



## CITIZENS *for* PUBLIC JUSTICE

### British Columbia provincial election and referendum “mini-Ola!”

As British Columbia goes to the polls May 17 for a provincial election and referendum on electoral reform, Citizens for Public Justice offers this overview for the benefit of all, inside and outside of British Columbia. If you are eligible to vote in BC, we encourage you to do so May 17.

#### **\*\*JUSTICE BERGER speaks June 2.\*\***

A special note for our friends in British Columbia. The eminent Justice Thomas Berger, long known for his great role in the Mackenzie-Valley Pipeline “Berger” Inquiry, will speak at the CPJ annual meeting in Vancouver, June 2, on “My Idea of Canada.” See the note at the bottom of the Ola! for more info.

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**QUICK FACTS** on the British Columbian election to be held on Monday, May 17.

(taken from *Elections BC* [www.elections.bc.ca](http://www.elections.bc.ca))

- \* This is BC's 38th general election.
- \* There are 45 registered political parties for the May 17 vote. (45!) And what a range they are! See the listing further down in this email.
- \* Voters will be provided with two ballots: one for a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and one for the Referendum on Electoral Reform.
- \* The question for the Referendum on Electoral Reform will be: *Should British Columbia change to the BC-STV electoral system as recommended by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform?*

To pass, the referendum must be approved by 60% of the valid votes cast, and by the majority of valid votes cast in at least 48 (60%) of the 79 electoral districts.

If the voters endorse the BC-STV system, the government has indicated that it will be in place for the following provincial general election scheduled to be held on May 12,

2009. For more information about the proportional British Columbia Single Transferable Vote go to [www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public](http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public)

\* To register, update, or confirm your voter registration information, contact Elections BC toll-free at 1-800-661-8683 or go to [www.elections.bc.ca/reg/voter.reg.htm](http://www.elections.bc.ca/reg/voter.reg.htm)

\* Voting hours on Election Day are from 8am to 8pm, PST.

\* Advance Voting is held from 12 noon to 9pm on the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday of the week preceding Election Day.

#### BRITISH COLUMBIAN VOICES

The date of the election has been certain for some time. What is not as certain is the result of this upcoming vote. Will the NDP regain power? Certainly, they will win more than the two seats they won last time. Will the Greens elect their first MLA? Will enough folks allow the Liberals another four years? Time will tell how the good citizens of BC will evaluate the government's performance.

Four years ago, British Columbians elected the tough love Liberals by a sweeping majority, ousting the scandal-ridden NDP after premier Glen Clark had stepped down. Canadians will remember that the premier at the time of the election, NDP Ujjal Dosangh, moved from defeat to a federal victory, running in last year's federal election as a Liberal. He is now our federal Minister of Health.

It was hard to know in 2001 if the electorate was voting for the Liberals or against the NDP. Maybe both. (Which is one reason the referendum on electoral reform is so interesting).

Regardless, the Liberals were given a strong mandate and they implemented many of the plans they had named before the election. That included tax cuts and also dramatic program cuts. Certainly, the economy is thriving as a result. But a number of British Columbians have speculated to CPJ that there's been outside help. The demand for and prices of resources -- base and precious metals, oil, gas, coal, paper and lumber -- has gone up tremendously due to the booming economies of other nations that need these things. Naturally, the government in power will always take credit for such success. And naturally the opposition parties will challenge that credit. What we know at CPJ is that poor people in BC are hurting today. The major parties (including the Liberals) are promising to help this situation. We suggest you read all you can of the party platforms carefully in deciding where to place your vote.

And, enter the fray. An election is another important opportunity for an exchange of opinions. Positive alternatives and analysis can only make the political discourse that much better.

So what are people's opinions about the impending BC vote? We approached Tim Schouls, Professor of Political Studies at Capilano College in North Vancouver (and a CPJ member) to do a short analysis of the upcoming election. We also invited various others from across BC to voice their opinion of the current state of BC politics by responding to the question, "What are the important issues in the BC election, from your perspective?" Below are their responses. Thanks to all who contributed.

#### A GOLDEN DECADE TO COME?

*Analysis by Tim Schouls, Professor of Political Studies, Capilano College*

When BC Premier Gordon Campbell asked Lieutenant Governor Iona Campagnolo to dissolve the BC legislature and call an election for May 17, it came as no surprise. British Columbians have known for four years when they would next be going to the polls since the Liberals

made BC the first province to have fixed election dates. With the surprise element concerning Election Day eliminated, political parties have had months to prepare and test run their election campaigns. Sadly, this time has not been put to good use as BC political parties have decided to focus their campaigns more on governing style than on visionary platform substance.

