

Gordon Campbell Shits on the Poor Again; Corporations Contracted to Wipe Them Off

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, July 26, 2006

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Gordon Campbell and his corporate media whores have just wasted our time again with their neoliberal vision of a better hyper-individualist, starve-if-you're-poor Canada.

Campbell's glowing philosophical piece [see below [or here](#)] advocating for minute decreases in most Canadians' tax bill is a shallow reflection of the real point: substantial decreases in the tax bill of the rich. Federal and provincial tax cuts that give most Canadians \$10-15/month in tax savings do nothing for the economy, the working poor or the destitute. Tax cuts recently have been an orgasmic boon for the rich who fund Campbell's neoLiberal party in BC and the federal Liberals and Conservatives.

These editorials are a waste of time because they rest on one scurrilous "If": **"If the federal government has more money than it needs to fulfill its responsibilities, its first priority should be to reduce the tax burden on all Canadians with a significant tax cut."** The federal government **does not** have more money than it needs to fulfill its responsibilities.

The rural poor throughout Canada, the destitute on reserves, urban homeless, the working poor, those in the majority of communities in BC who have constant boil water alerts, ill Canadians who do not benefit from closed wings of hospitals--all these people are not being served by the government.

Our beloved neoliberal premier, of course, thinks otherwise. The role of providing all these should go to the market where corporations can profit from human misery and those too poor to pay do not get the services they need to live in dignity.

Campbell's entire editorial rests on the assumption that people are doing ok. And they sure are. The people who read the *Globe* and the *Sun* typically are socially better off than those living in economic insecurity. They'll likely support his assumption because they are comfortable enough to not need economic support.

In calling for competitive tax rates, Campbell is not looking for an eased tax burden for the poor and working poor. He's calling for eased taxes for the wealthy in society who can be lured to Canada by lower tax burdens than elsewhere. The typical fiscal right wing arguments about trickle-down wealth and the multiplier effect usually follow this plan as these global entrepreneurs who settle in Canada will create economic opportunity, jobs, and a larger tax base.

This rhetoric is tired. It's been going on for decades. Parliament pledged to end child poverty in Canada by 2000. It grew. During that time, we were graced with NAFTA and the federal Liberals' gouging of social programs. Gordon Campbell can trickle down my ass.

Campbell's embrace of his inner-Indian is especially galling. His government's racist First Nations referendum early in his first mandate was an insult to all British Columbians and First Nations. Calling for more development for First Nations is a sound idea. Gordon Campbell's advocacy amounts to little more than a desire to get access to some federal pork. When our premier racist apologizes for the First Nations referendum, I will take his advocacy for First Nations development seriously.

Calling for infrastructure investment in a Pacific corridor through to the rest of the continent is an economically sound approach because it can facilitate economic growth and provincial and federal wealth-creation. The fiscal right, however, is loathe to provide the same kind of infrastructure support to actual human beings as it provides for corporations. "Ports, airports, roads, bridges and border crossings" are certainly important for economic growth. Quality education, small class sizes, improved pediatric and ECE care, universal daycare, quality health benefits, no tuition fees, improved grassroots healthcare support, a guaranteed annual income or living minimum wage, increased GST rebate thresholds--all these would help people. Instead, the fiscal right is interested in underwriting the costs of corporations to do business, corporations that claim to wish to operate in a free market system, but in reality spend a great deal of time funding governing parties to cover their expenses for them to pad their profitability.

Who pads the profitability of poor and working poor human beings? Not Gordon Campbell or the *Globe* and *Sun* that publish his anti-human, pro-corporate litanies.

In the end, Campbell's true motivational tone arrives at the end of his piece when he explains what provinces would do with more federal tax money. His rhetoric about vertical and horizontal imbalances is a red herring. He wants more federal cash. And sure, that's what a good advocating provincial premier will do. But the title of his piece is "Building a Stronger Canada", not trying to get a larger share of the federal fiscal pie.

[Building a Stronger Canada](#)

July 25, 2006

By Premier Gordon Campbell

Versions of this column by Premier Campbell were published today in the *Globe and Mail* and the *Vancouver Sun*.

Canada's premiers are meeting once again to discuss ideas for strengthening Confederation. Central to that endeavour is the need to ensure that all governments have the revenue they need to provide the services for which they are responsible, within taxpayers' ability to pay.

Canadians contribute about half-a-trillion dollars annually to their governments at all levels. That should be more than enough revenue to pay for all of the programs and services that governments provide. The question is: how can we better use that money to benefit taxpayers across Canada? How can we better ensure that all levels of government in every province have the fiscal capacity to deliver reasonably comparable levels of service at reasonably comparable levels of taxation?

