

# The First Green Wave

## Pollution Probe and the Origins of Environmental Activism in Ontario

RYAN O'CONNOR

FOREWORD BY GRAEME WYNN



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## Praise for *The First Green Wave*

Canada's environmental movement has a rich and significant history but has very few historians who have taken the time to chronicle and preserve that history. In this lively account, Ryan O'Connor has contributed enormously toward remedying that gap. Pollution Probe was one of the very first of Canada's environmental groups. Those early activists charted a course that many still follow – and more should."

– ELIZABETH MAY, OC, Leader of the Green Party of Canada

O'Connor's work provides crucial insights into the origins of one of the key organizations in the modern environmental movement. It is a must-read for any student of environmental policy and politics in Canada.

– MARK S. WINFIELD is a professor in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University and the author of *Blue-Green Province: The Environment and the Political Economy of Ontario*

Ryan O'Connor has not only captured the facts regarding the early modern environmental movement in Canada, but the spirit of those days as well. For me that spirit will always be reflected in the image of my best friend and founder of Pollution Probe, Tony Barrett, wearing an army helmet and headset, fiddling with a military switching device he installed on his phone, and shouting "Incoming! Incoming!" I have often been asked whether I'm not a little embarrassed about those early days. My answer: "Never. We were right about absolutely every issue we tackled and have since been proven so." A breezy read, for seminal times.

– MONTE HUMMEL, OC, President Emeritus, World Wildlife Fund Canada

*The First Green Wave* is a deeply researched, fine grained, nuanced history of Canada's early environmental movement. Ryan O'Connor convincingly demonstrates that organizations such as Toronto's Pollution Probe pioneered a distinct form of regionally focused, politically centrist environmentalism that reflected Canada's political, geographic, and social realities. It is a fine contribution to the growing body of literature on this important topic.

- FRANK ZELKO is a professor in the Department of History at the University of Vermont and the author of *Make It a Green Peace! The Rise of Countercultural Environmentalism*

Based on a wealth of research, *The First Green Wave* provides a valuable contribution to the history of Canada's environmental movement. O'Connor deftly examines – often through the voices of key participants – the birth and changing fortunes of Pollution Probe. This is a fascinating account of a social movement, borne of the cultural ferment of the 1960s, and sustained by the pragmatic cooperation of student and professional activists, scientific experts, the media, and business interests. Read O'Connor's book: "Do it"!

- JOHN F.M. CLARK is the director of the Institute for Environmental History and a lecturer in the School of History at the University of St. Andrews

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**Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication**

O'Connor, Ryan, author

The first green wave : pollution probe and the origins of environmental activism in Ontario / Ryan O'Connor.

(Nature, history, society)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-0-7748-2808-6 (bound). – ISBN 978-0-7748-2810-9 (pdf). –

ISBN 978-0-7748-2811-6 (epub)

1. Environmentalism – Ontario – History – 20th century. 2. Pollution prevention – Ontario – History – 20th century. 3. Ontario – Environmental conditions – History – 20th century. I. Title. II. Series: Nature, history, society

GEI99.C3O26 2015

333.720971309'045

C2014-905839-X

C2014-905840-3

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Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

Cover illustration: This photograph was taken in Toronto's High Park in conjunction with the launch of Pollution Probe's namesake publication, which was released by New Press in 1970. In tree (left to right): Jack Passmore, Stanley Zlotkin, Paul Tomlinson, Rob Mills, Varda Burstyn, unidentified child, Terry Alden (standing in tree), Monte Hummel, Tony Barrett, Peter Middleton, Brian Kelly, James Bacque (publisher, New Press), and Christopher Plowright. Standing in front of the tree is Donald Chant. *Courtesy of Merle Chant.*

UBC Press

The University of British Columbia

2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

[www.ubcpress.ca](http://www.ubcpress.ca)

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## FOREWORD

# Yogi Berra, William Wordsworth, and Canadian Environmentalism

by Graeme Wynn

ACCORDING TO BASEBALL GREAT Yogi Berra, watching teammates Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris hit back-to-back home runs, game after game, for the New York Yankees in the early 1960s was like déjà vu all over again. The phrase – one of many “Yogiisms” that led *The Economist* to recognize Berra, in 2005, as the “Wisest Fool of the Past 50 Years” – springs to mind as I read Ryan O’Connor’s *The First Green Wave* – not because this story has been told before – it has not – but because so much of this book deals with times, places, and events that I recall.<sup>1</sup>

Pollution was in the air when I began my academic career in 1968. Late that year, as I settled in to my MA program at the University of Toronto, the release of the Hall Commission report on *The Air of Death*, a television program first aired on CBC in 1967, re-animated discussion about the accuracy of the documentary’s claims. As debate raged over Hall’s critical findings, Larry Gosnell and Stanley Burke, the producer and narrator of the controversial film, showed their work on the university campus. Once again, viewers saw images of black smoke belching from an industrial plant and heard the grave, familiar voice of CBC television’s national news anchorman intone: “Every day your lungs inhale fifteen thousand quarts of air and poison.” Continuing, Burke drove home the frightening message: “You breathe sulphur dioxide, which erodes stone. Benzopyrene makes cancer. Carbon monoxide impairs the mind ... Death has been gathering in the air of every Canadian city. Poisons continue to accumulate and you must keep breathing.”<sup>2</sup>

Within days, Sherry Brydson, the editor of the University of Toronto student newspaper, reflected on the implications of the Gosnell-Burke documentary in three articles in the *Varsity* – the first of which asked: “Pollution: Is There a Future for Our Generation?”<sup>3</sup> Within weeks, an organization called Pollution Probe began to make its presence evident on campus. Because their offices (first in the cramped quarters of the *Varsity* and then in the Ramsey Wright building) were only a stone’s throw from Sidney Smith Hall where Geography was located, their existence and activities were impossible for me to miss. Later in 1969, mere weeks after I completed requirements for the MA, Pollution Probe garnered national attention by staging a funeral for the Don River, the unusual event with which O’Connor begins his book.

