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Les Leyne: Former insiders agree that NDP sky is falling

(Victoria) - There's a burgeoning doomsday cult developing in this province, made up of disaffected former advisers to the government who think the NDP world is coming to an end.

A lot of these Armageddon movements petered out when the millennium came and went with a minimum of fuss. But this one seems to be picking up momentum.

The latest to join up is Bill Tieleman, once a communications director to former premier Glen Clark, who went on the record Tuesday with a prediction the NDP may win only seven seats. That would be the worst showing since the NDP and its predecessor, the CCF, began running in elections in the 1930s.

Tieleman joins David Schreck, former adviser to Premier Ujjal Dosanjh, and Brad Zubyk, who managed Corky Evans' leadership campaign, each of whom has suggested the party will get annihilated, or close to it, when the premier finally makes up his mind.

Before that, former cabinet minister Bill Barlee lent his name to an analysis predicting the same thing.

Each member of this cult is a friend of mine, so I feel obligated to get help or counselling for them, or at least alert the authorities. (Hello, 911? There's a bunch of crazies down here saying their world is coming to an end! Come quick!)

But what stops me from trying to deprogram these poor unfortunates is the fact that most people probably feel they're dead right.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse have done a fair amount of work in support of their contentions. They ride in from different directions but all arrive at the same conclusion: the NDP is toast.

Tieleman said: "Our research shows definitely that at this point the NDP will retain party status but with as few as seven MLAs elected."

(The seven winners he picks are: Dosanjh, Joy MacPhail, Jenny Kwan, Sue Hammell, Joan Smallwood and Tim Stevenson in the Lower Mainland; and Steve Orcherton in Victoria-Hillside.)

He says another six seats are "on the bubble," winnable in the right circumstances, such as a poor campaign by the Liberals.

Prior to that, Schreck quit his job as a special adviser to Dosanjh because his pessimistic, negative election thoughts were clashing with others in the premier's office.

He went public in January, predicting total annihilation. "All of the research I've had the privilege of seeing shows that nothing will move the numbers."

Those numbers were poll results putting the NDP at 20 per cent or below. Schreck started publicly advancing the notion he'd been pushing privately; give up on winning and appeal to people to elect a capable opposition.

A month before that, Zubyk, an independent consultant with close ties to the NDP, wrote an op-ed piece in the Times Colonist arguing the NDP should give up the idea of trying to win and campaign instead on the idea that some semblance of opposition will be better than an overwhelming Liberal victory.

And in 1999, Barlee and partner Mike Geoghegan ran an analysis of poll results based on giving the NDP a generous 28 per cent share of the popular vote.

They translated that to a finding of just four "safe" NDP seats: Dan Miller in Prince Rupert, Gordon Wilson in Powell River, Moe Sihota in Esquimalt and Kwan in Vancouver-Mount Pleasant. (Miller and Sihota have since announced they're retiring.)

Faced with the latest convert to the NDP doomsday cult, Dosanjh said: "I'd be less than candid with you if I didn't say we were facing an uphill battle. But once we make the choices very clear before the people, we'll do better than most of the analysts think."

That might sound encouraging if the dismal analysts were just carping media critics, like myself.

But when they're all former insiders, some of whom still belong to the NDP and all of whom know the party inside and out, it sounds like whistling past the graveyard.

Just So You Know: Considering Tieleman's deep roots in the party and in the labour movement -- he was on the party executive and was communications director for the B.C. Federation of Labour -- he shows a surprising amount of capitalistic cunning in how he unveiled his theory.

He pitched the seven-seat theory in a news release plugging a two-volume report he's written on what to expect from a Liberal government -- with or without an opposition -- available for \$975 per volume, or \$1,795 for the set, in advance.

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