

Leap Manifesto's Alternative Seeks Changes to National Policy in Canada



Every political class considers themselves inclusive, diverse, open-minded. But present ideas outside the perimeters of sanctioned debate, imposed by power and a patrolling press, and watch how quickly they start bullying.

Consider the response to the Leap Manifesto, a declaration released this week by an unprecedented coalition of Canadian authors, artists, national leaders and activists in the midst of a federal election. It lays out a vision – bolder than anything on offer from political parties – to move the country away from fossil fuels while simultaneously improving the lives of most Canadians.

The smear-jobs started resounding immediately through the corporate press. The manifesto was advocating the “overthrow of capitalism,” a “utopia” that could be brought about only through “immediate social revolution.” It would “crash our economy,” throwing millions into poverty. No pragmatic politician could entertain the “manifesto’s madness,” thundered the Canadian press.

But the manifesto’s proposed policies – respecting Indigenous rights, debating a guaranteed annual income, taking back public control of energy systems, funding clean transit, public investment in low-

carbon sectors like education, health and childcare, promoting sustainable farming or raising taxes on corporations and the wealthy, and scrapping trade deals that prevent governments from banning extreme energy extraction – are more or less within the bounds of classic social democracy. And scientific studies – cited in the manifesto – have shown that a complete and economically-beneficial transition toward renewable energy is feasible within the next two to three decades.

So what in fact is the madness? A science-based political agenda, or our current course toward 6 degrees of catastrophic warming? Collapsing a corporation's right to override environmental laws, or a collapsing global food supply? Rising wages, or rising seas? The Leap Manifesto isn't radical. It's merely outside of Canada's head-in-the-sand politics.

Yet the establishment is so gripped by the neoliberal or austerity ideology – the belief the state has no role in positive collective action, that all solutions should be left to an unregulated market – means the Canadian elite are more able to imagine the end of the world than mild policies that ramp up funding for solar panels.

But if we don't break the boundaries of this narrowly policed debate, we will eventually break the ecological systems that make life possible on earth. Ordinary people are much more tuned into the realities of the climate crisis – and the changes it urges us on to – than the corporate media and its financial and political masters.

The neoliberal ideology is crumbling. The need for public austerity amidst obscene private wealth has shown itself to be a sham. Alternatives are possible, no matter the hysteria the corporate media – one of the last bastions of this ideology – attempt to foster.

And what is going on in this election in Canada? The Liberal party has started to regain momentum in polls as they have campaigned to the left of the New Democratic Party – recasting themselves as opponents of the austerity agenda and proponents of massive spending in green infrastructure. No matter how cynical the gesture, since the Liberals presided over the most savage austerity in the 1990s, gutting Canada's social programs, and the announced spending would undermine rather than strengthen the public sector – it is working.

The corporate media have presented the Leap Manifesto as either a threat to the New Democratic Party, or a project of its supporters. It is neither. It is a non-partisan document that has won support from a wide-range of people and organizations, those despairing of all that is going unsaid in this election. Its usefulness can be to build a counter-power to the next Canadian government. If it can gather a large number of signatories and momentum behind it, it can help build the kind of pressure that will compel changes to national policy on the most fundamental matters.

A powerful movement in Canada, animated by a compelling and positive vision for the climate and economy, can force the hand of whichever government comes to power in October. Even if the entire political class has forgotten this, clearly, Canadians haven't.

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