A few years later, while in the Maritime provinces pursuing my doctoral research, I encountered one of the most redoubtable of Canadian heroes in the ongoing war against pollution – the everyday, everywhere terror that threatened our way of life. This was Captain Enviro, summoned from the fertile imaginations of Robin Edmiston (writer) and Owen McCarron (illustrator and owner of Halifax-based Comic Book World) at the behest of the environment ministers of the three provinces. According to the garishly illustrated, eponomously named comic book that recounted Enviro’s achievements, King Sewage III and his people on the planet Polluto, located millions of miles from earth, faced a crisis. They were endangered by the spread of cleanliness through their territory. Anxious, King Sewage dispatched three trusty lieutenants to find a new home for the Pollutians. Earth seemed to offer decent prospects, so Sludge, Smog, and Slime descended on the disgustingly clean and beautiful Maritime Provinces to take them for their own. There, however, they met our superhero, who looked like a humble sanitation worker but possessed extraordinary powers that enabled him to survive the effects of a magic mind pollutant administered by the Pollutians, stop the polluting rampage of the filthy fiends from afar, and remind everyone of the need for constant effort to keep the region “Land, Air and Water Pollution-free.”<sup>4</sup>

As I recall, and O’Connor demonstrates, only a small fraction of the University of Toronto’s 25,000 students were sufficiently moved by Brydson’s words to write the *Varsity* or attend the meetings from which Pollution Probe emerged. But many more realized that there was something amiss with the air we breathed and perhaps the water we drank and began to ponder the nature of things to come. Others were angered that the university chancellor was a director of the company that operated the fertilizer plant that *The Air of Death* had indicted for poisoning the

environment around Dunnville, Ontario. These were heady days in which to be a student. Controversies, protests, and proto-revolutions vied for attention on the Toronto campus as they did on many others, and whether it was spawned by American involvement in Vietnam, the power of the military-industrial complex in the United States, a conviction that mass consumption had run out of control, or more specific concerns about the manipulation of authority and the pervasiveness of pollution, there was widespread concern about the state of the world. But there was also a strong sense of liberation, of the democratization of power, and of new possibilities as students challenged university authorities to implement more democratic governance and more open curricula, and society to change course. Or as the English Romantic poet William Wordsworth had it in “The French Revolution as It Appeared to Enthusiasts at Its Commencement”: “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!”<sup>5</sup>

Yet, I come to *The First Green Wave* with a sense of trepidation. There is something disconcerting for the historical scholar about revisiting the scenes of one’s youth through others’ depictions of them. Memories and interpretations seem to differ, meanings to shift, and old verities to crumble. Well I remember the astonishment I felt some years ago, when I discovered that an oft-cited expert source of information in a well-regarded doctoral dissertation on the contamination of the Great Lakes was one of my graduate student contemporaries. Him? An authority? How could this be? We make stories of our lives. Others, fellow travellers on parts of our journeys, have their own stories about those points where paths and memories intersect, shaped as ours are, by events before and after, the search for significance and coherence, and perhaps a desire to present a certain face to the world.<sup>6</sup> Then there are historians, magpie-like collectors of shiny objects from the past, who choose and display those objects in their own stories about times/places/events because they fit, or hold together, a particular view of things. “Oh! Pleasant exercise of hope and joy!” (Wordsworth again).<sup>7</sup> How then should I engage O’Connor’s interpretation of a thin slice from my own past, his interpretation of a burnished fragment from a rich and oft-recalled period? Perhaps simply by recognizing that memories are fickle, that histories are the creations of their authors (rather than mirrors of a fixed reality) and that Yogi Berra knew what he meant, or meant what he knew, when he said: “You can observe a lot just by watching.”<sup>8</sup>

Ryan O’Connor, a young scholar whose environmental sensibilities were forged on Prince Edward Island in the 1990s – when acid rain and

ozone depletion, major international issues, were the focus of concern – comes to the subject of this book neither as participant in, nor observer of, the events of which he writes, but as an historian. This gives him a certain distance – greater than mine – from his subject, and he has written what is, in many ways, a very traditional history tracing the rise, and changing fortunes, of a single organization through some two decades. He has fulfilled the historian's scholarly obligation to search out and examine a wide range of primary documents, and he has interviewed key participants in the events he describes. From these sources, O'Connor has constructed an accessible narrative that traces the story of Pollution Probe's emergence and evolution in an engaging manner.

This is an important contribution in its own right. Remarkably, given the considerable volume of writing about Greenpeace, the almost contemporary ENGO that emerged in Vancouver, Toronto's earliest environmental organizations have received little attention from scholars, and perhaps in consequence, general histories of the 1960s in Canada place far more emphasis on the social than the environmental upheavals of that tumultuous long decade.<sup>9</sup> Thus *The First Green Wave* offers a new and interesting story, well told and nicely amplified in the endnotes, many of which add intriguing facets to the central text. Simply put, this book is a significant addition to the literature on Canada in the second half of the twentieth century.

The main lines of O'Connor's account can be summarized thus. Pollution Probe emerged from the commotion generated by *The Air of Death* and subsequent efforts to question the accuracy of that documentary. It was a grass-roots, student-led movement that won important support from a cluster of similarly concerned university faculty members. Those involved in the organization in the early days spanned the political spectrum, but most of the group's key decision-makers were "pragmatic centrists." They endeavoured to establish good working relationships with the business community and politicians, even as the organization developed its reputation as an environmental stakeholder representing the interests of the environment and "the public" of Ontario.

Active, energetic, committed, and skilful in drawing support, Pollution Probe's founders quickly achieved both visibility and success.<sup>10</sup> By the end of 1970, the group had over 1,500 members and had mounted effective campaigns against the pollution of the Great Lakes by phosphates, the air by a 700-foot high "superstack" proposed for a local power-generating plant, highway verges by litter, and cottage country by sewage and gasoline exhaust. It had also published a 200-page guide to living an environmentally

friendly life. Pollution Probe affiliates began to proliferate, across Ontario, east into the Maritimes, and west onto the Prairies and were joined by offshoot organizations such as the Canadian Association on the Human Environment and the Canadian Environmental Law Association. By 1972, Probe had established teams to organize and address their activities and concerns across a range of fronts, which included education, energy and resources, recycling, and land use. There was also an Action Team, to organize high-profile events; and a Caravan Team, to take Pollution Probe's message across the province.

