The Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus: the secret group of MPs and Senators working to sabotage animal cruelty and wildlife protection legislation
Compassionate Canadians are continually frustrated and perplexed—despite years of campaigning and their best efforts—as to why it is so difficult to get the federal government to pass effective, well-enforced animal cruelty and wildlife protection legislation. This is particularly true when the Liberal Party forms the government. The Conservative government of Prime Minister Harper, working with the Senate, did marginally improve animal protection legislation by increasing sentences in the event of convictions.\(^\text{1}\) The last time the Liberals did anything substantive Louis St. Laurent was Prime Minister.

One of the main reasons it is so difficult to modernize and reform Canada’s animal cruelty laws, which date back to 1892, and improve wildlife protection is a secret group of Members of Parliament and Senators, who work in the ‘back rooms’ to sabotage efforts to protect animals. They are the members of the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus. According to a Canadian Shooting Sports article, “The mission of the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus is to entrench in law fishing, hunting, trapping and shooting sports as acceptable, traditional, environmentally-sustainable outdoor heritage activities with a safety credo and a conservation ethic as our highest priority.”\(^\text{2}\)

The Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus is not just a clandestine Parliamentary caucus. It also has close ties to industry through the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada\(^\text{3}\) whose Chair is an executive with Shimano,\(^\text{4}\) a major manufacturer of sport fishing equipment. According to an article in The Fishing Wire, “The Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada serves as a liaison between the Canadian fishing, hunting, trapping and recreational shooting community/related industry and the non-partisan all party Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus in Ottawa. The Outdoor Caucus was formed in 2006 and includes Members of Parliament and Senators from all political parties to reflect the fact that outdoor heritage activities are enjoyed by Canadians of all political persuasions and as such they must remain non-partisan and apolitical in Parliament.”\(^\text{5}\)

The Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada actively lobbies MPs and Senators. On June 7, 2016, for example, it and the Canadian Shooting Sports Association hosted an event for Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus members and some of their senior aides at the Stittsville Shooting Ranges, a half hour drive southwest of Ottawa, “to partake in an exciting morning enjoying the best of the shooting sports...101 MPs, Senators, and senior staff attended.”\(^\text{6}\)

The guests included the Hon. Rona Ambrose (Conservative) who “proved that her prowess with a .32 ACP Walther PPK was the equal of her considerable political skills,” the Hon. Kellie Leitch (Conservative), Christine Moore (NDP), Gudie Hutchings (Liberal), and the Hon. Peter Kent (Conservative).

It is estimated that about 123 MPs and Senators are members of the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus.\(^\text{7}\) Apart from the caucus’s co-chairs, Yvonne Jones (Liberal MP, Labrador) and Bob Zimmer (Conservative MP, Prince George-Peace River), membership in the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus is not made public. Canadian Shooting Sports learned from Bob Zimmer that, “Membership in the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus is voluntary. There is no membership list and MPs are not required to divulge their membership or attendance. This is by design. Many MPs want to be informed, but they don’t want their participation or attendance used against them politically.”\(^\text{8}\)

The Animal Protection Party can attest to the secrecy. In December, 2016 the Animal Protection Party mailed every Member of Parliament a simple query that asked “Are you a member of the Outdoor Caucus? Yes or No.” A stamped, return-addressed mailer was included so that all an MP had to do was check “Yes”
or “No” and drop the mailer in the post. Less than 20 MPs responded and, of those, only two confirmed they were Outdoor Caucus members.

The Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus is a very large caucus and its effectiveness is not in doubt. Zimmer gives credit to the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus, for example, for sabotaging Nathan Erskine-Smith’s (Liberal, Beaches—East York) private members bill, Bill C-246, the Modernizing Animal Protections Act.

“We came together,” Zimmer said, “and defeated Bill C-246, the animal rights bill, where most of the people who voted against it are Liberals. It was a group effort, but that’s the power of education.”

Much of the “education” that the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus spread about Bill C-246 was false and misleading, and, it seems, was intended to be so.

