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In the April 23<sup>rd</sup> –29<sup>th</sup> 2005 edition of *The Economist* the editorial titled Rescuing environmentalism began as follows: “The environmental movement's foundational concepts, its method for framing legislative proposals, and its very institutions are outmoded. Today environmentalism is just another special interest.” Those damning words come not from any industry lobby or right-wing think-tank. They are drawn from “The Death of Environmentalism”, an influential essay published recently by two greens with impeccable credentials. They claim that environmental groups are politically adrift and dreadfully out of touch.

The article goes on to talk about the environmental lobby losing high profile issues such as Kyoto in the USA, drilling on the ANWAR and the failure to engage at the consumer level. It also discusses what it sees as the three things that must happen for environmentalism to succeed: a proper price of the environmental commodity, proper information to fix this price, and finally the embracing of the cost-benefit model as it relates to and includes environmentalism. You may note that CAPP took a similar position when negotiated carbon credit pricing for the industry.

It is an interesting article from the standpoint of cherry picking the concepts and then seeing how they apply to Canada. As it is clearly an oncoming issue in our political world and our challenges with NIMBY and BANANA (see my past month's article), it is a worthwhile topic for discussion in this column. I like to consider the seismic industry as “practical environmentalists”. We lead all other sectors in reducing our impact environmentally and our people are forever trying to lessen impacts while at the same time keep our people safe. As with CAPP's issue of “right of access”, ours is the environment. We must convince the public and our politicians that we can and do create a sustainably based model of the environment in our work practices. The challenge with this are the long lines of seismic of old that will exist as a scar on the earth's surface for the next 100 years. A picture is worth 1000 words.

Nonetheless it is of interest to look at the environmental movement within Canada. We have seen the sprouting of a left leaning party in many jurisdictions called The Green Party. They have ran in the last couple of elections so therefore we can track their coming of age basically over the past decade. Environmentalism in itself has been around for many years and as it grows in popularity so has its funding base. Today many of the big names are well funded and are well schooled in using the media, using political tides and in using the courts. The 3 L's – (en)Lighten, Lobby, and Litigate. The trouble is that even though the consumer may feel empathy from a media standpoint they rarely back it from the wallet. Consumers will not make choices on an individual basis that costs them money (i.e. Rick Mercer's 1-Ton Challenge – Give it a try!). Therefore we recognize that issues such as these must be legislated in order to be accepted by the public (i.e. lowering car emissions at the manufacturer's level). However governments are extremely cautious when it comes to increasing direct costs to the consumer (i.e. Ontario's retraction of its electricity deregulation in 2002 and Ernie Eves' subsequent lowering of the consumer

electricity price below market prices to 4.3 cents per kilowatt hour). Politicians must walk the unenviable tightrope between being seen as “good for the environment” and as not hitting the consumer’s wallet in a direct fashion.

The Green Party across Canadian jurisdictions has seen a steady climb over the past year in politics. In Alberta the Greens were polling some 8 to 10 % of the popular vote but ended with about 3 % in the 2004 election. In the 2004 Federal election the Greens came away with about 4.3 % nationally. Highs in BC in the area of 13 % for the 2001 election and the polls have suggested they remain in the 12 to 15 % range for the 2005 election. Nonetheless this popularity has not translated into any seats in any jurisdiction in Canada (at the time I write this). One of the key elements to this is the fact that the mainstream parties have all dipped their toes into environmentalism. Ten years ago, environmentalism was clearly a fringe issue whereas today it is recognized as one of the top media issues along with Health and Taxes.

The consumer – Joe and Jane Public – do not tend to support these issues monetarily. They demand cheap energy prices so such things as wind power is a nice concept for the future but too expensive for today. They also support things such as wind power in concept but once again “not in my backyard” (NIMBY). We have seen windmill concepts rejected in the BC Juan de Fuca Strait and even here in Alberta near parks when the geographic area of the windmill farm is seen to be visually defiling to the aesthetics of the view.

Environmentalism must reflect more of the core values of the consumer – a mixture of environment and economics if you will. We have seen some movement in this fashion. There has been a change in their mind set on nuclear power generation, which is statistically very safe and has no greenhouse gas emissions. We have seen some movement towards acceptance of government incentives as ways to change consumer and/or industrial behaviour. We have seen some engagement with industry and with government in cooperative fashions rather than in confrontational ones.

Our world is an interesting place. As we make choices and decisions in one area, these have unforeseen consequences in another area. Humans are indicative of this complex model and with rarely having the big picture view are doomed to suffer the inevitable unforeseen consequences. Experience as it relates to humankind is open to interpretation.

From the Thursday Files:

I came across this quote yesterday and I thought to myself: wow this was so true when it was made, and even today it knocks the proverbial nail on the head. Seems like there are way too many people ready to take the credit for only the things that work out. Especially politicians. Ha Ha Ha!

*My grandfather once told me that there were two kinds of people: those who do the work and those who take the credit. He told me to try to be in the first group; there was much less competition.*

***-Indira Gandhi***