

THIS MEANS WAR! CAMPBELL'S NEW MINISTRY FINAL STRAW FOR ENVIRONMENTALISTS¹

Rafe Mair[©]

What has raged as an undeclared war between conservationists and the Campbell government starting in 2001 became a declared war when Gordon (Pinocchio) Campbell trotted out a new cabinet. For those of us dedicated to preserving our birthright, this war was formally declared when Campbell created an entirely new ministry called Natural Resource Operations as a one-stop-shop for permits in B.C., covering everything from large independent power projects to one-day hunting licences.

Campbell said the aim is to "streamline access to B.C.'s natural resources ...The drive has always been to try and increase more investment in the province, to increase our export opportunities." The new minister Steve Thomson (Steve WHO?) is given responsibility for a wide range of natural resource approvals, including approvals related to:

- **Crown land allocation and authorizations**
- **Forests and range authorizations**
- **Roads/bridges/engineering**
- **Independent Power Production**
- **Mines and minerals permitting and inspections**
- **Mineral and coal titles**
- **Aquaculture licensing and regulation**
- **Water use planning and authorizations**
- **Aboriginal consultation and coordination - natural resource operations**
- **Resorts and alpine ski developments**
- **Licensing and permitting for angling, hunting and trapping**
- GeoBC and information management
- FrontCounter BC
- **Provincial hatchery and stocking program**
- **Watershed restoration**
- **Fish, wildlife and habitat management**
- Drought management
- **Dam and dyke safety and regulation**
- **Flood plain management**
- Pests, disease, invasive plants and species
- Public backcountry and commercial recreation
- Recreation sites and trails
- Archaeology and Heritage Conservation Act permitting
- **Resource management compliance**
- Crown land restoration
- **Forest investment operations**
- **Wildlife management**

(The bolded powers are those of special concern to environmentalists).

What power is left to the Environment Minister? The premier's statement clearly indicates that an already weak-kneed ministry requiring a weak-kneed minister to suit his policy will be

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weakened even more. What other conclusion can one come to when giving plain meaning to Campbell's words? As far as *The Common Sense Canadian* is concerned this is war and we will join one and all British Columbians who care about their environment in taking the fight to Campbell and his bunch on every front and at every opportunity.

Is this over the top? Not at all, in fact it shows we haven't fought hard enough.

Damien and I had the great privilege of joining Corky Evans at two public meetings we held in the Kootenays last week and he, in two marvelous speeches, made the obvious but often forgotten point that the lands, water, and air we live in and use belong the Province of British Columbia **in the right of the crown**. It does **not** belong to the government of the province. And, here's the critical point: the Crown is us, the citizens of this province. The reality is, of course, that governments can, by passing a statute and having it approved by Her Majesty's representative, the Lieutenant-Governor, alienate these possessions of ours but we should sit back and remember just what that process is. It starts by The Legislative Council (the Cabinet) – the Queen's advisors – tabling a bill in the legislature asking for approval. When approved, the Council (Cabinet) then asks the Lieutenant-Governor on behalf of the Crown to proclaim this as law.

We know that in practice the government does what it pleases but we should understand the technicalities so as to better interpret - and hopefully one day stop - the practice of alienating the resources that we the people own in the name of the Crown. When the power of the Crown is corrupted, we the people must fight back. And it's sure as hell been corrupted in British Columbia. Consider how our resources were being dealt with by the Campbell government before Campbell made these changes. Take, for example, the Ashlu River. A large construction company sought to destroy the essence of this river so it sought government help to get this Crown-owned water given to them. (Actually, the request amounted to giving them the river and funding besides, but more on that in a moment).

At that time, the people had a process by which they could declare whether or not they wanted this to happen - it was called zoning. After several public hearings the Regional District the Ashlu was in (The Squamish and Lillooet Regional District) refused to zone in favour of the corporation and left our water and its ecology in our hands, unalienated. **The Campbell government immediately passed retroactive legislation taking away the right of local governments to zone these properties, known as Bill 30**. This meant that the people had no opportunity to pass judgment on these matters! The only hope the public was left with was the environmental assessment process where the public would be entitled to go to public meetings concerning these projects.

These meetings were fixed. There's no other word for it. The hearings were held at a time and place suitable to the company and – here's the rub – whether or not the project should be approved was out of order! All a member of the public could do is suggest terms of reference for the environmental review process! Damien and I have been to several of these sham meetings and the anger of the public was white hot. We the citizens can make our feelings known whether or not a Walmart Store should be built, whether a pub can go into a neighbourhood, or where an apartment will be permitted, and what form it will take - but when a company wants to steal a river, destroy it and the ecology it sustains, we have no right to be heard at all!

Even worse, the company pays almost nothing for the river and then – and mark this well – our Crown Corporation, BC Hydro, is forced by the Campbell government to give the company a sweetheart contract which pays the company twice or more what the power is worth on a “take

or pay” contract, which power is not needed by Hydro, and thus must be exported for 1/2 or less what they paid for it! The moment the approval is given, the company uses that approval to finance the project! We have our property stolen then must finance its destruction!

What I’ve just said applies to what has happened hitherto - now, says Campbell, the government is going to “streamline” this ghastly process. One must give plain meaning to those words. The Campbell government is going to make it even easier than it is now for our resources to be given away along with what amounts to a very generous cash-filled handshake! I’ve been referring to **Independent (Private) Power Production** but please go back to the list and note that this streamlining of public theft from the people will also apply to Crown land allocation and authorizations, forests and range authorizations, roads/bridges/engineering, aquaculture licensing and regulation, water use planning and authorizations, natural resource operations, resorts and alpine ski developments, licensing and permitting for angling, hunting and trapping, dam and dyke safety and regulation and Flood Plain management.

CONCLUSION

We have moved from a fatally flawed environmental regime with no public consultation, under the direction of an insipidly weak minister, to a fatally flawed environmental regime, with no public consultation, under the direction of a minister ordered by the premier to make it all happen even easier and faster. It’s now over to us – if we don’t defend what it ours, what is our legacy, we will go down in history as the generation that gave in to a tyrant. For our part at *The Common Sense Canadian* we will fight every outrage with every weapon at our disposal and will encourage and assist as best we can, all who do the same.