



Privatization By Stealth

People in Saskatchewan know that their publicly owned services and corporations serve them well. This is why Brad Wall and the Saskatchewan Party, in an about-turn from the previous election, vowed not to privatize our Crown Corporations. But there is more than one way to skin cat and corporations have figured out how to get around public opposition to privatization. Here is how British Columbia sneaked privatization in.

Create Confusion. Make the process so complex and multi-faceted that peoples heads swim trying to get at the truth. BC Hydro was the crown jewel of British Columbia's public companies and has provided BC with the cheapest power of virtually any jurisdiction in North America for decades. But upon coming to power the Liberals implemented a complex scheme that, when taken as a whole, has not only privatized parts of Hydro but has immobilized it as a power company. But do the people of BC still own BC Hydro? Sure they do, but it won't do them much good as they watch their rates double.

Smoke and Mirrors. Public private partnerships, or P3s, are usually extremely complex deals that appear to leave the facility in question - hospitals, schools, rec centres, highways and bridges - in public hands. Technically, they still operate as public services, based on long term contracts which set out all the responsibilities of the public service. The winning contractors design, build, finance and operate the facilities and with higher interest rates than governments pay and a built-in level of profit, the costs skyrocket.

Contract it out! Then, of course, there's the famous BC example of the massive privatization of health sector jobs, accomplished by the tearing up of legally binding contracts with several health care unions. Thousands of jobs were lost, and people were often hired back by the private contractor for 30-40 per cent lower wages. The Supreme Court ruled much of this was illegal but it doesn't mean it won't be tried here.

Lie. Lastly, if everything else fails, just lie. Gordon Campbell swore up and down he would not privatize BC Rail, an extremely successful Crown corporation. Then he did just that despite a hue and cry from everyone involved. The important part of this method is to do it fast and early and hope that people won't stay angry for four years, a good assumption in this case.