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BRITISH COLUMBIA: THE CUTS BEGIN

Introduction

On February 13, 2002, British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell delivered a televised address to the province, shortly after introducing his Liberal government's first budget. Clad in a sombre black business suit, Campbell did not have much good news to report to B.C. residents, the vast majority of whom had given his party a huge majority in the May 2001 election. He apologized for the difficult and quite likely unpopular steps his government believed it was necessary to take in the months to come. He claimed they were necessary in order to wrestle down the \$4.4-billion deficit that he asserted had been inherited by his government from its NDP predecessor. Acknowledging that cuts to education, health care, and social programs, along with a significant reduction in the public sector and a reopening of contracts with civil servants would arouse resentment among many, he claimed that there was no alternative course available to him. He reiterated his government's election pledge to balance the province's budget by 2005, a commitment it had actually passed into law shortly after the election. But he admitted that erasing the deficit was going to be a huge undertaking that would require patience and sacrifice from British Columbians over the next few years.

The reaction to Campbell's speech was instantaneous and dramatic. While most business groups hailed his determination to wipe out the deficit and reduce the cost of government, B.C.'s powerful labour unions and social and community organizations denounced the budget as mean-spirited and heartless. Many critics were especially appalled by the fact that Campbell had slashed provincial taxes after winning the election, and as a result was now contemplating serious cuts in social spending in order

pay for a measure they viewed as short-sighted and ill-timed. Others were outraged that he had ordered the province's striking teachers back to work, and that he had threatened to impose a salary settlement on them that most viewed as unsatisfactory. Labour groups were incensed at his decision to reopen signed contracts affecting health-care workers and others in the public sector, in order to roll back their wages and benefits. Community groups servicing the needs of the homeless and other marginalized people in Vancouver and elsewhere looked in vain for any indication from the government that funding for their activities would be increased. Environmentalists were deeply troubled by what they regarded as Campbell's lack of sympathy with their concerns for preserving the province's forests. Within days of Campbell's budget speech, a broad coalition of groups was planning a huge protest rally outside the provincial legislature in Victoria, to dramatize public opposition to the government's policies.

On February 23, a crowd of at least 20 000 people descended on Victoria, calling for Campbell's government to reconsider the cuts. Meanwhile, smaller gatherings were held in other communities throughout B.C., suggesting that the opposition was not concentrated only in the province's large cities. B.C. had seen this kind of anti-government protest before. In 1983, a huge mass movement known as Solidarity had galvanized a similar coalition of labour and social groups in opposition to spending cuts the Social Credit government of Bill Bennett had implemented. But despite large, noisy rallies and even a province-wide general strike, Solidarity had not been successful in deflecting the government from its charted course.

Since then, provincial administrations with a similar right-wing approach to government spending and social programs had been elected across Canada, most notably in Alberta and Ontario. They too had faced down, and apparently overcome, the concerted opposition of many groups who felt that their policies were harsh, wrong-headed, and would lead to a serious erosion of public services that governments provided to their citizens. Throughout the 1990s, budget cuts, deficit reduction, privatization of public enterprises, and an overall shrinking in the role of government had almost become a mantra for political parties of various stripes across Canada, at both the federal and provincial levels. In general, most of the public appeared to concur, or at least acquiesce, and governments that embraced this neo-conservative philosophy were not generally punished at the polls.

But by the beginning of the new century, there were some signs that this view of the role of government in society was beginning to come under serious question. Particularly after the tragedy of September 11 in the United States and the collapse of the giant energy company Enron, many people were coming to recognize that government and public institutions did have an important responsibility to play in guaranteeing the health, safety, and security of citizens. Conversely, the ability of the private sector to provide these kinds of services more efficiently and cheaply than government, which had once been a neo-conservative article of faith, was also being increasingly challenged. The B.C. Liberal government of Gordon Campbell may well have been one of the last to ride the wave of anti-government, low-tax, sentiment in Canada, and the backlash its policies appeared to have triggered might also be an indication of an important change in the public mood.

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The Campbell Plan

INTEGRATED VIEWING: Watch this *News in Review* report once, then, after reading the information below, watch it a second time and formulate answers to the viewing questions.

