

Angry Tories protest PC-Alliance merger

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Wednesday, November 12, 2003

VANCOUVER (CP) - An outraged Tory riding president was among 50 protesters who turned out for a luncheon attended by the leaders of the Progressive Conservative and Canadian Alliance parties on Wednesday.

Kady Williams of the Vancouver East riding said she voted for Peter MacKay in the Tory leadership race earlier this year, but she just can't stomach the proposed merger between the two parties.

"They don't stand for what I stand for," said Williams.

Behind her, the crowd that Williams said was made up of Tory members gathered outside a downtown Vancouver hotel chanting: "Hey, hey, Peter MacKay, how many lies have you told today?"

A few of the protesters later tried to enter the area where MacKay had finished addressing the luncheon, but were prevented by hotel staff.

Williams said she sent a note to MacKay requesting a meeting, but the Tory leader told reporters that his schedule was packed and he wasn't planning to meet with the group.

"They are having their say," said MacKay.

Despite the opposition outside, MacKay and Canadian Alliance Leader Stephen Harper joined hands and were cheered by the more than 100 attendees at the fundraiser put on by the PC Canada Fund.

Members of the Tories and Alliance will vote Dec. 6 on the merger plan.

"I am confident by an overwhelming majority the members of our party will vote Yes for ratification," MacKay told the crowd, which included former Tory leadership candidate Jim Prentice.

That said, he acknowledged this week is key to selling the merger to Conservative party members.

Anyone who wants to vote on delegates who will then decide whether to ratify the deal must have a membership by the end of this week.

"It's getting down to the short strokes," MacKay said.

Harper echoed MacKay's confidence in the merger, saying he doesn't believe the protesters represent the majority of Conservatives.

"I think this is mainly the Orchardista crowd," said Harper, in reference to David Orchard, the former Tory leadership candidate dead set against a merger with the Alliance.

"I don't know what their motive is."

MacKay signed a controversial last-minute deal at the leadership convention with Orchard agreeing not pursue merger talks in exchange for Orchard's support.

"It's pretty clear to me that most real members of the Alliance and PCs and the public want to see these parties get together," said Harper.



Progressive Conservative leader Peter MacKay makes his pitch for B.C. support of a new unified party on the Morning News Wednesday.

CREDIT: Global BC

A Canadian Alliance riding president who attended a private meeting with MacKay and other riding leaders earlier in the day said she supports the merger.

But the merger isn't wrapped up, said Marilyn Brown of Vancouver Kingsway.

"I certainly don't think it's a done deal because B.C. does have a large contingent of Orchardists and depending on how they vote and how they organize, we just don't know," she said.

Protester Williams said there are too many fundamental differences between the two parties for her to be comfortable.

She called the Alliance more of a "Republican" type of party, while the Tories are concerned about social programs.

But Harper said there can be a place for so-called Red Tories in the new party.

"Some Red Tories have been very vocal, as we know, opposing the deal," he said. "That's their prerogative and may speak to their self exclusion. But I think most even so-called Red Tories are in favour of this agreement."

Likewise, MacKay said there would be room for social conservatives.

For example, the Tory leader said he and Harper are not "polar opposites" on the issue of same-sex marriage.

"We both come to the view there is certainly a need under the law for a recognition of rights, responsibilities, privileges, that flow from a union.

"But I personally don't believe we have to change the definition of marriage," he said.

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