

Lower Island NEWS

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Times are a' changing on the Eco Front



Before she addressed the crowd, NDP leader Carole James (centre) talks to one of an estimated 1,300 demonstrators at old growth rally in front of the BC Legislature.

Photostory by Diane Walsh

Successful *Big Trees not Big Stumps* rally in Victoria on March 29, 2008

Its message: "Stop cutting old-growth. Ban raw log exports. Protect local forestry jobs in and for British Columbia. Focus on second-growth logging. Replant. Honour the Earth, trees and people – in the process".

How can anyone argue with this? Apparently they can – but it's not as bitter as it once was – now that there's a new coalition a-foot, building momentum in the forestry movement:

The Pulp and Paper Woodworker's Union of Canada displayed their flag as proudly as did the troopers from the Wilderness Committee who called forth this march on the Legislature in a groundbreaking unity against Premier Campbell's and Forest Minister Coleman's policies.

The scarring on the face of BC's old-growth movement, due to the environmental arrests made on Clayoquot protesters 15 years ago, seems to have healed somewhat.

The official number of protesters who showed up for the largest old growth forest

action since the rally days of Clayoquot Sound was reported to have been 1,300. It seems to me, having been there on March 29 that significantly many more people flocked from Victoria City Hall to the Parliament Buildings than the *Times Colonist's* estimate.

Oh well, I guess the eye can play tricks. Whether or not it's worth having a debate about the numbers, I don't know. What I do know with absolute certainty is that there is no dispute that what is so significant about this rally is, for the first time in Canada's history, loggers and environmentalists – yes; now **joint** tree huggers – marched in unison.

It brings tears. What a feat to bridge the worker's movements with the old growth cause. Simply put, the loggers themselves can see that there is no future in logging old growth. Logging equipment and policy must be retooled to be innovative in a way that cuts trees sensibly and sustainably.

NDP Leader Carol James gave the first guest speech, promising that her party would not "contract out" working people's jobs. Jane Sterk, leader of the provincial Greens (and a long time supporter of the

Wilderness Committee when it wasn't in fashion to be so) said a few words about how "sustainable" could actually work for BC and benefit everyone.

Arnie Bercov, forestry officer of the PPWC, spoke passionately and raised the crowd when he warned about company purchases "from the outside". Valerie Langer of Forest Ethics (and a well-known activist leader of the Clayoquot protests of the early 1990s) focused on "imagination" and "cooperation" as central themes to lead the work of changing government policy.

Ken Wu, campaign director for the Western Canada Wilderness Committee in Victoria, says of the rally, "We sent an undeniably strong and decisive message to the BC Liberal government only one year before a provincial election, that the fate of our ancient forests and forestry jobs can bring out more determined advocates onto the streets than any other issue right now.

"The size of the rally sends a clear message to the BC Liberal government that they can either do the right thing and protect our remaining old-growth forests and forestry jobs, or go down the path of near-sighted greed to benefit the timber

companies — in which case they'll face a hell of a fight this coming electoral year."

Wu added, "If Rich Coleman wants a fight we're ready to bring on a fight like this government has never seen. In addition, this time around I know many of the timber workers and environmentalists will be working together in solidarity.

"At this point with 75 percent of the



Protestors sign Old Growth petition.

Island's productive old-growth already logged, including 90 percent of the valley bottoms with the largest trees, the vast majority of people agree that the industry needs to get out of the old-growth and focus on the sustainable logging of second-growth.

"Who's still arguing to log the last of the old-growth here, with the exception of the timber companies and the BC Liberal government?"

Wu pointed out that, "Over the past year in particular, there has been great solidarity between the Wilderness Committee and the PPWC, United Steelworkers, and CEP on the issue of raw log exports, TFL deregulation, and increasingly I believe, on the need to shift the industry into the second-growth — which covers most of the Island now — and away from the last old-growth, using concrete timelines. The only backwards ones on these matters are the BC Liberal government and the timber companies."

Premier Campbell and Forests and Range Minister Rich Coleman were noticeably missing in person at the rally, although their names were frequently raised in not-so-positive slogans.



Protestors fill Broad street as they march to the Legislature from their rallying point at Victoria City Hall.

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