Since winning a crushing election victory over the NDP in May 2001, the B.C. Liberal government of Premier Gordon Campbell pursued an ambitious economic agenda, determined to undo what it viewed as the incompetence and overspending of its predecessor in power. Throughout the election campaign, Campbell was quick to blame all of B.C.'s woes on what he alleged was the inability of the NDP to manage the province's economy responsibly. External factors such as the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s, which severely impacted on B.C.'s markets for natural resource products, and the ongoing trade dispute with the United States over softwood lumber exports, were brushed aside as mere trivialities. Campbell and his Liberal team presented a clear message to the voters: it was the "tax and spend" policies of the NDP, coupled with its overly friendly stance toward labour and environmental groups and its hostility to business, that were the roots of B.C.'s malaise. The remedy, in their view, included much lower personal and corporate taxes, a major downsizing in the size and cost of government operations, and a set of economic stimuli designed to promote greater business investment and activity to kick-start the province's moribund economy.

VIEWING QUESTION ONE: Identify a moment in the video in which, in your opinion, Gordon Campbell gives a rationale for the cuts. Describe how this conflicts with his pre-election promises.

In its first provincial budget, announced in February 2002, the B.C. government introduced a set of policies that were completely in keeping with the general approach it had advocated during the election. It had already kept its promise to reduce taxes, even though it faced a fiscal deficit of \$4.4-billion dollars, which it had committed itself to erasing within its first term in office. With revenues declining, the government decided to raise the provincial sales tax from seven to seven-and-a-half per cent, and also hike tobacco taxes, making them the highest in Canada. Critics of this measure pointed out that while the personal and corporate tax cuts mainly benefited high-income earners, the increased consumption taxes penalized all B.C. residents irrespective of income, and were thus regressive and unfair. However, the rise in tobacco taxes did receive some praise from health and environmental groups. Increases in residential school property taxes, medical services plan premiums, and gas and transit taxes in Vancouver also formed part of the budget plan to hike revenues in order to deal with the deficit.

VIEWING QUESTION TWO: Describe how the video depicts and explains the various reactions to Campbell's cuts. Pay close attention to images, editing, language, and juxtapositions.

Even before tabling its budget, the Campbell government had aroused considerable opposition by its decision in December 2001 to slash the size of the provincial public service by almost 12 000 jobs. This measure was designed to reduce the cost of government operations by

almost \$2-billion over the course of the following three years. It also declared that it would reopen signed contracts with many of its unionized public employees, particularly in the health-care sector, that it was reducing welfare payments, ending the freeze on tuition fees, and contemplating the closure of some hospitals, all in the name of reducing spending in order to balance the budget and eliminate the deficit. The fact that this was very much a long-term plan that the government intended to commit to during its term in office was underlined by provincial Finance Minister Gary Collins, who stated in his budget speech, “We are a government that is trying to clean up a mess that we inherited—10 years of decline in British Columbia. We will not be able to do that overnight.”

Predictably, the budget announcement was greeted with a mixture of praise and denunciation. Most business groups were supportive, especially of the government’s indication that it was considering a greater contracting-out of previously public-administered services to the private sector. But the right-of-centre Canadian Taxpayers’ Federation, a group that had initially praised Campbell’s move to cut provincial taxes, was sharply critical of its decision to raise consumption taxes. A far greater challenge to the Liberals quickly emerged in the form of a renewed alliance of labour, environmental, and social and community groups, each of which had its own reasons for opposing the government’s economic and fiscal policies. With the NDP opposition still reeling from its defeat and reduced to two MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assembly) in Victoria, the task of mounting a concerted challenge to the Campbell plan fell to this extra-parliamentary coalition of organizations. It bore a strong resemblance to the 1983 Solidarity coalition that had been formed to confront a similar set of economic and social policies that the then Social Credit provincial government of Premier Bill Bennett had introduced. Its strategy and tactics also appeared to be very reminiscent of the demonstrations and protests that had rocked B.C. during the tumultuous summer of 1983, when huge rallies and a province-wide general strike had presented the government with a serious challenge to its legitimacy.

