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Shooting from the hip

Why does Glen Clark want to be premier of B.C.?

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In an era when politicians are viewed with suspicion and labels are becoming less relevant, Glen Clark wants to try something novel — he wants to be a populist.

"I've been compared to Ralph Klein, actually, and I take that as a compliment, I really do," he says in a one-on-one interview. "Despite my strong disagreements with his policies, he's connecting with the average voter in Alberta. He's not listening to bureaucrats, he's not listening as much to interest groups but he's listening to what people are saying and he's trying to respond to that.

"And I'm trying to do the same thing. I'm trying to get out of Victoria, I'm trying to stop listening to the interest groups, I'm trying to stop listening to the bureaucrats as much as I can... to get out and listen to the people who got me elected and respond to it.

"In that sense, we're both traditional populist politicians. And I think that's the secret to success."

And since taking over the reins of power from Mike Harcourt, Premier Clark has been on something of a spending spree, throwing pre-election goodies around with glee. But the premier makes no apologies for his decisions. In fact, he says British Columbians would be more upset by a quick election call than this hint of what a Clark government might be like.

"If I called an election and went out and promised a tuition freeze and promised some money from Forest Renewal B.C., people would say 'you're the government, why don't you just do it.'"

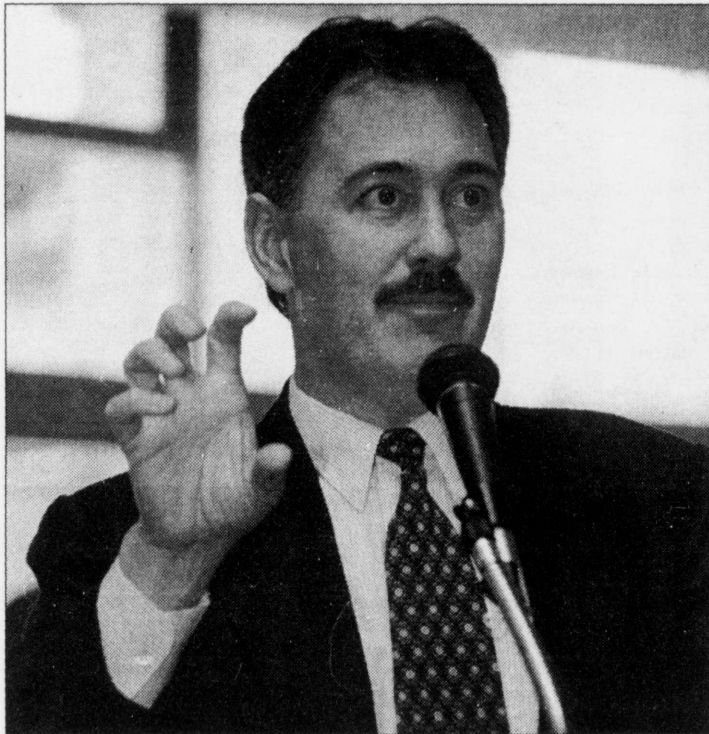
"So what I said was, I'm going to actually show action on these areas and then I'm going to call an election, after I've laid out where we're going to go."

The question people have, though, is who is Glen Clark? Is he the man who was labelled the most right-wing finance minister in the country during his time at the head of B.C.'s finances or is he the man who loves the unions before all else? According to Premier Clark, he's both of those men.

"I consider myself a populist politician. I'm very pragmatic about that. What I try to do is listen to what working people are saying. I know it's a very novel idea for politicians.

"So that means on some issues I might be considered more right wing, whether it's law and order or crime and safety issues, but on other issues I might be considered more left wing, such as making sure we're investing in things like Forest Renewal."

But just as the spectre of big business haunts Liberal leader Gordon Campbell, Premier Clark's ties to the unions (in particular the



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Fair Wage Policy and the Health Accord) have worried many, who see him as a pawn.

"On fair wages, it helped non-unions more than unions. And the Liberals opposed raising the minimum wage, twice we've raised it and they've opposed it both times," says Premier Clark.

"But I think it's entirely appropriate for the government to try and encourage apprenticeships on public construction. I think it's important that we encourage that trades people get paid fairly. Government should be a model in that regard.

"I don't run away from this issue. I know that the Liberals and Reformers will attack me for it but I think the people of British Columbia want a leader who's not going to pussyfoot around these issues. I support fair wage legislation, I supported the Health Accord, I support making sure that people who are working on public construction are paid a decent wage and I support even more strongly that there be a high level of apprenticeship in government construction projects."

Since he took over the leadership of the New Democrats, Premier Clark has brought the party up in the polls and has surpassed his two main competitors in the eyes of the public

as the man best able to lead the province.

But he's not quite ready to start planning for the next five years of government. Premier Clark says, with a wide grin, that the election will be soon and British Columbians can decide who will lead the province into the next century.

"All you can do is try and be honest and lay it out for people... I think that people have to get a sense of who I am and what my priorities are and that they can see the differences between me and Mr. Campbell and Mr. Weisgerber."

And when it comes to differences, Premier Clark has never been, how shall we say, shy about expressing his thoughts. But he hopes that the election stays, for the most part, on the high ground.

"There's no question I'm going to be out there campaigning hard. But what I'm really trying to avoid, and some media commentators are suggesting is going to happen, is personal attacks. I won't attack in those kind of attacks.

"I'll be very aggressive on policy issues, Gordon Campbell wants to cut taxes to big business and I think that's wrong and I'm going to be very aggressive on that... I think it's going to be an interesting campaign."

AROUND B.C.

► Beware of bombs

Quesnel — RCMP are warning parents and children to be on their guard after an egg-shaped explosive device was found on a local roadway on Easter Sunday.

Constable André Menoche says the device was found across from the Sikh Temple.

"A local resident found it on the street and took it apart, and discovered it was an explosive device," explains the constable.

Quite apart from the possibility of maiming — or even killing — an innocent bystander, Constable Menoche notes the people who manufactured the home-made bomb could have seriously injured themselves in the process.

► Volunteers cheaper

Kamloops — Firefighting could soon be joining teaching and nursing as vocations which are paid well for on-call work.

Kamloops council wants to cut costs on its \$10 million firefighting budget, despite a need for more firefighters to provide adequate protection.

"Rather than adding more full-time firefighters, we may look at the possibility of a well-trained auxiliary available to supplement the full-time force," says Mayor Cliff Branchflower.

To cut costs, council is looking at switching its fire department to a three-man crew from the current four-man crew. The move would save taxpayers \$600,000 a year.

► MP in census orbit

Terrace — Mike Scott wants to see several million Canadians identify themselves as Martians in next month's census.

The Reform MP for Skeena says that would be one way for people to protest census questions aimed at identifying Canadians on the basis of race — and thereby disrupt plans for federal hiring quotas.

"It would send a signal to the federal government that Canadians have had enough of this garbage," says Mr. Scott.

"It would thwart the objectives of the social engineers in Ottawa who feel they have to have the guiding hand in determining who gets hired for what job."

► Event on, but not really

Houston — Pleasant Valley Days will remain on the long weekend in May.

"There will be no changes, no nothing," Diane Smith told the district council.

"However, there are no activities planned for the long weekend this year."

And while there will be PV Days this year, Ms. Smith says people should be prepared to stick around next year when the rodeo may be back, along with new events.