

BC NDP Convention Minus 7 Days: My Journey Towards the Executive

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Friday, November 20, 2009

<http://politicsrespun.org/2009/11/bc-ndp-convention-minus-7-days-my-journey-towards-the-executive/>

Since 8:35pm on Tuesday, May 12, 2009, I've been thinking hard about the state of the BC NDP.

By that time of evening on election day, it was clear that there were profound problems in with the party. So I spent the following months talking to dozens of people about what is broken and how to fix it.

But these last 6 months have been just the most recent part of my adult life inspired by the NDP embracing progressive ideals of community-building and social justice.

It began in Coquitlam 20 years ago when Ian Waddell was my MP. These were years of profound social and political awakening for me as I attended NDP community meetings and saw what the pursuit of social justice meant.

So I embraced community.

I volunteered with the Red Cross running leadership, community involvement, international develop seminars. I became the president of the New Westminster branch of the Red Cross, and while I was studying organizational design at SFU, I was fortunate enough sit on the Strategic Planning committee of the BC-Yukon Division of the Red Cross.

Those volunteer experiences taught me the value of community development, education, the potential of youth, civic responsibility and commitment to healthy organizational change.

Those experiences dovetailed together to inspire me to become a high school English teacher in Coquitlam. I found helping youth communicate better meant empowering them to ask for what they want in society. Or even demand it.

Along the way I found being a BCTF activist to be a complementary activity to my teaching philosophy, supporting the union's efforts to join the BC Federation of Labour and take a stand against Gordon Campbell.

But the combination of a few events led to a profound transformation in my vocation.

I read Desmond Tutu write about the word "ubuntu": a person is a person through other people. It focussed my teaching even more towards social and political justice.

The MAI and WTO threats re-kindled my economics background with a rage against global neoliberalism.

Then Gordon Campbell and Christy Clark tried to destroy what it meant to be a teacher in BC.

I had enough.

So I left teaching, picked up a couple political science degrees and began a career as a CUPE researcher, now assigned to the healthcare sector at our HEU affiliate.

Along the way, the NDP has been at times both an inspiration and a frustration, falling short of my ideals at times and at other times demonstrating bold social and political leadership.

But it was when my inglorious MP David Emerson crossed the floor that I began to fully engage in party politics. I joined the riding executive in Vancouver-Kensington. I supported Don Davies' campaign for political integrity in Vancouver-Kingsway and I wrote and talked and advocated for an end to Campbell's new era of misery.

Following the election, Mable Elmore inspired a strategic planning session in our riding during which we started forming an idea that the NDP should build a social movement within itself to transform itself into something that can heal its wounds and be a force for progressive change in the 21st century.

That day led to the Think Forward BC NDP dialogue that has spread so far during these past months and stimulated debate about where the party needs to go.

Over the next few days I'll be writing about this: what's wrong with the party, why we lost the election, how we can fix the party, what it means to be an electoral wing of a progressive social movement, what internal democracy could look like, how we can define ourselves as a party, and why we should be the natural governing party in BC.

Through these daily updates, I will explain why now that, after studying our lost election and helping build Think Forward BC NDP, running for Vice-President of the party is a natural place for me to contribute to helping our party through its growing pains and out the other side as a vibrant force for powerful social, economic, political and economic justice.

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This idea led to Think Forward BC NDP and a dialogue that has spread all across British Columbia during these past months, uncovering challenges and stimulating debate about where our party needs to go.

Over the next few days I'll be writing about all this: what's wrong with the party, why we lost the election, how we can fix the party, what it means to be an electoral wing of a progressive social movement, what internal democracy could look like, how we can define ourselves as a party, and why we should be the natural governing party in BC.

Through these daily updates, I will explain why now, after studying our lost election and helping build Think Forward BC NDP, running for Vice-President of the party is a natural place for me to be. I want to contribute to helping our party through a massive, and necessary, transformation. And I want to see us emerge as a vibrant force for powerful social, economic, political and economic justice.