VIEWING QUESTION THREE: The reaction to the budget cuts produced a variety of strong reactions. How does the video use techniques particular to the medium of television to give the viewer a sense of the diverse reactions? How is a polarization of opinion also suggested?

But Bennett had overcome that challenge, and his legislative agenda became the prototype for a succession of neo-conservative government programs that came to be adopted, to a greater or lesser extent, all across Canada in the two decades that followed.

Despite antagonizing large sectors of the population, especially those who were members of trade unions, Bennett and his successor, Bill Vander Zalm, had been able to maintain support among enough B.C. residents to survive at the polls. Whether history would repeat itself this time with Gordon Campbell remained an open question. At the large anti-government rally staged in Victoria on February 22, 2002, B.C. Federation of Labour President Jim Sinclair gestured to the tens of thousands gathered outside the provincial legislature and defiantly proclaimed: “Mr. Campbell, let me introduce you to the people of British Columbia. Let there be no doubt that the people here today represent the majority of British Columbians.” From the sheer size of this rally, and others that took place that same weekend across B.C., it was

undeniable that the Campbell government's economic plan had touched off considerable opposition and anger among many residents of the province. But whether or not the anger over its hard-line conservative approach would eventually come to embrace enough people to present it with a serious threat, either at the polls or in the streets, remained to be seen.

VIEWING QUESTION FOUR: How does the video show the risks that an elected government faces when introducing controversial legislation? In your opinion, do the events depicted in the video appear to affirm or negate the democratic process?

Follow-up Discussion

With your classmates, discuss the use of non-violent protest as a means of pressuring governments to change unpopular policies. What effect, if any, do such actions have? Can you think of other means that might be more useful in persuading governments to rethink their policies between elections? What would these be, and how would they work?

BRITISH COLUMBIA: THE CUTS BEGIN

Idiosyncratic Politics

Since entering Confederation as Canada's sixth province in 1871, British Columbia has produced more than its share of colourful and occasionally controversial political leaders. Its political culture has also tended to be far more polarized and sharply divided along ideological lines than practically any other part of the country, making elections in the province much more intense and passionately fought than elsewhere. The party system in B.C. has traditionally been quite different from that in most of the rest of Canada, in that the two main political parties that have held power at the federal level of government since Confederation—the Liberals and Conservatives—have until recently not tended to be very strong there. Beginning in the 1950s, B.C. governments tended to be either more right-wing or left-wing, by Canadian standards. The presence of a large number of unionized workers, concentrated mainly in either the urban or resource-based areas of the province, favoured the political fortunes of the New Democratic Party (NDP), and its socialist predecessor the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). Conversely, the large bloc of small “c” conservative voters in small communities and rural parts of the province has tended to give its support to right-wing political movements such as Social Credit (imported into the province from neighbouring Alberta in the early 1950s) and later the current Liberal government of Premier Gordon Campbell. B.C. Liberals are far more conservative in their economic and social policies than Liberals in either Ottawa or other Canadian provinces. In effect, B.C.'s provincial Liberals are more of a right-of-centre coalition of groups whose sole point of agreement is their shared hostility to the NDP than a coherent centrist party.

A Capricious Political-Historical Context

Politics has a dynamic that is often unpredictable and changeable, and political leaders can, by dint of their personal and political styles, effect unexpected and dramatic changes. This has been particularly true in British Columbia. However while Gordon Campbell has certainly aroused a great deal of controversy and opposition over his government's plans to cut spending, jobs, and programs in the public sector, he is not generally perceived as being as colourful a political figure as others in the province's past. He is, nonetheless, part of a political tradition in B.C. that is vigorous and variable. Here are examples of some of British Columbia's more provocative and singular politicians. As you read this material, consider how the career of each suggests a political culture that has evolved as a unique and idiosyncratic one. Consider also how a provincial or territorial government leader can affect the life in that province or territory.

