



**Discussion Paper Prepared
for Participants**

October 30, 2010

Wosk Centre for Dialogue



CREATING A BLUEPRINT FOR A BETTER BC

**Our Shared Future: Summit
to Build a Better BC**



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BUILDING A BETTER BC



"We can work together for a better world with men and women of goodwill, those who radiate the intrinsic goodness of humankind."

-- Wangari Maathai (*Kenyan Environmental & Political Activist, Winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize*)

"We humans have a natural capacity and desire to be loving, peaceful, generous, and cooperative. Despite our wondrous cultural differences, at the core of our being we all want a world of healthy happy children, families, and communities living in peace and cooperation in a vibrant natural environment. For millennia, imperial culture and institutions have suppressed this capacity and held us back from realizing our dream—with devastating and now potentially terminal consequences. Culture and institutions are human creations. We created them through our individual and collective actions. We have the right to change them. Our new communications technologies give us the means. Our confrontation with social and environmental collapse creates the imperative."

-- David Korten (*Author and Lecturer*)

A Positive Alternative

It may have been our response to the provincial budget cutbacks following the economic downturn that brought us together. It will be our shared vision of a Better BC - a Better World – that keeps us together.

In the following pages you will find brief outlines of the concerns and hopes of a number of the organizations who have joined the Coalition to Build a Better BC. You will also see the beginnings of a consensus around key issues such as achieving justice for First Nations and challenging poverty and homelessness.



This paper does not encompass all the social sectors or issues that are – or could be – part of the Coalition to Build a Better BC. Deciding together how to broaden the coalition – or how to create greater focus in terms of strategies for joint action – will be an important part of our work. We hope the dialogue on October 30 at the Wosk Centre will be a good beginning.

Sharing our Stories – Creating a Shared Vision

We thought it important to share these stories with each other as we enter this next stage of deepening and bringing greater clarity to our relationships of social solidarity. We hope this sharing will also provide a welcoming

introduction to those attending the October 30 “Summit” who are not yet members of the coalition.



In our planning for this dialogue we also felt it important to begin grappling with the

practical challenges of achieving our vision. The concluding section of this discussion paper focuses on the issue of funding the public sector, social programs and civil society. It provides some facts and figures on provincial government revenue and spending. It asks some tough questions about the choices we need to make about priorities for spending and the politics of taxation.

These are just some of the questions we will need to address as we move forward together. But every journey has to start somewhere. Our dialogue must be ongoing and not afraid to address difficult issues and identify our differences. With goodwill and commitment to a better world and a better BC for our children and grandchildren we will find the answers.

Moving Forward Together

The Coalition to Build a Better BC was created in the belief that behind our separate struggles is a common foundation of shared values. That these values provide the basis for a progressive and liberating vision of a better province, a better world. That exploring and sharing this vision will bring us together and make each of our movements stronger. That we can replace the dominant vision with one that allows all people to flourish and sustains the earth that is the foundation of all life.

Ethical Reflections

Perhaps these values can be summed up by the still profound and relevant ideas expressed in the 1983 statement by Canada’s Catholic Bishops: [Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis](#):

- “The needs of the poor have priority over the wants of the rich”.
- “The rights of workers are more important than the accumulation of machines or the maximization of profit”.
- “The participation of the marginalized takes precedence over an order that excludes them”.

We may share fundamental values but we do not all come with the same histories, with the same language. Defining these values in words and phrases we can all share and feel we “own” will take openness and dialogue.



We may have common goals but we come from different cultures and different organizational traditions. It will take goodwill and frank discussion to build the bridges we need.

We may have the same dreams but we need to find ways to work together to create strategies to achieve changes we want.

We cannot assume that sustaining a broad coalition with this inclusive and long-term vision will come easy or quickly. We hope you will agree that it is a goal worth pursuing – a path well worth the taking.

STARTING AT THE BEGINNING – BC IS NATIVE LAND

Building a Better BC must begin with acknowledging the fact we live on the un-ceded traditional territories of First Nations.

In other parts of Canada, the French and then British governments negotiated treaties with the original inhabitants. By the time Europeans arrived in the area of British Columbia, the weight of numbers and force of arms was such that even this legal fig-leaf was not felt necessary. Towns and cities, roads and railways were simply imposed on First Nations territory without so much as a “by your leave”. The indigenous owners and stewards of the land were forced onto tiny reserves. Some were even imprisoned or executed for resisting.

The traditional spiritual practices of First Nations such as the Potlatch were outlawed; people were fined and jailed and their sacred masks and totems seized. Then their children were taken and locked away in “residential schools”. The impact on individuals, families and whole communities of the psychological, physical and sexual abuse suffered by generations of First Nations people is still very much with us today.

A Changed Legal Landscape

The Supreme Court of Canada in the 1997 Delgamuukw decision forever changed the legal foundation for negotiation and settlement between First Nations. It affirmed the validity of oral histories for establishing the factual basis for First Nations occupation and use of their traditional territories. It also further defined the obligation of Canadian governments to recognize aboriginal title.

It is fitting that this key decision for all First Nations within Canada arose in a case brought by the Gitksan and Witsuwit'en of British Columbia. However, as has been the case for so long, the implementation of First Nations rights has been difficult and lengthy.

