

## The Lie of Non-Partisanship

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Friday, July 08, 2005

<http://politicsrespun.org/2005/07/the-lie-of-non-partisanship/>

My [previous](#) post has helped me gel some ideas that have been bubbling in my head for years now.

Non-partisanship sounds spectacular. In BC, Gordon Campbell's neoLiberal government has spent its entire time in office--and then some time before that--complaining about special interest groups (SIGs): big labour, teachers, environmentalists...essentially, anyone with a bias, ideology, or belief system. The goal is to posit themselves as unbiased, objective and not swayed by hidden backroom string-pullers.

Campbell himself was mayor of Vancouver with the Non-Partisan Association, a political party that currently exists to counter the presence of COPE, a civic political party with NDP (partisan, yikes!) roots. So the NPA have been strolling around pretending to not have partisan affiliations, a political party with no political partisanship: a pure paradox.

Two of the NPA's [philosophical elements](#) are quite entertaining:

- Individuals have the right to enjoy the fruits of their labour, and to own private property, and individual enterprise is generally preferable to government intervention.
- Elected civic representatives should make decisions based on the viewpoint of many individuals and organizations, and not be under obligation to policies or platforms of political parties.

The first is a standard philosophical foundation for capitalist, right wing parties that exist in direct opposition to big government ideologues: communists, socialists, democratic socialists...generally, wealth redistributors. The second exerts the absence of particular political party platforms guiding decisions. If it looks like a neoLiberal, talks like a neoLiberal and acts like a neoLiberal, but says it is not a neoLiberal party, we can just nod and smile knowingly.

The problem, though, is this notion of non-partisanship is giving anyone with a political ideology a bad name, when those claiming to be unbiased, objective and free from ideology are as ideological as the SIGs they denigrate. They are getting away with it. Thus the lie of non-partisanship.

It's easy to see this play out in American federal politics lately. The Democrats are big-L Liberal scourges who want to tax and spend and erode the moral fibre of America. More accurately, I'd call them Republican-lite. The Republicans hate big government and taxes, want the courts to uphold the moral fibre of the land and tend towards evangelical imperialism. When the Democrats controlled the executive and legislatures, the Republicans demonized them Liberals [which is 21st century lingo for Godless Commie] and would not co-operate with their despicable agenda.

Now that the Republicans are in the White House, both houses of Congress and are set to appoint one, then soon another supreme court judge, they are demanding the Democrats not be so partisan. They should cooperate with bi-partisan efforts to expand their empire, reduce domestic civil rights and cut

taxes to the rich and the corporations. If they don't give in, they're being difficult and swayed by SIGs. Bad Democrats. Truly, this is what the Republicans did when in opposition: oppose and stand firm to their ideology. As the Democrats give in and cooperate, they show how Republican-lite they really are; they do, after all, take huge campaign contributions from the same rich folks and corporations that the Republicans do.

And new paradoxes emerge as well. The Republicans are not doing the old tax and spend Keynesian trick, but neither are they following the traditional right wing balanced budget rhetoric. They are cutting taxes (not so much a new thing for them), but they are blowing open the government coffers and spending into huge deficits to justify cutting social programs: all the things that big government ideologues love. This way, they can fund imperial pursuits, reward their rich and corporate backers with more cash and erode the role of government impeding unregulated free markets.

This radical morphing of Republican fiscal priorities has forced Democrats to play the fiscally responsible conservatives, promising balanced budgets and fiscal control: just what the Republicans have always sought.

Back to BC, the same neoLiberal tax cuts for the rich and corporations has created an artificial cash flow problem motivating Campbell's dreaded "tough choices" reflecting three of the four horsemen of global neoLiberal Structural Adjustment Programs that the western funded IMF loves to foist on the majority world: privatization (BC Ferries, BC Rail, health care support workers), deregulation (trimming "needless red tape"), and free trade (build BC ferries outside BC); increasing foreign direct investment is the fourth horseman.

And just like the Democrats, the provincial NDP has slipped to the centre, elected a moderate leader, promised balanced budgets over Keynesian or neo-Keynesian approaches and are fiscally as conservative as Social Credit used to be. The pendulum has not just swung to the right, but the whole thing has moved to the right.

So as citizens, it is our responsibility to remember that everyone in political life is ideological. People who claim to be non-partisan are lying if they have some economic, political, moral or social priorities that exist over others. People who claim that Special Interest Groups pull the strings of their political enemies likely have groups or even personal ideologies that motivate them as well.

In the end, politics SHOULD be about ideologies. Ideologically vacant politicians are worthless, though can often get elected because as chameleons, they reflect the will of the pollsters' snapshots of public will. We should be electing people with ideologies and we should be wary of people who claim to have none to appear to be unbiased: they are dangerous, dangerous liars.

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