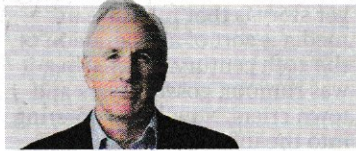


Governing looks easier when you're the opposition

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After 16 years out of office, British Columbia's NDP MLAs were all smiles when their party assumed power in 1991. But they quickly realized what happens when broad expectation meets the harsh realities of day-to-day governing. Some might say it was all downhill from there.

While that wouldn't be quite fair, it is true to say that running a province looks a lot easier when sitting on the opposition benches. The task becomes even more complicated and difficult when your survival depends on appeasing the desires of a three-seat party that is propping you up.

Alberta NDP Premier Rachel Notley isn't at the mercy of another party to sustain her government, but she does know something about taking over office after a long stint in opposition. She is also equipped to impart knowledge about the matters people ultimately care most about when it comes to their government.

The Premier told me during a chat last week that while she appreciates B.C. NDP Leader John Horgan may have apprehensions when it comes to the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, she said he will also need to demonstrate concern for good jobs for regular working families if and when he takes over as premier.

"I think when they are a little ways into government and they are faced with that issue, with the weight of governance on their shoulders, it will put that particular consideration into much sharper focus," Ms. Notley said.

In other words, it's one thing to campaign against pipelines and the construction of hydro-electric dams, but when you start throwing people out of work as a result of your actions it becomes another thing entirely. Maybe most people in Metro Vancouver don't rely on hard-hat jobs to earn a living, but there is another part of the province that does. And while voters didn't elect many NDP MLAs outside of the Lower Mainland in the recent provincial election, the party will soon have to concern itself with that half of the province too.

Mason, Page 3

» Mr. Horgan has promised he will adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which vows to give First Nations "prior and informed" consent on any projects on their territory - disputed or otherwise. In B.C., that is virtually the entire province. There is a school of thought that this edict gives Indigenous communities a veto over resource development. At the very least, it could slow the process significantly.

In the meantime, Green Party Leader Andrew Weaver told First Nations leaders this week that he hopes to flip the approach to

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resource development on its ear. He said he wants to consult Indigenous leaders at the beginning of the process, not at the end of it. He's promising the community a seat at the table that it has never had before.

Again, all this is noble and sounds wonderful. But the real-world reverberations these new tacks could set off may create enormous headaches for a new government with well-meaning but ultimately naive ambitions.

Mr. Horgan has identified his early priorities in office, should events unfold as expected, and they don't include any big job-

creation initiatives. Instead, they focus largely around campaign finance and electoral reform, which are important, undoubtedly, but don't help people pay the bills. Mr. Weaver talks about building a new economy around green technology and high-tech businesses, but he hasn't really laid out a timeline for developing such a plan - presuming he can get the NDP to adopt his strategic impulses.

This is extremely tricky terrain for the NDP and the Greens - especially the New Democrats. They don't have a guaranteed four-year runway with which to

work. They could have a year, maybe two. Fairly or not, they will be judged on whatever record they achieve in that limited time.

While democratic reforms will most certainly be welcome, those measures could well be undermined if there is any retreat on the economic front. B.C. was a jobs leader under the Liberals. The NDP knows that fiscal and economic stewardship remain the party's Achilles heel in the minds of the public.

The NDP's ability to get this part of governing right will likely determine its future.