In 2005 the provincial government signed a commitment to “A New Relationship” with BC First Nations. However, progress toward achieving fair treaty settlements remains painfully slow. Meanwhile, First Nations people on and off reserve suffer from high unemployment, bad housing, inadequate services, and discrimination. A Better BC will provide the commitment and funds to fulfill our obligations to the original owners of this land.



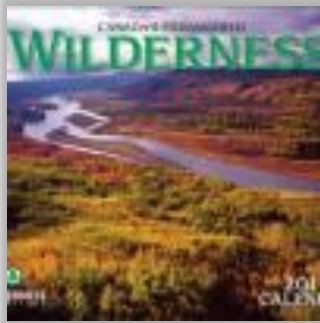
A “New” New Relationship

The sincere recognition of First Nations title on which A Better BC must be based does not mean trying to figure out at what price development will be able to go ahead. It means recognizing that for First Nations there is no price that can be put on Mother Earth and the future of all her children.

Truly recognizing First Nations rights means respecting their traditions and incorporating their values of sustainability into our own relationship with the environment. It means seeing ourselves as joint stewards of the land, the air and the waters in and around British Columbia. It means accepting First Nations as true partners and beneficiaries in whatever economic development is mutually agreed on.

INVESTING IN A GREEN BC

Recently in the United States, a local fire department let a person's home burn down because a \$75 fee had not been paid. If taxes had been raised to pay for the Fire Department, a whole lot of money and needless grief could have been saved. How many more will burn to the ground if this isn't fixed?



The same idea applies to stopping Climate Change. Raising public revenue and creating green jobs, especially in BC's public service, is

an investment in the future and makes sense now. It will put money in people's pockets now and create an even better BC down the road. It only makes sense - just like putting out that house on fire would have.

Here is one example. In September 2001, the BC government released a report entitled 'Economic Benefits of British Columbia's Provincial Parks'. The key finding of the report: "For each dollar invested by government in the protected areas system, there were about \$10 dollars in visitor expenditures."

And the economic benefits of parks are widely distributed across BC's communities.

Over one-half of these benefits occur outside of the Lower Mainland and Victoria regions. Here is another one:

The Auditor General reports the BC government has been slashing the parks budget. Fewer than

half of BC's world famous parks even have a management plan. BC's parks budget has fallen steadily over the past three years even while we are coming up to the one hundredth anniversary of our parks system.

There are many more examples of how the creation of good green jobs would be good for the environment and the economy. It was a very pleasant surprise this summer to see a bumper crop of wild salmon coming up the Fraser River. But, what if they don't have home streams to return to?

A 2009 report by BC's Forest Practices Board found there are thousands of stream crossings on old logging roads that need to be fixed up because they are a barrier to fish. Fixing them would create good green jobs that would have a big long-term payoff for everyone in BC.

It turns out that everywhere you look we are literally tripping over good green jobs waiting to be done. Here's one last example. Did you know that we can create 10 more jobs per tonne of waste by investing in recycling and composting than we can by investing in burning or burying garbage?

We just need a government with enough common sense to see through the haze of burning homes and burning forests and see what a Better – Green – BC will look like.

A BETTER BC WOULD END POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS

By any measure British Columbia has the highest overall poverty rate in the country and the highest child poverty rate. Homelessness exists not just in Vancouver's downtown eastside but in communities all around the province.



There is nothing inevitable about poverty in a society with our wealth and resources. It can be reversed with a planned and affordable strategy. Poverty has many causes so a

poverty reduction plan must have many parts.

Working at, or near, the minimum wage is not just an issue for young people getting their first job. It impacts parents, families and children. Everyone has a right to a living wage and raising the minimum wage to \$10 and increasing it every year to keep up with the cost of living is the first essential step.

A decent and fair society would also ensure adequate income for those who cannot work - or work full-time - due to physical, mental or emotional challenges. Cuts to social assistance and the erosion of other support programs take us exactly in the wrong direction. A Better BC will be judged by how it treats the most unfortunate among us.

We Need a Poverty Reduction Strategy

Other provinces have done better. Both Quebec and Newfoundland would have higher poverty rates than ours based on market income alone. But after including the effect of government transfers their poverty levels fall below BC's.

For many poor and low-income individuals and families decent housing is simply not available. This is mostly due to the elimination in the early 1990's of federal support for building social housing. However, the provincial government could do far more to encourage and support the creation of affordable housing.

The price of poverty is not just borne by the households who experience it firsthand. We all pay in higher costs for social, community and charitable services, in higher costs to the criminal justice system, in lost productivity and lower school success, and particularly in terms of higher health costs. Poverty impacts cognitive development, creating a multi-generational legacy.

A Better BC would make steady progress toward eliminating poverty and homelessness with a comprehensive plan with measureable targets and firm timelines.

A Better BC Would End Child Poverty

The economic crisis has left many workers without jobs and many more families without the resources to fully support their children. Child poverty can only be eliminated if there are government policies to increase the income of low-income families and provide a sense of security and well-being to all individuals.

British Columbia, one of Canada's richest provinces, has the highest level of child and family poverty in the country. One out of every five students lives in poverty, a significant barrier to educational success. Child poverty is often a story of low-wages. Fifty six percent of poor children in BC live in households with at least one parent working full-time. Having the lowest minimum wage in the country is a big part of the problem. So is the failure of many employers in both the private and public sectors to pay a living wage to people with families to support.

