

The Broad Coalition

GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY AT WORK

Executive Summary

Extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures. We, the Broad Coalition, seek to ensure that a principled and electable alternative is in place to defeat the BC Liberal agenda in the 2005 election. In 2001, the opposition vote was split between the Greens and the NDP. Also large number of citizens didn't exercise their democratic right to vote. The result was a government without official opposition. We need to address why so many people didn't vote. We need to address the splitting of votes by progressives with many shared values. All progressives must collaborate on a strategy to change the outcome of the next election. One option could be an agreement between Greens and NDP to run only one progressive candidate in each constituency. This "Made-in-B.C." solution would ensure that every progressive vote counts. As progressive women, we choose to reclaim our values and our society on election day. Now is the time to look beyond ideology and work on grassroots democracy and a progressive agenda.

Introduction

In early 2002, a group of NDP, Green and nonpartisan women got together to discuss how progressives might cooperate to ensure more seats in the next legislature and collectively form a strong alternative to Campbell's New Era. We call ourselves the Broad Coalition.

The Broad Coalition would like to share some ideas in the hope that other grassroots conversations will begin across B.C. Collectively, we can develop an alternative to Campbell's New Era that all progressives can support, regardless of party affiliation.

THE PROBLEM

- We have elected an unstoppable majority government.
- The Liberals say they have a mandate, but they are implementing changes that were not part of their election platform.
- Without an official opposition, discussion or debate is restrictive and limited.
- MLAs consistently refuse to meet with constituents.
- The corporate media is consistently biased toward globalization and the Liberal agenda.
- This government is preparing B.C. for total privatization of the commons.
- Without some form of mixed proportional representation, the progressives will split their vote and the Liberals will likely win the election in 2005.
- Recall has proven unworkable.
- The combined support of NDP and Green parties will be needed to win the next election.

*Extraordinary measures need to
be taken to restore our
democracy.*

Campbell's War on the Poor

The Liberal's "New Era" agenda is waging war on the people of B.C.

The script is familiar enough. We saw it in the U.S., Britain, N.Z. and many other countries — income tax cuts, higher fees for basic needs (flat tax) and the withdrawal of social services to the most vulnerable in society. Around the world, the free-market agenda has failed in all its promises to reduce poverty. Instead it has destabilized economies and created a level of poverty never experienced before.

The Liberals have rewarded the wealthiest in B.C. with tax breaks. Then there were huge pay increases for ministers and top civil servants. Other election payback rewards were made to the financial backers of the Liberals, like a \$9M treaty referendum, new training wage, and the Olympic bid. To pay for these extravagant rewards, social programs have been gutted. The public service is being restructured in preparation for privatization of many of its functions. The healthcare system is being dismantled in preparation for privatization. Collective agreements have been torn up and labour regulations are being rewritten, in preparation for privatization. Large multinationals will be the new service providers, turning the public service into the private service, public good to private good.

New Era Ideologically Driven

The WTO (World Trade Organization), IMF (International Monetary Fund) and World Bank, representing the interests of the wealthiest corporations, are literally forcing governments to adopt a “free market” agenda through **restructuring, deregulation and privatization of public services**. The goal of the neoliberal agenda is to remove all barriers — such as legislation to protect the environment, local economies, health, education, labour and justice — to the wholesale exploitation of natural and human resources on the entire globe. The term of endearment is “globalization”.

Gordon Campbell’s New Era is a free-market agenda. While anti-corporate globalization protests have targeted the IMF, World Bank, WTO and the G8, we have our own target here in B.C. But we can do more than protest.

Unlike many governments that were experiencing economic problems when the IMF took over their economies, the B.C. Liberals inherited a \$2 billion surplus and a lean and efficient public service, already downsized by the previous government.

In order to “balance the budget by 2005” as promised, they had to create an economic problem.

The Liberals, breaking one of their election promises, quickly emptied the provincial coffers of \$2 billion, by extending tax cuts to the wealthy and to corporations. They could then go ahead with their agenda to restructure, deregulate and privatize. But can they balance the budget, having now created a huge deficit?

Restructuring: The “necessity” of downsizing government programs and services and privatizing publicly owned corporations has been spun from the pretext of debt.

Deregulation: The New Era agenda includes deregulation — removing legislative obstacles to privatization. Accordingly, the Liberals are dismantling legislation that protects labour standards, collective bargaining, health care, education, the environment, children, seniors, the disabled and unemployed.

Privatization: In preparation for privatization, public private partnerships (P3s) will soon replace public control of our commons — power, water, forests, parks, education and health.

Opening Doors to Foreign Investment

Globalization, unlike international trade, involves adherence to trade rules that ensure the highest possible profits for corporations.

When public services, like healthcare are privatized, trade rules under NAFTA, GATS and the FTAA will protect the investment or foreign companies from any domestic laws that limit their profits. This includes legislation at any level — national, provincial and municipal.

Reclaiming public control of services, like education, will be virtually impossible under these trade rules as it would involve expropriation of a foreign investment.

In the jargon of trade law, all environmental standards and regulations are considered technical barriers to trade (TBT) — even laws banning carcinogens and other dangerous products.

