

There are major consequences to inaction on climate change that are already being demonstrated through natural disasters, economic hardship, and ecological harm.

Ever since the '90s, Canadian governments have been all talk and no action on climate change. The major parties are talking again about the climate in this campaign – more than ever – but it's hard to separate the wheat from the chaff.

To that end, this article offers a critical summary of what the major parties are promising on climate change and touches on whether they would or could achieve these goals.

First, let's quickly remind ourselves of the dire situation we're facing and the international commitments we have made to try and survive it.

THE CRISIS OVERSIMPLIFIED

The climate crisis is here. With every report published by the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the ominous warnings become increasingly alarming. All sectors must immediately and drastically decrease greenhouse gas emissions in order to hold global average temperature increases to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, while efforts should ultimately pursue to halt the increase at 1.5°C.

Signatories to the 2015 Paris Agreement committed to a reduction in emissions that could meet this target. Yet signatory countries to various climate agreements in recent decades have consistently failed to meet their targets, leading to a climate strike rebellion among global youth. Everyday people are increasingly frustrated by political and economic elites who consistently stifle efforts at reducing emissions.

With a federal election looming amid IPCC alarm bells and global youth resistance, climate change has become a prominent election issue like no other time in Canada's history. What are the major parties saying they would do about it?

THE LIBERAL PARTY

Since being elected in 2015, the Liberal party has established a federal carbon tax with a clear plan until 2022. The tax slapped a fine of \$10 per tonne of carbon pollution emitted. The fine increased by \$10 dollars till 2022 to an amount of \$50 per tonne. It is unclear if the price will continue to scale past 2022.

The Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) has stated that to abide by the Paris Agreement, Canada would have to double the tax to a total of \$102 a tonne, unless other drastic actions are taken alongside the current tax policy. The discrepancy has allowed the Conservatives to put political pressure on the government, accusing them of intentionally hiding a plan to keep raising taxes to hold up our end of the international deal.

This has also led to statements by Environment Minister Catherine McKenna like "We will meet our 2030 target through what we are already doing and new measures, including tackling plastic pollution, doubling the amount of nature that we are protecting, [and] investments in cleantech and innovation."

These sorts of eco-goodies

were mentioned on the Liberal party platform from 2015, Liberal budgets and throne speeches throughout their term, and will undoubtedly get announced some more in staggered updates to the platform to generate publicity throughout the electoral campaign. They are vague promises that have led to little action in the first term (so what would change in a second?), and their projected impact on carbon emissions is uncertain even if they were enacted.

To sum up, the Liberals have no clear plan to get to Paris Agreement benchmarks and a clear record of failure at meeting their climate change promises, no matter how photogenically they're presented.

It seems like the Liberals don't want to scare away Conservative-leaning voters or offend industry by upping the tax to effective levels, but still want to appeal to progressives with rhetoric and skin-deep change. This is a classic Liberal electoral strategy and it may work well for them again. After all, they're excellent politicians and terrible climate leaders.

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

Andrew Scheer recently unveiled his climate plan. It's helpfully titled "A Real Plan" so you know it's serious. In the 33-page booklet, there's glossy photos of a sun-kissed Scheer striking poses by a cornfield, harbour, waterfall, greenhouse, sunset, beach, and while planting a tree – at an oil refinery in Jamnagar, India, if you can decipher and believe the small tasteful caption.

This real plan sells the dream: to address the problem of climate change "without taking money out of Canadians' pockets." However, the first policy principal of the plan is "Green technology, not taxes."

Now when politicians speak vaguely of innovation and technology solving the climate crisis, far too often they speak of interesting ideas that do not yet exist or are not yet economically viable. Unfortunately, we have a deadline to get our emissions in check, so leading with a science-fiction solution is disheartening, if not unexpected.

It is worth noting that this real plan does include some real facts. It acknowledges that anthropogenic climate change is real. It also acknowledges the gap between the current carbon tax plan and what would need to be done to meet Paris Agreement benchmarks, according to the PBO.

However, Scheer's real plan sets no

goals beyond scrapping the Liberals' inadequate carbon tax and replacing it with... nothing.

Well, not quite nothing. When the Conservatives roll back the carbon tax, they will replace it with a new set of vague and less aggressive incentives and policies. They will set no standards or benchmarks for emission reductions. But they will provide a green homes tax credit and establish a Green Technology and Innovation Fund. They will set emissions standards for major emitters and make them get a Green Investment Standards Certification that will make a company that produces too many emissions to spend a "proportionate amount in an eligible clean tech investment."