In a Better BC finding homes for children and their families who are inadequately housed would be a priority. Much more affordable housing is required. No child should face the physical and emotional impact of being without

a home. We cannot say that we are serious about providing an education to all children when too many do not have a stable, warm, and welcoming place to live.

In a Better BC a universal and affordable childcare program will not only allow parents, especially women, to participate without barriers in the labour force but provide an essential stepping stone to better, and more equal, education for all children.

A BETTER BC WILL RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Building a society that nurtures and supports children and youth is about more than just poverty. BC's children and youth need the full support of society. We must commit to supporting healthy early childhood development and to supporting young people as they transition from childhood to youth and adulthood.



Children and youth deserve to have their rights respected and to have the opportunities and supports they need to achieve their full potential and to participate in the challenge of creating a better society.

BC and Canada have signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, promising to put the best interests of the child first and foremost in their decision-making. We have a long way to go to live up to this

commitment. Child poverty is just one signal of our failure to respect children's rights.

Supporting children also means supporting their parents and other caregivers.

There is a strong case to be made for investing in healthy child and youth development. There is a mountain of empirical research, both Canadian and international, about the cost effectiveness of preventive services. Giving children and youth the support they need will save millions of dollars in health, education, social services and justice system costs down the road.

WOMEN WILL HAVE AN EQUAL PLACE IN A BETTER BC

In a Better BC women will be full and equal participants. Their roles both in the workplace and as mothers and caregivers will be valued and supported through programs such as affordable, public and universal childcare. Their reproductive rights will be protected as well as their right to be free of domestic and other forms of violence.

Women have fought long and hard to overcome their second-class position. The women's movement won inclusion of equality in the Canadian constitution and the right to equal pay for work of equal value. Further advances such as extended parental leave have also been achieved.

Unfortunately, in recent years we have seen setbacks in this progress:

- Job losses in the public sector were a double blow to women – they make up the majority of workers in this sector and women rely to a greater degree on the services provided by the public sector.

- Cuts to income assistance benefits and eligibility affect women disproportionately.
- Cuts to women’s centres and legal aid undermined crucial supports needed by women to leave abusive relationships and retain custody of their children.
- Women are more likely than men to be in low-wage and precarious work situations where the erosion of employment standards has the greatest impact.

Advancing Gender Equality

In a Better BC women’s contribution to society would be recognized. In terms of total work (paid and unpaid) women perform, on average, about the same amount as men. Unpaid work, including caring for children and elders, and preparation of meals, is invisible and uncounted.

A Better BC will recognize that discrimination and violence hit especially hard on Aboriginal women, women of colour, women trapped in poverty and women with disabilities. A Better BC will ensure that the necessary resources are provided to assist the most vulnerable.

A Better BC will have a culturally appropriate and accessible province-wide network of transitional shelters for women and children. Women in rural and First Nations communities are often forced to leave their familiar surroundings – or remain trapped in abusive relationships. In urban centres the underfunding of women’s centres and shelters remains at crisis proportions. In a Better BC women and children will receive the support and assistance they require to escape domestic abuse and live free of fear and violence.



Changing Attitudes – Changing the Structures of Sexism

Marginalized women are also the victims of police and court attitudes that are indifferent at best and prejudicial at worst. The murdered women from the Downtown Eastside and the disappeared from the “Highway of Tears” are

testament to the still prevalent double-standard that makes the disappearance or death of women, especially the most marginalized, a lesser priority.

In a Better BC this systemic discrimination will be constantly challenged. There will be generous support – including core funding - for organizations

that advocate for women and provide the independent voice essential to fight institutionalized sexism, racism and homophobia. In a Better BC women will have access to legal aid and funding will be available for court challenges to ensure laws and policies are consistent with the equality provisions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

WHAT DOES A HEALTHY BC LOOK LIKE?

Imagine a province in which everyone, no matter their age, cultural heritage, or geographic location, has truly equal access to health care.



We want to build a BC that looks after our elders - where people can age with dignity and respect. It will be a place where sons and daughters can enjoy time with their parents and not have to worry about the costs of their care. In a Better BC home and community care services will be fully covered under Medicare.

We want to build a BC where the things that are basic to good health – housing, food, education, and income – are treated as central to the health of the community.

We want to build a BC where people are at the centre of decision-making and knowledge accumulation about our own health.

A Better BC will value the principles of the **Canada Health Act** and stands up to profit-seeking parties who attempt to undermine equality by offering services only to those who can pay.

A Better BC will provide adequate training and living wages to health care providers.

A Better BC will strengthen our health care system through ongoing innovation. We must scale up positive, public models and pilot projects that are working and make them the

cornerstone of a revitalized public health care system.

Building on a Strong Foundation

The universal and comprehensive health system in a Better BC will finish the work of creating

Medicare by including the last three major pieces of the original Hall Report on establishing Medicare that have not yet been implemented:

- Full dental coverage;
- Full home care services;
- An effective Pharmacare program.

Restructure health care delivery:

- Restructure the six (and a half) health authorities as currently constituted – either re-centralize in the Health Ministry, or go back to the much more locally-based and -elected Boards of the sort established in the late 1990's; and
- Move aggressively to a community clinics model exemplified in the REACH Community Health Centre.