An economic recession in 1973 brought a chill to all aspects of the environmental movement as politicians, business leaders, and the public alike made the reinvention of economic growth a major priority. Buffeted by circumstances to the point of financial disarray, Pollution Probe was forced to adapt – and shrink. A focus on toxic waste issues and the safety of the drinking water supply brought the organization out of the doldrums in the early 1980s. That decade brought success – even if somewhat indirectly in the development of Pollution Probe's long-standing arguments for recycling into a very successful blue box program by Resource Integration Systems and Laidlaw Waste Management Systems – and controversy – over support for Loblaw's new biodegradable disposable diapers – to the organization. But the landscape of environmental activism was changing away from the local issues that were the main focus of its early protests to the transnational problems that drew attention – and spawned different, pan-Canadian activist organizations – in the last decade or two of the century. Pollution Probe survived into the new millennium and continues, yet with a much narrower focus – and far less name recognition – than in days of yore.

These are the bald “facts” elaborated on, contextualized, and interpreted in the pages that follow. They are in some simple sense the “truth” about Pollution Probe's history, the bare bones fleshed out in O'Connor's telling of a story that one brief account presents as a tale of “an exuberant, attention-grabbing, loosely structured collective of young environmental activists” who believed that a little “humour never hurts,” who married guerrilla theatre with science “to raise public awareness and push for change,” and whose legacy is an organization working “quietly behind the scenes.”

But it is wise to pause here, to ask what histories such as *The First Green Wave* really do. Surely it is more than grubbing up relevant pieces of information and ordering them chronologically. Several paragraphs above, I suggested that O'Connor's youthfulness endowed him with a certain perspective on the subject of his book, a “distance” greater than

mine because I was caught up in the stream of time from which Pollution Probe emerged. This was a deliberate nod to a commonplace of historical scholarship that “truth is the daughter of time.” I was invoking the notion of “historical distance”: the idea – as the great Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm once expressed it – that “retrospectiveness is the secret weapon of the historian,” because it allows him or her to see events in proper proportion and to assess their implications accurately.<sup>11</sup> As an undergraduate, I was instructed in the implied corollary: that it was impossible to study history, properly construed, of the period subsequent to one’s birth (some sticklers drew the line well before that) – and that to consider anything of more recent vintage was to dabble in sociology, politics, or some other such amusement. But the last fifty years have taught us many things, and few would hold to this ancient verity today. Rather, we are inclined to say, as has Canadian intellectual historian Mark Salber Phillips, that “what histories ‘most manifestly’ do is to mediate the relationship between the now of the present and the then of both past and future.”<sup>12</sup>

Seen in this light, *The First Green Wave* is a timely and valuable product of its time. It looks back to one of the pivotal moments in the development of Canadian environmentalism when Pollution Probe emerged from a groundswell of concern about the future of life on earth and exercised a great deal of influence, with other important environmental non-governmental organizations, on the development of environmental policy. It does so from a now-point in which there is growing fear (among environmentalists at least) that their influence on policy is waning. Despite the “Inconvenient Truths” marshalled and promulgated by Al Gore, despite glacial retreat, escalating rates of ice-sheet melt, rising CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the atmosphere, and repeated warnings that anthropogenic climate change is a real and present danger, rates of fossil-fuel consumption continue to rise, and many governments are unwilling to sacrifice (as they typically see it) economy for ecology.<sup>13</sup> All of this begs big questions about the future of the planet, prompts introspection about the current tactics of environmentalists, and leads one to wonder whether the past can provide the present with lessons that might help secure the future.

Does *The First Green Wave* offer anything that might help us to address these pressing concerns? First it offers hope. Like all good historical scholarship, this book reveals that history is contingent – which is to say that outcomes depend on particular prior circumstances (which are in turn the result of antecedent conditions, and so on, ad infinitum). Had something, anything, anywhere along the line been different, this or that particular historical outcome might not have been what it was. Had Sherry Brydson

spent reading week 1969 in Florida rather than Toronto, there might have been no Pollution Probe and the 5 million or so Ontario households that participate in the bluebox recycling program today might be generating three times the garbage they currently contribute to the province's waste stream. The world is, and always has been, a wonderfully interconnected, interdependent place. Contingency makes it highly unlikely that history will repeat itself, but acknowledging its importance encourages us to think deeply about the past, present and future, and their interconnectedness. Acknowledging contingency also creates room to believe that things can be different and reminds us that even small individual actions can have large effects in shaping human (and indeed environmental) affairs.

One of the central motifs of O'Connor's story is that Pollution Probe struggled to retain its relevance and influence as the world and the nature of its most pressing environmental problems changed. The organization began with a strong commitment to local action. The dirty Don River, the belching Robert Hearn superstack, befouled recreational lakes, litter-strewn highways – these were all issues with evident causes and tangible consequences that ordinary people might take action to resist or prevent. Pollution Probe found its cause and made its name addressing what students of pollution call end-of-pipe issues. They fit like a glove with the great environmental mantra of the 1960s and 1970s: “Think globally, act locally.” In the 1980s and 1990s, however, the hot-button issues were acid rain – which seemed to come from the clouds (shifting nebulous affairs that drifted in from afar) and fall everywhere – and the so-called ozone hole(s) – far away, undetectable to the human eye, and reportedly caused by the release of invisible molecules (CFCs). These threats, O'Connor suggests, posed a different order of problem, one with which Pollution Probe was not well attuned to deal and that spawned new environmental organizations given to different forms of campaigning.

Thinking about these developments as part of the continuum between past and future may provide helpful perspective on responses to perhaps the most pressing of current environmental concerns: global climate change. Like the hot-button issues of the 1990s, this is a problem that is at once everywhere and nowhere, real yet invisible. The scientific evidence of anthropogenic climate change is unimpeachable, but tangible everyday experience offers no convincing confirmation: bitter winter weather, harsher than any in recent memory, can be accounted for in ways consistent with the atmospheric models of climate scientists but the abstract notion of global warming fails to cohere with the experience of those consigned to shovelling snow late into the spring. Yet, the Montreal Protocol

of 1987, a decisive step forward, addressing the ozone hole issue by controlling the use of CFCs, held while the Kyoto Protocol has proven ineffective in limiting atmospheric emissions. Do we need a new approach to campaigning on climate change? Is there a scale question to be addressed here? The success of the Montreal Protocol turned in large part on the availability and relatively low cost of replacements for CFCs. Is the current, generally tardy, response to warnings about impending climate (and ecosystem) tipping points a reflection of the expense and inutility of replacements for the gasoline-powered automobile? For fossil fuel generated electricity? For heavy dependence on global trade? Is the problem in the pocketbook of individuals, or is it a tragedy of the commons scenario: Why deprive oneself of convenience and comfort while others (people/nations) who refuse to do so reap benefits, and collapse or catastrophic change is unavoidable in the (not-so-distant) end? Are we looking at policy failure, corporate greed, the triumph of particular ideologies? Ultimately, the answer is, most probably, a combination of all of these things and more.