Our democratic right to make laws that regulate how businesses impact our environment, our health and our economy, now and in the future, will be challenged by the trade agreements (FTA, NAFTA, and soon FTAA). Canada has already been sued by a foreign company for banning a dangerous gasoline additive. Canada withdrew the ban and paid a fine for damage to the company’s reputation, even though the additive has already been banned in several other jurisdictions.

Justice denied: Rule by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its tribunals will soon replace our democracy and justice system as decisions will be made without recourse to courts of law.

A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE LIBERALS' NEW AGENDA

The most common political comment these days is “What’s the alternative?” or “Why don’t the Greens and NDP get together?” Both those questions demand serious dialogue.

As long as the majority of people can’t see a credible alternative to the Liberals, they will be confused about whether to vote Green or NDP. Many people feel that voting NDP would not guarantee a change of government. At the same time, they don’t want to vote Liberal or support the Liberals by splitting the vote.

Cooperation of all progressives is necessary if we are to regain democracy in the legislature. We need to work together to restore the values missing in the neoliberal “free market” agenda of globalization.

Voters need to know they are not simply voting against the Liberals, but for a real alternative. This alternative will ensure that a range of interests and values are properly addressed and not ignored.

Building on shared values of Green and NDP could offer a credible alternative to the present situation.

Definitely Not Politics As Usual

The political dynamic has shifted from capitalism versus socialism to corporate rule versus democratic rule.

The political landscape is no longer defined by left, centre and right. The neoliberal ideology of a free-market global economy is being strongly promoted by parties from the ultra-right (U.S.), centre (Canada), to labour (U.K.).

Now is the time for NDP and Greens to put down our ideological swords and position ourselves on the side of democratic rule. This is an emergency requiring a new electoral strategy.

We need to make the right strategic choices to ensure we elect as many MLAs as possible to form government. One choice could be to run only one progressive candidate in each constituency.

Since each party will run fewer candidates, there will be more shared resources to support those candidates. (For example, in a constituency, if an NDP runs, the Greens in that constituency could share in the campaign costs and help in the campaign. Similarly, if a Green runs in a constituency, NDP could help).

By reaching an agreement before the election, the voters will have more confidence in their ability to defeat the Liberals. This would be a major campaign tool.

When elected, our MLAs will restore democracy and reform our electoral system. They will usher in a new kind of governance — nonadversarial democracy.

B.C. could become the most progressive, rather than the most regressive government in Canada.

COOPERATION AT THE GRASSROOTS: THE WINNING STRATEGY

We can’t afford to squander valuable time while the Liberal government is dismantling our democratic institution. We need to begin the discussions now.

We need to initiate grassroots discussion groups to examine the present situation — restructuring and privatization — and develop clear principles that the public can understand.

Working at the constituency level, we need to:

- Recognize the strengths of ALL parties
- Stress Green Party’s organizing efforts in the Pro-Rep campaign
- Support NDP strength in governing and campaign experience
- Recognize Green strength in environmental principles
- Recognize NDP strength in social principles

We need to convince the leaders of the parties that there is strong grassroots support for cooperation and that we are prepared to work together.

Grassroots progressives need to be involved in exploring options. There needs to be an extensive education program instilling an understanding of how free-market globalization impacts society, the alternative, and the need for justice, compassion and morals.

The public needs to understand that an NDP or Green MLA would ensure passage of electoral reforms, including proportional representation, so that the people of BC are never again oppressed by a government that doesn’t represent a large portion of the population.

YOU CAN MAKE THIS HAPPEN

START a discussion group or invite someone from the Broad Coalition to speak to your group. Help formulate principles for a 2005 coalition platform.

LAUNCH a grassroots campaign to raise awareness of the choice between corporate globalization and economic localization, between corporate rule and democratic rule.

CONVINCE NDP and Green Parties to start planning a coalition strategy.

If you want to be on our email distribution list, contact: broadcoalition@telus.net or phone: 250-478-6906

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SHARED VALUES

Here are some ideas for a discussion on principles that have come out of our meetings:

- Develop policies and programs that sustain life in a holistic way
- Support local investment and locally-owned business for a strong community-based economy
- Base decisions on triple bottom-line accounting (environmental, social and economic)
- Adhere to the precautionary principle when there is any doubt about the impacts of new and unproven “scientific solutions”
- Increase support and access to justice
- Support self-government for First Nations
- Emphasize prevention in justice, social, health, education and environment programs
- Address poverty by introducing legislation such as guaranteed annual income
- Reduce waste and pollution
- Secure the basic needs of all citizens (food, housing, health)
- Secure education, training and employment for all citizens
- Ensure clean air, water and food is accessible (i.e., non-irradiated, non-GE food)
- Support economic growth that benefits people, local communities and the environment
- Develop a measurement of well-being instead of GNP
- Promote electoral reforms, such as mixed proportional representation
- Promote grassroots democracy
- Reform political party financing
- Value the Commons and protect from privatization
- More participatory democracy and citizen oversight
- Support local farms and environmentally sustainable agricultural practice