Together with moving to community health clinics, promote the health care consumer empowerment ethos which views professionals as consultants, with the health care consumer at the centre of decision-making and knowledge accumulation.

As a crucial part of health care consumer empowerment, eHealth will be made much more health care consumer focussed. It will include full access by individuals to their own Electronic Health Records and be restructured so individuals can decide for themselves whether or not to participate.

The current near catastrophic shortage of appropriate psychiatric services across the province will be addressed.

Ongoing and comprehensive public education and social marketing campaigns will be used to address debilitating public attitudes about diseases and conditions such as HIV, Hepatitis C, mental illness and poverty. A Better BC will effectively address the stigmatization and marginalization that greatly complicates and often frustrates effective prevention and treatment efforts.

MAKING THE ARTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES CENTRAL TO A VIBRANT SOCIETY

What would BC look like if our arts and culture were fully supported and flourishing?



From the cradle to the grave, culture fills our lives with music, dance, craft, photography, film; with the art on our walls, the books we read, the theatre we attend and the festivals we

love. It's often how we define ourselves and let ourselves be known.

The arts have value in and of themselves. We listen to music because it moves us with beauty, complexity, poetry, drama and compelling meaning. Video and film tell stories that offer us insight into our own and others' lives. We connect with both our heads and our hearts.

We understand historic and present realities with greater depth and clarity when experienced through the eyes of artists. Dancing seems driven from a force within us from a time when we are very young. We travel the world to experience the arts and the world comes to BC to discover the voices and visions of our cultures. Cutting edge arts practices, mystifying to some, expand the scope of the human imagination. All forms of art and culture, whether in large theatres and galleries or on our city streets, are part of an interconnected continuum that celebrate what it is to be fully human.

The arts also have profound economic and instrumental value. Studies prove that the arts and design sector are significant economic drivers. Cities thrive when they promote and support their creative communities, attracting workers while providing significant tax and other spin-off revenues. (According to its own statistics, the BC government receives \$1.36, in taxes alone, for every dollar it invests in arts and culture). In 2010 around 80,000 British Columbians are working in this sector, making it a significant part of our work force.

The Arts are Good for Your Health

Research shows that participation in the arts mitigates the effects of aging, bringing better health to our senior citizens. Artists collaborate with ecologists to develop new ways to address complicated issues and to engage other citizens

to find solutions. We know that children’s brain development is greatly enhanced through visual arts, music and dance.

We grow to appreciate the diversity of BC’s pluralistic society through festivals and events that encourage us to learn about traditions other than our own. Communities become stronger when people collaborate with artists in creative processes; we are able to find common ground when different perspectives are aired in safe environments and new decision-making skills are learned.

Through participation in community arts, people who have been dislocated from meaningful community find their creative selves, connect with others, develop working skills, and find a new sense of purpose and hope. Personal and community identity and pride are built with accomplishments that demonstrate ability. Our well-being is affected when creative activity, an essential part of normal brain function, is neglected.

Promoting the Creative Spirit

Creativity, while not confined to the arts, is certainly the foundation of this sector. At a time when we need innovative solutions to the urgent and complex issues we face, government policy should be supporting creative capacity in all of its citizens.



The BC government grossly undervalues the contributions of our artists and their organizations. Recent drastic cuts of around fifty percent fly in the face of logic and are out of proportion to other cost-savings. Funding the sector at a rate of only 1/10th of 1 percent of the provincial budget BEFORE the cuts, the

Campbell government is the only jurisdiction in Canada to take the axe to arts at a time when we need to create jobs and promote cultural activities.

In a Better BC, creativity and the arts would be at the core of education. Easily-accessible theatres, galleries, our community centres and streets would be filled with citizens and tourists engaged with the arts, bringing vitality and economic benefit to every corner of the province.

Artists in residence with labour groups, in hospitals, works yards and in prisons would revitalize those environments. Communities would work with artists to help plan and achieve visions. We would have a government that understands that participation in the arts creates fully-rounded citizens who are better able to realize their potential. A Better BC would see arts and culture at the heart of our lives.

A BETTER BC WILL BE “AN AGE-FRIENDLY” COMMUNITY

People are living longer and the number of older people is growing. This can be an opportunity not a burden. As more people enter their “senior years” in good health and mental capacity they make valuable contributions to British Columbia.



For many this takes the form of continuing paid work – full or part-time. For others it means

volunteering in a wide variety of community activities. Seniors are also increasingly active in leisure activities that are a boon to the economy.

Aging means, at some point in our lives, we may require assistance. Beginning with home support and moving along to home care, assisted living, residential care and palliative care. The more coordinated, appropriate and accessible these services are, the greater is the contribution seniors can make; and the closer we will come to ensuring everyone has a full life in dignity and comfort.

Unfortunately, the entire spectrum of support for seniors in this province has deteriorated in recent years.

- In 2001, BC ranked second in Canada in per capita health funding. By 2007, we had fallen to sixth place.
- In 2001, BC was above average compared to other provinces in terms of access to residential care for people 75 and over. By 2008, BC had the second lowest rate of access, after New Brunswick.
- In the mid-1990's, BC was a leader in the provision of home health services. By 2003, BC had fallen well below the national average in terms of per capita spending in this area.

