pollution Probe at the Archives of Ontario. A letter from Elizabeth May, dated 4 January 1980, explained the group's rationale and appealed for funding from the country's established environmental organizations. I have remained intrigued by the topic and believe that the proposed project will be the perfect avenue for addressing it.

BUDGET

\$1,500.00 – Programming
 \$ 600.00 – In-kind support
 \$ 106.05 – Return bus fare
 \$ 105.50 – Domain registration
 \$ 100.00 – Reproduction charges
 \$ 100.00 – Digital recorder
 \$ 65.00 – USB headset

I request \$2,576.55 in funding for this project. Interviews will be conducted using a digital recorder (\$100) or, via Skype using a USB headset (\$65). Reproduction costs are estimated at \$100 and will cover photographs from newspaper archives, materials from the personal collection of interviewees, and archival documents. During the forthcoming winter break I would like to examine the Maritime Energy Coalition Fonds held at the New Brunswick Provincial Archives in Fredericton. The cost of a round-trip bus ticket from my family's home in Charlottetown to Fredericton is \$106.05. I intend to program the website utilizing Omeka, a web publishing program that is used by many archivists and librarians. I am asking for \$1,500 to program this website myself based on an estimated fifty hours spent working at a rate of \$30 an hour. I rationalize this expense on two fronts. In order to complete the programming in time for an early February launch I will step down next semester from my position as a teaching assistant, where I would earn approximately this amount. Furthermore, to obtain the services of a professional designer competent with Omeka, if available, would cost significantly more. \$105.50 will register the domain name <www.smallparty.ca> for ten years. The final expense is for in-kind support from NiCHE (\$600). This includes the value of using its server for hosting the online exhibit, the use of tools available in the NiCHE office, and occasional professional advice.

BRIEF CV

Ryan O'Connor
99 Ridout Street South, Apartment 3
London, ON
N6C 3X2
reoconnor@gmail.com

Education:

Ph.D. (ABD) in History, in progress
 The University of Western Ontario, London, ON
 Thesis: "Toronto the Green: The Emergence of the Canadian Environmental Movement."
 Thesis Supervisor: Alan MacEachern

M.A. in History, 2004
 Queen's University, Kingston, ON
 Thesis: "'Shutting the Island Down': Prince Edward Island Conservatism and the 1971 National Farmers Union Highway Demonstration."
 Thesis Advisor: Peter Campbell

B.A. [Honours] in History, 2002
 University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PEI

Select Publications:

With Alan MacEachern, "Back to the Island: The Back-to-the-Land Movement on PEI." March 2009. <<http://niche.uwo.ca/backtotheisland>>

"Agrarian Protest and Provincial Politics: Prince Edward Island and the 1971 National Farmers Union Highway Demonstration," *Acadiensis* (Volume 37, Number 1, Winter/Spring 2008), pp. 31-55.

Select Conference Presentations:

"Ideology and the Environmental Movement in Canada: An Analysis of Pollution Probe, 1969-1979." World Congress of Environmental History. 8 August 2009. Copenhagen, Denmark.

"*The Air of Death* and the Origins of the Environmental Movement in Canada." 88th Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association. 25 May 2009. Ottawa, Ontario.

"Support Your Ecosystem! Documentaries, Dead Ducks, and the Origins of Pollution Probe." *Quelques arpents de neige*. 13 December 2008. Toronto, Ontario.