The Liberals routed the NDP in the election of 2001, captured 77 of 79 seats. Their campaign slogan is "BC is back" suggesting that after four years of governing, the Liberals have rescued BC from the "lost decade" of inept and catastrophic NDP governance (1991-2001). What is worrying, however, is the Liberal's singular focus upon the economy as the issue of the campaign. The Liberals see the role of government as providing the means for the economy to flourish. Consequently, all their policies are justified in terms of their ability to contribute to economic growth whether it is health care, education, environmental protection, or Aboriginal rights. So confident are the Liberals in their vision that they promise British Columbians, "Follow us and we will lead you to a golden decade."

The NDP, the only viable contender to the Liberals for political power, are trying to recover from their devastating electoral loss of 2001. Their campaign has focused upon two issues – the untrustworthiness of the Liberals given their tendency to break election promises and the need for a politics of moderation that balances economic development with social policy concerns. Carole James, the new leader of the NDP, calls her approach one that is dedicated to "modernizing along with society." The NDP's campaign literature suggests that this modernization approach is in fact a moderation approach that looks deceptively like the platform of the Liberals. The principal difference, according to James, is that the NDP would be a government that British Columbians could trust.

Missing from the debate is substantive consideration of what public justice ideals ought to guide the political life of British Columbia. In this age of cynicism concerning politicians' motives for governing, trust is important but I would rather see the issue of trust framed in terms of the responsible use of power. How can governments guide the development of the economy so as to ensure that all citizens can work for the public good of the province? What plans do political parties have to build social infrastructure to care for the ongoing and changing needs of the province's poor and vulnerable citizens? And how can the treaty process be renewed such that Aboriginal title and rights are protected? Personal attacks and pre-occupation with economic growth charts are a poor substitute for an invigorating debate about political ideals based on questions such as these.

## **more voices**

### **GETTING TOO TOUGH**

There is every indication that the BC Liberals are sliding to the American "get tough law and order philosophy." This repressive conservative push is moving BC away from its progressive reintegration achievements of the 70's and 80's.

The BC Liberals have placed heavy restraints on staffing for BC's prisons resulting in a lot of overcrowding and long periods of being locked up without meaningful programs or work. This is especially so for remanded inmates, and maximum security inmates. There are also a lot of people in on immigration hold.

Social support systems have also suffered, such as the withdrawal of funding for women centres, and few services for shelter and support for those coming out of jail and waiting for drug and alcohol treatment. Vancouver's drug courts and harm reduction programs are a positive aspect, but in many small towns of BC these programs are not available. The Downtown Eastside is often a "no-go zone" for women working the streets for survival. Many are Aboriginal. A general concern here for the feminization of poverty, many

have mental and emotional disorders, many are homeless. We rescue them from virtual death, but prisons are expensive ways to address health and social issues. Criminal justice and social justice issues are interrelated in the area of immigration, health and poverty.

I am personally an advocate of the philosophy and theology of restorative justice.

*\* Henk Smidstra, provincial chaplain since 1991*

#### A NEW ERA NOT FOR ALL

School districts dismantled highly acclaimed supports respecting children of diverse needs and backgrounds. Limiting Legal Aid primarily to criminal cases in which the Crown seeks jail time, and cutbacks for women's centres have caused untold grief, and justice denied, at Family Court and in the lives of poor children and families outside. Human rights are now ineffectively enshrined in legislation, with the key related administrative tribunal scrapped. Medical Services Plan cuts make some preventative medicine and rehab the privilege of those who are the advantaged. Fewer conservation officers work vast areas, and we're entertaining mining in parks. Major transportation decisions influencing development for decades are made without significant public or municipal consultation. We do well to consider the opportunity provided by the Electoral Reform referendum and its particular version of proportional representation.

*\* Gus Polman, Surrey*

#### ABNEGATION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

I continue to see abnegation of the government's role and responsibilities in many areas. The large ones are: Health Care – closing hospitals, privatizing hospital services, and ripping up union contracts; Education – closing schools, decreasing staff, decreasing alternative programs, especially for kids with disabilities; Devolution of Ministries to Authorities, where budgets, staff and services is slashed; Lack of monitoring in forestry and environment; Private development in Parks and oil and gas exploration in environmentally sensitive areas.