Back to the Future

We can afford to return to the path of progress forged by previous generations and move to a truly “age-friendly” society. We need to support the programs and services that help seniors stay healthy – from health literacy to public recreational facilities to ensuring our communities are fully accessible.

An “age-friendly” society will also be a “disability-friendly” society; benefiting everyone

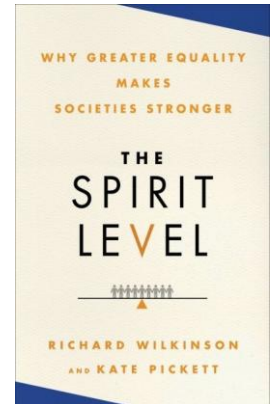
from childhood onwards who have some challenge to realizing their full potential.

A More Equal Society for Seniors – A More Equal Society for Everyone

Working toward a more equitable income distribution – including adequate retirement income – benefits everyone. Thirty years of research summarized in a recent publication:

“*The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*” shows how inequality breeds negative outcomes across a wide spectrum of social indicators.

It also demonstrates that more equal societies provide a better life for everyone, including the better off. Some may have less “stuff” but they live in safer, healthier and more liveable communities.



IN A BETTER BC AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE LEARNING WILL BE A RIGHT

Protecting and improving public education will be a top priority in a Better BC. A properly-funded public education system is a cornerstone of a civil and diverse society.

In the last decade conditions in BC’s public schools worsened while access to post-secondary education went downhill. The recent decision to continue cutting corporate taxes has created serious funding pressures throughout the education system. We now have the perverse situation of revenue from tuition fees exceeding revenue from corporate taxes.

In a Better BC the provincial government will increase funding to reflect real increases in costs.

An injection of more than \$300 million in new funding is required to address shortfalls in the public education system. The provincial funding formula does not really capture the costs of public education for grades K to 12.

We have often heard the mantra of “highest funding ever.” However, what is hidden by that slogan is the reality of “highest costs ever.” Funding has not kept up with inflation, with the provisions of the collective agreement, or with the costs that have been downloaded onto school districts.

The result has been dramatic cuts in student services. Supports for students with special needs have been reduced while the number of identified students has increased. School libraries and teacher-librarians have been cut. Classroom resources have been reduced.

In a Better BC the provincial government will provide stability and keep its funding promises to school districts.

K to 12 funding has received an ever smaller share of the provincial budget for almost two decades. Each year school districts are pushed deeper into a financial squeeze. Added to this, school boards don't know what their funding will be in the following year – or the one after that.



The impact on students, the classroom and the school community is becoming severe. Students do not have free public education if they have to raise funds for regular activities or to pay for field trips.

In a Better BC the government will fully fund new requirements and new programs such as all-day Kindergarten. Even such positive changes have a negative impact if they force boards to cut elsewhere to meet new requirements.

School boards throughout BC have been forced to close schools in order to cover the cost of new mandates imposed by the provincial government. The loss of a local school discourages families from staying in a neighbourhood and new families from moving in. It can start a downward spiral of community decline.

In a Better BC post-secondary learning opportunities will be accessible and affordable to every citizen

Achieving sustainable prosperity will depend on the investments we make in post-secondary education. Public opinion polls show strong support for this direction but since 2001 real per-student operating grants to post-secondary institutions have fallen by over 8 percent.

This widening funding gap creates big problems. Tuition fees have

skyrocketed; students are graduating with a mountain of debt. They are taking longer to complete their degree programs because rising tuition costs are forcing them to balance school with work.

For institutions the crunch means fewer services, longer wait-lists for popular programs and aging infrastructure, especially in key areas of technology. For faculty, the funding shortfall means increased workloads and limited course options.

The under-funding of post-secondary education has really hit trades training and apprenticeship programs. Post-secondary institutions deliver over 90 percent of those programs so this financial squeeze has worsened BC's growing skills shortage and created a serious drag on future growth and prosperity.

It is largely because of lobbying for lower taxes by the business community that our province has failed to invest in education. It is ironic that the skills and knowledge they say are necessary for a growing, modern economy are the very things we are losing.

A Better BC will promote opportunities for every citizen to learn and to grow; for the benefit of the economy, for society and for themselves.

A BETTER BC WILL RESPECT THE RIGHTS AND DIGNITY OF WORKING PEOPLE

In a Better BC all working people will earn a living wage in conditions of safety, security, dignity and respect. Over many decades of often difficult efforts working people had made real progress in this province. A large percentage of workers had the benefit of belonging to a trade union and were covered by collective agreements. Even those who were not were at least protected by the floor set by the **Employment Standards Act** coupled with enforcement of those regulations through inspections and complaint mechanisms.



Since 2001, those rights and protections have been eroded. In May of 2002 **Bill 48** was introduced. Among its provisions were:

- The “privatization” of enforcement through delegation to employer associations;
- Eliminating the “meet or exceed” requirement which set a floor for union contracts;
- Allowing individual “employment agreements” which simply put workers at the mercy of their employers;
- Longer maximum hours of work; and
- Exclusion of farmworkers from receiving overtime pay, minimum wages and statutory holidays.

Respect for Contracts – Respect for Workers

Bill 29 tore up the contracts covering 80,000 healthcare workers. Over 8,000 mostly women workers lost decent, family-supporting jobs with pensions and other negotiated benefits. The contracting out of their jobs did not save any money but it did lead to retention and

recruitment problems, instability in the sector and lower standards of cleanliness.

