

New Premier, Same Dismissive BC Liberal Insensitivities

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Friday, March 25, 2011

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In less than two weeks, Premier Clark and the same old BC Liberal government have boldly continued the decade-long tradition of being mean, dismissive and insensitive to vulnerable British Columbians:

1. suggesting students should drink less coffee to pay for tuition fee increases
2. highlighting how much grant money they are not restoring after restoring a minority of grant money they previously stripped
3. funding food banks when party policies have entrenched poverty for almost a decade

1. Just hours after being sworn in, the government released a fact sheet on post-secondary education. It included a clever comparison of recent tuition fee increases to a cup of coffee a day, implying reducing by a cup a day would make the pain of tuition fee increases go away. [The new minister apologized](#) for the insensitivity and the ministry [yanked the insensitive statement from the fact sheet](#). And since the BC government will collect more in tuition fees next year than in corporate income taxes, we've gone fully through the rabbit hole of fair taxation [[Did you know BC's corporate tax rate hits zero percent next January for the first \\$500,000 in revenue?](#)]. The BC Liberal brand has a new spokesperson/premier, but it is the same dismissive insensitivity we've seen for a decade. Let them eat cake/coffee/whatever.

2. In an attempt to re-spin the mean-spirited reputation of the previous BC Liberal government, the new premier cheerily announced the restoration of \$15 million in grants her party previously stripped from community organizations. Not only is it cynical to celebrate the reversal of her own party's anti-social funding cuts, the restoration of just 5/12 of the money stripped allowed everyone to focus on the glass that is still 7/12 empty as \$21 million remains stripped away. Why not restore it all? Even her main leadership opponent pledged to restore it all, but not the new premier. Trying to spin this announcement like some sort of gift is typical dismissiveness from the BC Liberal party.

3. But most galling is that the anti-social, poor bashing policies of a decade of misery with this government have led to record child poverty, a stalled minimum wage, depressed social assistance rates, increased user fees and stripped advocacy services for the poor. In this context, and in the premier's announcement of restored funding, she included this gem, ["This new funding will provide an extra 25 per cent to help food banks meet growing demand."](#) So not only does her party exacerbate poverty for a decade, then strip funding from community groups, then in magnanimously restoring it, pledge to fund food banks, a band aid solution to the poverty they themselves have stoked.

"It's very interesting," said Cheryl Carline, CEO of the Greater Vancouver Food Bank, following the statement from Clark. "We don't accept government funding. We never have."

In fact, none of the 90 or so food banks represented by Food Banks B.C. accept government funding.

The reason, Carline said, is to ensure that the organization remains autonomous.

“We’ve always been self-sustaining,” Carline said. “While we’ve always had good relationships with governments, we’ve never accepted government funding simply because we need to be able to speak candidly about the issue of hunger as an NGO.”

“I was surprised when the announcement came across my desk, and we’ll be getting in touch with the premier’s office for some clarification.”

via [Metro - Food banks puzzled by announcement](#).

In the end, the public is going to have to sift through the spin and rhetoric from a new face on the same mean-spirited, insensitive, dismissive party that has been bludgeoning the vulnerable for the first decade of this century.

The new premier might smile more, deliver announcements in as many child care centres as she wishes, but she will still be peddling the same brand of BC Liberal misery that has been destroying the social fabric of the province for years.

I've had enough.