Writing in The Hill Times, Barbara Cartwright, CEO of the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies said, “The Hill Times published a full-page ad sponsored by hunting and fishing groups that was riddled with inaccuracies and misleading information about humane societies, SPCAs, and animal cruelty enforcement.

“Hunters and anglers continue to push misinformation and half-truths about the intentions of animal-care agencies when it comes to the enforcement of animal cruelty laws, creating unnecessary animosity between animal-use industries and animal-care agencies.

“We were discouraged to see such outright misinformation being perpetuated by industry groups in response to Bill C-246, which proposes a series of very reasonable changes to Canada’s federal animal cruelty laws. It is time to stop getting caught up in the politicization of these issues and get down to the work of protecting animals.”

Based on the letters Members of Parliament, particularly Liberal MPs, sent to constituents who wrote them in support of Bill C-246, it is clear they believed the falsehoods or as Bob Zimmer calls it “education.” Also, it’s likely that many people who contacted their MPs in support of Bill C-246 did not know their MP could have been a secret member of the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus.

Working closely with the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus was the Chair of the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada, Phil Morlock, who is also the Government Affairs Chair of the Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association, another industry group.

He said, “Once again we see the timeworn tactic by these [MPs and groups] fronting a façade which appears to promote a seemingly reasonable solution to an animal cruelty issue, while concealing the true intention of the legislation. The implications of this Bill are chilling. It is a nuclear strike against our outdoor heritage activities and threatens anyone who just wants to take their kids fishing.”

The close relationship between the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus and the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada was made very evident in a March 19, 2015 CBC (Thunder Bay) ‘Superior Morning’ radio report about the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus. The spokesperson for the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus, in Gord Ellis's report, was not one of the co-chairs of the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus nor any MPs or Senators who are members of the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus, but rather Phil Morlock, the Chair of the industry-friendly Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada.
The Board of Directors of the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada is a “Who’s Who” of the industries that harm and kill animals for sport and fashion. It includes people like Barry Turner who was a lobbyist for Ducks Unlimited; Kelly Semple, a professional outfitter; and Rob Cahill, director of the Fur Institute of Canada and Senior Vice President of International Marketing for North American Fur Auctions.

The secrecy of the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus is embraced, it appears, by the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada. Despite claims that the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada has worked closely with Members of Parliament, a preliminary search of the Registry of Lobbyists failed to turn up any reference to the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada or anyone or any company or organization associated with it, with the exception of the Fur Institute of Canada. As well, despite the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus’s and the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada’s claims of working to sabotage Bill C-246, according to reports filed with the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada, only three groups lobbied MPs and they were all animal protection groups. The Fur Institute does not appear to have filed any communications reports.

Questions are raised by the apparent absence of reports and registrations on the Registry of Lobbyists from the sport hunting, fishing, trapping, and fur fashion trade associations and industries. Are the members of the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus and the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada operating legally? Is an investigation by the Commissioner of Lobbying in order, and should charges be laid if the evidence supports them?

Both the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus and the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada represent a tiny and declining minority of Canadians. Only about 5% of Canadians sport hunt. About 8.5% of Canadians sport fish. And, when asked in polls, Canadians tend to overwhelmingly oppose sport hunting.

Because of the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus and Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada’s very effective back room and, possibly, unlawful dealings, government policy and, in particular, Liberal government policy not only does not reflect the views of the majority of Canadians, but also is not evidence-based, as promised by the Liberals.

The challenge for Canadians who care about animal cruelty and wildlife protection and for the non-governmental organizations and charities whom they support is how to overcome the undue influence that the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus has over legislation. First steps might include asking the Prime Minister and the leaders of the opposition parties to require that their Members of Parliament be transparent about their involvement in the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus and a request that the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada investigate the Outdoor Caucus Association of Canada and its relationship and dealings with the members of the Parliamentary Outdoor Caucus.

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