

# FAIRNESS FOR ISLANDERS

THE 1996  
ELECTION PLATFORM  
OF THE  
ISLAND NEW DEMOCRATS



## P.E.I. AT THE CROSSROADS

A MESSAGE FROM  
DR. HERB DICKIESON

PRINCE EDWARD ISLANDERS are proud of their Province and of the society that they have built over generations. Yet the true potential of our Island and of our people has never been fully realized.

Encumbered on one hand by an inefficient political system that thrives on political patronage, dividing the Island community between the "haves" and the "have nots," burdened on the other hand with an economic system that increasingly delivers control of our natural and human resources into the hands of new absentee landlords, Prince Edward Island will never fulfil its promise until the voices of Islanders from every sector of society have an equal say in the decisions that affect our daily lives.

Today, Islanders in every walk of life are facing a number of very serious threats on the economic and political fronts--perhaps the most serious situation in the past fifty years. Islanders must work together with a new sense of purpose.

Never has there been a greater need for a concerned, effective government committed to fairness for Islanders.

Islanders know it is time for a significant change in our political approach. Only by acquiring as much control as possible over local and provincial decision-making; only by making our individual and collective decisions in an open and cooperative spirit, will the talents and strengths of Islanders truly come to grow and flourish.

For years, Island governments have spent our taxes and borrowed millions of additional dollars. Today, government finds itself obliged to restore some measure of stability to Prince Edward Island's finances. But its deficit-cutting agenda has systematically cut adrift the poor and those without political strength, while rewarding the rich and politically connected, maintaining the privileges of its members and friends. The perks of office rest easy on the shoulders of the vast majority of present MLAs and cabinet ministers. And the back-room boys who have firmly attached themselves to the reins of power see no need to reduce their standard of living on behalf of an improved democracy.

We Islanders tend to be careful people. We don't make hasty decisions. But if we are to bring about a real change, we must decide to pursue genuine reform--not the fraudulent reforms of recent years, when the drive to cut dollars has cut the lifeblood from our health care system, our schools and our Island communities.

We must decide instead to act now. Real and meaningful change will come only from those who are committed to a vision of fairness for Islanders.

The 1996 Policy Plan of the Island New Democrats presents such a vision, and outlines a program to secure a brighter future for all Prince Edward Islanders. First and foremost is the need for democratic and accountable government. Second, we reaffirm the need for universal health care and appropriate social

provision for Island society as a whole. We call for democratic education, training the talents of young working men and women for a future here on our Island. We call for the full realization and responsible management of our land and sea resources. We call for full employment and local economic decision-making not as unrealizable dreams but as the only realistic alternatives to systemic unemployment and dependency on large corporations.

Finally, our Policy Plan sets forth the principle that government has an important and *positive* role to play, and that if government is to play this role effectively, the funding of government services must be fairly shared through a more equitable system of taxation.

Islanders must regain control of our government and of our resources, and provide openness and fairness to all our people. This Policy Plan is Island New Democrats' commitment and our pledge to our fellow Islanders, should they place their trust in us.

**Dr. Herb Dickieson**  
*Leader, Island New Democrats*



## **A GOVERNMENT AND LEGISLATURE ACCOUNTABLE TO THE PEOPLE**

The Legislative Assembly was once an honoured place, where debate among elected representatives helped to inform and educate Islanders about public issues great and small. Under recent governments, however, the P.E.I. legislature has become little more than an annual ritual required by the law of the land. Significant economic and social decisions that affect the lives and pocketbooks of all Islanders are made in the secrecy of the Executive Council, and made public only when it becomes expedient to reveal them. Sham consultative meetings are held from time to time, only for Islanders to discover, again and again, that the final decisions have been made well in advance. Public comment, concerns, recommendations--in short, the voices of the people--are ignored.

### **THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

Islanders want good government. They want a government that they can believe in. A government with a fair and open legislative process. A government where the



legislators are not afraid of the voters. A government where the interests of all Islanders are represented in every respect. New Democrats are committed to restoring credibility to the Legislative Assembly and public service.