How then to move forward? Ryan O'Connor's history gives no direct answer, but for those interested in the Canadian environmental movement and the future of Canadian and global environments, one of the most intriguing and important claims of *The First Green Wave* is its contention that Pollution Probe influenced environmental policy development in Ontario from the 1970s by inserting itself into the existing bipartite model of policy formulation. On this account, environmental policy was traditionally developed in "private negotiations between regulators and firms," between the government and business.<sup>14</sup> Beginning as early as 1971, representatives from Pollution Probe were invited to serve on municipal and provincial policy committees as recognized stakeholders on behalf of the environment. This was possible, argues O'Connor, because the pragmatic centrists in Pollution Probe sought from the outset to establish a working, rather than adversarial, relationship with bureaucrats and businessmen, and this stance ultimately won the group the respect that made many of its accomplishments possible.

This is no small thing, especially in comparison with the history of environmental activism on Canada's west coast, where confrontation between business, government, and environmentalists was the norm through the 1990s. Not for nothing were the protests at Clayoquot Sound in 1993 dubbed the "War in the Woods." Disruptive actions, civil disobedience, staged arrests, and carefully prepared news-bites were the stock-in-trade of environmental activists ("protestors") in British Columbia and many other parts of the country from the 1960s. Not until the final stages

of the Clayoquot confrontation was this approach nudged aside by a more collaborative, respectful form of engagement and bargaining involving government, corporate, indigenous, and environmental interests.

Reaching this point was not easy, as the parties involved had demonized one another consistently. It was also, at least in one telling, substantially contingent on the chance meeting of two forceful antagonists from the corporate and environmentalist sides of the struggle in a Vancouver neighbourhood, where they recognized each other as mothers with babies, rather than as sworn enemies; as mothers they had shared interests and thus found common ground. Meeting later for coffee, “mom to mom, person to person,” in the words of prominent activist Tzeporah Berman, “they saw each other as people for the first time,” and the result was “a breakthrough for forest politics in Canada.”<sup>15</sup> To make a complex story simple, this shift in consciousness not only helped to resolve immediate tensions between arch-enemies, it laid the foundations for the Great Bear Rainforest Agreement, reached early in the new millennium by consultation and consensus among First Nations, government, environmental groups, and industry leaders and widely touted as breaking new ground in efforts to tackle “the highly complex and critical problems societies are increasingly coming to face around the globe.”<sup>16</sup> If there is a lesson in all of this, and the pages that follow, it may be that hasty judgments, dismissive labeling, and a failure to listen all get in the way of solutions – or that inclusive, open, and respectful discussions in which evidence trumps ideology and conciliation is valued over confrontation, offer the best prospect of realizing a just and lasting future for both humans and nature.<sup>17</sup>

Those who remember Pollution Probe’s crowded makeshift offices at 91 St. George Street might find a certain poignancy in the arc traced by O’Connor’s history of the organization. Recalling a movement spawned by a combination of youthful enthusiasm and noble idealism (albeit tinged with a certain anxiety) that quickly achieved great things, they might well lament how times have changed. To read *The First Green Wave* is to learn, after all, of a once enormously influential, widely recognized, and youthfully exuberant organization pummelled by changing circumstances that has slipped into relative invisibility in the landscape of early twenty-first century Canadian environmentalism, its place, and this new scene, symbolized by its current headquarters location in a suburban Toronto office tower.

Yet, this is too forlorn a view. Pollution Probe survives, and despite scant knowledge of its origins and achievements among current staffers, and the relative narrowness of its contemporary agenda, it remains politically

non-partisan and committed to building partnerships among stakeholders to address important environmental concerns. This is not failure. Nor, though, is it necessarily the future. Environmental problems, socio-economic and political circumstances, and the nature of environmental activism have all been transformed over the last half-century, and there is every prospect that they will be again. With Ryan O'Connor's full and valuable account of Pollution Probe's past in hand, we are surely better equipped to look back as we go forward, not in anger, nor with any sense of nostalgia, but certainly with a firmer understanding of the contingent quality of human affairs, and the hope that flows therefrom: that it is possible for individuals, and groups of like-minded souls, to change the world.

Looking back on the events of 1789 in France, Wordsworth marvelled at how "the inert / Were roused" and both "the meek and lofty" found "helpers to their heart's desire," as they were summoned to "exercise their skill,"

Not in Utopia, subterranean fields,  
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!  
But in the very world, which is the world  
Of all of us, – the place where in the end  
We find our happiness, or not at all!

Pollution Probe may have changed and blended into a landscape in which there is rather less wild-eyed environmental activism than once there was, but as that wisest of fools once said: "It ain't over 'til it's over."<sup>18</sup>

# Acknowledgments

THIS BOOK IS THE PRODUCT of years of research, writing, and rewriting. My deepest appreciation is extended to Alan MacEachern, who provided guidance from the get-go. He saw the potential when I presented the idea of working on “green politics” in Canada, and provided the necessary support throughout the research and writing stages. Roger Hall likewise provided support throughout the process, and, when necessary, helped open doors to private collections and interviews. They, along with Finis Dunaway, Jason Gilliland, and George Warecki, read earlier drafts of this manuscript and provided many helpful comments and suggestions for improvement. I would also like to thank Stephen Bocking, Claire Campbell, Peter Campbell, Ian Dowbiggin, Edward MacDonald, Robert MacDougall, Bill Turkel, and Robert Wardhaugh. You all helped with the evolution of this project and my development as an historian. Thank you.

Staff at the University of Western Ontario’s D.B. Weldon Library, the Archives of Ontario, Library and Archives Canada, and the University of Toronto Archives helped me find the research materials I needed. My appreciation is also extended to Michael Moir and the staff at the Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections at York University, David Sharron at the Brock University Special Collections and Archives, and Jessica Blackwell at the University of Waterloo Special Collections and Archives for their help securing images for this book.