Amor de Cosmos (William Alexander Smith)

Only in British Columbia, some might say, could a politician with the unlikely name Amor de Cosmos (Spanish for “love of the universe”) become premier. Born William Alexander Smith in Windsor, Nova Scotia, in 1825, de Cosmos left his job in a Halifax warehouse to find his fame and fortune in California during the Great Gold Rush of 1849. He was an avid photographer, and his success in capturing the rugged beauty of the West Coast soon encouraged him to forego panning for gold and set up a photography studio instead, in the small mining community of Mud Springs. Local residents felt their town's name was unflattering, and in order to promote its gold-mining activities, they renamed it El Dorado. Not to be outdone, Smith asked the state legislature to pass a bill in 1854 authorizing him to change his own name to Amor de Cosmos. He said that this name captured what he loved most: order, beauty, the world, and the universe.

In 1858 news of yet another gold strike, this time in the Fraser River valley of British Columbia, reached de Cosmos in California. He immediately headed north, but instead of taking up gold mining again, he settled in Victoria, where he founded a newspaper known as the *British Colonist*. In it, he frequently denounced the policies of the British colonial governor, James Douglas, and used the paper as a springboard for his own political career, winning election to the Vancouver Island assembly and later the B.C. legislative council. As a politician, de Cosmos was known for his outbursts of temper, sometimes worsened by his drinking habits. When provoked, he occasionally assaulted his opponents with his walking stick, which he wielded as a weapon. De Cosmos' main political objective was to promote the idea of B.C.'s joining Canada. He organized the province's Confederation League, and demanded that the British colonial authorities grant responsible government to the territory as a prelude to full union with Canada. In 1871, de Cosmos saw his efforts come to fruition when B.C. entered Confederation as the nation's sixth province, in return for a commitment from the federal government to build a transcontinental railway linking the province with the rest of the country within a decade.

The voters showed their appreciation to De Cosmos by electing him to both the provincial legislature and the federal Parliament in Ottawa. From 1872 to 1874 de Cosmos served as both B.C.'s second premier and a federal MP, but soon disappointed his supporters by his lackluster and unenthusiastic performance in office. While in opposition, he had used his considerable charm and charisma to galvanize a movement in B.C. against continued British rule and in favour of union with Canada instead of annexation to the United States. In 1882, de Cosmos lost his seat in Victoria after endorsing the idea of full Canadian independence from Britain. Always eccentric, his personal behaviour became even more bizarre and erratic during his last years, and he fell victim to full-blown insanity in 1895, just two years before his death.

T.D. Pattullo

Thomas Dufferin Pattullo, or "Duff" as he liked to be known, was born in Woodstock, Ontario, and pursued a career as a journalist and editor with a number of newspapers in that part of Canada before entering politics. Helped by his father's strong links to the federal Liberal government of Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, Pattullo secured a post in the territorial government of Yukon at the time of the famous Klondike Gold Rush of 1898. He served as assistant gold commissioner in Dawson City before being elected to city council. In 1908, he moved to the northern B.C. boomtown of Prince Rupert to open a branch office of the profitable real estate and insurance firm he had established in Yukon. After serving as mayor of the town, he was elected to the provincial legislature during the First World War, and became Minister of Lands in the Liberal government of Premier H.C. Brewster. After the Liberals lost the 1928 election, Pattullo assumed the party leadership, and led it to a remarkable comeback victory in 1933.

By this time, the Great Depression had hit B.C.'s resource-based economy hard, resulting in widespread unemployment and poverty. With foreign markets for the province's lumber, fish, and minerals shrinking, and government revenues stretched to the limit, Pattullo's new government soon found itself struggling to cope with huge economic and social problems. B.C.'s workers were among the most organized and militant in the country, and there was considerable concern about labour unrest and even violence in Vancouver and other major centres. Pattullo had seen the new socialist CCF replace the previously governing Conservatives as the province's second-largest party in the election he had won, and was determined to prevent it from gaining even greater support. For this reason, he instituted a set of sweeping policies that

vastly extended the role of government in the province's economic and social life. This came to be known as the "Little New Deal," after U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal program that had achieved some success in confronting the problems of the Depression in that country.