In the Ministry of Human Resources (income assistance) the two Vernon offices were closed and instead a call centre was set up in Kamloops. But the centre is virtually unreachable, the average time to wait before response is about 30 minutes, and many of the poor don't have phones. Consequently the assistance rolls are down and more people end up on the street. Children and Family Development is taking Community Living (services to Adults with Development Disabilities) and moving it over to a Provincial Authority, with a potential loss of service to these very vulnerable folks.

There's much more: cuts to legal aid, cuts in funding to women's centres, cuts to social planning councils, cuts to transition homes, etc. Instead tax breaks have gone to the richest 20% and kids have to work at Wal-Marts for minimum wage, or worse, training wage at \$6.00/hr.

*\* Johanna M. Kooistra, Vernon*

#### THE BEAVER MUST BITE BACK

A good government must, necessarily so, do its best to balance fiscal responsibility with social compassion. When the former trumps the latter, we become moral cripples. The provincial Liberal party of BC has done much, in its years in power, to significantly undermine public education, social services and environmental protection. An uncritical turn to American style privatization and classical liberal economic theory has hurt and harmed many. The beaver must bite back. We need to ask hard and firm questions about how the Liberal government has harmed public education, social services and the environment by its

single vision approach to economics. If this is not done, the prosperity of BC will, increasingly so, be for fewer and fewer rather than for the commonweal.

*\* Ron Dart, Department of Political Science/Philosophy/Religious Studies University College of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford*

#### THE POOR AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In this election people of faith need to insist that we do not want to move forward by deepening impoverishment of God's most disadvantaged people and the continuing violation of God's creation. I hope we reject the worst changes to the Employment Standards regulations and the shrinking of benefits and services to the poor, especially children and immigrants. We need affordable housing dollars for housing, not just for health (subsidized assisted living). Finally, the referendum is crucial to ensuring fairer representation.

*\* Donna Stewart, Vancouver*

#### WORRIED AND CONCERNED

I am concerned about the many new salmon farms that seem to foul the waters for the wild salmon. I worried about the many public services that have become privatized – new managers are able to push general wages down, the quality of health services has decreased, the availability of services for the elderly has been cut, funding for education has suffered, the cost of university fees have become higher. I'm concerned about the environment and the logging that is allowed in public parks. These and many more issues have alarmed me about this current government. But Gordon Campbell has done one good thing! He has allowed our citizens to vote in a referendum – the single transferable vote, and it will allow the voters to have a bit more power if accepted.

*\* Catharina Donkersloot, Sechelt, BC*

#### SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE = BROADER REPRESENTATION

I think the biggest issue is the opportunity we have to change the way we vote. The Single Transferable Vote allows voters to express their true preferences and, by offering a greatly increased chance that someone representing their views will get elected, will nearly eliminate vote wasting. This should promote broader representation in the legislature and will make it more likely that candidates with a faith-based perspective could find a sufficient constituency to get elected.

*\* Tony Hodgins, Vancouver*

#### 1-2-3 VOTING

One year ago, 160 citizens were picked by lot from the voters list and mandated to recommend the best voting system for British Columbia. The Citizens Assembly by a vote of 146 to 7 recommended that BC scrap its "first past the post" voting system for a preferential ballot in multi-seat districts, called Single Transferable Vote, popularly known as "1-2-3 Voting." The proposed system aims to deliver effective local representation, less party discipline, accountable government, and a less polarized politics. The decision is up to the people. Will they support it? There is an appetite for doing democracy differently, for less party discipline, for more effective local representation and greater accountability in government.

*\* Nick Loenen, a former Richmond Councillor and MLA who has written extensively on voting system reform*

## DON'T FORGET THE NORTH

The Bulkley Valley, the smaller communities along the Yellowhead Highway, and the north generally, from my point of view, have these concerns:

1. Disproportionate (geographically speaking) funding, jobs, and services go to the south and the north is hurting. The Campbell government tore the guts out of our communities by taking away professional services (forestry, environment, etc) and centralizing them in the south, or larger communities like Prince George.
2. Health care services. We need to have cancer (and other) services nearer by. It is very costly to families, not just in dollars, to be so far and so long away from a member requiring specialized services.
3. The environment, mining, forests, and fisheries, are our future. The government has been putting a lot of effort into marketing crown land, selling it and other assets off - this has helped achieved a balanced budget, but is it a responsible sustainable way to manage financially?
4. Develop our own industries. Don't just export raw logs and live beef. Process it in BC, and link to countries beyond the USA.
5. Keep developing services like UNBC, the university in the north.