This book draws extensively on oral interviews that I conducted with members of Ontario’s environmental community and their contemporaries. I wish to extend a sincere thank you to each person who shared their memories with me. Of special note, I would like to thank Merle Chant

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and Peter Middleton, who shared my enthusiasm for this subject and helped me track down veterans of the environmental movement in three different countries. In addition, I was granted special access to private papers by Merle Chant and Denise Gosnell, while Patty Chilton and Bob Oliver provided access to Pollution Probe's internal archives.

Financial support from the University of Western Ontario, a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship, and several Ontario Graduate Scholarships, made the research behind this book possible. I would like to thank the following, whose generous contributions helped defray the costs of publication: Sherry Brydson, David Crombie, David Estrin, Monte Hummel, the Love family, Peter Middleton, Robert Mills, Terry O'Malley, Ann Rounthwaite, Mark Rudolph, Lynn Spink, and David Wood, as well as the Pollution Probe Foundation for its administrative support. Additional financial support was provided by the Symons Trust Fund for Canadian Studies.

A version of chapter one first appeared as "An Ecological Call to Arms: *The Air of Death* and the Origins of Environmental Activism in Ontario" in *Ontario History* 105:1 (2013). I would like to thank the Ontario Historical Society for granting permission to republish the article here. I appreciate the comments I received while preparing this article, as well as the comments I received on chapter drafts and conference presentations.

Working with UBC Press has been a positive experience. My appreciation goes out to Randy Schmidt, Megan Brand, and Graeme Wynn. Thank you for your support and professionalism throughout this process. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers, whose comments have made for a better book.

Research trips were made possible by friends and family who opened their homes to me, including Mike O'Connor and Amanda Firth, Jenia O'Connor and Mark Moore, and Ryan MacDonald. Friends within the University of Western Ontario history department shared their valuable insight, provided advice, and made life more interesting. At the risk of exclusion, I would like to thank Sandra Ceccomancini and Adrian Gamble, Adrian Ciani, Bill Couchie, Mark Eaton, Devon Elliott, Michelle Hamilton, Rollen Lee, Jeremy Marks, Forrest Pass, Andrew Ross, and Carly Simpson. My deepest gratitude is extended to my girlfriend, Kate Cruikshank, who has provided support and a measure of calm throughout the publication process. Thank you for your patience. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, George and Linda O'Connor, for their ongoing support, and for instilling in me a love of learning and an appreciation for the natural world.

# Abbreviations

ACE	Advisory Committee on Energy
CAHE	Canadian Association on the Human Environment
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CCAR	Canadian Coalition on Acid Rain
CELA	Canadian Environmental Law Association
CELRF	Canadian Environmental Law Research Foundation
CFCs	chlorofluorocarbons
COPE	Council Organized to Protect the Environment
CRTC	Canadian Radio-Television Commission
EMR	Department of Energy, Mines and Resources
ENGO	environmental nongovernmental organization
ERCO	Electric Reduction Company
GASP	Group Action to Stop Pollution
IFF	Is Five Foundation
LIP	Local Initiatives Program
MTARC	Metropolitan Toronto Airport Review Committee
NFB	National Film Board
OAPEC	Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries
OWRC	Ontario Water Resources Commission
RCO	Recycling Council of Ontario
RIS	Resource Integration Systems
TZPG	Toronto Zero Population Growth
UCC	Upper Canada College
WWFC	World Wildlife Fund Canada



# The First Green Wave



# Introduction

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IT WAS AN UNUSUAL SIGHT. On Sunday, 16 November 1969, the members of Pollution Probe, an upstart group of environmental activists, gathered to orchestrate a funeral for the Don River. Beginning with a solemn hundred-car procession from the University of Toronto's St. George campus, the mourners disembarked at the Prince Edward Viaduct. Standing on the banks of the Don, a crowd of two hundred watched as a coffin – representing the waterway – was carried out of a makeshift hearse. A forty-minute ceremony was conducted by a university chaplain. While expressive griever, some of them clad in period costume, wailed, descriptions of the river's former grandeur were read aloud. As the event came to a conclusion, a Pollution Probe member portraying the Dickensian industrialist Simon Greed, decked out in top hat and tailcoat, began to extoll the virtues of unhindered economic progress. In a moment of poetic justice, Greed was pied in the face, a wreath was placed in the river, and the mourners dispersed.

Theatrical events such as this have become routine within the environmental movement. International organizations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have full-time staff dedicated to dreaming up publicity stunts sufficiently novel to capture the interest of an increasingly indifferent public. By contrast, Pollution Probe's event had little trouble garnering attention. Occurring at a time before environmental protests became commonplace, the mock funeral attracted the attention of media outlets throughout the city and across Canada.

My environmental consciousness developed in the early 1990s. As a youth, I was well acquainted with the dangers of ozone depletion, acid rain, habitat destruction, and resource exhaustion. Recycling programs were available in most Canadian cities, environmental studies programs were offered at numerous universities, and environmental journalism had become firmly established. Environmental issues had elbowed their way onto the political agenda, and, although it would not enjoy any measure of political success for many years, the seeds of the Green Party of Canada had been sown. Just twenty-five years earlier, none of these features were present. As Monte Hummel, a former Pollution Probe employee and the current President Emeritus of World Wildlife Fund Canada (WWFC), has characterized the domestic scene, “in 1969 there were no ministers of the environment, no environmental protection acts, and pollution was a brand new word.”<sup>1</sup>

Canada’s environmental activist community developed rapidly. Only a handful of organizations existed in 1969, but by 1971 they operated in all major, and most minor, cities across the country.<sup>2</sup> These activists have played an important role in raising and addressing issues concerning air and water quality, the use of diminishing resources, toxic substances, and energy alternatives. Nonetheless, very little has been written on the origins and development of environmental activism in Canada. Doug Macdonald, G. Bruce Doern, and Thomas Conway have examined the governmental response to Canadians’ environmental concerns. Jennifer Read, Arn Keeling, and Mark J. McLaughlin demonstrate the inculcation of environmental values among Canadians during the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. Philip Van Huizen’s work highlights the role of cross-border dam projects in shaping British Columbians’ ecological values, as well as the provincial government’s efforts to cultivate an environmentally friendly image. And an entire cottage industry has developed for publications concerning Greenpeace, the internationally renowned environmental activist organization that originated in British Columbia in 1971. As Frank Zelko has established, however, Greenpeace never had a domestic Canadian focus, and its rapid evolution into an international organization suggests that it is hardly an ideal organization to study in order to understand the nature of Canada’s environmental movement.<sup>3</sup>