Premiers have often called on Ottawa to assist in funding all sorts of worthy national priorities, from

health care or skills training and post secondary education to transportation, infrastructure and a national pharmaceutical strategy. These represent billions of dollars in potential new investment, to say nothing of our common commitment to close the gaps for Aboriginal Canadians in health, education, housing and economic opportunity.

These are all vitally important national needs that should be supported within governments' means. But there is a limit to what provinces can expect or should demand from the federal government, because taxpayers also deserve a break.

There is only one taxpayer in Canada--you. The biggest fiscal "imbalance" is not the so-called "vertical imbalance," which suggests that the federal government has relatively more revenue than the provinces to pay for its responsibilities. Nor is it the "horizontal imbalance" that relates to the provinces' differing abilities to generate revenues. Rather, it is the growing imbalance between governments' insatiable appetite to spend and taxpayers' ability to pay.

Simply put, governments at all levels are taking too much out of taxpayers' pockets for too little marginal benefit, leaving working families too little to make ends meet and get ahead. **If the federal government has more money than it needs to fulfill its responsibilities, its first priority should be to reduce the tax burden on all Canadians with a significant tax cut.** This should take precedence over any increases in equalization or massive new increases in federal transfer payments to other governments.

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rnments striving to increase revenue should focus on economic growth and wealth creation. While we look at modernizing fiscal federalism, we should also be driving a national competitiveness agenda, with competitive tax rates at the top of the list.

To compete and prosper in today's economy, we must step up our commitment to train, attract and retain skilled workers. We do need new investments in post secondary education, skills training and apprenticeships. We also need to dramatically expand our efforts to recruit skilled immigrants, with flexible and pragmatic new immigration policies and national strategies for credentialing in areas of skills shortages. And we need to face up to the challenges of our aging population and consider alternatives to mandatory retirement.

Let's create wealth by closing the social and economic gap with Aboriginal Canadians, the fastest growing segment of our population. The sooner we close the Aboriginal skills training gap, the faster we will address skills shortages and improve the quality of life for Aboriginal Canadians. Moreover, the sooner we negotiate contemporary solutions to the age-old problems that have made Aboriginal Canadians Canada's third solitude, the faster we can all benefit from new partnerships across the economic and social spectrum.

Working together, Canada's governments can generate economic growth by expanding targeted investments in infrastructure and transportation. We need to open up Canada's Pacific Gateway and establish a Pacific corridor into the heart of the country and the continent with strategic investments in our ports, airports, roads, bridges and border crossings.

Economic growth can also be generated by getting accountability for spending tax dollars closer to the

level of government delivering the service. For example, we could transfer 80 per cent of federal fuel taxes back to the provinces, along with the responsibility for funding provincial transportation priorities and the cost of the "New Deal" with municipalities, which is funded from fuel taxes. The federal government could then retain 20 per cent of that funding to pay for strategic transportation investments that are vital to our national competitiveness.

We should foster greater mobility of labour, investment and truly free trade within Canada. British Columbia and Alberta are leading the way in this regard through a new landmark agreement that establishes the second largest economic union in Canada, after Ontario. This is something that all provinces could do on their own, without a penny of new federal funding.

These are all far more urgent priorities, in my view, than a wholesale renewal of the equalization program. At a minimum, any change in equalization must not create new barriers to competitiveness through policies that tilt the scales against taxpayers in provinces that foot the bill.

Provinces that receive equalization should not have a higher fiscal capacity than non-recipient provinces. Provinces that benefit from equalization should not have higher per capita program expenditures than the average of provinces that foot the bill. And equalization subsidies should not grow faster than the average rate of inflation or the average rate of economic growth for Canada.

We should not make the equalization formula even more unfair and complicated by counting assessed property values as a measure of fiscal capacity when, in fact, these property values are not a measure of taxpayers' ability to pay.

In the new fiscal federalism, commitments made should be commitments kept. And all governments should respect the hard work it takes for every taxpayer in every province to generate the revenues that we are entrusted with.

As we meet in Newfoundland, the premiers should be considering how we can strengthen Canada's competitiveness through lower taxes, strategic national investments, co-ordinated planning, new relationships with Aboriginal Canadians and fair transfer payments. That is the roadmap to prosperity for all Canadians that British Columbia is committed to pursuing.

Make your voice heard!

Do you agree with Premier Campbell's ideas to Build a Stronger Canada?

Send your comments about the Premier's editorial to the Vancouver Sun (sunletters@png.canwest.com) and Globe & Mail (letters@GlobeAndMail.ca) newspapers directly through a letter to the editor.

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