\* *Peter Rhebergen, Smithers*

## GROUP IDEAS

*These organizations have election materials and campaigns that you might find of interest.*

KAIROS – VANCOUVER (CANADIAN ECUMENICAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES) have put together a special message for the provincial election which is addressed to the members of the church, to all citizens, and the political parties in the province.

[www.bcsynod.org/documents/FinalStatementElection2005FormattedMarch17.doc](http://www.bcsynod.org/documents/FinalStatementElection2005FormattedMarch17.doc)

THE MULTIFAITH SOCIAL JUSTICE COALITION is a network of diverse faith group members who have come together to express common concerns and to take action on social justice issues within British Columbia. By relying on faith-based values they aim to contribute a distinctive and necessary voice to the debate shaping governmental policies to realize a more just and democratic society within an ecologically sustainable economy.

[www.msjc.ca](http://www.msjc.ca)

THE SOCIAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH COUNCIL OF BRITISH COLUMBIA (SPARC BC) works with communities in building a just and healthy society for all. Get engaged for the provincial election on May 17th: take a look at their voter information package, *BC Votes*.

[www.sparc.bc.ca](http://www.sparc.bc.ca)

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES (BC OFFICE). Established in 1997, the CCPA's BC Office has become a key source of public policy analysis and ideas on issues of social and economic justice.

[www.policyalternatives.ca/index.cfm?act=main&call=462584F1](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/index.cfm?act=main&call=462584F1)

FIRST CALL: BC CHILD & YOUTH ADVOCACY COALITION has a child and youth issues election advocacy tool if you're concerned about these issues. First Call is a cross-sectoral, non-partisan coalition in BC. The coalition is made up of over 60 provincial organizations and 25

mobilizing communities. In addition, they have a network of thousands of community groups and individuals.

<http://www.firstcallbc.org/whatsnew/2005%20Provincial-final.pdf>

BC CITIZENS FOR PUBLIC POWER is calling for British Columbians to vote for candidates support public electricity and BC Hydro.

<http://www.citizensforpublicpower.ca/election.html>

THE WESTERN CANADA WILDERNESS COMMITTEE works for the preservation of Canadian and international wilderness through research and grassroots education. They have produced an educational report that describes the environmental record of the current BC government as well as laying out the five main issues that they believe are important for BC voters to consider.

[www.wildernesscommittee.org/campaigns/policy/vote\\_wild/reports/Vol24No03/](http://www.wildernesscommittee.org/campaigns/policy/vote_wild/reports/Vol24No03/)

VOTE ENVIRONMENT is the Sierra Club's BC Chapter's way of sharing how important it is to get involved in the coming provincial election. The goal of the project is to get people talking about environmental issues and values in the lead-up to May 17.

[www.sierraclub.ca/bc/vote](http://www.sierraclub.ca/bc/vote)

GET YOUR VOTE ON is a bunch of people doing what they call the impossible – making voting fun, interesting, worth doing for people, especially those 18 to 34. Their slogan: voting with intention.

[www.getyourvoteon.ca](http://www.getyourvoteon.ca)

FAIR VOTING BC is a non-profit, non-partisan society formed by concerned citizens from all political persuasions for the purpose of changing BC's voting system to one that is more proportional, giving equal weight to all votes.

[www.fairvotingbc.com](http://www.fairvotingbc.com)

KNOW STV is a group of individuals with wide experience in government, politics and public life who want voters to think carefully about the STV electoral system recommended for British Columbia by the Citizens Assembly.

[www.knowstv.ca](http://www.knowstv.ca)

NODICE.CA is an independent website about both federal and provincial elections in Canada.

[www.nodice.ca/elections/britishcolumbia/index.php](http://www.nodice.ca/elections/britishcolumbia/index.php)

ELECTION PREDICTION PROJECT is a non-profit initiative operated by volunteer effort.

[www.electionprediction.org/2005\\_bc/index.html](http://www.electionprediction.org/2005_bc/index.html)

THE TYEE is an alternative daily newspaper focussed on British Columbia. Named after the Tyee salmon, it calls itself "a feisty one online." It has a lot of election coverage including a daily list of news releases direct from the various parties, and an online mechanism to "ask a candidate" about particular issues.

[www.thetyee.ca](http://www.thetyee.ca)

MAPLE LEAF WEB is a non-profit, non-partisan Canadian political education website that aims to provide educators, students and the attentive public with a credible source for political education and information. It has a feature on the issues in the BC election.