This book examines the origins and development of environmental activism in Toronto, home to Canada’s earliest and most dynamic community of environmental nongovernmental organizations (ENGOS). At the heart of the story is Pollution Probe. Founded in February 1969 by

students and faculty at the University of Toronto, Pollution Probe quickly established itself as a leading force within the nascent Canadian environmental community.<sup>4</sup> Emphasizing the core ideals of sound science, public engagement, and an effective utilization of the media, as well as the necessity of accessing the corridors of power, it met with success in its first year of operation, which saw well-publicized confrontations with Toronto's City Hall over the reckless use of pesticides, with Ontario Hydro over air pollution, and with the detergent industry over the phosphate-caused pollution of the Great Lakes. These actions, which inspired the emergence of Pollution Probe affiliates across Canada, were just the beginning for the organization. In later years, it addressed a wide range of issues, from waste reduction to its pioneering work on energy policy and inner-city environmental justice, often pushing the boundaries of what was considered a matter of environmental concern. Pollution Probe would also serve as a mentor within the Canadian environmental movement, fostering the growth of additional institutions while also sharing its expertise on effective lobbying and fundraising with other organizations, such as British Columbia's Scientific Pollution and Environmental Control Society (later renamed the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation) and Halifax's Ecology Action Centre.

Pollution Probe provides insight into the early history of the Canadian environmental movement. In the United States, the environmental activist organizations evolved from existing conservation groups. This came as a result, beginning in the 1950s, of a gradual infusion of ecological values and a newfound activist orientation in groups such as the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society. Furthermore, the old-line conservation groups used their large membership bases and financial clout to launch new ENGOs such as the Environmental Defense Fund (1967) and the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund (1971). As Christopher Bosso explains succinctly, "the founders and patrons of most environmental advocacy organizations [in the United States] were other organizations." This scenario did not repeat itself in Canada. Although Canada was home to numerous conservation organizations, including the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (1931), the British Columbia Sportsmen's Council (1951), the Conservation Council of Ontario (1952), and the Nature Conservancy of Canada (1962), these groups were highly regionalized and lacked the deep pockets of their American cousins. Furthermore, although George Warecki notes that an ecological consciousness had crept into the Ontario conservation movement during the late 1960s, by that point the first Canadian ENGOs had

already begun to organize.<sup>6</sup> Thus, rather than evolving from pre-existing conservation organizations, Canadian ENGOs such as Pollution Probe appeared on the scene almost spontaneously.

The Canadian ENGOs that emerged during the late 1960s and 1970s were regional entities. This further differentiated the Canadian environmental movement from that of the United States, which, despite a multitude of region-specific organizations, was dominated by large national organizations. This difference is in part attributable to the origins of such groups: as noted, ENGOs in the United States had the support of the well-heeled conservation organizations. However, it is also the direct result of the high costs and administrative difficulty of maintaining a truly national presence in a geographically huge yet sparsely populated country that contains many regional and cultural fissures.<sup>7</sup>

This book examines the environmental movement in Toronto from its origins in the late 1960s to its coming of age in the 1980s. As Robert Paehlke has demonstrated, the movement experienced two distinct waves, as well as an intermittent lull, during this timeframe. The first wave, beginning in the late 1960s, focused on local pollution problems as well as energy and resource issues. In addition to the emergence of Canada's initial environmental activist organizations, the first wave was characterized by heightened sensitivities to ecological issues among the general public and government. By the late 1970s, however, interest in environmental issues on the part of both the general public and government declined. Concern for the environment revived in Canada during the mid-1980s. This second wave of the environmental movement was characterized by the emergence of transnational concerns, such as acid rain, global warming, and the depletion of the ozone layer. The second wave also emphasized the preservation of biodiversity and wilderness areas. These issues were addressed by the creation of a series of new, pan-Canadian ENGOs such as the Canadian Coalition on Acid Rain (CCAR), Sierra Club Canada, and the WWFC.<sup>8</sup>

This book maintains a distinction between the conservation movement, which first arose at the turn of the twentieth century, and the environmental movement, which is a product of the postwar rise of ecology. While inter-related, the movements differed in important ways. As John McCormick explains in *Reclaiming Paradise: The Global Environmental Movement*:

If nature protection had been a moral crusade centered on the nonhuman environment and conservation a utilitarian movement centered on the rational management of natural resources, environmentalism centered on

humanity and its surroundings ... There was [in the environmental movement] a broader conception of the place of man in the biosphere, a more sophisticated understanding of that relationship, and a note of crisis that was greater and broader than it had been in the earlier conservation movement.<sup>9</sup>

This line of reasoning is echoed by Samuel Hays in “A Historical Perspective on Contemporary Environmentalism”:

[The] conservation movement was associated with efforts of managerial and technical leaders to use physical resources more efficiently; the environmental movement sought to improve the quality of the air, water, and land as a human environment. Conservation arose out of the production or supply side of the economy, the environment[al movement] out of the consumer or demand side.<sup>10</sup>

To this point, it is worth noting that first-wave Canadian ENGOs such as Pollution Probe expressed little interest in issues concerning wildlife habitat and the forests. Furthermore, the environmentalists interviewed for this book commonly differentiated themselves from the conservationists, characterizing theirs as a new, youthful movement struggling to protect the planet from pollution and other forms of ecological degradation. This distinction diminished over time as ecological values crept into the former conservation organizations and conservation concerns penetrated the ENGOs. The transition was typified by concern over the disappearance of tropical rainforests in the 1980s; likewise, groups such as the WWFC emerged that straddled the line between conservation and environmental activism. Despite the inevitable degree of overlap between the two forces, the distinction between the conservation and environmental movements is maintained in this book.

Although Pollution Probe was central to the emergence and development of the environmental movement in Toronto, it did not act alone. Numerous organizations emerged between the late 1960s and early 1980s. First on the scene was Group Action to Stop Pollution (GASP). Formed more than a year before the emergence of Pollution Probe, GASP was launched with much fanfare. The Canadian Environmental Law Association (CELA) and the Canadian Environmental Law Research Foundation (CELRF) were founded to provide the movement with a legal arm, while Toronto Zero Population Growth (TZPG) addressed the controversial

neo-Malthusian worldview that the ever-expanding human population was at the centre of the global environmental crisis. Still other groups emerged to fill specific niches, including the countercultural Is Five Foundation (IFF), which focused its energies on advancing the cause of recycling, and Greenpeace Toronto, which brought the values of direct action environmentalism, first seen on Canada's west coast, to Ontario's capital. Thus, while Pollution Probe receives the lion's share of attention in this book, it would be impossible to tell the story of the movement's development in the city without incorporating the stories of its contemporaries.