The Canadian Supreme Court ruled **Bill 29** unconstitutional in 2007, but the impact of the law on public sector workers has not been reversed.

Then there is BC's minimum wage of \$8 an hour. Frozen since 2001, it is now the lowest in Canada. The so-called "training wage" of \$6 for the first 500 hours of work is just 60 percent of the minimum wage in Newfoundland.

"Please sir, can I have some more?"

We do not yet see the return of debtors' prisons and workhouses but changes to child labour regulations moved us closer to the world of Charles Dickens we thought were left far behind.



In 2003, the BC government lowered the work-start age (that's the age you can work without government's permission) to 12 years old. (With the exception of the film industry where employers must still get a permit to hire children).

BC is now the jurisdiction with the youngest work-start age in North America.

Now more children are working and getting hurt in the workplace. WorkSafeBC (BC's workplace insurer) recorded a ten-fold increase in the number of accepted injury claims for 12 to 14 year olds on the job between 2004 and 2008.

BC is now below the minimum standards provided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Labour Organization's (ILO) conventions on child labour. According to the ILO convention:

- *Any work which is likely to jeopardize children's physical, mental or moral health, safety or morals should not be done by anyone under the age of 18.*
- *The minimum age for work should not be below the age for finishing compulsory schooling, which is generally 15.*
- *Children between the ages of 13 and 15 years old may do light work, as long as it does not threaten their health and safety, or hinder their education or vocational orientation and training.*

All We Want is Fairness and Respect

In a Better BC these policies would be reversed. All workers, especially the most vulnerable, would have the protection of employment standards that are fair and enforced. Immigrants, migrant workers, farmworkers and especially children and youth must be protected from abuse and exploitation.



The Supreme Court's ruling that collective bargaining is a fundamental right would be implemented, with the right to join a union and bargain collectively respected and enforced. All working people need and deserve the dignity and fairness that comes when they unite in solidarity and mutual support.

EXPANDING THE PUBLIC AND SOCIAL SPHERES

There's a saying that "vision without implementation is just hallucination." We believe the Better BC we want to see is not an illusion or pipe-dream. It is an affordable and practical goal.

We are standing at a crossroad with a stark choice of paths to follow. The wealth gained mostly from our natural resources created the foundation of the province through a mix of private and public investment.

The Great Depression exposed the fragile nature of unregulated capitalism. The memory of that tragic period tipped the balance of forces in the direction of steady – if often slow – progress. Recently that progress has been reversed as memories faded and the lessons learned forgotten.

Restoring the Balance

We are simply calling on the people of BC to work together to restore a healthy balance between the private and public sectors.

Many of our goals will mean an expansion of the public sector and public services. We make no apologies for this. It is often fairer, more democratic and even more efficient, to meet our needs through public services rather than the marketplace.

Show Me The Money! We often hear that we just can't afford more public services; in fact that we can't sustain what we have now. Is that true?

A good yardstick for determining what is affordable is the cost as a percentage of the overall economy - measured by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 1993 (fiscal year ending March 1994) government spending was at an even 20 percent of GDP. In 2001, spending was at 18.5 percent. By 2008, it had sunk to just 15.7 percent.

The following table based on the "Consolidated Revenue Fund"¹ shows how much would have been available if we had simply maintained existing levels of public services. The amounts are in *millions of dollars* so think "billions" when you scan down the columns.

It uses conservative targets based on government revenue as a percentage of GDP in the years 1993 and 2001. In other words, what could have been spent even while balancing the provincial budget

	Actual Spending	Spending as % of GDP	Shortfall to 19.4%	Shortfall to 18.1%
2002	24,941	18.0%	1,868	72
2003	25,246	17.3%	3,009	1,115
2004	26,040	16.5%	4,549	2,499
2005	27,370	16.2%	5,476	3,275
2006	28,224	15.4%	7,228	4,852
2007	30,291	15.7%	7,059	4,557
2008	31,366	15.7%	7,282	4,692

If government spending was restored to just 18.1 percent of GDP there would be an additional four and a half billion dollars available annually to raise social assistance levels, build affordable housing, support the arts and provide adequate support to the public and post-secondary education systems.

If we had a government prepared to restore public spending to where it was in 1993 there would be over seven billion dollars more a year.

¹ 2009 Financial and Economic Review

Think what that would mean to not only the quality of life in this province but our ability to create a healthy and sustainable future. A 21st century public transit system, major investments in green and alternative energy and restoration of our forests and marine ecosystems to provide sustainable employment in communities throughout our province.

Giving It Away

The table above shows how provincial

more than any other province. Excluding that exceptional year the average would be 3.2.

It is argued that corporate tax cuts stimulate investment in machinery and equipment - the key to improving productivity. In these same two decades the average annual growth in this area was almost identical - 5.3 percent and 6.3 percent respectively.

Without the huge investment that took place in

Consolidated Revenue Fund Revenue - Percentage of Gross Domestic Product – Year ending March 31									
2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
18.1	17	15.9	15.9	17.3	17.4	17.1	16.7	15.4	15.2

government spending was reduced. What happened on the revenue side?