[www.mapleleafweb.com/features/electoral/british-columbia/index.html](http://www.mapleleafweb.com/features/electoral/british-columbia/index.html)

## REGISTERED POLITICAL PARTIES LINKS

The Alternative Party [250-554-5421](tel:250-554-5421)  
The Annexation Party of British Columbia [www.annexationbc.com](http://www.annexationbc.com)  
BC Youth Coalition [no website or phone](#)  
The Bloc British Columbia Party [250-359-6625](tel:250-359-6625)  
British Columbia Conservative Party [www.bcconservatives.ca](http://www.bcconservatives.ca)  
British Columbia Citizens Alliance Now [www.bccitizensalliancencow.com](http://www.bccitizensalliancencow.com)  
British Columbia Democratic Futures Party [250-617-0890](tel:250-617-0890)  
British Columbia Labour Party [250-882-5051](tel:250-882-5051)  
BC Liberal Party [www.bcliberals.com](http://www.bcliberals.com)  
British Columbia Libertarian Party [libertarian.bc.ca](http://libertarian.bc.ca)  
BC Marijuana Party [www.bcmarijuanaparty.com](http://www.bcmarijuanaparty.com)  
British Columbia Party [www.bcparty.com](http://www.bcparty.com)  
British Columbia Patriot Party [250-546-0550](tel:250-546-0550)  
British Columbia Social Credit Party [www.bcsocialcredit.bc.ca](http://www.bcsocialcredit.bc.ca)  
British Columbia Unity Party [www.bcunity.ca](http://www.bcunity.ca)  
Canadian Alliance Party of British Columbia [604-263-8644](tel:604-263-8644)  
Centre Democratic Party [no website or phone](#)  
Citizens Action Party [www.capbc.org](http://www.capbc.org)  
Citizens Commonwealth Federation [250-813-0896](tel:250-813-0896)  
Communist Party of BC [cpbc.communist-party.ca](http://cpbc.communist-party.ca)  
Confederation Party of BC [250-477-5045](tel:250-477-5045)  
Democratic Reform Party [www.drbc.ca](http://www.drbc.ca)  
The Emerged Democracy Party of British Columbia [www.vote-ed.com](http://www.vote-ed.com)  
Enterprise Party of BC [250-376-5756](tel:250-376-5756)  
Free Canadian Party [250-578-8422](tel:250-578-8422)  
The Freedom Party of British Columbia [www.thepunks.com/freedom.html](http://www.thepunks.com/freedom.html)  
The Green Party of British Columbia [www.greenparty.bc.ca](http://www.greenparty.bc.ca)  
Idealist Party [604-948-1215](tel:604-948-1215)  
Link BC [no website or phone](#)  
The Moderate Democratic Movement [www.bcndm.ca](http://www.bcndm.ca)  
Natural Law Party of British Columbia [604-263-2655](tel:604-263-2655)  
New Democratic Party of BC [www.bc.ndp.ca](http://www.bc.ndp.ca)  
Party Of Citizens Who Have Decided To Think For Themselves And Be Their Own Politicians  
[www.geocities.com/partyofcitizens](http://www.geocities.com/partyofcitizens)  
People's Front [604-949-0777](tel:604-949-0777)  
The People of British Columbia Millionaires Party [250-283-2620](tel:250-283-2620)  
The Platinum Party [www.platinumparty.org](http://www.platinumparty.org)  
Reform Party of British Columbia [www.reformbc.net](http://www.reformbc.net)  
The Renewal Party of BC [604-813-2137](tel:604-813-2137)  
The Sex Party [www.thesexparty.ca](http://www.thesexparty.ca)  
United People's Action Party [250-573-3759](tel:250-573-3759)  
Western Canada Concept Party of BC [www.westcan.org](http://www.westcan.org)  
The Western Refederation Party of British Columbia [www.refedbc.com](http://www.refedbc.com)  
Western Reform [250-562-6151](tel:250-562-6151)  
Work Less Party of British Columbia [www.worklessparty.org](http://www.worklessparty.org)  
Your Political Party of BC [www.yourpoliticalpartyofbc.com](http://www.yourpoliticalpartyofbc.com)



### **JUSTICE BERGER at the Annual Meeting**

Great news! Justice Tom Berger will speak at the CPJ annual meeting on June 2 on "My Idea of Canada." His address will be followed by a brief business meeting in which the votes will be tabulated for board positions, budget and auditor. There is no charge to this event. Coffee, tea and dessert will be offered. This event is open to the public and we invite all interested to attend. Bring friends!

The gathering will be held on Thursday, June 2, at 7:30 p.m., at Killarney Park Mennonite Brethren Church, 6426 Kerr Street, Vancouver (which is Kerr and 48th Ave.)

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