Fearing serious challenge on the floor of the National Assembly, the present government has restricted Prince Edward Island's legislative session to a few weeks a year -- barely time to rubber-stamp its own laws--leaving the actual process of governing to be done largely by orders-in-council.

New Democrats will propose that, in order to adequately consider the affairs of our Province, the Legislative Assembly should meet at least twice a year.

Fearing defeat at the polls, the government has refused to call by-elections to replace MLAs who have vacated their seats. As of Fall 1996, four Island ridings are without representation. Some have had no MLA for over a year.

New Democrats will propose legislation to ensure that by-elections are held within six months of any vacancy.

New Democrats would also encourage development of a more open process for the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council alike. Legislative committees should operate in full public view, listening to the people before the laws are written--not after.

Nor should financial decision-making be a privileged area. Visibility is accountability. Prince Edward Island's books should be open to full public scrutiny so that Islanders might know what every government department is doing with their money.

New Democrats believe that the role of the MLA is a matter of honourable service to the people. It is not a nest of privilege. That does not mean that certain special allowances, expense accounts, credit cards or cars should not be provided to help legislators do their proper work. But such things should be made available

as necessary, not handed out as fringe benefits, with stricter rules and more thorough review procedures.

In addition, New Democrats will propose a code of ethics and conflict of interest guidelines to ensure that MLAs and public servants carry out their responsibilities honestly and fairly.

## **PENSIONS AND ALLOWANCES**

New Democrats will propose a major overhaul of pensions, separation allowances and other benefits once the Island public has had an opportunity to make its views known. Our elected representatives should of course be adequately compensated for their years of service. Such compensation, however, should be in line with the reasonable expectations of Islanders in other walks of life.

## **PUBLIC EMPLOYEES**

Government services that put people first are possible only when government treats its own public service employees as people, not pawns in an economic power game.

The next Island government must seek to re-establish a relationship of trust with its public-sector employees and their unions. New Democrats call for an end to the fear, instability and work-to-rule conditions brought about in the Island's public service through the breaking of contracts, unilateral pay reductions, and a return to patronage appointments (under no fewer than five Cabinet ministers).

Effective government services depend on fair and just employment conditions for all public service employees. New Democrats propose the restoration of an



independent hiring agency.

Fairness is also a matter of efficiency. The same economies we rightly expect of our MLAs should apply to public service expenses. For instance, senior public servants entitled to the use of a government-paid vehicle or an equivalent travel allowance should be reimbursed only for actual itemized travel costs.

## **PATRONAGE**

### **Casual, Part-time, Contract Employees**

Through no fault of their own, a great many Prince Edward Islanders have come to depend on the personal favour of MLAs and Cabinet ministers, who regularly and actively dictate hiring for casual and seasonal work. This degrading practice must be ended once and for all. Working Islanders who in the past have gained experience on the job under patronage contracts would not be disqualified. However, all future appointments in non-professional fields would be made through an independent, non-political hiring authority.

### **Professional Services**

For years, some members of the legal, accounting, management and other professional fields have prospered through their political connections. Such questionable dealings with government should be abandoned. New Democrats propose that professionals' future services be tendered and evaluated by a jury of their peers for recommendation to government.



## A FAIRER ISLAND FOR US ALL

### PUBLIC EXPENDITURE

Successive Island governments over the past twenty years have abused the overall economy and credit of our Province in order to stay in power. Since the early 1990s, however, when the worldwide recession made it difficult to borrow more on the money markets, the government has exploited an atmosphere of economic uncertainty and fear to introduce a program of "reform." This program is neither more nor less than an agenda to alter the basic economic and social framework of Prince Edward Island in the interests of big money and big business.

No thoughtful citizen would deny that something must be done about Prince Edward Island's high deficit. High interest payments squeeze out the funding that should provide quality public services. And high deficits undermine democracy. Because in a heavily indebted province, bankers and brokers call the shots, not the voters.

