

The End of "Mayor" Sam Sullivan

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Saturday, August 04, 2007

<https://politicsrespun.org/2007/08/the-end-of-mayor-sam-sullivan/>

Welcome Peter Ladner, NPA's next mayoral candidate.

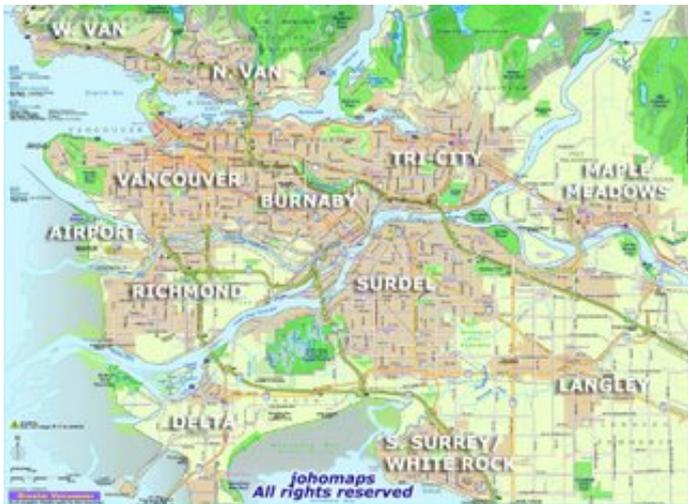
Sam Sullivan has unofficially ended his term as mayor at 11:03AM today as [CUPE announced a tentative settlement in North Vancouver](#). We have passed the tipping point in the regional dispute.

[Sullivan's strategy has been](#) absurd, ill-conceived and ill-informed at best, arrogant and destructive at worst. In fact, however, it is not a new strategy: it has a historic [and historically foolish] basis: [Boulwarism](#).

It's all about rejecting bargaining entirely and starting "negotiating" with a final offer that won't budge from threats or strikes. It inherently opposes the rights of workers to negotiate with management.

In light of the Supreme Court of Canada's recent ruling that BC's Bill 29 is illegal and that collective bargaining is protected under the Charter, "Mayor" Sam's tactics are in the spirit of what the Supreme Court opposes, as are the abuses the HEU suffered earlier in the decade and BC teachers' loss of the right to bargain wages, working conditions and class sizes.

But "Mayor" Sam is always right. Until he is embarrassingly wrong. Here's how it looks today:



Richmond, Surrey, Delta, Burnaby and North Vancouver have got Vancouver surrounded with contracts that aren't punitively designed to punish labour because it is organized. Vancouver has had the strength to bargain unfairly with the GVRD's bargaining support, until now as the 5 largest municipalities around Vancouver have or will settle by tomorrow. Vancouver's bargaining strength is virtually gone. Richmond and Surrey, that do not use the GVRD bargaining stick, helped set a pattern that the other 3 cities have recognized, and in doing so have constrained the GVRD's scope to push Vancouver's agenda and support Vancouver's internal turmoil.

Keith Baldrey wrote in the *Coquitlam Now* on July 25, 2007, “the BC economy has undergone significant changes (forestry, while still big, is not the huge industry it once was) and the power of organized labour has diminished in the past two decades. ...The economy is doing well, and employees consider themselves deserving of a bigger portion of that richer economic pie.”

The truth is broader though. Sure, the better economy means the workers ought to share in it. But the truth is that even when the economy was not so good in recent decades, corporate profits and management salaries have done well, often at the expense of workers, whose purchasing power today is close to half of what it was 30 years ago.

People often complain—especially during civic strikes like now--that union workers are lazy whiners who seek opportunities to strike while “real” workers in the private sector don’t have job security or finite hours of work or good working conditions. Their goal seems to be to make unionized workers have to suck it up and suffer the same kind of crappy jobs, wages, working conditions, hours of work and lack of protections that non-union workers are forced to endure.

Unions have spent the better part of two centuries agitating for change: weekends, a 40 hour work week [hopefully to decline further for quality of life concerns and higher meaningful employment rates], no children working 12-hour 7-day weeks in coal mines [except in BC now, thanks to Campbell’s neoLiberal regime, children as young as 12 can get their asses to work], overtime pay, holidays, vacations, health and safety provisions, etc. So many of these benefits have become so valued that society as a whole has adopted them into legislation: the Labour Code, minimum wages, collective bargaining rights to support democracy in the workplace. And now the Supreme Court has joined our side.

So while many non-union workers think unionized workers get too much, my question to them is don’t you deserve as much too? Why try to stop others from being treated with dignity at work because you aren’t. Should we all have a labour race to the bottom so we’re all back in sweatshops? Stop the insanity.

And as Baldry writes that the power of unions has declined, it is because unionization, particularly private sector unionization, has declined. Instead of trying to drag other workers down to lower levels of treatment, it’s time increase the level and breadth of unionization, particularly in the private sectors. Why aren’t bank workers unionized? They are often treated like moronic cogs on a product-shilling wheel while the big banks in Canada regularly post quarterly profits [not revenues!] in the billions?

Sam Sullivan doesn’t get it. Actually, he does get it. It’s just that he rejects it while [claiming in his inaugural address to support it](#):

“Vancouver is blessed with highly skilled staff who maintain our status as the most liveable city in the world. Tightening labour markets will present challenges over the next five years to attract, retain and develop our work force. All of us should be grateful for the front line workers who serve us so well. Our recruitment theme ‘Powered by Innovation’ should be more than a slogan as we provide interesting and rewarding careers.”

Intelligent city councils surrounding Vancouver get it too and they don’t reject it. CUPE workers get it because they know they deserve to be treated with respect...as do all other workers, despite what our arrogant, anti-social premier and mayor believe.

So thanks for the memories, "Mayor" Sam Sullivan. Let your lame duck mayoralty begin.

And, Peter Ladner, the tide is turning. Remember that as you build your NPA leadership campaign.