Who will set these emission standards and proportionate amounts? Who will administer this certification? This sounds like an awful lot of regulation and bureaucracy. Here we thought Conservatives favoured flat taxes and market incentivization – but not when it comes to carbon, apparently, or saving humanity and half of the biosphere from extinction. No, those are too important to trust to the magic of market forces.

By now you should be able to see why Greenpeace strategist Keith Stewart told the CBC that the Conservatives' real plan to tackle climate change is "a plan only an oil lobbyist could love. It checks all the key boxes on the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' wish list and if it ever became federal policy it would deepen the climate crisis."

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The NDP's "Power to Change: A new deal for climate action and good jobs" may be the most ambitious yet concrete climate plan ever put forward by the party. While Singh's New Deal would maintain the Liberal price on carbon to 2022, with a few tweaks, overall it includes a 450-megatonne reduction by 2030, which equates to about a 37 per cent reduction of emissions below 2005 levels.

Significantly, the NDP plan has been touted as the strongest across party platforms regarding implementing emissions-reduction accountability mechanisms. Targets would be legally-binding under an NDP government, and interim targets measures established and tracked by a Climate Accountability Office.

Further, the NDP promises to spend \$15 billion to drive the transition required to meet the Paris mark, including the creation of 300,000 jobs within their first mandate. Singh's New Deal also promises net carbon-free electricity and all new buildings net-zero ready by 2030, to replace diesel use with renewable microgrids in Indigenous and northern communities, to eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, and to continue carbon pricing while reducing exemptions for companies.

Now the NDP typically attempts a balancing act in order to woo leftist and more centrist voters. This is a tricky and tedious line to tow; when Mulcair's steered the party to the right in the last election, it resulted in the party falling flat on its face and allowed the Liberals to capture the vote of many naive progressive-leaning voters.

In 2019, the NDP seems to be edging left, deploying the language of the

Green New Deal – U.S. legislation aiming to address climate change and economic inequality, while avoiding talk of the 'socialism' its most prominent American proponents happily flaunt – and while catering to workers in natural resource and manufacturing sectors, supported in part by a proposed \$3 billion Canadian Climate Bank.

Jagmeet Singh's environmental plan is uniquely connected to the role of Indigenous Peoples, unlike other party platforms. Singh promises to make Indigenous peoples "full and equal partners" in fighting climate change and to recognize the role of Indigenous knowledge and the importance of "uphold(ing)" "Indigenous rights to protect lands, waterways, and biodiversity."

It's not easy to judge if the NDP would or could implement all these measures, since they have no history as a federally governing party to go on. They do have a clear plan to meet Paris Agreement targets, however. At the moment, the biggest challenge is simply getting elected. The party is sitting at 13 per cent in the polls as of this writing and CBC's Poll Tracker doesn't even bother presenting their chances of winning.

THE GREEN PARTY

The 2019 election could be a breakthrough for the federal Green Party. Climate change and environmental degradation is a top priority for Canadian voters – a mid-September Ipsos poll assessing voter priority put climate change third behind health care and affordability/cost of living and thus even ahead of the coveted economy.

This gives the Greens room to shine and the party is riding a wave of momentum, scoring recent breakthroughs by electing members to provincial legislatures in B.C., New Brunswick, and P.E.I.

The federal Greens are promising a 60 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions below 2005 levels by 2030, touting their plan as "Mission: Possible – The Green Climate Emergency Action Plan." This is both more specific and more ambitious than any other party. (To put it in perspective, that doubles the current Liberal target). The Greens argue that only by taking such measures can the Paris emissions-reduction targets be met.

The Green's "Mission Possible" includes a 20-point plan that is by far the most concise yet comprehensive we've looked at so far. They pledge to eliminate all fossil fuel subsidies, refuse any new oil drilling or pipeline developments, and ban all fracking. The Greens would set a target of 100 per cent renewable electricity by 2030 and zero emissions by 2050, saying they would ban internal combustion engines by 2030.

As reflected in its title, their platform emphasizes that we are in a climate emergency and they would establish a cross-party cabinet "modelled on the war cabinets of Mackenzie King and Winston Churchill" to address this emergency.

So what's the catch? Obtainability. Although all 20 of the plan's goals are logical responses to the challenges of sustainability, actually following through would involve drastic action – and the social licence and broad political will to do that does not yet exist, it seems.

The Green Party's infrastructure plans have also come under fire from

several directions. They aim for a kind of national energy self-sufficiency, in the long run through a national electrical grid to transport renewable energy interprovincially and in the short-term by cutting off oil imports and transporting oil from Western to Eastern Canada.