The Canadian environmental movement did not begin with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 or the celebration of the first Earth Day in 1970. While historians of the United States cite these as key events in the environmental movement's popular emergence, the origins of environmental activism in Toronto can be traced back to the 1967 television documentary *The Air of Death*. Produced by Larry Gosnell and featuring renowned Canadian newsman Stanley Burke, *The Air of Death* drew attention to the myriad effects of air pollution in Canada. Televised on 22 October 1967 by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), it was not the first documentary to tackle this subject, but it was the first to attract a large audience. Critically hailed, it nonetheless drew the ire of industrial interests, which attempted to discredit the filmmakers and their findings. In the ensuing thirty-two months, the filmmakers were subjected to two high-profile investigations, an Ontario-ordered inquiry, and a Canadian Radio-Television Commission (CRTC) hearing. Chapter 1 tells the story of *The Air of Death*, and will demonstrate how it, and the subsequent controversy, was directly responsible for the creation of Toronto's first two environmental activist organizations, GASP and Pollution Probe.

Chapter 2 examines the Toronto environmental community from *The Air of Death* controversy to the summer of 1970. While GASP enjoyed an initial rush of interest among Torontonians, drawing an estimated three hundred to its December 1967 founding meeting, it never again reached such heights. By 1969 it had morphed into the pet project of an ambitious municipal politician. Lacking any measure of broad-based support, it ceased operations in the summer of 1970. Meanwhile, the student-based Pollution Probe, formed in 1969, found itself thriving. This chapter examines the opposing trajectories of these pioneering Canadian environmental activist organizations and argues that an important difference was that Pollution Probe enjoyed the institutional support of the Department of Zoology at the University of Toronto, which provided the group with credibility as well as the infrastructure necessary to operate full-time. The

support of the Department of Zoology was not in itself a guarantee of success, however, as demonstrated by the rather ineffectual emergence of TZPG. Rather, Pollution Probe, unlike GASP and TZPG, benefited from the energies of a relatively large and active membership. Pollution Probe also benefited from the presence of a dedicated cadre from elite backgrounds who played a central role in shaping its organizational character. This group's willingness to approach the business community for support made Pollution Probe unique among ENGOs during the 1970s, enabling it to finance its ambitious plans. Subsequently, it made the transition from a volunteer-driven organization to one run by a full-time paid staff of four. This chapter also describes the emergence of Pollution Probe affiliate groups across Canada – a clear and telling example of the organization's national influence.

Chapter 3 examines the period between autumn 1970 and the end of 1971. During this time, Pollution Probe exerted its leadership and laid the foundation of Toronto's modern environmental community. Buoyed by its early successes, Pollution Probe's staff grew from four to sixteen in September 1970. The staff fostered the creation of CELA, CELRF, and other organizations that complemented their work. The organization also expanded its parameters, from an initial focus on pollution issues to more deep-rooted issues concerning energy and resources. Pollution Probe's continued growth created problems for the group, however. Although the paid staff was responsible for day-to-day operations, key decisions were made by consensus at general meetings. As the number of paid staff and volunteers continued to increase, the decision-making process became more difficult. Marathon sessions became the norm, and calls for a restructuring of Pollution Probe arose. Amid increased tensions, the resignation of a long-time staffer, and the threatened resignation of a second, in summer 1971 the organization created an executive director position, with responsibility for providing oversight of Pollution Probe's operation.

Pollution Probe reached its apogee between 1972 and 1974. As Chapter 4 demonstrates, this period saw continued growth within the organization. Reorganized according to a hierarchical team model, Pollution Probe branched out into a variety of areas not previously associated with environmental activism, including environmental justice and city planning. Besides surveying the organization's varied activities during this period, Chapter 4 examines the internal dynamics of Pollution Probe's staff. However, the ENGO's extended period of growth, dating back to its founding, would soon come to a halt. When Canada entered a recession as a result of the 1973 energy crisis, it became increasingly difficult to secure

operational funding, and in 1974 the organization had its first brush with contraction.

Chapter 5 tells the story of the Toronto environmental community's changing landscape through the 1970s. While the energy crisis led to a period of austerity at Pollution Probe, the newfound public interest in energy issues resulted in the launch of a semi-independent sister project, Energy Probe. Long the standard bearer of the city's environmental community, Pollution Probe soon found itself eclipsed by Energy Probe. This, combined with the emergence of the new, high-profile Toronto-based organizations Greenpeace Toronto and the IFF, spelled the end of Pollution Probe's local dominance. Despite the enthusiasm generated by Ecology House and Pollution Probe's new energy-efficient demonstration site-cum-headquarters, ongoing financial difficulties led Energy Probe, the more prosperous of the two organizations, to sever its affiliation in 1980.

As noted in Chapter 6, Pollution Probe managed to reverse its fortunes in the early 1980s through a newfound focus on hazardous waste and public health, including involvement in the high-profile Love Canal court proceedings in New York. Pollution Probe found itself ill-fitted for the period, however. Whereas the late 1960s and early 1970s were marked in Canada by the emergence of localized ENGOs, these were joined in the 1980s by pan-Canadian organizations such as Greenpeace Canada, the WWFC, Sierra Club Canada, and the CCAR. With their broad-based support, these groups were better equipped to address the defining issues of the period, particularly acid rain, the depletion of the ozone layer, and the decline in global biodiversity, which tended to be international in scale. Pollution Probe continued operations, as did other localized ENGOs across the country, but never regained the prominence of its formative years.

This book draws on extensive archival research. Pollution Probe's records are found in two locations. The bulk of the early and mid-1970s material, including reports and correspondence, are located at the Archives of Ontario. Additional material was gleaned from Pollution Probe's internal archives. Other sources include the Omond McKillop Solandt fonds at the University of Toronto Archives; the John Swaigen fonds at the Wilfrid Laurier University Archives; the Energy Probe fonds at the Archives of Ontario; and the Tony O'Donohue fonds at the City of Toronto Archives. I was granted unprecedented access to the papers of Dr. Donald Chant, a key figure in the development of Pollution Probe, and filmmaker Larry Gosnell, whose documentary *The Air of Death* inspired Toronto's early environmental activists. This book also makes extensive use of oral history. Sixty-seven interviews were conducted between 18 November 2007 and

27 May 2010. Those interviewed include activists, academics, politicians, members of the business community, and the media. Thus, the book draws a unique and telling portrait of this long-neglected aspect of Canadian history, weaving together the stories of many organizations and individuals.

