

Gordon Campbell's neoLiberal Government: Forced Sadomasochism

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Thursday, February 23, 2006

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The new BC Budget is out.

Boy, am I happy!

Not only does half a decade of appeasing-the-rich fiscal policy infuriate fans of progressive taxation, now the well-to-do get more than the brunt of tax cuts. The Homeowner Grant Program is [doing more to help the destitute lower end of the upper class](#) with an elevation of the value of homes that qualify for this program:

"The threshold at which homeowners qualify for the full grant will increase to \$780,000 in assessed property value."

Truth: I ran screaming from my 3rd year Finance and Investment course long ago, but I can do enough math to realize that to own a home worth 3/4 of a million dollars, a monthly mortgage payment at 6% interest may be around \$5k. At a 1/3 debt-equity ratio, this homeowner should be grossing \$15k/month, or \$180k/year. People earning \$180,000/year certainly need a tax break for owning a home in a city that prides itself since Expo 86 as a place where psychotic real estate appreciation will [impoverish common folks and] make us a world class [unaffordable] city like London, Paris, Hong Kong and New York. Now, you can assail me for my math being off somewhat, but however you cut it, you need to be quite wealthy to be at the high end of the Homeowner Grant Program.

Granted, the posterchild for this program is the grandmother who lives in West Point Grey [Gordon Campbell's riding] whose husband built their house in 1954 and has seen property taxes erode her pension since Expo 86. But beyond these posterchildren are the large number of people with huge incomes and huge mortgages who will benefit from the huge contribution of tax dollars donated by British Columbians who cannot afford their own home. Equity in the neoLiberal era.

Forced sadomasochism. It's one thing for people unable to own a home to voluntarily subsidize the rich. To be willingly masochistic is one's right. But to be forced into a masochistic role by the sadistic BC neoLiberal government is too hard to bear.

But the sadists in Victoria have more in store for the forced masochists of BC:

"Balanced Budget 2006 also commits up to \$6 billion out to 2009/10 to support the province's Negotiating Framework for public sector compensation. This includes up to \$1 billion in incentives to reach agreements in 2005/06."

Ten years ago, federal Finance Minister Paul Martin balanced the budget through decimating social

programs, largely through decreasing UI eligibility before changing its name to the Orwellian EI. In this decade in BC, the Campbell neoLiberal government has built a surplus through the fluke of high commodity prices and the intentional gutting of public sector wage costs.

Now with this splendid new surplus teasing us though to the Olympics, the government in its magnanimity is committing money to public sector wages. Beat public sector workers down with wage cuts and layoffs, then take that money, hold it high in the rainbow light and give it to us all--as long as we sign contracts that don't expire before the Olympics. Labour peace. Oh yes, if the public sector doesn't sign contracts by the end of the government's fiscal year, the signing bonus goes to pay down the debt. Sign here or I shoot the puppy.

Please, sir, may I have another?

In the end, class is an impolite topic in Canada. We're all middle class. There is no nobility, aristocracy or untouchables. Surveys show that most upper income Canadians think they're middle class--making me wonder if they think most Canadians have a 3-car garage. Surveys also show that most lower income Canadians also think they're middle class--making me wonder if they think that shopping at the Salvation Army for clothes is a reality for all.

The sad thing about all of us who do not regularly attend the Vancouver Board of Trade power breakfasts is that as long as the majority of people in the province whose incomes are not in the top 5% disregard the reality of class in BC in the 21st century, the upper class [the hyper-rich, the ones making more than \$180k/year, the contributors to the BC neoLiberal party, the Hummer owners] will continue to enact fiscal and social policies that entrench the two-tiered life they want.

I hate to invoke the movie Robocop, but it may be time to. The stratified society in that movie of the hyper-rich minority and the nearly destitute and desperate vast majority is becoming more of a reality in our province. It's bad enough that the 6.5 billion people in the world reflect that proportion, with virtually all Canadians being in the hyper-rich category.

If the leaders are sadists and we are unknowingly masochists, it may require a renewed focus on class for us to wake up.

Please, sir...if you give me another, you will regret it.

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