We can see the immediate effect of corporate and personal income tax cuts that began in 2003. In 2005 and 2006, the higher numbers create the appearance at least of a change in direction. The details tell a different story. In fiscal 2005:

- Federal Transfers were \$884 million higher due to changes in the equalization program and increased health and social transfers;
- Natural resource revenue was \$541 million higher due to higher international commodity prices;
- An extra \$340 million resulted from the sale of BC Rail.

Tax Cuts Are Not the Answer

The argument for tax cuts was that they would stimulate investment and the overall economy. They would pay for themselves as the provincial tax base expanded. The evidence does not support this claim or the theory behind it.

In the 1990’s the average growth rate of the economy was 3 percent – even with the impact of the 1997 Asian economic crisis that hurt BC

the natural gas fields in 2005 and 2006 this past decade would show less investment growth than in the previous ten years. In the crucial high technology sector including Computers and Electronic Equipment pre-tax cut growth beat post-tax cut by 420 percent to 2 percent.

The forest industry that was the foundation of this province - and remains the backbone of most regions outside the major urban centres - has been devastated in the last ten years. Part of that is the result of reduced US demand and increased US trade harassment; factors outside the provincial government’s control. But the crisis in the industry has been made worse by government policy.

Forestry has also suffered from a lack of capital investment – exactly what corporate tax cuts were supposed to remedy.

It’s All About Choices

BC’s experience shows that the economy grows just as much – or more – when the government plays a larger role and pays for itself through the tax system. This is not surprising as the same result is seen around the world.

Even a recent OECD paper focused on business oriented tax ‘reform’ admits that, “Indeed, the cases of the Nordic countries go to show that a high level of economic efficiency and heavy taxation are not mutually exclusive.” (*OECD Working Papers No. 631, page 30*)

There is no reason we cannot choose as a society to increase the role of the provincial government to at least the levels at the beginning of the decade; or perhaps to the even higher levels achieved in previous years.

We could even decide to move the goalposts closer to those Nordic countries that have created societies that are at the top of the rankings for both economic and social success.

That is what democracy looks like – or what it should look like. People engage in a collective discussion of the kind of society they want to live in and then work together toward making that vision a reality.

Building A Better BC

We can afford a stronger public sector and more dynamic and inclusive civil society. That doesn’t mean the possibilities are limitless or some tough decisions won’t have to be made.

First, five or six or even seven billion dollars sounds like a lot of money. However, when we look at all the unmet needs in our province the costs can add up.

Secondly, just because government revenue and expenditures are now well below their earlier share of the total economy does that mean it is politically possible to return to previous levels?

Let’s look first at spending priorities. The largest item in the budget is health. Its share of the provincial budget has grown from 33.2

percent to 39.5 percent. This actually represents a slight decline in terms of share of GDP – from 7.3 percent down to 7 percent; but the total fiscal pie is smaller.

We need to move boldly toward integrating community and continuing care, expanding outreach and prevention programs, revitalizing primary care, providing adequate resources for mental health services and funding drug and addiction support services. There is a serious shortage of long-term care beds for seniors and both the capital and operating costs will be significant.

Some of these changes should save money in the long term but it will take big upfront investments to get there. Just how fast should we move? How much should we spend on an annual basis? What are our priorities – and how much do we value them compared to other needs such as education and poverty reduction?

Getting Down to Specifics

With regard to education we can calculate the annual shortfall at just short of \$2 billion since its share of the GDP has been cut from 4.7 to 3.7 percent. The education budget could be increased by a fifth and it would just get us back to where we were in 2001. That could go a long way to meeting the need to restore programs for K-12 and improve the accessibility and affordability of post-secondary education.

It might not be sufficient to also bring in universal and affordable early childhood education. It might not be enough to also bring in the kind of advanced skills training and lifelong learning needed for a 21st century knowledge based economy. There will be some choices to make in this area as well.

Poverty and homelessness are the greatest scourges in our province today. The shortfall in this area compared to 2001 is 0.9 percent of GDP or \$1.78 billion.

However, it has been estimated that social assistance levels should probably be doubled to bring people – especially single moms with children - just beyond poverty levels. It will take hundreds of millions of dollars a year to begin to make a dent in the shortage of affordable housing. There is a huge need for supported housing for persons living with physical, mental, emotional and substance abuse challenges.

We also know that many critical areas of the public service such as environmental protection, employment standards, workers health and safety and compensation have been decimated by cuts and it will take many hundreds of millions of dollars to restore these programs to adequate levels.

Together with restoring the cuts to everything from the Arts to women’s centres and shelters the totals will add up very quickly. To have a credible program to present to the British Columbian public we will have to discuss and present our priorities - the choices we would propose.

The Art of the Possible

It is one thing to talk about what our priorities should be, how we would spend the money if government revenue was restored to previous levels or even expanded. We also need a frank discussion on whether this is politically possible in the current climate, in the face of the sustained campaign by politicians and the media promoting lower taxes.

There is a reason many people are against paying more. It is almost thirty years since most wage earners saw any increase in their real

purchasing power. Many families are doing better but only because they now have two wage-earners instead of one as women’s participation in the paid workforce has steadily grown. As a family they are working twice as hard just to stay in the game.

On top of this is the constant barrage from right-wing think tanks, pundits and commentators with the message that “your taxes just disappear down a big dark hole.

