

NDP preparing its labour platform hand-in-glove with B.C. Federation of Labour

Bill C-377 at final stage in House of Commons

Michael Smith – Dec 06, 2012

Unions across B.C. are in “extensive” pre-election talks with the NDP, and the party’s labour platform is being developed with the B.C. Federation of Labour, according to a document obtained Thursday by The Province.

The labour organization also poured money and staff time into two recent by-elections, the document says, though the NDP candidates in both by-elections did not list the B.C. Federation of Labour as a donor in campaign-finance reports.

It all has the rival Liberals slamming “heavy handed” union influence in the NDP backrooms, and questioning whether the New Democrats properly disclosed campaign donations from the province’s largest labour organization.

“Adrian Dix tried to fool people that he was a moderate with a modest agenda,” Liberal campaign director Mike McDonald said of the NDP leader.

“He just got busted.”

The 11-page document was prepared for the executive of the B.C. Federation of Labour and distributed at its recent convention. It details the organization’s top priorities and its work with the NDP to achieve them.

“Labour platform is being developed with the B.C. NDP,” the document says.

“This includes extensive affiliate discussions on key issues including the B.C. Labour Code, Workers Compensation Board, trades training and employment standards.”

The document had the Liberals seeing red and on the attack.

“It spells out how big labour is working hand-in-hand with the NDP to develop their policies for them,” said Liberal cabinet minister Mary Polak.

She said business should worry about an NDP government bringing in pro-union labour laws and workplace regulations that will raise their costs and deflate investor confidence.



“It’s hardly a secret agenda,” says B.C. Fed boss Jim Sinclair after The Province reveals the close working relationship between the NDP and the unions over the party’s labour policy. “We’ve been very open about the fact that we’re lobbying the party.” Photograph by: Ward Perrin, PNG

“It’s clear from the document that this is the same old NDP of the 1970s and 1990s and it could hurt our economy,” she said.

But NDP MLA Carole James said the party is simply listening to labour’s concerns, and the NDP will write its own policy platform, not the labour movement.

“They’re presenting their ideas to us and we’re listening,” she said, adding none of the labour movement’s “suggestions” have been officially adopted by the party yet.

“Only the Liberals would attack us for consulting with people. They’re fearmongering.”

B.C. Federation of Labour president Jim Sinclair said copies of the document were widely circulated at the organization’s recent convention.

“It’s hardly a secret agenda,” he said. “We’ve been very open about the fact that we’re lobbying the party.”

But Polak disagreed.

“Adrian Dix has been saying he’s friendly to business, but business is not writing the NDP election platform — big labour is,” she said.

The document says the B.C. Federation of Labour wants an overhaul of the Labour Code. The organization has already said it wants an NDP government to scrap the secret-ballot rule for certifying a union, requiring a majority of workers to simply sign a union card instead.

The group also wants a “total review” of the Workers Compensation Board, and “fair” apprenticeship rules and employment standards affecting union and non-union workers alike.

Under the heading “Ensuring the NDP Wins in 2013”, the document calls for “creating opportunities for Adrian/NDP to directly engage members. We have to publicly support Adrian/NDP with our members, instil confidence in his leadership.”

On the two recent by-elections — both won by the NDP — the document details work and donations: “The Federation co-ordinated a fundraising drive that raised \$120,000 for the by-elections. In addition, staff worked full-time organizing volunteers.”

Yet the campaign-finance reports disclosed by winning NDP candidate Joe Trasolini and Gwen O’Mahony did not list the B.C. Federation of Labour as donors of money or staff.

“It doesn’t seem right,” said Polak, adding the donations should be reviewed.

But NDP provincial secretary Jan O’Brien said the money raised by the Federation was donated to the NDP head office, properly disclosed, and then transferred to the byelection campaigns.

And she said Federation staff did not work on the byelection campaigns directly, so no public disclosure was required — an explanation Polak found “disingenuous.”

The NDP, meanwhile, pointed out that McDonald (the Liberal campaign director) has scheduled a “stakeholder meeting” in the boardroom of the B.C. Business Council next week.

“That shouldn’t surprise anyone,” said Sinclair. “At least we’re being open about our work with the NDP.”

You can read the B.C. Federation of Labour document in its entirety at www.theprovince.com.

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