

On Carole James Being a Woman

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Saturday, November 28, 2009

<https://politicsrespun.org/2009/11/on-carole-james-being-a-woman/>

On [Monday](#) and [Tuesday](#) I wrote about reasons I had been hearing from people about why they think we lost the election. It was a list of reasons I had heard, presented in no particular order.

The only order jiggling I did was to put my belief at the end, the one about engaging with members and the progressive social movement in BC that I contributed to [Think Forward BC NDP](#).

In describing the category of reasons why people think we lost that dealt with Carole James, among the 5 reasons I included that people were suggesting, one of them was that she is a woman.

Not explicitly writing that I don't necessarily believe this list of explanations of the electoral loss meant I left some ambiguity about what I do believe.

I don't believe we lost the election because of any of the first 8 categories of reasons, including that our leader is a woman. I believe we lost because we alienated our members who chose to not fund, volunteer for or vote for a party that no longer reflected what they felt the party should be. I don't think it was the gender of the leader.

I think people who don't think women should be premier wouldn't vote NDP anyway. I have also talked to party members who were concerned about having a female leader because they feared sexist voters wouldn't vote for the party. But like I said, I don't think they'd vote NDP anyway.

The sexist reality of this province is that one's gender can be an element in their political success or failure. There are also racist elements in the political culture in BC. We don't talk about either of them too much, though. They are very touchy subjects, understandably.

But we need to talk about race and gender and all sorts of demographic issues that unjustifiably bias the public's political decision-making.

These are real issues to discuss, not in the context of deciding how to let racism and sexism sway our political existence, but to figure out how to build a progressive society in BC that is beyond this kind of bigotry.

Two days ago, Carole James [discussed one example](#) of this bigotry in politics:

"It's difficult for women because you can be seen as shrill very easily," Ms. James said. "You can be seen as haranguing in a way that men aren't. When you take on tough issues I think there's also a tougher standard for women to find that balance."

What kind of civilized, enlightened society exists in which a provincial political party leader who happens

to be a woman has to moderate her political existence to accommodate troubling perceptions in the population? It turns out, ours. Martin Luther King, Jr. had a few things to say about how we ought to judge people. Decades later, we still have a way to go.

And when we voted for an equity policy at the 2007 convention, there was much debate: uncomfortable and touchy, but necessary.

This weekend we'll receive the Equity Mandate Report and decide what to do in the future to encourage more diversity in NDP candidacies.

Having had the pleasure of watching the equity policy contribute to a number of successes like Mable Elmore's election in Vancouver-Kensington, I will encourage continued discussion about the various forms of bigotry that exist in our political culture, with a goal of moving past it.

I voted for the equity policy in 2007 and I will vote for the new Mandate recommendations this weekend.

Dialogue is important.

It isn't always easy and it is often cumbersome to the point of wondering if it's worth it. But in a progressive political party, earnest members of good intentions deserve the space and the freedom to discuss controversial subjects in a productive way.

While I don't think we lost either of the last 2 elections because our leader is a woman, some people still do. And that is worth discussing because if we don't, the elephant in the room will remain, which is what we're trying to avoid when we examine equity issues in the first place.