

Where Are The Voices?

In a society in which complex challenges seem to be emerging each and every day, we continue to see little intelligent, innovative, and visionary leadership which can help overcome these challenges. These challenges are reflective of the condition of our planet and our disconnection with anything related to environmental or social conscience. Climate change impacts; shortages and high costs of energy; Site C; the tar sands; the Gulf of Mexico fiasco; offshore tankers in BC waters; increasing levels of air pollution; governments (provincial and federal) revising and constraining the environmental review assessment processes; increasing economic and social inequity locally and globally; pollution in our oceans; Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Reserve still under siege; failing economic systems; no visible understanding or implementation of the principles of sustainability; the diminishing farm land resource; the hazards of GMO foods; heavy-footprint mining proposals; increasing piles of garbage; disappearing salmon resources; secretive governments....the list seemingly is never-ending.

But, where are the voices? The voices we heard so much from in *The War in the Woods* in the 1990s? With all of these issues highly relevant to us here in British Columbia, why are the public air waves so quiet on these issues? Why are the opposition parties so quiet – it seems that there is an incredible opportunity here to loudly promote alternatives to what we currently see and hear in Victoria and Ottawa. Rather than continuing to nit-pick governments' ineptness and lack of vision, the opposition parties should be saying something intelligent, innovative, and visionary. There is a lot of talk about doing things to benefit future British Columbians and Canadians but the visible action speaks for us today and today only. Given the rate of exploitation and consumption of our natural resources, it appears to me that we don't care at all about future generations or about peoples in the poorer countries of the world.

For the past thirty years, we have loudly proclaimed that we have managed our lands and resources sustainably. But, where's the proof? It seems that we have talked the talk but have not been interested in walking the talk. The predictions of the so-called "doom-and-gloomers" of the 1960s and 1970s have, for the most part, come true. We have lived and consumed as if there will be no tomorrow. Well, we now may be facing the "no-tomorrow" scenario.

There is, however, some reason to be hopeful. Communities and community groups are trying to provide the intelligent, innovative and visionary leadership required to address local challenges. In Cowichan, we have a number of community-based efforts (e.g., Cowichan Green Community Association, O.U.R. EcoVillage, Transition Cowichan, Providence Farm, Cowichan Energy Alternatives, Cowichan Carbon Busters, Mid-Island Sustainability & Stewardship Initiative, Cowichan Bio-diesel Cooperative) that are working towards building a community-based economy, providing a better quality of life, providing food and energy security, and increasing the level of public understanding of the challenges facing us and what's required to address these challenges. One of the universal messages coming from these groups is that each of us must take responsibility for our own lives and begin the long, and what may turn out to be somewhat painful, process of change. This is the leadership which may provide us with a tomorrow. As indigenous peoples' wisdom tells us, "We are the ones we have been waiting for."

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