This book also expands our understanding of postwar movements in Canada. As sociologist William K. Carroll notes, the late 1960s and early 1970s were “the climax of a period of social movement activism in Canada.”<sup>11</sup> In the introduction to *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties*, Lara Campbell and Dominique Clément write that the “sixties were an historical moment that fomented a revolution in education, racial divisions, anxieties about national security, consumerism, Aboriginal mobilization, anti-Americanism, the search for national identity, clashes between capital and labour, innovations in public policy, and debates surrounding the family, health, and the environment.”<sup>12</sup> This turbulent period has spawned a growing academic literature. Between 2008 and 2012, three edited collections dedicated to Canada in the 1960s were published. While much was said about topics such as student activism, the New Left, and the expansion and protection of civil rights, not a single chapter was dedicated to the history of Canada’s nascent environmental movement.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the environmental movement is conspicuously absent from such wide-ranging monographs as Myrna Kostash’s *Long Way from Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada*, Doug Owram’s *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation*, and Bryan Palmer’s *Canada’s 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era*.<sup>14</sup> This leaves an obvious gap in the literature, for if we are to understand the 1960s as “a transformative period,”<sup>15</sup> how can we ignore the emergence of the environmental activists who played a vital role in educating the public and lobbying for protective measures?

On the surface, it makes sense that the Toronto environmental activist community first developed in the late 1960s. As with its contemporary social movements, the environmental activists believed that if people worked hard they could build a better – and in this case cleaner and healthier – future. This belief among baby boomers that they could parlay their unprecedented affluence and hard work into a more ideal world was typical of the spirit of the 1960s. Pollution Probe’s roots at the University of Toronto further connect it to the climate of change that was part of the zeitgeist of the decade. With a vibrant student movement that gained in strength and radicalism as the decade wore on, the University of Toronto was home to high-profile protests against the United States’ ongoing war

in Vietnam, a popular series of teach-ins that attracted thousands to discuss controversial topics such as revolution, human overpopulation, and the role of religion in international affairs, and the emergence of the New Left Caucus, a motley group of Maoist-Marxists.<sup>16</sup> In addition, just blocks away from Pollution Probe's university headquarters were Yorkville and Rochdale College, key gathering spots for Canada's counterculture.

Closer analysis reveals, however, that Pollution Probe was quite different from its campus contemporaries. Most student groups from this period were associated with the political left, and existing scholarship highlights the leftist orientation of Canadian social movements during the 1960s. Such characterization does not fit Pollution Probe. Although there were those among its volunteers and staff who aligned themselves with the left – for example, one of the early members was noted feminist, social critic, and author Varda Burstyn – the organization adopted a centrist approach that made it equally at home dealing with the Toronto business community and the Progressive Conservative government of Ontario led by Premier Bill Davis. As explained in Chapter 2, this was the result of the elite backgrounds of the early leaders of the organization.

Pollution Probe's centrist approach and ease around power brokers also distinguishes the organization from its counterparts at Greenpeace. Founded in 1971, Greenpeace was shaped by a number of features unique to its origins in Vancouver, British Columbia. These defining characteristics, historian Frank Zelko notes, include resonant anti-Americanism, which was inflamed by the city's large population of draft dodgers, the New Left, and the counterculture. These characteristics resulted in a natural eschewal of cooperation with business and politicians. Instead, Greenpeace became a more confrontational organization that gained fame for its utilization of direct action techniques, as in its initial campaign to stop US nuclear tests in the Aleutian Islands by navigating a boatload of activists into the detonation zone.<sup>17</sup> Thus, while Pollution Probe and Greenpeace both focused on environmental causes and effectively harnessed the mass media, their tactics differed considerably due to the circumstances of their founding.

This book also provides insight into the evolution of environmental policy making in Canada. It has been noted that environmental policy was traditionally developed through the bipartite bargaining model, which featured, in the words of Doug Macdonald, "private negotiations between regulators [i.e., government] and firms."<sup>18</sup> In this scenario, the government and its respective agencies were considered the rightful representatives of the environment and the public good. Environmentalists were excluded,

notes political scientist George Hoberg, because they lacked the necessary “organizational sophistication and political clout”<sup>19</sup> to warrant an invitation to the negotiating table. According to most scholars, it was not until the environmental reawakening in the mid-1980s that ENGOs and other environmental interests were invited to join government and industry in making policy, a development partly attributable to the fact that government had lost the public legitimacy necessary to bargain on behalf of the environment.<sup>20</sup>

In his recent study of the relationship between the environment and the political economy of Ontario, Mark S. Winfield notes that the collapse of the bipartite bargaining model began in the 1970s. Although he credits the environmental movement with only partial success in creating a new norm of multipartite bargaining concerning environmental matters during this decade, he attributes the progress made to the increasing sophistication and professionalization of Canadian ENGOs that occurred during the mid-1970s.<sup>21</sup> This book contends that the decline of bipartite bargaining, particularly in Ontario, was closely related to the emergence of Pollution Probe and its legal spinoff CELA, and can be traced to the early 1970s.

Repeated surveys and opinion polls have demonstrated that ecological values are entrenched among a large percentage of Canadians.<sup>22</sup> Much of this can be attributed to the activists who have worked hard to educate the public and elected officials on environmental issues. Of course, the integration of environmental values among Canadians is not absolute; one need look no further than the Conservative federal government, which formally withdrew Canada from the Kyoto Protocol, cut hundreds of jobs at Environment Canada, and described opponents of the Enbridge Northern Gateway oil pipeline development as, in the words of Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver, possessors of a “radical ideological agenda.”<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, Canada continues to be affected by a multitude of environmental concerns, including climate change, the disappearance of wildlife and their natural habitat, as well as air and water pollution. In short, there is still much to be done in the ongoing quest to protect Canadians’ environment. It is my hope that this book, in addition to answering various historical questions, will provide some insight into how environmentalism can succeed in the future.