But it isn't the cost of health care that undermines economic growth. A healthy society is a productive society.

It isn't the cost of education. The same "liberal neo-conservatives" who attempt to plug the deficit with textbook fees also promote "lifelong training" for our new high-tech society.

New Democrats recognize that social provision is the legitimate business of government. But we can't provide long-term prosperity and social stability while paying hundreds of dollars per day per citizen on interest payments. Islanders' long-term public debt is short-term profit for others.

A reasonable approach to the government deficit would take account of:

- The urgent need for immediate and major correction at the top in areas such as MLA and Cabinet pensions and perks, the unnecessarily large and costly Cabinet, the large numbers of high-priced contracts and politically appointed employees
- The devastating effects, direct and secondary, of the destruction of long-established social programs in Island communities
- Waste and extravagance arising from un-tendered contracts and sweetheart deals with large corporations
- The likelihood that government revenues will rebound with a general economic recovery in two or three years.

A New Democratic reform would consider four categories of public spending.

- Expenditures that serve no valid or necessary purpose should be targeted and dealt with immediately.

- Everyday operations should be paid out of current revenue, that is, money raised in the year that it is spent. These include essential government services delivered on a regular basis, and other operations that have an impact on Islanders primarily in the year in which the money is spent.
- Investment in the future. Current governments have a responsibility and an obligation to ensure that future generations are able to live and function in society with confidence and some measure of security. Such "investment in the future" may be quite legitimately made with borrowed money, to be repaid by those for whom the investment is made. Clearly, however, such borrowing must be done with all due care and prudence.
- Finally, the immediate fruits of economic growth should be systematically harvested and preserved, and distributed through a reserve fund that would provide extra discretionary income to our province. In addition, an investment fund should be created into which individuals, local organizations and small businesses can invest. Such a fund would provide financial backing for community development.



## HEALING THE WOUNDS

A new government of Prince Edward Island today faces the task of healing the wounds inflicted upon Islanders in recent years. We must advance a careful, considered and responsible program of renewal to build a better and more just Province.

### CHILD CARE

Prince Edward Island is a hard-working province. That both parents in any Island family should hold jobs, whether full-time or part-time, seasonal or permanent, is today the social and economic norm. For Island women, paid work outside the home is an undeniable necessity.

Consider a few facts. Today, 28,000 Island women work full-time or part-time in the formal workplace--the second highest female workforce participation in Canada. Three out of four Island mothers participate in the paid workforce (including seasonal and temporary positions). Among mothers with pre-school children, the rate is 83.5 percent--the highest in the country. Single Island parents,

contrary to neo-conservative myth, are not welfare parents; 78.9 per cent work every year.

These working parents must provide alternative care for their young children. Yet most working Island families must rely on informal or occasional child care. Private child care schemes, however well-intentioned, do not fill the bill.

Island New Democrats demand a comprehensive child care policy for Prince Edward Island:

- A separate child care program (no more burying child care in other government programs)
- Child care benefits that reflect working parents' real costs
- A comprehensive, standardized pre-school education program available to all Island families.

This program would be financed on an ongoing basis from general revenue. Initial capital costs could be amortized over a number of years as an Investment in the Future. At the same time, child care is also an investment in the present, creating much-needed jobs and training opportunities.

## EDUCATION

No effort should be spared to obtain the finest education for all Prince Edward Islanders. It is not enough to put computers in classrooms. Entire new programs, challenging in content, socially responsible in context, must be developed and delivered.

Contrary to what some would have us believe, the private sector is not prepared to be an educational funding agency. The necessary spending for quality public education will come from government and not by way of commercial sponsors.

- **Kindergarten.** The absence of universally available kindergarten facilities in Island schools defies explanation. For over a century, it has been recognized that appropriate formal schooling before grade One provides significant learning advantages throughout a child's entire education.

Island New Democrats have led the demand for a province-wide kindergarten system, with appropriate facilities, qualified educators and modern program concepts. Numbers of qualified educators are already available. The budget would come from general revenue, with capital investment where necessary.

