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## **Canada's Parliament Gives Olmsted Federation A Major Boost: Cities Without Parks Will Face Massive Budget Cuts**

By TOM BROWN

**After decades of industrial expansion and urban sprawl, the look and feel of Canadian cities will soon shift — or millions of dollars of Federal support will be stanchied. Directly influenced by the Olmsted Federation, which was instrumental in recent elections in seating a majority of the members, Parliament today endorsed a plan which gives all major Canadian cities five years to convert 25% of city lands to developed parks or face drastic budget cuts.**

Rhoom Nassif, who's president of the Olmsted Federation, called the vote "historic to the point of epoch-shaping." His organization, which has roots stemming from the philosophy of Frederick Law Olmsted, amassed millions of dollars over the last decade — all collected from ordinary citizens who endorse the Federation's assertion that cities have

become “uninhabitable” due to the congestion, pollution, and density of population.

Few Members of Parliament seemed willing to go on record about this vote, given its unpopularity with the Canadian commercial sector, which also contributes heavily in election campaigns. However, Pierre de St. Esteban, an MP from the Montreal area and one of three co-sponsors of the legislation, said that it was hard for Parliament to resist the logic of the Olmsted Federation — nor its broad popular support.

“What we have in this vote is the outcome of the proverbial irresistible force meeting the immovable object. How we will get an entrenched commercial base to re-locate itself to meet the guidelines of this bill is hard to imagine right now,” de St. Esteban said.

Yet that is exactly what would happen under the provisions of this legislation. Called the “Olmsted Act,” its spartan language belies a major re-direction of social policy. By stipulating that “25% of all city lands must be re-configured so as to maximize developed park or park-like environments,” it will not allow cities to point to large, undeveloped tracts of land on the outskirts of the city limits and say that they are in compliance.

“That’s correct — and was quite clear in the debates on the floor of Parliament,” de St. Esteban said. Nassif, who joined him for the only overt news conference to be held after the historic vote, agreed. “What the Olmsted Federation has been pushing a decade for is some acknowledgment that enough is enough. We have had factories, stores, condominiums, parking garages, schools, and every other conceivable concrete structure built endlessly and from city end to city end.

“The result is a collection of Canadian cities that resonate congestion and commerce — and nothing more. The earliest cities had 25% or more of their land set aside for people to meet and mingle. This is as much about humanity as it is about trees and lawns.”

Not everyone sees the law in that light. “This is Big Brotherism to the point of massive social setback,” said Deff Tack, a Member of Parliament from Winnipeg who is also known to be an indirect spokesman for Canadian commercial interests.

“Where does the Federal Government get off trying to tell any Canadian city what it can and cannot do? If this law holds — and I intend to fight it in the courts — more than 25% of Canada’s working citizens will be unemployed in five years. Even the Olmsted Federation can’t hire all of them for its shameless lobbying efforts.”

De St. Esteban provoked titters from the press gallery when he insisted that, in time, even business would see the merits of the Olmsted Act. “Things have gotten so bad — you all know this, no? -- that few people want to stay inside city limits after their work or business has been completed.

“Here’s a once-in-a-lifetime chance,” de St. Esteban said, “to refresh our cities and ourselves. This is a grand national experiment. And I’ll bet you that people who feel happy and charged up about their cities will also feel more inclined to eat and shop in city establishments.”

Under the law just passed, a Federal Parks Department would be established immediately to determine via prescribed guidelines the extent of current city compliance with the provisions of the Olmsted Act. The law only applies to cities of 250,000 or more census-verified citizens.

In 2020, any city not aligned with the new “25% Parks” law would lose one percent of their Federal support for each percent it is out of compliance.

Frederick Law Olmsted lived in the 1800s and was a major influence on 19th Century American cityscapes. Among other achievements, Olmsted is credited with the planning of New York’s Central Park and California’s Stanford University campus. |<

