

Sunday April 28, 2013

Massive mistrust of all governments

By Jim Taylor

B.C. has a provincial election in just over two weeks. I feel I should be writing about a variety of election issues, but for the life of me, I don't see issues. I see only one issue – massive mistrust in the governments we elect.

The election itself feels like a foregone conclusion – the B.C. Liberal party will get creamed. I don't know how badly. They might hang onto enough seats to form a minority government. Or they might be reduced to as few seats as the federal Conservatives after Brian Mulroney's exit.

Not because the people of B.C. object to Liberal policies, whatever they are. Premier Christy Clark down-home kitchen-table homilies seem to boil her government's policies down to balancing the budget, spending responsibly, and not burdening our grandchildren with debts.

Who could possibly object to those goals?

The legacy of arrogance

Yet I remain convinced she will be defeated. Not because people in general think that the NDP's policies – whatever they are – are any better. Or because they think Adrian Dix has any clearer idea of how to guide the province into the future.

The Liberal party will be toppled from power simply because former premier Gordon Campbell's arrogance left such a bad taste in voter's mouths.

Campbell had the same effect as finding the proverbial turd in a punchbowl -- after you've imbibed liberally....

It makes one suspicious of all punchbowls thereafter.

Campbell was elected because he projected an image of being in charge. He wasn't, of course. No single government is. Like flies in a wind tunnel, governments get whirled along by powers far beyond their control. When even the government of the world's most powerful nation can have its agenda hijacked by a handful of terrorists (or a similarly small minority of homegrown religious fundamentalists and gun worshippers), the chances of any lesser government actually controlling its own future shrink to less than pigs flying.

Campbell was sure he knew what was best for B.C. And that he was the man to do it.

It's interesting to compare situations. The Conservative party scratched candidate Jeff Sprague over an *alleged* impaired driving charge. Campbell hung onto the premier's powers after being *convicted* of impaired driving.

NDP candidate Dayleen Van Ryswyk was forced to resign for making politically unacceptable statements four years earlier. At least she believed what she said. Campbell campaigned against selling B.C. Rail, against imposing the HST (Harmonized Sales Tax) -- and then did both, anyway.

The parties are the problem

Campbell's song has ended, but his malady lingers on. So the vote on May 14, I predict, will not just be a vote against his former party, but a vote against politics in general.

What could we do to change things?

I have a radical suggestion – ban all political parties!

To my jaundiced view, political parties serve only two purposes.

First, they enable candidates to align themselves with an ideological perspective (which may or may not be what their party leader actually enforces following the election)

Second, they provide a central source of funding for campaigns.

I'd like to see candidates limited to funds raised within their own constituency. If they can't generate enough local support to mount a viable campaign, why should they bother running?

Depending on local support would also put the emphasis on the person, rather than on some distant messiah-figure.

I would rather vote for an individual who shares my concerns – or, at worst, is willing to listen to my concerns without leaping to judgment. I do not want to vote for someone who, as soon as he's elected, turns into a remotely controlled terrier endlessly replaying His Master's Voice.

By using preferential balloting, the person elected would have at least qualified support from a majority of constituents.

The papal process

Then perhaps we could take a page from the Roman Catholic Church's process for electing a new pope – lock all these newly elected representatives into the legislature in Victoria and don't let them out until their disparate viewpoints coalesce into identifiable policy groupings. Exclude all cell phones, e-mail, and arm-twisting by unions, corporations, or billionaire donors.

Once a majority group coalesces, those representatives would choose their own leader and become the government. The alternative view(s) would form the opposition.

White smoke would probably look like an anachronism, though.

Leaders thus elected would have to honour the values and priorities of their back-bench supporters. They could not emulate a Gordon Campbell or Stephen Harper, imposing their own views through rigid party discipline.

Don't tell me it wouldn't work. It does work. It's working now, on a smaller scale, in the governments of the Northwest Territories and of Nunavut.

Do I expect it to happen here? Not likely. NDP leader Adrian Dix says that politics has become a dirty word. I agree. But I doubt if he's sufficiently committed to change, to change the system he's already tangled in.

Copyright © 2013 by Jim Taylor. Non-profit use in congregations and study groups encouraged; links from other blogs welcomed; all other rights reserved.

Please encourage your friends to subscribe to these columns too.

To send comments, to subscribe, or to unsubscribe, write jimt@quixotic.ca

YOUR TURN

Bob Stoddard felt that Erin Niemala's comments (which I quoted last Sunday) were "important for people of North America to realize/remember. In our more isolated geographical setting, we forget about the frequency of such occurrences in England and Spain (a few years ago), Nigeria, India, etc."

Bob wondered if such acts of violence were becoming "regarded as 'normal' and thus not something that creates paranoia and continual fear. Of course, we do tend to put car accidents in that category of non-news..."