- **Primary and Secondary Schooling.** Instead of devoting precious dollars to the primary purpose of education--training young people to make their way in the modern world, as knowledgeable and competent members of their communities--Island governments have spent an inordinate amount of time and money on the "reform" of primary and secondary school administrative structures.

Island New Democrats will work with parents, students and educators to resume the process of preparing Island schools to meet Canada's highest educational standards.

- **Post-secondary Education.** Repeatedly, studies have shown that even in times of high unemployment, a young person with a college or university background has a significantly better chance of finding adequate and meaningful employment. Yet federal and provincial governments today seem determined to make it more difficult for students to afford some form of post-secondary education.



New Democrats insist that no young Islander should be denied the opportunity for want of means to advance to post-secondary studies. Nor should students be burdened with back-breaking debts to achieve their goals.

- **Training.** Many Islanders today find that they must add to their existing training and knowledge. But training for training's sake is not the answer. It is not an alternative to employment. There is no point training for jobs that won't be available.

Effective workforce training requires an effective employment policy, and government must provide the plan. We must know what workers we'll need, and what Island workers will need to know. New Democrats will work both inside and outside government to support quality training for productive skills, based on a shared understanding among workers, training institutions, employers and government about what our present and future workforce requirements.

## HEALTH CARE

New Democrats were the first to envision and put into practice the principle of universal health care in Canada. On Prince Edward Island, New Democrats have fought hardest to preserve our health care system.

Under recent Liberal government "reform" in the name of deficit reduction, Islanders have watched the virtual dismantling of health care. Local medical services have been withdrawn. Hospitals have closed. Frustrated with the present system, numbers of physicians have already left the Island.

At the same time, the most cumbersome health care bureaucracy in Island history now rules what little is left of our health care system, while the voices of those Islanders who actually know something about health and social services have been largely ignored.

It is time to reform health care reform. Time to restore stability, appropriate care and adequate facilities to our health care system:

- Rural acute care facilities must remain open.
- Existing specialist services must be retained on the Island, and services recently lost must be restored, wherever possible.
- A new plan for affordable access to modern, professionally staffed and adequately equipped health care services must be developed in partnership with service providers, citizens and government.

## **A SOCIETY AT WORK**

New Democrats believe all Islanders should have the opportunity to engage in productive and meaningful work. Work that earns an adequate income, while allowing each individual to train and develop skills that allow them share the collective benefits of the enterprise in which they are employed.

## **A FRAMEWORK OF COOPERATION**

Island New Democrats stand for a fair society based on cooperation. An economy that supports and a legal system that promotes the principles of equity, shared decision-making, and a responsible relationship to our community and the global environment that is our common home.

## **JOB CREATION**

### **A role for government**

Our current federal and provincial governments have lost touch with their proper role in job creation and economic development. After years of wrestling with



interest rates and deficits, they have thrown up their hands and declared that government cannot create jobs--that only the private sector can do this.

Government must again recognize that to guarantee a fully productive society is a fundamental responsibility of every modern democratic state. Our Island government must continue its leadership role, identifying opportunities and securing a balance of public, cooperative and private enterprise to realize our province's potential.

### **A role for Island communities**

Island New Democrats believe every community has the right to establish standards for the use of the financial strengths, natural resources and human potential within its boundaries.

Island New Democrats would promote job creation and economic growth through the creation of Community Economic Councils. These would work with existing regional development corporations and agencies to coordinate ideas, talents and resources. In addition, they would provide people with local input into planning decisions, with fair and equal treatment for competing interests.

### **LABOUR RELATIONS**

There can be little doubt that the agenda of both traditional parties is to keep wages low, make life difficult for organized labour and attract to the Island enterprises that are looking for a political jurisdiction with a low-wage workforce and non-unionized workers.

Island New Democrats know that healthy labour conditions must prevail, if

our Island is to prosper. Respect, tolerance, openness and fairness must guide our relations with the working women and men of our province. These are reasonable expectations. To fulfil them, however, will require the full and active participation of all concerned groups and individuals.