Environmental scientist Blair King criticizes this admittedly ambitious infrastructure plan as impractical and overly expensive in a piece for The Orca; King is also the kind of self-described "pragmatic environmentalist" who supports the Trans Mountain Pipeline and the Site C dam.

These plans have also faced criticism from within party ranks for not taking a harder line on tar sands production. Back in May of this year, Quebec Green Alex Tyrrell made headlines by publicly condemning Elizabeth May's approach to cutting off oil imports and instead relying on Canadian crude – including tar sands bitumen – until weaning the country off fossil fuels by 2050.

Regardless of May's questionable stance on tar sands production, a vote for the Green Party is a vote for a comprehensive emissions-reduction plan that would undeniably take commitment, time, and resources to accomplish with any level of success.

BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

The Bloc Québécois is a unique party in the federation. It is the only federal party committed solely to furthering the interests of its provincial constituency. In recent decades the Bloc has held significant influence in Canada's House of Commons. Since its first election run in 1993 (when it won 54 out of 75 seats in Québec), it has been either the second or third largest party in the House, until it rolled under the NDP's "orange wave" in 2011.

The Bloc's platform "Le Québec, c'est nous" outlines that the party is sovereigntist and works exclusively for the interests of Québec. Within this, the platform outlines eight guiding principles and the first on the list asserts "souveraineté environnementale" (environmental sovereignty). It promises a bill granting Québec the authority to block any federal projects in the province, including pipelines, airports, and cell towers.

In the Bloc's environmental platform, "L'environnement, c'est nous," the province is touted as one that doesn't produce oil yet has abundant renewable natural resources – in stark contrast with Canada, which acts like a petrol-state whose policies cater to big Western oil.

Like other parties, the Bloc criticizes the inadequacies of the Liberal carbon tax scheme. It then proposes that Ottawa levy a carbon tax that targets provinces that have greater per-capita emissions and that these revenues be distributed to provinces with lesser per-capita emissions – a green equalization payments system.

Regarding greenhouse gas emissions, the Bloc proposes implementing a law to mandate emissions reductions in line with Paris targets. The law would include an accountability mechanism compelling Ottawa to account for all of its actions, including subsidies. The Bloc underlines that the federal government has never respected targets going back to the Kyoto Protocol and that accountability measures are required.

Other environmental commitments outlined by the Bloc include an outright rejection of the Energy East pipeline, an end to fossil fuel subsidies, rebates for electric vehicles, green renovations, and a net-zero emission law mandating that auto dealers sell a minimum number of zero-emission vehicles, in line with what California has done.

In Québec, those voters intent on casting a climate change ballot will have to consider the Bloc among the Greens and NDP when stepping in to the poll booth.

PEOPLE'S PARTY OF CANADA

No serious voter concerned with climate change and the environment should consider the People's Party. Former Conservative Cabinet member Maxime Bernier left the party to form the People's Party, not long after Bernier narrowly lost the leadership race to Andrew Scheer. Bernier now leads a libertarian-populist party who draws its greatest support from the xenophobic demographic of Canada's electorate.

While the anti-immigration zeal is worrying, Bernier's environmental platform is more laughable. "Global Warming and Environment: Rejecting Alarmism and Focusing on Concrete Improvements" is an exercise in denying the human role in climate change.

Here's a select quote or two:

"Until twelve thousand years ago, much of Canada was under ice, and it is thanks to natural climate change that we can live here today." How insightful!

The platform continues, "There is however no scientific consensus on the theory that CO2 produced by human activity is causing dangerous global warming today or will in the future, and that the world is facing environmental catastrophes unless these emissions are drastically reduced. Many renowned scientists continue to challenge this theory."

There is much more, but we cannot devote any further space here. We invite you to check it out, if you would like to learn how CO2 is "beneficial for agriculture," how climate change policy debate has been "hijacked" to spread fear, and how children are being manipulated to protest and pressure their parents.

To summarize, the People's Party pledges to withdraw from the Paris Accord, abolish the carbon tax, and cut all subsidies for green technology.

CONCLUSION

Election season arrives with much fanfare and each day of the campaign is greeted with breathless play-by-play commentary by media pundits. Voting is treated like a sacred duty, yet by the time election comes and gone we tend to feel deflated. At *The Leveller*, we know that voting can make a difference, but voting itself will not solve climate change. The climate justice movement we need may involve electoral politics (or not), but it will certainly have to be so much bigger than that, involving mass social movements, protest, public and clandestine direct actions, broad cultural changes, dramatic economic shifts and lifestyle changes, etc., etc. The fight doesn't end at the ballot box, it begins there.