

New Green leader shifts policy tacks

Party hopes Jane Sterk's electability will extend to it's candidates



Sterk: Staying on Esquimalt council

BY LES LEYNE
Times Colonist

"I am not an alpha male," new Green Party of B.C. Leader Jane Sterk told an approving crowd of members Sunday afternoon after cinching the win. "I am not testosterone-driven."

The remark troubled me, for I did not comprehend it. So I went out in the backyard after dinner and howled at the moon for a while, seeking to understand. Until I noticed it was raining. And there was no moon. And the neighbours were yelling again. So I had to come in.

If she's not an alpha male, what is she?

She's a mother, grandmother and poll-topping Esquimalt councilor, for starters. She was also a counseling psychologist, which seems to underlie a lot of her thinking about politics.

She called herself a strategic thinker and a feminist, and cheerfully admitted to being manipulative.

"I was a PhD psychologist and that's what you do, you manipulate people so they can see themselves in a different light."

"I do that at the council table and I do that in my municipality. If I can't get something across at the council table, I go to staff and say: 'I want you to do this.' It comes back to council, it doesn't have my name on it, great. I get what I want."

Playful. Collaborative. Admits to not smiling enough.

"I'm also very competitive," she said toward the end of her very frank self-analysis session.

That's the one trait that might prove interesting, if it becomes part of the Green party's collective personality as well.

If Sterk's doctorate-level psychological ju-jitsu becomes the new Green strategy, the party will start to look quite a bit different. It reveled in its "alternative" image for its first years, but went nowhere with it.

The only alternative label Greens seem to want now is to be a legitimate alternative to government. That means joining the mainstream. It's no coincidence Ken Melamed was the guest speaker at the party's weekend convention.

He was an environmental activist in Whistler who vigorously opposed the 2010 Olympics. Now he's the mayor of the town that will be hosting half the games. His lesson on how to go from the outside to the inside was studied closely.

The party also took a few steps during policy debate away from the idealistic dream world some members have been living in. They're moving toward operating successfully in the here and now.

They're open for business now. Literally.

A ban on accepting donations from businesses was voted down, after some intense debate. Greens will take up to \$2,500 from small businesses from now on. Same goes for unions.

That might bulk up the \$130,000 in donations it got last year.

Business people will even be welcome in the party, no matter what business they're in

An endearing attempt to ban anyone involved in the military industrial complex from being a party director was voted down.

(They're still leery of war criminals, though. No one with a UN war crimes record

can join, according to a resolution passed on the weekend.)

As a measure of how ready the Greens are to operate in the real world, they even lifted the ban on wireless devices. Suspicions about cellphone radiation prompted members to outlaw their use at meetings. Now they say members have the free will to judge their own risk, so the ban is off.

Sterk supports the new opens-donation policy. She said business owners were always puzzled that they couldn't donate to the party. She even admitted to members she's a capitalist herself.

She wants to move the headquarters from Vancouver to Victoria, for the simple reason she can't afford the time and expense of traveling there constantly. She wants to bring some campaign experts in, and maybe a facilitator of some sort to heal any rifts between the "deep Greens" and the "light Greens."

Although the rift is probably minimal, it looks like the argument it over. The light Greens won.

Sterk obviously won the contest largely because of her successful municipal record. (She's going to stay on Esquimalt council, partly to exploit the exposure advantage it gives her.) She was elected for her electability.

Her main push now is to get organized and talk about Green solutions "in ways that are easy to understand and don't feel like they'll cause people to get all upset and concerned about 'We're going to destroy the economy.'"

There have been too many unfounded predictions of a Green breakthrough over the years to float yet another, based on one leadership change. But with a new wave of environmentalism sweeping the country in response to climate change, and an environmental party dedicated to rounding off its alternative edges, you have to think there's some growth potential for them — if they're smart enough to take advantage.