Pattullo was small in stature, but what he lacked in height he more than compensated for in self-confidence and personal style. He ordered his suits from the finest New York City tailors, threw fancy parties for his supporters in Victoria's famous Empress Hotel, and liked to send his political opponents roses on their birthdays as a joke. But Pattullo was also a practical politician who greatly increased public spending on social programs and education. His government was limited in this undertaking by the severe restrictions on provincial spending power that Ottawa had imposed at the time of Confederation. In a series of federal-provincial conferences held during the latter part of the Depression decade of the 1930s, Pattullo frequently clashed with his fellow Liberal, Prime Minister Mackenzie King, and formed an unlikely alliance with two other colourful provincial leaders, Ontario's Mitchell "Mitch" Hepburn and Quebec's Maurice Duplessis, in opposition to the federal government. Despite its modest scope, Pattullo's "Little New Deal" became a model for other provincial leaders to follow, and also served as the basis for Conservative Prime Minister Richard B. Bennett's short-lived and ill-fated "New Deal" of 1935.

With the onset of the Second World War in 1939, the resource economy of British Columbia came to life again, and unemployment fell to almost zero practically overnight. Pattullo's government lost its majority in the provincial election of 1941, which saw the CCF surge in voter support. He rejected a coalition with the Conservatives to prevent the socialist takeover, and as a result lost the support of his own party. Defeated in the 1945 election, he retired from politics. Pattullo is regarded as one of the more innovative political leaders of the Depression era, and his efforts to expand the scope of government to provide a decent minimum standard of living were soon followed by both his own and other political parties as the postwar "social welfare state" was born in Canada. Despite his business background and considerable personal wealth, he was not the kind of politician who believed that government should model itself along the lines of private enterprise. Instead, he firmly believed that government carried the responsibility to "meet every problem arising from our complex social and economic conditions in order that not merely a few, but all of our people may live in reasonable comfort." Drawing on a gambling analogy that harkened back to his days in the wide-open Yukon boomtown of Dawson City, he once stated that his goal in political life had not been so much to change the rules of the game but to redistribute the chips, so that a greater number of players could approach the table.

William Andrew Cecil Bennett and William Richards Bennett

W.A.C. Bennett and his son William "Bill" Bennett dominated B.C.'s political scene from the 1950s to the 1980s. The Social Credit dynasty the father created, and the son continued, was to leave its mark on the province's politics during a period of unparalleled economic growth, based on B.C.'s vast natural resources. The elder Bennett was born in the Maritimes, but headed west as a young man and established a hardware business in the town of Kelowna in the Okanagan Valley. He entered provincial politics as a Conservative during the Second World War and won a seat in the legislature. Strongly opposed to the rising socialist CCF, Bennett was attracted by the right-wing political philosophy of Social Credit, which had swept to power in neighbouring Alberta during the 1930s. Its business-friendly economic policies, coupled with

the oil boom of the postwar era, had transformed Alberta from a have-not province into one of the most prosperous parts of Canada. Bennett believed that a similar political approach could also benefit B.C., and he founded his own Social Credit Party in 1952. After a confusing election in which the CCF won the most seats but failed to gain a majority, Bennett was able to persuade the remaining Liberals and Conservatives in the legislature to join his party in order to keep the socialists from taking power.

Bennett's assumption of the premiership coincided with a prolonged economic boom in B.C., as post-war markets for its forest and mineral products grew dramatically, especially in the United States. His government promoted economic growth and the development of an improved infrastructure of railways, roads, and ferries linking the mainland with Vancouver Island, which made it possible for companies to gain access to the resources and move their products to market. However, Bennett's fiscal conservatism prevented his government from incurring any deficits while it spent public money on projects that largely benefited private industry. He introduced measures that limited the rights of trade unions and was reluctant to fund social programs for those the economic boom had left behind. His government appealed to rural and small-town voters, and his almost visceral anti-socialism was brought to the forefront during every provincial election campaign, when he would warn voters that "the socialists are at the gates!"

