

INTERVIEW WITH GREEN PARTY OF ONTARIO POLITICIANS

By Scott Baker, New York, NY

(The following interview by Scott Baker with Erich Jacoby Hawkins & John Fisher was also posted Jan. 5, 2011 on Op Ed News of which Scott Baker is a Journalist/Senior Editor at <http://www.opednews.com/articles/My-Interview-with-Green-Pa-by-Scott-Baker-110102-478.html> and on the Huffington Post, where Baker is a blogger, at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/scott-baker/my-interview-with-green-p_b_803402.html)

John Fisher resides in Rodney, Ontario, Canada, and Erich Jacoby Hawkins resides in Barrie, Ontario, Canada.)

Scott Baker: Not all the answers to our political and economic difficulties will come from the traditional Democratic or Republican parties -- indeed, many will say that most of the productive answers will NOT come from them; they are simply too bought out by the corporate complexes. They do things differently in Canada, where third parties have more influence. Herein are a series of answers from my interviews of two of the leading figures in the Green Party of Ontario, John Fisher (President, Henry George Foundation of Canada; Chairman, Henry George Foundation of Canada; Ontario and Quebec Chapter Chair, Common Ground-USA) and Erich Jacoby Hawkins (Member at Transition Barrie; Cabinet at Green Party of Canada; Member at Greater Barrie Chamber of Commerce).

I met both Gentlemen at the 30th Annual Georgist Conference sponsored by the Council of Georgist Organizations in July 2010 in Albany, New York, which they have both attended regularly, since they, like me, are long-time Georgists. Georgism, for the unfamiliar, promotes the Single Tax on natural resource values and locational values, both of which are created by the community, not the producer, while untaxing results of production: wages, capital, and sales. It is immediately apparent that Georgism is neither Left nor Right. It is, we believe, simply correct, but I'll let Erich and John explain that and their other positions further.

Their responses have been lightly edited for clarity, American spelling, and formatting.

Scott Baker: Many people think the various Green parties around the world have a similar left-of-center, progressive stance, but there are really substantial differences. Could you compare the Green Party of Ontario (GPO) to the American Green Party and tell our readers where they differ? Also, does the Green party of Ontario represent "Greens" in Canada in general?

John Fisher: The GPO in most ways represents Greens in the GPC. The main difference, to date, is the absence of a Georgist focus (the GPO leader was a Georgist). Hopefully the economic resolution to the August GPC (Green Party of Canada) Conference will move the GPC toward the GPO on this front.

Most Green Parties started from common roots but in Canada I think it was circumstances (see above) and smaller

political (i.e. population) units for better communication.

Erich Jacoby Hawkins: I believe Green Parties exist in a space which cannot easily be addressed from the traditional left-right spectrum. They can certainly be termed "progressive", especially in social policy, but also tend to diverge significantly from the traditional Left on economic and fiscal approaches. In a country like the U.S. where the dominant parties are (on a world scale) right-wing and moderate-right, the Green Party will naturally appear to the left. But in Canada, where the major parties range from center-right to left-wing (social democrat), the Greens occupy what might be considered a centrist position, except that their policy mix is more eclectic than that of a traditional centrist party. Green parties reject both the communist/socialist class approach and the Austrian school of "free market" thought.

The Green Party of Ontario has the most developed economic platform amongst Canadian Greens, with the federal party following closely behind. Other provincial Green Parties tend to have much less development in areas of economic policy, so one sees a greater variety there. I tend to hope that they will follow the GPO and GPC's lead in adopting generally Georgist and Pigovian approaches to taxation. In the meantime, many of the provincial Green Parties are influenced by a membership who come from a social democrat or leftist perspective but are disillusioned with the traditional Left parties, so have formed a Green Party instead. In those cases, one sees more vestiges of leftist economic approaches, such as a preference for higher income or business taxes and lower property taxes (both the opposite of Georgist prescriptions). In most cases this is a result of not having yet put their economic policies under a rigorous analysis -- those provincial parties tend to have a policy focus mainly on issues of environmental protection.

One of the striking differences I see between GPUS and Canadian Green stances is that much of what the GPUS demands for Americans is already in place in Canada -- universal public health care, a decent minimum wage, 12 month's paid maternity leave, peace-keeping over war-fighting, etc. Therefore, while the GPUS needs to push for these "leftist" policies the Democrats seem unable or unwilling to achieve, Canadian Greens need only watch that such programs are not eroded, and in that effort they are joined by most of the other mainstream Canadian parties (with the exception of the most right-wing).

SB: Another thing that is quite different in Canada is the Parliamentary system. Could you describe that and also if a Canadian citizen is likely to get more representation among diverse parties than in our U.S. winner-take-all system?

JF: The nature of a Parliamentary system makes it easier for third parties to get elected. However it is the 'winner-take-all' vs. 'proportional representation' that makes the big difference. Canadians have a W-T-A like the U.S. but the GP and other parties have PR (Proportional Representation) in their platforms. It definitely gives better representation and decision-making (continued on page 13)