Coalition of BC Businesses

Small businesses ask Carole James for straight answer on labour agenda

NDP leader refuses to rule out eliminating secret ballot for workers in certification votes

VANCOUVER – The Coalition of B.C. Businesses has asked Carole James to tell B.C. voters what she really plans to do on labour policy. The Coalition was reacting to a candidate survey by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) in which the NDP dodged simple questions on labour policy.

In the candidate survey, both the leaders of the Green Party and the B.C. Liberal Party clearly stated their support for the secret ballot for workers in union certification votes, but the NDP leader refused to rule out its elimination.

"The Coalition is astounded and concerned that Carole James is not prepared to commit to something as fundamental in a modern democracy as an employee's right to choose, through the exercise of a secret ballot vote, on the important decision about whether or not to be represented by a particular union," said Kevin Evans, Chair of the Coalition of BC Businesses.

The abolition of the secret ballot vote by an NDP government in 1992 was one of the central issues that triggered the formation of the Coalition of B.C. Businesses. The NDP's old card-signature system tended to promote unionization rather than employee choice and democratic participation in the workplace.

"Carole James has said labour reform is needed, but she then refuses to discuss specifics," Evans said. "The secret ballot vote issue has been the subject of consultation in B.C. for many years. All that's required now is for Carole James to be forthright with the people of British Columbia about her position before May 17, 2005."

The Coalition has yet to receive a reply to an April 8, 2005 letter to the NDP urgently requesting clarification of the party's position on Labour Code and Employment Standards reform.

The Coalition of BC Businesses speaks for organizations representing over 50,000 small and family-owned businesses active in all sectors of B.C.'s economy. The Coalition's focus is the development of labour policies that will foster a positive relationship between employers and employees and a positive climate for new economic growth, opportunities and jobs.

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For more information, contact:
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COPY OF LETTER TO CAROLE JAMES

April 8, 2005

Ms. Carole James
Leader of the NDP
New Democratic Party of B.C.
3110 Boundary Road
Burnaby, BC V5M 4A2

Dear Ms. James:
I am writing as the Chair of the Coalition of B.C. Businesses to express our concern with your statements about labour policy in B.C. and the lack of clarity about your party's position.

As you may know, the Coalition speaks for organizations representing over 50,000 small and family-owned businesses active in all sectors of B.C.'s economy. The Coalition's focus is the development of labour policies that will foster a positive relationship between employers and employees and a positive climate for new economic growth, opportunities and jobs. Small businesses in the province are responsible for 98 per cent of all private sector jobs in B.C.

We are very concerned that you have reportedly decided not to detail your labour policies in your election platform, even though you have said that labour policies are "unfair" and need to be changed.

By not revealing your labour policies—despite reaching a conclusion that they need to be changed—small businesses fear the worst. We are very nervous that you may be planning on reintroducing the labour and employment policies of the previous NDP government, such as the elimination of the secret ballot.

We are requesting that you reconsider your position on leaving out labour policy from your election platform.
We believe that small businesses, and B.C. voters, deserve to know where your party stands on labour policy; an area of great importance to the largest private sector job creators in the province.

Sincerely,
Kevin Evans
Chair, Coalition of B.C. Businesses