Bennett's government contained a mixture of strange personalities. His minister of transport, Philip Gagliardi, won the nickname "flying Phil" for his penchant for receiving speeding tickets. Bennett himself was a larger-than-life character who was nicknamed "Wacky" because of his tendency to employ inflated political rhetoric in denouncing his NDP opponents. For two decades, he controlled the political life of the province, and won every single election from 1952 to 1972, despite concerted CCF and NDP efforts to topple him. He was never very popular in urban centres like Vancouver, whose residents sometimes objected to his unsophisticated style, which nonetheless played very well elsewhere in the province. After surviving a strong NDP challenge in 1969, Bennett decided to fight one more election in 1972, which he lost to another colourful B.C. political leader, Dave Barrett of the NDP. After his defeat at the polls, he passed the Social Credit leadership to his son Bill, who defeated Barrett and succeeded his father as premier in 1975.

Bill Bennett held office in B.C. from 1979 to 1986. His years as premier were full of turmoil, and his government was plagued with scandals and a massive labour-organized public campaign against the budget cuts it introduced in 1983. A coalition of unions and community organizations called Solidarity staged a general strike against Bennett's government, but despite widespread shutdowns of government offices and other facilities, the movement failed to halt the cutbacks. Bennett's crowning, and last, achievement as premier of B.C. was the opening of Expo 86, a world's fair that gave the province an opportunity to showcase itself to an international audience. After leaving office, he continued to be haunted by the scandals that had faced him as premier. He was accused of insider trading in some stock transactions, for which the provincial securities commission eventually found him guilty.

David "Dave" Barrett

Dave Barrett was the son of a Jewish working-class immigrant family in Vancouver. He studied philosophy in the United States and pursued a career in social work before entering politics

as a CCF and later NDP member of the B.C. provincial legislature. He represented a predominantly working-class area of Vancouver's east end, where his blunt, down-to-earth style and earthy humour won considerable support from its blue-collar residents. In 1969, after the NDP under his rival Thomas Berger failed to oust the Social Credit government despite being widely expected to do so, Barrett took over the party leadership. After three years of hard work, he finally succeeded in leading the NDP to its first B.C. election victory in 1972. In office, Barrett quickly introduced a number of sweeping reforms, including a freeze on the conversion of agricultural land, a tax on mining-company royalties, greater public spending, and labour policies that helped unions organize new members. His government's radical approach soon attracted national and international attention, not all of it favourable. Some members of President Richard Nixon's administration in the United States referred to Barrett as the "Allende of the north," comparing his democratic-socialist policies with those of the Chilean leader Salvador Allende, who was overthrown in a U.S.-backed military coup in 1973.

After only three years in office, Barrett lost the 1975 election to his rival Bill Bennett's Social Credit Party. Business and middle-class opposition to his policies, along with an economic slump and unrelenting media criticism from influential newspapers like the *Vancouver Sun* probably helped defeat him. Undeterred by his rejection at the polls, Barrett led the NDP into two more campaigns, and narrowly missed regaining the premiership in 1979. In 1984, he resigned as party leader to pursue a new career as the host of a Vancouver radio talk show. But shortly after he made a political comeback, this time at the federal level, and was elected to Parliament in 1988. Barrett sought the NDP leadership after veteran party chief Ed Broadbent stepped down in 1989, but narrowly lost to Audrey McLaughlin. In the 1993 federal election, the NDP was virtually wiped out in B.C., once a party stronghold, as the new Reform Party won over many previous supporters. Barrett lost his seat, and retired from politics, but remained an active commentator on his home province's frequently bizarre and unpredictable political scene.

Wilhelmus "Bill" Vander Zalm

Bill Vander Zalm emigrated to B.C. with his family from Holland as a teenager just after the Second World War and established a successful gardening business in the Fraser Valley near Vancouver in the 1950s. He invested in real estate, became wealthy, and created Fantasy Garden World, a popular theme park in Richmond prior to beginning a career in local politics in the city of Surrey. He served as a councillor and later mayor, and ran for the Liberals in both provincial and federal elections in the 1960s, without success. His right-wing, pro-business views attracted him to the governing Social Credit Party, which he joined in 1974, and was elected as the member for Surrey in the 1975 provincial election. In the government of Premier Bill Bennett, Vander Zalm held a number of posts, including human resources, municipal affairs, and education. Known for his outspoken, blunt manner, he attracted considerable controversy for denouncing welfare recipients for being too lazy to pick up a shovel, calling his cabinet colleagues "gutless wonders" for refusing to back his ideas, and complaining about bilingual lettering on cereal boxes.