If we want a government that will support public programs and make them sustainable through raising sufficient revenue then we have to commit ourselves to a long and difficult campaign of challenging prevailing views on government and taxes.

Is there an easy alternative?

Some people may think there is an easier option. The wealthy don’t have enough votes to worry about but they have plenty of money we can tax.

There is certainly room to make the tax system more progressive. But would raising taxes on just the wealthy get us to where we need to be?

Precise numbers are difficult to come by. Government statistics do not provide information on the very wealthy. They lump the really wealthy in with what could be called the comfortable middle class - those in the top ten percent who in 2007 earned an average of \$72,600.

But it is possible to paint a more detailed picture. The following chart combines information from the BC Ministry of Finance, BC Stats and a university study based on Canada Revenue Agency records for the top ten percent of income earners in Canada.

	Lower Bound	Average	Number of tax filers
BC wage earners (approx. 40% of population earning minimum wage to average weekly earnings of \$747.84)	\$16,640	\$38,888	1,085,945
BC average income (and total number of tax filers)	\$56,556	\$56,556	2,171,890
Top 10% (90-95)	\$64,363	\$72,600	108,595
Top 5% (95-99)	\$83,872	\$108,700	86,876
Top 1% (99 -99.5)	\$169,321	\$200,700	10,859
Top one half of 1% (99.5-99.9)	\$246,842	\$358,000	8,688
Top one tenth of 1% (99.9-99.99)	\$621,297	\$970,000	1,955
Top one hundredth of 1% (99.99-100)	\$1,843,601	\$3,832,500	217

Nine out of ten people in this “top ten percent” earned between \$64,363 and 169,321 in 2007. Not bad work if you can get it but these are not millionaires. They are salaried engineers, software developers, high school principals and middle managers and skilled tradespeople – if they put in a good chunk of overtime in the year.

It is only when we get to the around 22,000 people in the top 1 percent that we find people who some might say, “Have more money than they know what to do with” - those who make an average of \$200,000 to almost \$4 million a

year. It is only this small group at the very top of the “top ten percent” that has seen real income gains in the last three decades.

In BC, they almost doubled their share of after-tax income from 6.6 percent to **12.0 percent** between 1982 and 2007. The other 99 percent of us have seen our earnings stagnate for three decades. No wonder people grasp at anything that seems to increase their disposable income – even tax cuts.

So how much money is this in terms of cash? In 2008 total personal income in BC was \$158.5 billion. Twelve percent of that is just over \$19 billion. Provincial tax in BC is around 5 percent of income which would bring the contribution of the wealthiest one percent to just short of \$1 billion.

We could double their provincial tax bill and it still wouldn’t come close to what is needed.

It’s Not Just About Tax Rates

What about other sources of revenue, such as taxing business, especially the very large ones? There are certainly options there but, as these tables show, there are some tough decisions to make in this area as well.

Revenue by Source - Actual 2008/09	(\$ millions)	Percentage of Total
Taxes		
Personal Income	6,093	15.9%
Corporate Income	2,038	5.3%
Social service	4,958	12.9%
Fuel	891	2.3%
Carbon	306	0.8%
Tobacco	708	1.8%
Property	1,848	4.8%
Property Transfer	715	1.9%
Corporation Capital	108	0.3%
Other Taxes	532	1.4%
Total Taxes	18,197	47.5%

Taxes are actually less than 50 percent of the provincial government’s revenue and personal taxes are around a third of that. The social service tax (the provincial sales tax replaced by the HST) is next in size to personal income tax. People clearly don’t like the new HST but would they support a shift back to a **higher** provincial sales tax?

Other Sources of Revenue (Actual 2008/09)	(\$ millions)	Percentage of Total
Natural Resources	3,848	10.0%
Other Revenue (incl. MSP premiums)	7,389	19.3%
Contributions from Federal Government	5,989	15.6%
Net Income from Crown Corporations	2,905	7.6%
Total Revenue – All Sources	38,328	100%

What about the other 52.5 percent of the total budget? We could increase royalties on natural resources but the volume of production is largely determined by world markets. We also don’t have complete control over the revenue received from Crown Corporations and have pretty much no control over what the Federal Government contributes. Would we want to raise MSP premiums or other fees that hit poor and working families hardest?

Building a Social Movement – Changing Politics

The fact the alternatives are complicated and the choices may be difficult should not discourage us. It is why it is so important to

build a broad social movement that not only fights back against cutbacks but works together to find progressive alternatives.

We cannot rely solely on politicians or the electoral process that chooses them. We have seen with the success of the anti-HST campaign how people react to being misled by political parties – especially when it hits them right in the pocketbook.

It is good to see large numbers of people getting involved in and supporting a grass-roots initiative. But it is also a warning. A government cannot carry out a progressive agenda – including increasing taxes and other revenue – unless it runs and gets elected on such a platform.

Making that possible must be a central priority of our social movement. Political parties are like boats. If the tide is out all the paddling in the world won’t move them off the mud. Our job is to float that boat.

The Tide Is Turning

If the right-wing approach worked; if it actually created prosperity for at least most – if not for all – it would be hard to beat. But it does not work. That is why people all over the world are looking for and finding new paths - from grass-roots community groups to country-wide opposition movements to global networks for change.

A Better World and a Better BC is possible. The tide is turning and the winds of change are stirring. Together we are the wind, we are the tide, we are the change.