Charles Hill noted that "political/wartime killing has [always] been impersonal. I've always wondered about the God who could tell the Israelites to kill every man, woman and child in Jericho (except for one prostitute and her family) and in numerous other populations.

"Not only has the technology of killing changed, the ability to know about worldwide events has also changed. As a high school student, I would never have known that yesterday at least 160 people were killed in China

by an earthquake. Living in the Pacific Northwest, I never heard of tornadoes nor the deaths they caused. Maybe, psychologically, ignorance can be bliss.

"It reminds me of Luke 21:26 (referring to the 'end' time): "Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world..."

Allan Baker sent along a column by Matthew Behrens, drawing a connection between the Boston bombs and U.S. drone strikes in Yemen. You can read it at <http://rabble.ca/columnists/2013/04/cluster-bombs-boston-and-drone-strikes-yemen>

Margaret Carr also picked up on the drone issue. She sent a picture of a robot mosquito, with this caption: **"Is this a mosquito? No. It's an insect spy drone for urban areas, already in production, funded by the US Government. It can be remotely controlled and is equipped with a camera and a microphone. It can land on you, and it may have the potential to take a DNA sample or leave RFID tracking nanotechnology on your skin. It can fly through an open window, or it can attach to your clothing until you take it in your home. One is left with little doubt that police and military may look into these gadgets next."**

Laurna Tallman writes long (but informative) letters. Here's clip: "Jesus taught us by word and example about 2000 years ago that violence cannot be overcome by violence but only by self-sacrificing love.

"To me, one of the most appalling aspects of the events this past week in Boston was the preposterous display of force brought out to overpower two individuals with primitive weapons: 6,000 strong and heavily armed, ran roughshod over the liberties of an entire city of Americans in the attempt to catch two—count them, two—men. And at that, a private citizen found the second suspect. The media lament the financial costs of the medical expenses incurred through the acts of the terrorists but never breathe a word of the costs of the militaristic response of the 'law enforcers.' The media has hastened to place "the fault" on the influence of a foreign country, never examining the violence that America breeds in the classed society it perpetuates. This legal violent response to unlawful violence was not only applauded by Americans but has been echoed in Canada by a desire of at least one politician.... This approach is insane. Violence breeds violence, whether or not the violence is legalized. That is one of the primary values embodied in Jesus."

David Gilchrist had some strong words about our justice system, responding to my previous week's column about guilty pleas subverting justice: "I'm sorry you had less than expected feedback from last week's column. I am one of those who had something to say; but just didn't get it done. Working with the John Howard Society in very court appearances surely opened my eyes - and my disgust. Time and again I would go back with a young chap (who was more than likely guilty), and his lawyer would ask to have the case 'remanded' for some fictitious reason. The tactic seemed to be to delay the trial as long as possible so that facts could be forgotten or confused, until witnesses could be considered unreliable. There was a better chance of getting the lad off. I longed to hear a judge simply say: 'You had time since last week to check out any detail you may have questioned. Now let's see what you do know, and we'll get on with it. If there is still some reasonable doubt, we'll deal with that later.' But that never happened.

"It seems to me that the weakest part of our system is the priority of some lawyers: 'My reputation depends on winning cases', rather than 'Let's get at the truth.' To achieve their personal interests, too many don't reveal all they know -- both prosecuting lawyers (who would rather see an innocent person convicted than to lose a case) and defence lawyers (who would rather see a guilty person go free than lose a case). Thanks goodness, I did meet other lawyers who had higher moral standards than that; but there are enough of the wrong breed to skew the system against real justice.

"The other factor is cost. No accused person should have their lives determined by how expensive a lawyer they can afford. If we truly had a Justice system, the courts would operate more like the Medicare system. If you are proven innocent, it should not cost you a cent. No one should lose their homes, etc., when they have done nothing wrong. If one is guilty, society should not have to pick up the tab. The old Rasp Houses (carpenter shops for men) and Spin Houses spinning-weaving facilities for women) made it possible for criminals to pay for their own keep - and help to pay for what they had cost society. Some such facilities did operate in Canada with the Prison Farm system that helped many prisoners learn skills they could use on release: but our brilliant government felt that punishment was more important than reforming people."

TECHNICAL STUFF

This column comes to you using the electronic facilities of Woodlakebooks.com.

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, at jimt@quixotic.ca.

To subscribe or unsubscribe, send me an e-mail message at the address above. Or you can subscribe electronically by sending a blank e-mail (no message) to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca. Similarly, you can un-subscribe at sharpedges-unsubscribe@quixotic.ca.

You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca

PROMOTION STUFF...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to jimt@quixotic.ca. Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other sources worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, www.seemslkegod.org;
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap" -- reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, www.traditionaliconoclast.com
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.