Vander Zalm's roughhouse political style played well with the Social Credit rank and file, and he won the party leadership in 1986, succeeding Bennett as premier. Despite strong NDP opposition to his conservative policies, Vander Zalm was able to use his considerable personal charm and charisma to win a big election victory that year over his hapless NDP opponent, Ray

Skelly. He likened his folksy, personal approach to the voters as the “sizzle on the steak,” the steak referring to his economic policies, which he was convinced would restore prosperity to the province after the recession of the early 1980s.

In office, Vander Zalm’s government faced mounting public protests over its support of the 1988 Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, its opposition to legal abortion clinics, and a succession of embarrassing scandals involving senior cabinet ministers. When Vander Zalm himself was implicated in questionable dealings involving his Fantasy Garden World properties, he was forced to resign as premier in 1991. With the rise of the Reform Party at the federal level, he attempted to create a provincial right-wing counterpart that could replace the now-defunct Social Credit Party, which had been wiped out in the NDP victory of 1991, but to no avail. Although he could still command some support among some voters, to most right-wing B.C. activists he was viewed as a political liability and something of a has-been. Instead, the provincial Liberals, under their new leader Gordon Campbell, were able to position themselves as the only viable right-of-centre alternative to the NDP government of Premier Mike Harcourt, which held power from 1991 to 1996.

Glen Clark

Glen Clark was one of the youngest political leaders in Canada to win the premiership of a province when he led the NDP to a surprise re-election victory in B.C. in 1996. Less than 40 years old at the time, he had already been a member of the legislature for ten years, and served in a number of prominent cabinet positions in the government of his predecessor, Mike Harcourt, including finance, corporate relations, and house leader. One of his greatest achievements was restoring a balanced budget after the mounting deficits left by the Vander Zalm government. However, within two years of winning power, Harcourt was embroiled in an embarrassing scandal over the misallocation of funds raised in a charity bingo that somehow found their way into NDP coffers. This scandal, known as “bingogate,” implicated a number of senior cabinet ministers, and threatened to sink the NDP government. However, Clark had been able to maintain enough distance from these questionable dealings that he was able to present himself as a clean and relatively competent member of the administration. In 1996, with public support for his government plummeting to record-low levels, Harcourt was forced to resign as premier, and Clark was chosen to succeed him. Few observers believed he had any chance of winning the election he was forced to call shortly after becoming premier, least of all the new Liberal leader, Gordon Campbell, who was eagerly waiting to oust the NDP.

But Glen Clark was a fighter who had learned his political skills in B.C.’s Lower Mainland as a party organizer while still a teenager. Relishing the role of an underdog, he led the party against a well-heeled and confident Liberal opposition that enjoyed a 20-point lead in the opinion polls at the beginning of the campaign. Playing on the theme of what was called “class politics,” Clark appealed to working-class B.C. voters to overlook the NDP government’s scandals and recognize the measures it had taken to improve their lives. His simple pitch to the voters was “You know who’s on your side,” and he never failed to portray his opponent Campbell as too closely aligned with powerful business interests. To the surprise of almost everyone, Clark narrowly won the 1996 election, the first time the NDP had been able to win two back-to-back victories in the province.

However, Clark's honeymoon with the voters of B.C. proved to be very short-lived. Soon after the election, it was revealed that he had misled the public by suggesting that the government did not face a financial deficit, when in fact this was the case. Yet another series of scandals and accusations of incompetence continued to dog him for the next few years, as his government seemed to lurch from one crisis to the next. The Asian financial meltdown of the late 1990s hit B.C.'s resource-based economy hard, and as overseas markets fell, the unemployment rate rose. A multi-million dollar government investment in fast ferries to service the Lower Mainland – Vancouver Island area proved to be a fiscal fiasco, adding fuel to Liberal charges that the NDP did not know how to manage the province's economy properly. Despite some solid achievements, like a freeze on tuition fees, progressive environmental and labour legislation, and the landmark treaty with the Nisga'a people, Clark's government saw its level of public support drop rapidly by the end of the decade.