Island New Democrats would therefore support legislation to create a fair and equitable relationship between employers and employees. Such legislation would provide:

- A higher basic level of rights, protections and compensation for non-unionized employees
- Adequate worker's compensation and the right to refuse unsafe or dangerous work
- A minimum wage, keyed to inflation, that will allow working families to live above the poverty line
- The right of all workers to join a union of their choice
- Full and free collective bargaining for all unionized employees
- Pay equity policies to guarantee a fair income for Island women and their families
- The right to strike and to negotiate essential services, where applicable
- Anti-scab provisions to promote settlement of strikes without violence
- Restrictions on outsourcing and untimely, un-negotiated relocation of industry
- Binding arbitration in disputes involving first contracts, and expedited arbitration for timely settlement of disputes under existing collective agreements.

## A ROLE FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Technological and economic change has certainly altered the nature of work and the connection of workers to the workplace. Yet even in a high-tech society, the private sector can provide an environment in which workers acquire employable skills. Companies should be encouraged to invest in their people and to adopt strategies that include a commitment to their workforce.

New Democrats recognize the need for a dynamic partnership of government, labour, and business. In a fully realized form, such a partnership could and would set the economic agenda for our society in a comprehensive and equitable way.

The main job creators today are small and medium-sized business. New Democrats on Prince Edward Island, as elsewhere in Canada, support:

- Reduced taxes for small businesses
- Simplified access to information for SMBs, e.g. a "single-window system" to deliver business support services
- Less emphasis on mega-projects and sweetheart deals for trans-national giants
- A comprehensive plan for sector-by-sector strategies and partnerships

## EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

It is all too clear that only a major shift of political leadership will bring about an equitable solution to Canada's unemployment insurance issues.

Island New Democrats are committed to fair and adequate compensation for seasonal workers--to an enlightened policy under which "employment insurance" is



a meaningful term. It is possible, for instance, that employers' insurance costs could be based upon the ratio of layoffs to full-time employment. Part-time workers would be eligible for benefits on the same basis as full-time workers. Policy should focus on rewarding those who are attempting to become self-sufficient in the labour market, not on penalizing seasonal workers and low-wage earners with temporary jobs.

## LAND AND SEA

On Prince Edward Island, our natural resources must remain the basis of our economic activity. Our economic strengths lie in the soil, the sea, the forests and the natural beauty of our Island. Importation of low-paying industrial jobs is no substitute for the real and potential wealth of our resource-based industries.

Yet Island farmers and fishers, and the many communities they support, have been increasingly ignored. Successive governments have gone from one experiment to another. They have flirted with the prospect of Island agriculture dominated by big business. In the fishery, meanwhile, the Island government has allowed the federal government to run roughshod over fishers' futures, with only token objections.

Two Royal Commissions on the Land have been held since the 1970s. But no Island government has had the courage or foresight to follow their tough recommendations. The use of chemicals on Island farms continues to pose significant short- and long-term risks to the environment. New Democrats urge immediate action, before this vital resource is lost or degraded to the point

of no return.

Management of Island land and sea resources under a single ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has done little to balance competing interests and promote understanding between resource sectors. Where the stakes in each sector are so high, and the problems so complex, "less government" is *not* the most economical solution.

Island New Democrats recommend establishment of three separate ministries: one for agriculture, another for fisheries and a third for forestry.

## THE FISHERY

In the Island fishery, the federal government, with only token opposition from our provincial government, is dismantling the infrastructure that is so necessary to sustaining a successful and renewable industry. Rules and regulations designed for other parts of the country are forced upon Island fishers, with astronomical fee increases.

Island New Democrats are prepared to resist these destructive forces. We are ready to educate the government--from grassroots sources. New Democrats support:

- Cancellation of privatization plans for small craft harbours
- A marketing policy for Island shellfish, with appropriate supports to ensure steady, long-term employment
- An action plan for inshore and waterways pollution.



