

Property rights under attack

Landowners may find Tories expensive to know

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Here we go again. In 1974, the Alberta government set aside land around Calgary as Restricted Development Areas, for possible use as transportation and utility corridors. In so doing, it shafted more than 700 owners, whose land was devalued because buyers were few for property on which development was frozen. Deep frozen, in fact: Calgary's ring road in the east is being built now on land set aside 35 years ago.

It was an abuse of property rights then and so now is Bill 19, which, introduced Monday by another Alberta government, does much the same thing.

Specifically, the Land Assembly Project Area Act (Bill 19) empowers the government to arbitrarily designate land for a so-called Land Assembly Project, then "make regulations respecting the control, restriction, prohibition or approval of any kind of use, development or occupation" upon it. It also renders "the provisions of the Surface Rights Act inapplicable," likewise the Expropriation Act.

Thus, if you own property where the government thinks it might build a road in 2044, you could find yourself aggregated into a project and no longer controlling your own property. Flout the regulations, and the act provides penalties up to \$100,000 and/or two years in the slammer.

Kiss your equity goodbye. Who would want to buy land with that kind of baggage attached to it?

All this grief, before the government has paid so much as a cent for your property. (You, of course, will still be required to pay property taxes in a timely manner.)

It is truly baffling that a government beholden to rural landowners as this one would propose such a robust assault on their rights.

It is not that the occasional need to compulsorily purchase land is disputed: of course a pipeline or road should not be hostage to stubborn (or opportunistic) land holders. However, if the government wants somebody's land, it should cough up fair market price, not use regulations to devalue and sequester it for decades.

Given the recent tarnished history of the hearings on the Edmonton-Calgary electrical transmission line, it requires a generous spirit to believe Bill 19 is anything but a cynical government response to determined opposition from landowners along the route and is why we agree with Alberta Green party Leader Joe Anglin.

For a government that wants to make the provincial motto "Strong and free," this is bad legislation --

property rights are the foundation of freedom.

Once was bad enough. Twice is shameful.

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