An RCMP raid on Clark's home in search of evidence implicating him in a conflict-of-interest charge in 1999 proved to be the last straw. Clark was accused of offering a friend preferential treatment in a casino license application in return for having decks built on his house and cottage. As a result of this imbroglio, Clark was forced to resign as premier and was succeeded by Ujjal Dosanjh, the first Indian-Canadian premier of a Canadian province. Despite his reputation for honesty and competence, Dosanjh proved to be little more than a caretaker premier, however, and the NDP government was virtually obliterated in the May 2001 provincial election, which saw Gordon Campbell's Liberals sweep to power. As of early 2002, Clark was on trial in a Vancouver court, still fighting the charges against him and confident that he would be vindicated.

Activities

- 1. What, in your opinion, makes a political leader colourful or idiosyncratic? Which of the current political leaders in Canada do you consider to be most colourful or interesting, and why? Do you think politicians in Canada are generally considered to be uninspiring or colourless? Why do you think this is the case?
2. After reading the above passage, suggest some common themes you can notice about politics and politicians in British Columbia from the time of Confederation to the present day. In what ways does B.C.'s political history differ from that of other parts of Canada?
3. In what ways does the current political situation in British Columbia, and the difficulties facing the Campbell government, resemble previous examples of conflict and turmoil in the province's history?
4. How have scandals and corruption shaped the political face of B.C. over the last 20 years?

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Discussion, Research, and Essay Activities

- 1. With your classmates, present a visual display including newspaper articles, photos, and other information about the current political situation in British Columbia, including the personalities and groups involved, the policies of the government, and opposition they have provoked.
2. Read and prepare a book report on one of the following books dealing with B.C. politics and history: *Barbarians in the Garden City: The B.C. NDP in Power*, by Mark Milke; *Fantasyland: Inside the Reign of Bill Vander Zalm*, by Gary Mason and Keith Baldrey; *A White Man's Province: B.C. Politics and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914*, by Patricia E. Roy; *Solidarity: The Rise and Fall of an Opposition in B.C.*, by Bryan D. Palmer; *Amor de Cosmos*, by Keith Wilson; *Two Political Worlds: Parties and Voting in B.C.*, by Donald E. Blake; *Barrett: A Passionate Political Life*, by Dave Barrett and William Miller; *From Snowshoes to Politics*, by Cyril Shelford; *Pillars of Profit: The Company Province*, by Martin Robin; *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia*, by David J. Mitchell; *Duff Pattullo of B.C.*, by Robin Fisher; *The Politics of Resentment: B.C. Regionalism and Canadian Identity*, by Philip Resnick; *Politics, Policy, and Government in British Columbia*, edited by R.K. Carty; *From Amor to Zalm: A Primer on B.C. Politics and its Wacky Premiers*, by Peter Murray; *Fantasy Government*, by Stan Persky; *Grassroots Politicians: Party Activists in B.C.*, by Donald E. Blake, R.K. Carty, and Lynda Erickson; and *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Towards Orientals in British Columbia*, by W. Peter Ward.
3. As a class, debate the pros and cons of the economic policies the new Liberal government of Premier Gordon Campbell has introduced in British Columbia. Are they necessary to deal with the province's fiscal deficit? Will they help restore the health of the provincial economy? Will they cause more harm than good? Will they provoke a massive and sustained public opposition that will pose serious problems for the government?
4. Compare and contrast the legislative program of the B.C. government with similar policies that have been introduced during the 1990s in other Canadian provinces, especially those of the Conservative governments of Mike Harris in Ontario and Ralph Klein in Alberta.
- 5. Find out more about the treaty that was negotiated between the B.C. government and the Nisga'a. Why was this treaty such an important milestone in the history of relations between First Nations groups and governments in Canada? Why did it create so much controversy? What is the position of the Liberal government of Premier Gordon Campbell on this treaty?