## FORESTRY

Island forest industries once played a major role in the history of our province. In some rural areas, work in the woods still accounts for significant employment levels. Properly planned and managed, our forests could once more become a major component of Island growth and prosperity. Yet for years, the government has sown confusion. Plant, then uproot. Support new growth, then encourage massive clear-cuts. Destroy costly new plantations in the hope that blueberries may be the crop of the future.

New Democrats support a comprehensive forest management plan, worked out in consultation with those most affected. Among other things, cost-sharing arrangements must be negotiated with federal authorities under consistent forestry policies, with practical assistance to the industry.

## AGRICULTURE

The very nature of Prince Edward Island demands the existence of strong and vibrant local communities. Agriculture performs best when it is controlled and run locally, by men and women who share a commitment to their community, their history, and their land.

Prince Edward Island is a natural resource in itself. We do not really own our Island; we only hold it in trust from those who came before us, and for those yet to be born. The vast majority of Islanders know we cannot trade away or negligently diminish our Island's fragile future.

Yet our governments seem to have difficulty with a conservation-minded approach to our agricultural resources. Perhaps it is their tendency to favour large corporate interests over those of ordinary Islanders. The serious topsoil losses now threatening Island agriculture are due not to over-ambitious local farmers but to the pressures of an over-developed potato industry attempting to meet the demands of the big potato processors. Tough economic times, international market forces, ineffective government policies--all of these compel farmers and other private land owners to overwork the land or sell out to corporate interests.

One thing is certain. Massive monoculture is *not* the way of the future. Farm diversification strategies under the New Democratic government in Saskatchewan have proven an alternative is possible. The Saskatchewan strategy promoted, on the one hand, pooled marketing, good farming practices, and risk spread through a range of crops and products. On the other, it offered market-neutral farm support programs, research, development and value-added processing. The result: spectacular market returns--over half a billion dollars--to farm families in 1994.

Island New Democrats support the principle of sustainable, community-based agricultural policy:

- Productive family farms with positive modern supports and incentives
- Value-added enterprise for better job opportunities in rural communities, with equity funding and export support for rural manufactures
- Improved crop insurance and management -- there must be no more PVYn disasters
- Diversification for higher profits and a healthier farm environment
- New opportunities and supports for agricultural biotechnology

- A sustained rural transport, utilities and communications infrastructure for competitive marketing and delivery of Island farm products
- Continuing access to the information highway for rural communities.



## RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT OF OUR MONEY

For years, Liberal and Conservative parties have pretended to Islanders that only they know how to manage our Province's fiscal and monetary needs. Elsewhere in Canada, New Democratic governments give the lie to these claims. New Democrats in Saskatchewan were the first to deliver a balanced provincial budget in our time. And throughout the recession of the early 1990s, New Democrats kept British Columbia on track as Canada's most prosperous province.

New Democrats know the value of a dollar. Prince Edward Island must put its financial house in order. But fiscal responsibility does not mean undermining our senior citizens' well-earned security. It does not mean jeopardizing our health care and educational systems.

Responsible management means responsible social provision. With care, prudence and good management, our Island's financial problems can be solved, and prosperity restored, in the foreseeable future, without penalizing our society's most vulnerable members.

- A fair share from corporations, with possible tax incentives for job creation
- A 0.1% tax on stock purchases, corporate takeovers and other speculative investments.
- Reduction of the P.E.I. Sales Tax by two percentage points over the next two years
- Adjusting personal income taxes, general corporation taxes, gas and diesel fuel taxes, tobacco and liquor taxes to the average levels of other Atlantic provinces.

Reducing P.E.I. sales tax would cost roughly \$12.4 million for each year. To go to the Atlantic average with progressive tax measures would yield about \$17 million per year. By year two, both measures would effectively match the advantages that other Atlantic provinces might gain under harmonization. At the same time, Prince Edward Island would continue not to tax electricity, children's clothing, shoes and books. As revenues increase, we would be in a position to further reduce the PST in future years.

A fair taxation system would make Prince Edward Island an increasingly attractive place to live, work and do business.