

Government Dependency Has Created Individualism¹

Upon my return to BC last year after wandering the earth for 43 years, several things hit me like a brick. A shocking package of related trends has developed over those years that includes rampant individualism at the expense of community and an amazing degree of dependence on governments all too ready to intervene wherever they can-- along with the consequent heavy tax burden.

I returned just in time to witness the BC liberal dismantling of the dependency system. I feel that, though the chosen process may be clumsy and too fast, it was necessary. The economics of the province simply would not allow it to continue.

As helpful as the system of handouts may have been to some, it had some serious negative consequences. The subsidies have made us dependent on government but independent of each other. Most of us no longer take responsibility for each other, since this has become the responsibility of the state. Many of us have become a bunch of individualists who do not know their neighbours or care for them.

The side-effects of the dismantling process may yet prove better than most of us expect. Pamela Fayerman's story about neighbours and other members of the community showing new concerns for seniors (Nov. 13, 2002) shows that the process is encouraging the development of a new sense of community.

I doubt that Premier Campbell intended or even foresaw this result, but it is a healthy development. May neighbours and our social organizations, including churches, jump on this positive bandwagon. A community with a strong sense of responsibility for each other is much healthier than a province full of immature isolated individualists who run to Mama Victoria for a handout at the first sight of blood. If it spreads and takes root,

¹ Letter to Editor, *VS*, 30 Dec/2002.

we may yet thank the Liberals for their unintended restoration of our sense of community.

Bottom Line Shouldn't Rule Government

Letter to the editor, *Vancouver Sun*

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by Wayne King

John H. Boer's Dec. 30 letter "Depending on each other better than on Mama Victoria"² reveals the essential misunderstanding of what government is, and should be, that is sadly epitomized by those holding office in Victoria today.

The business of government is not business. It is not a corporate entity owned by citizen shareholders, and its function is not to merely balance the books at any cost.

It is a congress of elected leaders whose purpose is to govern the state in a manner that reflects the will of the majority and their vision of how the world should be.

Mr. Boer's call for us to depend on each other is remaking the wheel. Modern government is an instrument that evolved in answer to that very need. Our Constitution and our laws all developed over the centuries in answer to the need for social justice, equal opportunity and a minimum standard of human existence guaranteed by society. That "safety net" that Mr. Boer and so many others like him sneer at is *us* coming together with our tax dollars to maintain a civilized society in which the poor, the sick and the elderly can depend on their neighbours, their fellow citizens, for support and services essential for life with dignity – delivered by the entity we call government.

I don't think Mr. Boer, or Premier Gordon Campbell, understands.

²That was the original title. The title of that letter used here is "Government Dependency Has Created Individualism." King's reference to "misunderstanding" is a misunderstanding. It is a *disagreement* over the role of government, not merely misunderstanding. Letters to editors have to be notoriously short and thus can say very little—only the core. I agree on the need for the government safety net, but it was not meant and should not have led to individualism and independence of neighbour from neighbour. It was never meant to *undermine* community and mutual responsibility for each other; it was meant, I should think, to *strengthen* that by providing additional support where neighbourly helpfulness proved short in resources.